

Aimard Gustave

The Border Rifles: A Tale of the Texan War



Gustave Aimard

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PREFACE

In the series commencing with the present volume GUSTAVE AIMARD has entirely changed the character of his stories. He has selected a magnificent episode of American history, the liberation of Texas from the intolerable yoke of the Mexicans, and describes scenes *quorum pars magna fuit*. At the present moment, when all are watching with bated breath the results of the internecine war commencing between North and South, I believe that the volumes our author devotes to this subject will be read with special interest, for they impart much valuable information about the character of the combatants who will, to a great extent, form the nucleus of the confederated army. The North looks down on them with contempt, and calls them "Border ruffians;" but when the moment arrives, I entertain no doubt but that they will command respect by the brilliancy of their deeds.

Surprising though the events may be which are narrated in the present volume, they are surpassed by those that continue the series. The next volume, shortly to appear under the title of "The Freebooters," describes the progress of the insurrection till it attained the proportions of a revolution, while the third and last volume will be devoted to the establishment of order in that magnificent State of Texas, which has cast in its lot with the Secessionists, and will indubitably hold out to the very last, confident in the prowess of its sons, whose fathers Aimard has so admirably depicted in the present and the succeeding volumes of the new series.

L.W.

CHAPTER I

THE RUNAWAY

The immense virgin forests which once covered the soil of North America are more and more disappearing before the busy axes of the squatters and pioneers, whose insatiable activity removes the desert frontier further and further to the west.

Flourishing towns, well tilled and carefully-sown fields, now occupy regions where, scarce ten years ago, rose impenetrable forests, whose dense foliage hardly allowed the sunbeams to penetrate, and whose unexplored depths sheltered animals of every description, and served as a retreat for hordes of nomadic Indians, who, in their martial ardour, frequently caused these majestic domes of verdure to re-echo with their war-yell.

Now that the forests have fallen, their gloomy denizens, gradually repulsed by the civilization that incessantly pursues them, have fled step by step before it, and have sought far away other and safer retreats, to which they have borne the bones of their fathers with them, lest they might be dug up and desecrated by the inexorable ploughshare of the white men, as it traces its long and productive furrow over their old hunting-grounds.

Is this constant disafforesting and clearing of the American continent a misfortune? Certainly not: on the contrary, the progress which marches with a giant's step, and tends, before a century, to transform the soil of the New World, possesses all our sympathy; still we cannot refrain from a feeling of pained commiseration for that unfortunate race which is brutally placed beyond the pale of the law, and pitilessly tracked in all directions; which is daily diminishing, and is fatally condemned soon to disappear from that earth whose immense territory it covered less than four centuries ago with innumerable tribes.

Perhaps if the people chosen by God to effect the changes to which we allude had understood their mission, they might have converted a work of blood and carnage into one of peace and paternity, and arming themselves with the divine precepts of the Gospel, instead of seizing rifles, torches, and scalping-knives, they might, in a given time, have produced a fusion of the white and red races, and have attained a result more profitable to progress, civilization, and before all, to that great fraternity of nations which no one is permitted to despise, and for which those who forget its divine and sacred precepts will have a terrible account some day to render.

Men cannot become with impunity the murderers of an entire race, and constantly wade in blood; for that blood must at some time cry for vengeance, and the day of justice break, when the sword will be cast in the balance between conquerors and conquered.

At the period when our narrative commences, that is to say, about the close of 1812, the emigration had not yet assumed that immense extension which it was soon to acquire, for it was only beginning, as it were, and the immense forests that stretched out and covered an enormous space between the borders of the United States and Mexico, were only traversed by the furtive footsteps of traders and wood-rangers, or by the silent moccasins of the Redskins.

It is in the centre of one of the immense forests to which we have alluded that our story begins, at about three in the afternoon of October 27th, 1812.

The heat had been stifling under the covert, but at this moment the sunbeams growing more and more oblique, lengthened the tall shadows of the trees, and the evening breeze that was beginning to rise refreshed the atmosphere, and carried far away the clouds of mosquitoes which during the whole mid-day had buzzed over the marshes in the clearings.

We find ourselves on the bank of an unknown affluent of the Arkansas; the slightly inclined trees on either side the stream formed a thick canopy of verdure over the waters, which were scarce rippled by the inconstant breath of the breeze; here and there pink flamingos and white herons,

perched on their tall legs, were fishing for their dinner, with that careless ease which generally characterizes the race of great aquatic birds; but suddenly they stopped, stretched out their necks as if listening to some unusual sound, then ran hurriedly along to catch the wind, and flew away with cries of alarm.

All at once the sound of a musket-shot was re-echoed through the forest, and two flamingos fell. At the same instant a light canoe doubled a little cape formed by some mangrove-trees jutting out into the bed of the stream, and darted in pursuit of the flamingos which had fallen in the water. One of them had been killed on the spot, and was drifting with the current; but the other, apparently but slightly wounded, was flying with extreme rapidity, and swimming vigorously.

The boat was an Indian canoe, made of birch bark removed from the tree by the aid of hot water, and there was only one man in it; his rifle lying in the bows and still smoking, shewed that it was he who had just fired. We will draw the portrait of this person, who is destined to play an important part in our narrative.

As far as could be judged from his position in the canoe, he was a man of great height; his small head was attached by a powerful neck to shoulders of more than ordinary breadth; muscles, hard as cords, stood out on his arms at each of his movements; in a word, the whole appearance of this individual denoted a vigour beyond the average.

His face, illumined by large blue eyes, sparkling with sense, had an expression of frankness and honesty which pleased at the first glance, and completed the *ensemble* of his regular features, and wide mouth, round which an unceasing smile of good humour played. He might be twenty-three, or twenty-four at the most, although his complexion, bronzed by the inclemency of the weather, and the dense light brown beard that covered the lower part of his face, made him appear older.

This man was dressed in the garb of a wood-ranger: a beaver-skin cap, whose tail fell down between his shoulders, hardly restrained the thick curls of his golden hair, which hung in disorder down his back; a hunting shirt of blue calico, fastened round his hips by a deerskin belt, fell a little below his muscular knees; *mitasses*, or a species of tight drawers, covered his legs, and his feet were protected against brambles and the stings of reptiles by Indian moccasins.

His game-bag, of tanned leather, hung over his shoulder, and, like all the bold pioneers of the virgin forest, his weapons consisted of a good Kentucky rifle, a straight-bladed knife, ten inches long and two wide, and a tomahawk that glistened like a mirror. These weapons, of course with the exception of the rifle, were passed through his belt, which also supported two buffalo horns filled with powder and bullets.

The appearance of the man thus equipped, and standing in the canoe amid the imposing scenery that surrounded him, had something grand about it which created an involuntary respect.

The wood-ranger, properly so termed, is one of those numerous types of the New World which must soon entirely disappear before the incessant progress of civilization.

The wood-rangers, those bold explorers of the deserts, in which their whole existence was spent, were men who, impelled by a spirit of independence and an unbridled desire for liberty, shook off all the trammels of society, and who, with no other object than that of living and dying unrestrained by any other will save their own, and in no way impelled by the hope of any sort of lucre, which they despised, abandoned the towns, and boldly buried themselves in the virgin forests, where they lived from day to day indifferent about the present, careless as to the future, convinced that God would not desert them in the hour of need, and thus placed themselves outside of that common law they misunderstood, on the extreme limit that separates barbarism from civilization.

Most of the celebrated wood-rangers were French Canadians; in truth, there is in the Norman character something daring and adventurous, which is well adapted to this mode of life, so full as it is of strange interludes and delicious sensations, whose intoxicating charms only those who have led it can understand.

The Canadians have never admitted in principle the change of nationality which the English tried to impose on them; they still regard themselves as Frenchmen, and their eyes are constantly fixed on that ungrateful mother-country which has abandoned them with such cruel indifference.

Even at the present day, after so many years, the Canadians have still remained French; their fusion with the Anglo-Saxon race is only apparent, and the slightest pretext would suffice to produce a definitive rupture between them and the English. The British government is well, aware of this fact, and hence displays toward the Canadian colonies a marked kindness and deference.

At the earlier period of the conquest this repulsion (not to call it hatred) was so prominent between the two races, that the Canadians emigrated in a mass, sooner than endure the humiliating yoke which was attempted to be placed on them. Those of them who, too poor to leave their country definitively, were compelled to remain in a country henceforth sullied by a foreign occupation, chose the rude trade of wood-rangers, and preferred such an existence of misery and danger to the disgrace of enduring the laws of a detested conqueror. Shaking the dust over their shoes on the paternal roof, they threw their rifles over their shoulders, and stifling a sigh of regret, went away not to return, burying themselves in the impenetrable forests of Canada, and laying unconsciously the foundation of that generation of intrepid pioneers, to one of the finest specimens of whom we introduced the reader at the beginning of this chapter.

The hunter went on paddling vigorously; he soon reached the first flamingo, which he threw into the bottom of his canoe. But the second gave him more trouble. It was for a while a struggle of speed between the wounded bird and the hunter: still the former gradually lost its strength; its movements became uncertain, and it beat the water convulsively. A blow from the Canadian's paddle at length put an end to its agony, and it joined its mate in the bottom of the canoe.

So soon as he had secured his game, the hunter shipped his paddles, and prepared to reload his rifle, with the care which all devote to the operation who know that their life depends on a charge of powder. When his gun was in order again, the Canadian took an inquiring glance around.

"Why," he presently said, talking to himself, a habit which men who live in solitude very frequently acquire, "hang me! if I have not reached the meeting-place without suspecting it. I cannot be mistaken: over there are the two oaks fallen across each other, and that rock, which stands out over the water. But what's that?" he exclaimed, as he stooped, and cocked his rifle.

The furious barking of several dogs became suddenly audible in the centre of the forest; the bushes were parted eagerly, and a Negro appeared on the top of the rock, at which the Canadian was at this moment looking. This man, on reaching the extremity of the rock, stopped for an instant, and seemed to listen attentively, while displaying signs of the most extreme agitation. But this halt was short, for he had hardly rested there for a few seconds, ere, raising his eyes to heaven in despair, he leaped into the river, and swam vigorously to the opposite bank.

The sound of the Negro's fall into the water had hardly died away, when several dogs dashed on to the platform, and began a concert of horrible barking. These dogs were powerful animals; their tongues were pendant, their eyes infested with blood, and their hair standing on end, as if they had come a long distance.

The hunter shook his head several times while giving a glance of pity at the hapless Negro, who was swimming with that energy of despair which doubles the strength – and seizing his paddles, he turned the canoe toward him, with the evident intention of rendering him assistance. At this moment a hoarse voice was heard on the river-bank.

"Hilloh, there! silence, you demons incarnate! silence, I tell you!"

The dogs gave vent to a few whines of pain, and were suddenly silent. The individual who had reproved the animals then said, in a louder key —

"Hilloh, you fellow in the canoe there! – hilloh!"

The Canadian had just pulled to the opposite bank; he ran his canoe on the sand, and then carelessly turned to the person who addressed him.

This was a man of middle height, muscular, and dressed like the majority of rich farmers. His face was brutal, crafty, and four persons, apparently servants, stood by his side; it is needless to say that all were armed with guns.

The stream at this spot was rather wide, being about fifty yards, which, temporarily, at any rate, established a respectable barrier between the Negro and his pursuers. The Canadian leaned against a tree.

"Are you by chance speaking to me?" he asked, in a somewhat contemptuous tone.

"Who else do you suppose?" the first speaker continued, angrily: "so try and answer my questions!"

"And why should I answer them? Will you be good enough to tell me?" the Canadian continued, with a laugh.

"Because I order you to do so, you scoundrel!" the other said, brutally.

The hunter shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"Good-bye," he said, and made a movement as if to retire.

"Stop where you are!" the American shouted, "or so truly as my name is John Davis I will put a bullet through your skull!"

While uttering the threat he levelled his gun.

"Ah! ah!" the Canadian went on, with a laugh, "then you're John Davis, the famous slave-dealer?"

"Yes, I am," the other said, harshly.

"Pardon me; but I had hitherto only known you by reputation. By Jove! I am delighted to have seen you."

"Well, and now that you know me, are you disposed to answer my questions?"

"I must know their nature first, so you had better ask them."

"What has become of my slave?"

"Do you mean the man who leaped off the platform just before you reached it?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"Here, by my side."

In fact, the Negro, his strength and courage quite exhausted from the desperate efforts he had made during the obstinate pursuit of which he had been the object, had dragged himself to the spot where the Canadian stood, and now lay in a half fainting condition at his feet.

On hearing the hunter reveal his presence so clearly, he clasped his hands with an effort, and raised toward him a face bathed in tears.

"Oh! master, master!" he cried, with an expression of agony impossible to render, "Save me! Save me!"

"Ah, ah!" John Davis shouted, with a grin, "I fancy we can come to an understanding, my fine fellow, and that you will not be sorry to gain the reward."

"In truth I should not be sorry to hear the price set on human flesh in what is called your free country. Is the reward large?"

"Twenty dollars for a runaway nigger."

"Pooh!" the Canadian said, thrusting out his lower lip in disgust, "that is a trifle!"

"Do you think so?"

"Indeed I do."

"Still, I only ask you to do a very simple matter in order to earn them."

"What is it?"

"Tie that nigger, put him in your canoe, and bring him to me."

"Very good. It is not difficult, I allow; and when he is in your power, supposing I do what you wish, what do you intend doing with him?"

"That is not your business."

"Granted: hence I only asked you for information."

"Come! Make up your mind; I have no time to waste in chattering. What is your decision?"

"This is what I have to say to you, Mr. John Davis, who hunt men with dogs less ferocious than yourself, which in obeying you only yield to their instincts – you are a villain! And if you only reckon on my help in regaining your Negro, you may consider him lost."

"Ah, that is it!" the American shouted, as he gnashed his teeth furiously, and turned to his servants; "fire at him! Fire! Fire!"

And joining example to precept, he quickly shouldered his gun and fired. His servants imitated him, and four shots were confounded in a single explosion, which the echoes of the forest mournfully repeated.

CHAPTER II

QUONIAM

The Canadian did not lose one of his adversaries' movements while he was speaking with them; hence, when the shots ordered by John Davis were fired, they proved ineffectual; he had rapidly hidden himself behind a tree, and the bullets whistled harmlessly past his ears.

The slave-dealer was furious at being thus foiled by the hunter; he gave him the most fearful threats, blasphemed, and stamped his foot in rage.

But threats and imprecations availed but little; unless they swam the river, which was impracticable, in the face of a man so resolute as the hunter seemed to be, there were no means of taking any vengeance on him, or recapturing the slave he had so deliberately taken under his protection.

While the American racked his brains in vain to find an expedient that would enable him to gain the advantage, a bullet dashed the rifle he held in his hand to pieces.

"Accursed dog!" he yelled in his fury, "do you wish to assassinate me?"

"I should have a right to do so," the Canadian replied, "for I am only defending myself fairly, after your attempt to kill me; but I prefer dealing amicably with you, although I feel convinced I should be doing a great service to humanity by lodging a couple of slugs in your brain."

And a second bullet at this moment smashed the rifle one of the servants was reloading.

"Come, enough of this," the American shouted, greatly exasperated; "what do you want?"

"I told you – treat amicably with you."

"But on what conditions? Tell me them at least."

"In a moment."

The rifle of the second servant was broken like that of the first: of the five men, three were now disarmed.

"Curses," the slave-dealer howled; "have you resolved to make a target of us in turn?"

"No, I only wish to equalise chances."

"But –"

"It is done now."

The fourth rifle was broken.

"And now," the Canadian said, as he showed himself "suppose we have a talk."

And, leaving his shelter, he walked to the river bank.

"Yes, talk, demon," the American shouted.

With a movement swift as thought, he seized the last rifle, and shouldered it; but, ere he could pull the trigger, he rolled on the platform, uttering a cry of pain.

The hunter's bullet had broken his arm.

"Wait for me, I am coming," the Canadian continued with perfect calmness.

He reloaded his rifle, leaped into the canoe, and with a few strokes of his paddle, found himself on the other side of the river.

"There," he said as he landed and walked up to the American, who was writhing like a serpent on the platform, howling and blaspheming; "I warned you: I only wished to equalise the chances, and you have no right to complain of what has happened to you, my dear sir: the fault rests entirely with yourself."

"Seize him! kill him!" the wretch shouted, a prey to indescribable fury.

"Come, come, calm yourself. Good gracious, you have only a broken arm, after all; remember, I could have easily killed you, had I pleased. Hang it, you are not reasonable."

"Oh! I will kill him," he yelled, as he gnashed his teeth.

"I hardly think so, at least not for the present; I will say nothing about by and by. But let that be: I will examine your wound, and dress it while we talk."

"Do not touch me! Do not come near me, or I know not to what extremities I may proceed."

The Canadian shrugged his shoulders.

"You must be mad," he said.

Incapable of enduring longer the state of exasperation in which he was, the dealer, who was also weakened by the loss of blood, made a vain effort to rise and rush on his foe; but he fell back and fainted while muttering a final curse.

The servants stood startled, as much by the unparalleled skill of this strange man, as by the boldness with which, after disarming them all in turn, he had crossed the river, in order, as it were, to deliver himself into their hands; for, if they had no longer their rifles, their knives and pistols were left them.

"Come, gentlemen," the Canadian said with a frown, "have the goodness to shake out the priming of your pistols, or, by Heaven! We shall have a row."

The servants did not at all desire to begin a fight with him; moreover, the sympathy they felt for their master was not great, while, on the other hand, the Canadian, owing to the expeditious way in which he had acted, inspired them with a superstitious fear: hence they obeyed his orders with a species of eagerness, and even wished to hand him their knives.

"It is not necessary," he said; "now, let us see about dressing this worthy gentleman's wound: it would be a pity to deprive society of so estimable a person, who is one of its brightest ornaments."

He set to work at once, aided by the servants, who executed his orders with extraordinary rapidity and zeal, for they felt so thoroughly mastered by him.

Compelled by the mode of life they pass to do without any strange assistance, the wood-rangers all possess, to a certain extent, elementary notions of medicine, and especially of surgery, and can, in case of need, treat a fracture or wound of any nature as well as a professional man; and that, too, by simple means usually employed with the greatest success by the Indians.

The hunter proved by the skill and dexterity which he dressed the slave-dealer's wound, that, if he knew how to inflict wounds, he was equally clever in curing them.

The servants regarded with heightening admiration this extraordinary man, who seemed suddenly metamorphosed, and proceeded with a certainty of glance and lightness of hand which many a surgeon might have envied him. During the bandaging, the wounded man returned to consciousness, and opened his eyes, but remained silent; his fury had been calmed, and his brutal nature subdued by the energetic resistance the Canadian opposed to him. The first and piercing pain of the wound had been succeeded, as always happens when the bandaging is properly done, by an extraordinary feeling of relief: hence, recognising, in spite of himself, the comfort he had experienced, he had felt his hatred melting away in a feeling for which he could not yet account, but which now made him regard his enemy almost with a friendly air.

To render John Davis the justice due to him, we will say that he was neither better nor worse than any of his fellows who trafficked in human flesh. Accustomed to the sufferings of slaves, who to him were nothing but beings deprived of reason, or merchandize in a word, his heart had gradually grown callous to softer emotions: he only saw in a Negro the money he had expended, and what he expected to gain by him, and like a true tradesman, he was very fond of money: a runaway Negro seemed to him a wretched thing, against whom any means were permissible in order to prevent a loss.

Still, this man was not insensible to every good feeling; apart from his trade, he even enjoyed a certain reputation for kindness, and passed for a gentleman.

"There, that is all right," the Canadian said, as he gave a satisfied glance at the bandages; "in three weeks there will be nothing to be seen, if you take care of yourself; for, through a remarkable piece of good luck, the bone has not been touched, and the ball has only passed through the fleshy part of the arm. Now, my good friend, if you like to talk, I am ready."

"I have nothing to say, except to ask you to return the scoundrel who is the cause of the whole mishap."

"Hum! If we go on in that way, I am afraid we shall not come to an understanding. You know perfectly that the whole quarrel arose about the surrender of the scoundrel, as you term him."

"Still, I cannot lose my money."

"What money do you mean?"

"Well, my slave, if you prefer it; he represents a sum I do not at all care to lose; the less so, because things have been going very queerly with me lately, and I have suffered some heavy losses."

"That is annoying, and I pity you sincerely; still, I should like to settle the affair amicably as I began," the Canadian continued.

The American made a grimace.

"It is a deuced amicable way you have of settling matters," he said.

"It is your fault, my friend; if we did not come to an immediate arrangement, it was because you were a little too quick, as you will allow."

"Well, we will not say any more about that, for what's done cannot be undone."

"You are right, so let us return to business. Unluckily, I am poor; were not so, I would give you a few hundred dollars, and all would be settled."

The dealer scratched his head.

"Listen," he said. "I do not know why, but, in spite of all that has passed between us, perhaps in consequence of it, I should not like for us to separate on bad terms; the more so, because, to tell you the truth, I care very little for Quoniam."

"Who's Quoniam?"

"The nigger."

"Oh, very good, that's a funny name you have given him; however, no matter, you say you care very little for him?"

"Indeed I do."

"Then why did you begin the obstinate hunt with dogs and guns?"

"Through pride."

"Oh!" the Canadian said, with a start of dissatisfaction.

"Listen to me, I am a slave dealer."

"A very ugly trade, by the way," the hunter observed.

"Perhaps so, but I shall not discuss that point."

"About a month ago, a large sale was announced at Baton Rouge, of slaves of both sexes, belonging to a rich gentleman who had died suddenly, and I proceeded there. Among the slaves exposed for sale was Quoniam. The rascal is young, active, and vigorous; he has a bold and intelligent look; so he naturally pleased me at the first glance, and I felt desirous to buy him. I went up and questioned him; and the scamp answered me word for word as follows, which put me out of countenance for a moment, I confess.

"'Master, I do not advise you to buy me, for I have sworn to be free or die; whatever you may do to prevent me, I warn you that I shall escape. Now you can do as you please.'"

"This clear and peremptory declaration piqued me, 'We shall see,' I said to him, and then went to find the auctioneer. The latter, who was a friend of mine, dissuaded me from buying Quoniam, giving me reasons, each better than the other, against doing so. But my mind was made up, and I stuck to it. Quoniam was knocked down to me for ninety dollars, an absurd price for a Negro of his age, and built as he is; but no one would have him at any price. I put irons on him, and took him away, not to my house, but to the prison, so that I might feel sure he would not escape. The next day, when I returned to the prison, Quoniam was gone; he had kept his word.

"At the end of two days he was caught again; the same evening he was off once more, and it was impossible for me to discover how he had foiled the plans I had formed to restrain him. This

has been going on for a month; a week ago he escaped again, and since then I have been in search of him; despairing of being able to keep him, I got into a passion, and started after him, this time with my blood-hounds, resolved to finish, once for all, with this accursed Negro, who constantly slips through my fingers like a lizard."

"That is to say," the Canadian remarked, who had listened with interest to the dealer's story, "you would not have hesitated to kill him."

"That I should, for the confounded scamp is so crafty; he has so constantly taken me in, that I have grown to hate him."

"Listen in your turn, Mr. John Davis; I am not rich, but a long way from it. What do I need gold or silver, as a man of the desert to whom Heaven supplies daily food so liberally? This Quoniam, who is so eager for liberty and the open air, inspires me with a lively interest, and I wish to try and give him that freedom to which he so persistently aspires. This is what I propose; I have in my canoe three jaguar skins and twelve beaver skins, which, if sold at any town of the Union, will be worth from one hundred and fifty to two hundred dollars; take them, and let all be finished."

The dealer looked at him with a surprise mingled with a certain degree of kindliness.

"You are wrong," he said, presently; "the bargain you offer is too advantageous for me, and too little so for you. That is not the way to do business."

"How does that concern you? I have got it in my head that this man shall be free."

"You do not know the ungrateful nature of niggers," the other persisted; "this one will be in no way grateful to you for what you do for him; on the contrary, on the first opportunity he will probably give you cause to repent your good action."

"That is possible, but it is his business, for I do not ask gratitude of him; if he shows it, all the better for him; if not, the Lord's will be done! I act in accordance with my heart, and my reward is in my conscience."

"By the Lord, you are a fine fellow, I tell you," the dealer exclaimed, incapable of restraining himself longer. "It would be all the better if a fellow could meet with more of your sort. Well, I intend to prove to you that I am not so bad as you have a right to suppose, after what has passed between us. I will sign the assignment of Quoniam to you, and I will only accept in return one tiger skin in remembrance of our meeting, although," he added, with a grimace, as he pointed to his arm, "you have already given me another."

"Done," the Canadian exclaimed, eagerly; "but you must take two skins instead of one, as I intend to ask of you a rifle, an axe, and a knife, so that the poor devil we now set at liberty (for you are now halves in my good deed) may provide for his support."

"Be it so," the dealer said, good humouredly; "as the scoundrel insists on being at liberty, let him be, and he can go to the deuce."

At a sign from his master, one of the servants produced from his game bag ink, pens, and paper, and drew up on the spot, not a deed of sale, but a regular ticket of freedom, to which the dealer put his signature, and which the servants afterwards witnessed.

"On my word," John Davis exclaimed, "it is possible that from a business point of view I have done a foolish thing, but, you may believe me or not, as you like, I never yet felt so satisfied with myself."

"That is," the Canadian answered, seriously, "because you have to-day followed the impulses of your heart."

The Canadian then quitted the platform to go and fetch the skins. A moment after, he returned with two magnificent jaguar hides, perfectly intact, which he handed to the dealer. The latter, as was arranged, then delivered the weapons to him; but a scruple suddenly assailed the hunter.

"One moment," he said; "if you give me these weapons, how will you manage to return to town?"

"That need not trouble you," John Davis replied; "I left my horse and people scarce three leagues from here. Besides, we have our pistols, which we could use if necessary."

"That is true," the Canadian remarked, "you have therefore nothing to fear; still, as your wound will not allow you to go so far a-foot, I will help your servants to prepare you a litter."

And with that skill, of which he had already supplied so many proofs, the Canadian manufactured, with branches of trees he cut down with his hatchet, a litter, on which the two tiger skins were laid.

"And now," he said, "good bye; perhaps we shall never meet again. We part, I trust, on better terms than we came together: remember, there is no trade, however shameful, which an honest man cannot carry on honourably; when your heart inspires you to do a good action, do not be deaf to it, but do it without regret, for God will have spoken to you."

"Thanks," the dealer said, with considerable emotion, "but grant me one word before we part."

"Say on."

"Tell me your name, so that if any day accident brought us together again, I might appeal to your recollections, as you could to mine."

"That is true, my name is Tranquil; the wood-rangers, my companions, have surnamed me the Panther killer."

And, ere the slave dealer had recovered from the astonishment caused by this sudden revelation of the name of a man whose renown was universal on the border, the hunter, after giving him a parting wave of the hand, bounded from the platform, unfastened his canoe, and paddled vigorously to the other bank.

"Tranquil, the Panther-killer," John Davis muttered when he was alone; "it was truly my good genius which inspired me to make a friend of that man."

He lay down on the litter which two of his men raised, and after giving a parting glance at the Canadian, who at this moment was landing on the opposite bank, he said: —

"Forward!"

The platform was soon deserted again, the dealer and his men had disappeared under the covert, and nothing was audible but the gradually departing growls of the bloodhounds, as they ran on ahead of the little party.

CHAPTER III

BLACK AND WHITE

In the meanwhile, as we have said, the Canadian hunter, whose name we at length know, had reached the bank of the river where he left the Negro concealed in the shrubs.

During the long absence of his defender, the slave could easily have fled, and that with the more reason, because he had almost the certainty of not being pursued before a lapse of time, which would have given him a considerable start on those who were so obstinately bent on capturing him.

He had not done so, however, either because the idea of flight did not appear to him realizable, or because he was too wearied, he had not stirred from the spot where he sought a refuge at the first moment, and had remained with his eyes obstinately fixed on the platform, following with anxious glance the movements of the persons collected on it.

John Davis had not at all flattered him in the portrait he had drawn of him to the hunter. Quoniam was really one of the most magnificent specimens of the African race: twenty-two years of age at the most, he was tall, well-proportioned and powerfully built; he had wide shoulders, powerfully developed chest, and well-hung limbs; it was plain that he combined unequalled strength with far from ordinary speed and lightness; his features were fine and expressive, his countenance breathed frankness, his widely opened eyes were intelligent – in short, although his skin was of the deepest black, and unfortunately, in America, the land of liberty, that colour is an indelible stigma of servitude, this man did not seem at all to have been created for slavery, for everything about him aspired to liberty and that free-will which God has given to his creatures, and men have tried in vain to tear from them.

When the Canadian re-entered the canoe, and the American quitted the platform, a sigh of satisfaction expanded the Negro's chest, for, without knowing positively what had passed between the hunter and his old master, as he was too far off to hear what was said, he understood that, temporarily at least, he had nothing to fear from the latter, and he awaited with feverish impatience the return of his generous defender, that he might learn from him what he had henceforth to hope or fear.

So soon as he reached land, the Canadian pulled his canoe on to the sand, and walked with a firm and deliberate step toward the spot where he expected to find the Negro.

He soon noticed him in a sitting posture, almost at the same spot where he had left him.

The hunter could not repress a smile of satisfaction.

"Ah, ah," he said to him, "there you are, then, friend Quoniam."

"Yes, master. Did John Davis tell you my name?"

"As you see; but what are you doing there? Why did you not escape during my absence?"

"Quoniam is no coward," he replied, "to escape while another is risking his life for him. I was waiting ready to surrender myself if the white hunter's life had been threatened."¹

This was said with a simplicity full of grandeur, proving that such was really the Negro's intention.

"Good!" the hunter replied, kindly, "I thank you, for your intention was good; fortunately, your interference was unneeded; but, at any rate, you acted more wisely by remaining here."

"Whatever may happen to me, master, be assured that I shall feel ever grateful to you."

"All the better for you, Quoniam, for that will prove to me that you are not ungrateful, which is one of the worst vices humanity is afflicted by; but be good enough not to call me master again,

¹ Nothing appears to us so ridiculous as that conventional jargon which is placed in the mouth of Negroes; a jargon which, in the first place, impedes the story, and is moreover false; a double reason which urges us not to employ it here – all the worse for the local colouring. – G.A.

for it grieves me; the word implies a degrading inferiority, and besides, I am not your master, but merely your companion."

"What other name can a poor slave give you?"

"My own, hang it. Call me Tranquil, as I call you Quoniam. Tranquil is not a difficult name to remember, I should think."

"Oh, not at all," the Negro said with a laugh.

"Good! That is settled, then; now, let us go to something else, and, in the first place, take this."

The hunter drew a paper from his belt, which he handed to the Black.

"What is this?" the latter asked with a timid glance, for his ignorance prevented him deciphering it.

"That?" the hunter said with a smile; "it is a precious talisman, which makes of you a man like all the rest of us, and removes you from the animals among which you have been counted up to this day; in a word, it is a deed by which John Davis, native of South Carolina, slave dealer, from this day restores to Quoniam his full and entire liberty, to enjoy it as he thinks proper – or, if you prefer it, it is your deed of liberation written by your former master, and signed by competent witnesses, who will stand by you if necessary."

On hearing these words the Negro turned pale after the fashion of men of his colour; that is to say, his face assumed a tinge of dirty gray, his eyes were unnaturally dilated, and for a few seconds he remained motionless, crushed, incapable of uttering a word or making a movement.

At length he burst into a loud laugh, leaped up twice or thrice with the suppleness of a wild beast, and then broke suddenly into tears.

The hunter attentively watched the Negro's movement, feeling interested to the highest degree in what he saw, and evidencing each moment a greater sympathy with this man.

"Then," the Black at length said, "I am free – truly free?"

"As free as a man can be," Tranquil replied, with a smile.

"Now I can come, go, sleep, work, or rest, and no one can prevent me, and I need not fear the lash?"

"Quite so."

"I belong to myself, myself alone? I can act and think like other men? I am no longer a beast of burthen, which is loaded and harnessed? I am as good as any other man, white, yellow, or red?"

"Quite so," the hunter answered, amused and interested at the same time by these simple questions.

"Oh!" the Negro said, as he took his head in his hands, "I am free then – free at last!"

He uttered these words with a strange accent, which made the hunter quiver.

All at once he fell on his knees, clasped his hands, and raised his eyes to Heaven.

"My God!" he exclaimed, with an accent of ineffable happiness. "Thou who canst do all, thou to whom all men are equal, and who dost not regard their colour to protect and defend them. Thou, whose goodness is unbounded like thy power; thanks! Thanks! My God, for having drawn me from slavery, and restored my liberty!"

After giving vent to this prayer, which was the expression of the feelings that boiled in his heart, the Negro fell on the ground, and for some minutes remained plunged in earnest thought. The hunter respected his silence.

At length the Negro raised his head again.

"Listen, hunter," he said. "I have returned thanks to God for my deliverance, as was my duty; for it was He who inspired you with the thought of defending me. Now that I am beginning to grow a little calmer, and feel accustomed to my new condition, be good enough to tell me what passed between you and my master, that I may know the extent of the debt I owe you, and that I may regulate my future conduct by it. Speak, I am listening."

"What need to tell you a story which can interest you so slightly? You are free, that ought to be sufficient for you."

"No, that is not sufficient; I am free, that is true, but how have I become so? That is what I do not know, and I have the right to ask of you."

"The story, I say again, has nothing that can interest you at all; still, as it may cause you to form a better opinion of the man to whom you belonged, I will not longer refuse to tell it to you; so listen."

Tranquil, after this opening, told in all their details the events that happened between himself and the slave dealer, and when he had finished, added —

"Well, are you satisfied now?"

"Yes," the Negro replied, who had listened to him with the most sustained attention. "I know that, next to God, I owe everything to you, and I will remember it; never will you have to remind me of the debt, under whatever circumstances we may meet."

"You owe me nothing, now that you are free; it is your duty to employ that liberty in the way a man of upright and honest heart should do."

"I will try not to prove myself unworthy of what God and you have done for me; I also thank John Davis sincerely for the good feeling that urged him to listen to your remonstrances; perhaps I may be able to requite him some day; and, if the opportunity offers, I shall not neglect it."

"Good! I like to hear you speak so, for it proves to me that I was not mistaken about you; and now what do you intend to do?"

"What advice do you give me?"

"The question you ask me is a serious one, and I hardly know how to answer it; the choice of a profession is always a difficult affair, and must be reflected upon ripely before a decision is formed; in spite of my desire to be of service to you, I should not like to give you advice, which you would doubtless follow for my sake, and which might presently cause you regret. Besides, I am a man whose life since the age of seven has always been spent in the woods, and I am, consequently, far too unacquainted with what is called the world to venture to lead you on a path which I do not know myself."

"That reasoning seems to me perfectly correct. Still, I cannot remain here, and must make up my mind to something or other."

"Do one thing."

"What is it?"

"Here are a knife, gun, powder, and bullets; the desert is open before you, so go and try for a few days the free life of the great solitudes; during your long hours of hunting you will have leisure to reflect on the vocation you are desirous to embrace; you will weigh in your mind the advantages you expect to derive from it, and then, when your mind is quite made up, you can turn your back on the desert, go back to the towns, and, as you are an active, honest, and intelligent man, I am certain you will succeed in whatever calling you may choose."

The Negro nodded his head several times.

"Yes," he said, "in what you propose to me there is both good and bad; that is not exactly what I should wish."

"Explain yourself clearly, Quoniam; I can see you have something at the end of your tongue which you do not like to say."

"That is true; I have not been frank with you, Tranquil, and I was wrong, as I now see clearly. Instead of asking you hypocritically for advice, which I did not at all intend to follow, I ought to have told you honestly my way of thinking, and that would have been altogether better."

"Come," the hunter said, laughingly, "speak."

"Well, really I do not see why I should not tell you what I have on my heart. If there be a man in the world who takes an interest in me it is certainly you; and hence, the sooner I know what I have to depend on, the better: the only life that suits me is that of a wood-ranger. My instincts and feelings

impel me to it; all my attempts at flight, when I was a slave, tended to that object. I am only a poor Negro, whom his narrow mind and intelligence would not guide properly in towns, where man is not valued for what he is worth, but for what he appears. What use would that liberty, of which I am so proud, appear to me, in a town where I should have to dispose of it to the first comer, in order to procure the food and clothing I need? I should only have regained my liberty to render myself a slave. Hence it is in the desert alone I can profit by the kindness I owe to you, without fear of ever being impelled by wretchedness to actions unworthy of a man conscious of his own worth. Hence it is in the desert I desire henceforth to live, only visiting the towns to exchange the skins of animals I have killed for powder, bullets, and clothing. I am young and strong, and the God who has hitherto protected me will not desert me."

"You are perhaps right, and I cannot blame you for wishing to follow my example, when the life I lead seems to me preferable to all others. Well, now that is all settled, my good Quoniam, we can part, and I wish you luck; perhaps we shall meet again, sometimes, on the Indian territory."

The Negro began laughing, and showed two rows of teeth white as snow, but made no reply.

Tranquil threw his rifle on his shoulder, gave him a last friendly sign of parting, and turned to go back to his canoe.

Quoniam seized the rifle the hunter had left him, passed the knife through his girdle, to which he also fastened the horns of powder and bullets, and then, after a final glance to see he had forgotten nothing, he followed the hunter, who had already gained a considerable start on him.

He caught Tranquil up at the moment he reached his canoe, and was about to thrust it into the water; at the sound of footsteps, the hunter turned round.

"Halloh," he said, "is that you again, Quoniam?"

"Yes," he answered.

"What brings you here?"

"Why," the Negro said, as he buried his fingers in his woolly hair, and scratched his head furiously, "you forgot something."

"What was it?"

"To take me with you."

"That is true," the hunter said, as he offered him his hand; "forgive me, brother."

"Then you consent?" he asked, with ill-restrained joy.

"Yes."

"We shall not part again?"

"It will depend on your will."

"Oh, then," he exclaimed, with a joyous outburst of laughter, "we shall be together a long time."

"Well, be it so," the Canadian went on. "Come; two men, when they have faith in each other, are very strong in the desert. Heaven, doubtless, willed that we should meet. Henceforth we shall be brothers."

Quoniam leaped into the canoe, and gaily caught up the paddles.

The poor slave had never been so happy; never had the air seemed to him purer, or nature more lovely – everything smiled on him, and made holiday for him, for that moment he was about to begin really living the life of other men, without any bitter afterthought; the past was no more than a dream. He had found in his defender what so many men seek in vain, throughout a lengthened existence – a friend, a brother, to whom he could trust entirely, and from whom he would have no secrets.

In a few minutes they reached the spot which the Canadian had noticed on his arrival; this spot, clearly indicated by the two oaks which had fallen in a cross, formed a species of small sandy promontory, favourable to the establishment of a night bivouac; for thence not only could the river be surveyed a long distance up and down, but it was also easy to watch both banks, and prevent a surprise.

"We will pass the night here," Tranquil said; "let us carry up the canoe, so as to shelter our fire."

Quoniam seized the light skiff, raised it, and placing it on his muscular shoulders, carried it to the spot his comrade had pointed out.

In the meanwhile, a considerable period had elapsed since the Canadian and the Negro met so miraculously. The sun, which had been low when the hunter doubled the promontory and chased the herons, was now on the point of disappearing; night was falling rapidly, and the background of the landscape was beginning to be confused in the shades of night, which grew momentarily denser.

The desert was awakening, the hoarse roar of the wild beasts was heard at intervals, mingled with the miauwling of the carcajou, and the sharp snapping bark of the prairie wolves.

The hunter chose the driest wood he could find to kindle the fire, in order that there might be no smoke, and the flame might light up the vicinity, so as to reveal at once the approach of the dangerous neighbours whose cries they could hear, and whom thirst would not fail soon to bring toward them.

The roasted birds and a few handfuls of pemmican composed the rangers' supper; a very sober meal, only washed down with water from the river, but which they ate with good appetite, like men who knew how to appreciate the value of any food Providence places at their disposal.

When the last mouthful was swallowed, the Canadian paternally shared his stock of tobacco with his new comrade, and lit his Indian pipe, in which he was scrupulously imitated by Quoniam.

"Now," said Tranquil, "it is as well you should know that an old friend of mine gave me the meeting at this spot about three months ago; he will arrive at daybreak to-morrow. He is an Indian Chief, and, although still very young, enjoys a great reputation in his tribe. I love him as a brother, and we were, I may say, brought up together. I shall be glad to see you gain his favour, for he is a wise and experienced man, for whom desert life possesses no secrets. The friendship of an Indian Chief is a precious thing to a wood-ranger; remember that. However, I feel certain you will be good friends at once."

"I will do all that is required for that. It is sufficient that the Chief is your friend, for me to desire that he should become mine. Up to the present, though I have wandered about the woods a long time as a runaway slave, I have never seen an independent Indian; hence it is possible that I may commit some awkwardness without my knowledge. But be assured that it will not happen through any fault of mine."

"I am convinced of it, so be easy on that head. I will warn the Chief, who, I fancy, will be as surprised as yourself, for I expect you will be the first person of your colour he has ever met. But night has now quite set in; you must be fatigued by the obstinate pursuit you experienced the whole day, and the powerful emotion you endured: sleep, while I watch for both, especially as I expect we shall make a long march to-morrow, and you must be prepared for it."

The Negro understood the correctness of his friend's remarks, the more so as he was literally exhausted with fatigue; he had been hunted so closely by his ex-master's blood-hounds, that for four days he had not closed his eyes. Hence, laying aside any false shame, he stretched out his feet to the fire, and slept almost immediately.

Tranquil remained seated on the canoe with his rifle between his legs, to be prepared for the slightest alarm, and plunged into deep thought, while attentively watching the neighbourhood, and pricking his ear at the slightest noise.

CHAPTER IV

THE MANADA

The night was splendid, the dark blue sky was studded with millions of stars which shed a gentle and mysterious light.

The silence of the desert was traversed by thousands of melodious and animated whispers; gleams, flashing through the shadows, ran over the grass like will-o'-the-wisps. On the opposite bank of the river the old moss-clad oaks stood out like phantoms, and waved in the breeze their long branches covered with lichens and lianas; vague sounds ran through the air, nameless cries emerged from the forest lairs, the gentle sighing of the wind in the foliage was heard, and the murmur of the water on the pebbles, and last that inexplicable and unexplained sound of buzzing life which comes from God, and which the majestic solitude of the American savannahs renders more imposing.

The hunter yielded involuntarily to all the puissant influences of the primitive nature that surrounded him. He felt strengthened and cheered by it; his being was identified with the sublime scene he surveyed; a gentle and pensive melancholy fell upon him; so far from men and their stunted civilization, he felt himself nearer to God, and his simple faith was heightened by the admiration aroused in him by these secrets of nature, which were partly unveiled in his presence.

The soul is expanded, thought enlarged, by contact with this nomadic life, in which each minute that passes produces new and unexpected incidents; where at each step man sees the finger of God imprinted in an indelible manner on the abrupt and grand scenery that surrounds him.

Hence this existence of danger and privation possesses, for those who have once essayed it, a nameless charm and intoxication, incomprehensible joys, which cause it ever to be regretted; for it is only in the desert man feels that he lives, takes the measure of his strength, and the secret of his power is revealed to him.

The hours passed thus rapidly with the hunter, though slumber did not once close his eyelids. Already the cold morning breeze was curling the tops of the trees, and rippling the surface of the stream, whose silvery waters reflected the shadows of its irregular banks; on the horizon broad pink stripes revealed the speedy dawn of day. The owl, hidden beneath the foliage, had twice saluted the return of light, with its melancholy toowhit – it was about three o'clock in the morning.

Tranquil left the rustic seat on which he had hitherto remained, shook off the stiffening feeling which had seized on him, and walked a few paces up and down the sand to restore the circulation in his limbs.

When a man, we will not say awakes – for the worthy Canadian had not closed his eyes once during the whole of this long watch – but shakes off the torpor into which the silence, darkness, and, above all, the piercing cold of night have plunged him, he requires a few minutes to regain possession of his faculties, and restore perfect lucidity of mind. This was what happened to the hunter; still, long habituated as he had been to desert life, the time was shorter to him than to another, and he was soon as acute and watchful as he had been on the previous evening; he therefore prepared to arouse his comrade, who was still enjoying that good and refreshing sleep which is only shared here below by children and men whose conscience is void of any evil thought – when he suddenly stopped, and began listening anxiously.

From the remote depths of the forest, which formed a thick curtain behind his camping-place, the Canadian had heard an inexplicable rumour rise, which increased with every moment, and soon assumed the proportions of hoarsely-rolling thunder.

This noise approached nearer; it seemed like sharp and hurried stamping of hoofs, rustling of trees and branches, hoarse bellowing, which had nothing human about it; in short, it was a frightful, inexplicable sound, momentarily growing louder and louder, and yet more confused.

Quoniam, startled by the strange noise, was standing, rifle in hand, with his eye fixed on the hunter, ready to act at the first sign, though unable to account for what was occurring, a prey to that instinctive terror which assails the bravest man when he feels himself menaced by a terrible and unknown danger.

Several minutes passed thus.

"What is to be done?" Tranquil murmured, hesitatingly, as he tried in vain to explore the depths of the forest, and account for what was occurring.

All at once a shrill whistle was audible a short distance off.

"Ah," Tranquil exclaimed, with a start of joy as he threw up his head, "now I shall know what I have to depend on."

And, placing his fingers in his mouth, he imitated the cry of the heron; at the same moment a man bounded from the forest, and with two tiger-like leaps was by the hunter's side.

"Wah!" he exclaimed, "What is my brother doing here?"

It was Black-deer, the Indian Chief.

"I am awaiting you, Chief," the Canadian answered.

The Redskin was a man of twenty-six to twenty-seven years of age, of middle height, but admirably proportioned. He wore the great war-garb of his nation, and was painted and armed as if on the war-trail; his face was handsome, his features intelligent, and his whole countenance indicated bravery and kindness.

At this moment he seemed suffering from an agitation, the more extraordinary because the Redskins make it a point of honour never to appear affected by any event, however terrible in its nature; his eyes flashed fire, his words were quick and harsh, and his voice had a metallic accent.

"Quick," he said, "we have lost too much time already."

"What is the matter?" Tranquil asked.

"The buffaloes!" said the Chief.

"Oh! oh!" Tranquil exclaimed, in alarm.

He understood all; the noise he had heard for some time past was occasioned by a *manada* of buffaloes, coming from the east, and probably proceeding to the higher western prairies.

What the hunter so quickly comprehended requires to be briefly explained to the reader, in order that he may understand to what a terrible danger our characters were suddenly exposed.

Manada is the name given in the old Spanish possessions to an assemblage of several thousand wild animals. Buffaloes, in their periodical migrations during the pairing season, collect at times in manadas of fifteen and twenty thousand animals, forming a compact herd; and travelling together, they go straight onwards, closely packed together, leaping over everything, and overthrowing every obstacle that opposes their passage. Woe to the rash man who would attempt to check or change the direction of their mad course, for he would be trampled like a wisp of straw beneath the feet of these stupid animals, which would pass over him without even noticing him.

The position of the three hunters was consequently extremely critical, for hazard had placed them exactly in front of a manada, which was coming towards them at lightning speed.

Flight was impossible, and could not be thought of, while resistance was more impossible still.

The noise approached with fearful rapidity; already the savage bellowing of the buffaloes could be distinctly heard, mingled with the barking of the prairie wolves; and the shrill miauls of the jaguars which dashed along on the flanks of the manada, chasing the laggards or those that imprudently turned to the right or left.

Within a quarter of an hour all would be over; the hideous avalanche already appeared, sweeping away all in its passage with that irresistible brute force which nothing can overcome.

We repeat it, the position was critical.

Black-deer was proceeding to the meeting place; he had himself indicated to the Canadian hunter, and was not more than three or four leagues from the spot where he expected to find him, when

his practised ear caught the sound of the mad chase of the buffaloes. Five minutes had sufficed for him to recognize the imminence of the danger his friend incurred; with that rapidity of decision which characterizes Redskins in extreme cases, he had resolved to warn his friend, and to save or perish with him. He had then rushed forward, leaping with headlong speed over the space that separated him from the place of meeting, having only one thought, that of distancing the manada, so that the hunter might escape. Unhappily, however quickly he went – and the Indians are remarkable for their fabulous agility – he had not been able to arrive soon enough to save his friend.

"When the Chief, after warning the hunter, recognized the futility of his efforts, a sudden change took place in him. His features reassumed their old stoicism; a sad smile played round his mocking lips, and he sank to the ground, muttering, in a hollow voice —

"The Wacondah would not permit it."

But Tranquil did not accept the position with the same resignation and fatalism, for he belonged to that race of energetic men whose powerful character causes them to struggle to their dying breath.

When he saw that the Redskin, with the fatalism peculiar to his race, gave up the contest for life, he resolved to make a supreme effort, and attempt impossibilities.

About twenty yards in front of the spot where the hunter had established his bivouac, were several trees lying on the ground, dead, and, as it were, piled on each other; then, behind this species of breastwork a clump of five or six oaks grew, isolated from all the rest, and formed a sort of oasis in the midst of the sand on the river bank.

"Quick!" the hunter shouted. "Quoniam, pick up as much dead wood as you can find, and come here. Chief, do the same."

The two men obeyed without comprehending, but reassured by their comrade's coolness.

In a few minutes a considerable pile of dead wood was piled over the fallen oaks.

"Good!" the hunter exclaimed; "By Heaven! All is not lost yet – take courage!"

Then, carrying to this improvised bonfire the remains of the fire he had lit at his bivouac, to defeat the night cold, he enlarged the flames with resinous matters, and in less than five minutes a large column rose whirling to the clouds, and soon formed a dense curtain more than ten yards in width.

"Back! back!" the hunter then shouted, – "follow me."

Black-deer and Quoniam dashed after him.

The Canadian did not go far; on reaching the clump of trees we have alluded to, he clambered up the largest with unparalleled skill and agility, and soon he and his comrades found themselves perched a height of fifty feet in the air, comfortably lodged on strong branches, and completely concealed by the foliage.

"There," the Canadian said, with the utmost coolness, "this is our last resource; so soon as the column appears, fire at the leaders; if the flash startles the buffaloes, we are saved; if not, we shall only have death to await. But, at any rate, we shall have done all that was humanly possible to save our lives."

The fire kindled by the hunter had assumed gigantic proportions; it had extended from tree to tree, lighting up the grass and shrubs, and though too remote from the forest to kindle it, it soon formed a curtain of flames nearly a quarter of a mile in length, whose reddish gleam tinged the sky for a long distance, and gave the landscape a character of striking and savage grandeur.

From the spots where the hunters had sought shelter they commanded this ocean of flame, which could not reach them, and completely hovered over its furnace.

All at once a terrible crash was heard, and the vanguard of the manada appeared on the skirt of the forest.

"Look out!" the hunter shouted, as he shouldered his rifle.

The buffaloes, startled by the sight of this wall of flame that rose suddenly before them, dazzled by the glare, and at the same time burned by its extreme heat, hesitated for an instant, as if consulting, but then rushed forward with blind fury, and uttering snorts of fury.

Three shots were fired.

The three leading buffaloes fell and rolled in the agonies of death.

"We are lost!" Tranquil said, coldly.

The buffaloes still advanced.

But soon the heat became insupportable; the smoke, driven in the direction of the manada by the wind, blinded the animals; then a reaction was effected; there was a delay, soon followed by a recoil.

The hunters, with panting breasts, followed anxiously the strange interludes of this terrible scene. A question of life or death for them was being decided at this moment, and their existence only hung on a thread.

In the meanwhile the mass still pushed onward. The animals that led the manada could not resist the pressure of those that followed them; they were thrown down and trampled underfoot by the rear, but the latter, assailed in their turn by the heat, also tried to turn back. At this moment some of the buffaloes diverged to the right and left; this was enough, the others followed them: two currents were established on either side the fire, and the manada cut in two, overflowed like a torrent that has burst its dykes, rejoining on the bank, and crossing the stream in close column.

Terrible was the spectacle presented by this manada flying in horror, pursued by wild beasts, and enclosing, amid its ranks, the fire kindled by the hunter, and which seemed like a gloomy lighthouse intended to indicate the track.

They soon plunged into the stream, which they crossed in a straight line, and their long serried columns glided up the other bank, where the head of the manada speedily disappeared.

The hunters were saved by the coolness and presence of mind of the Canadian; still, for nearly two hours longer, they remained Concealed among the branches that sheltered them.

The buffaloes continued to pass on their right and left. The fire had gone out through lack of nourishment, but the direction had been given, and, on reaching the fire, which was now but a pile of ashes, the column separated of its own accord into two parts.

At length, the rearguard made its appearance, harassed by the jaguars that leaped on their back and flank, and then all was over. The desert, whose silence had been temporarily disturbed, fell back into its usual calmness, and merely a wide track made through the heart of the forest, and covered with fallen trees, testified to the furious passage of this disorderly herd.

The hunters breathed again; now they could without danger leave their airy fortress, and go back again to earth.

CHAPTER V

BLACK-DEER

So soon as the three rangers descended, they collected the scattered logs, in order to rekindle the fire over which they would cook their breakfast.

As there was no lack of provisions, they had no occasion to draw on their own private resources; several buffaloes that lay lifeless on the ground offered them the most succulent meal known in the desert.

While Tranquil was engaged in getting a buffalo hump ready, the Black and Redskin examined each other with a curiosity revealed in exclamations of surprise from both sides.

The Negro laughed like a maniac on remarking the strange appearance of the Indian warrior, whose face was painted of four different colours, and who wore a costume so strange in the eyes of Quoniam; for that worthy, as he himself said, had never before come in contact with Indians.

The other manifested his astonishment in a different way: after standing for a long time motionless, and watching the Negro, he walked up to him, and not uttering a word, seized Quoniam's arm, and began rubbing it with all his strength with the skirt of his buffalo robe.

The Negro, who at the outset readily indulged the Indian's whims, soon began to grow impatient; he tried at first to liberate himself, but was unable to succeed, for the Chief held him firmly, and conscientiously went on with his singular operation. In the meanwhile, the Negro, whom this continued rubbing was beginning not merely to annoy, but cause terrible suffering, began uttering frequent yells, while making the most tremendous efforts to escape from his pitiless torturer.

Tranquil's attention was aroused by Quoniam's cries; he threw up his head smartly, and ran up at full speed to deliver the Negro, who was rolling his eyes in terror, leaping from one side to the other, and yelling like a condemned man.

"Why does my brother torture that man so?" the Canadian asked as he interposed.

"I?" the Chief asked in surprise, "I am not torturing him; his disguise is not necessary, so I am removing it."

"What! My disguise?" Quoniam shouted.

Tranquil made him a sign to be silent.

"This man is not disguised," he continued.

"Why, then, has he painted all his body in this way?" the Chief asked obstinately, "Warriors only paint their face."

The hunter could not repress a burst of laughter.

"My brother is mistaken," he said, so soon as he recovered his seriousness; "this man belongs to a separate race; the Wacondah has given him a black skin, in the same way as he made my brother's red, and mine white; all the brothers of this man are of his colour; the great Spirit has willed it so, in order that they may not be confused with the Redskin nations and the Palefaces; if my brother look at his buffalo robe, he will see that not the least bit of black has come off on it."

"Wah!" the Indian said, letting his head sink, like a man placed before an insoluble problem; "the Wacondah can do everything!"

And he mechanically obeyed the hunter by taking a peep at the tail of his robe, which he had not yet thought of letting go.

"Now," Tranquil went on, "be kind enough to regard this man as a friend, and do for him what you would do, if wanted, for me, and I shall feel under the greatest obligations to you."

The Chief bowed gracefully, and held out his hand to the Negro.

"The words of my brother the hunter warble in my ears with the sweetness of the song of the *centzontle*," he said. "Black-deer is a Sachem of his nation, his tongue is not forked, and the words his

chest breathes are clear, for they come from his heart; Black-face will have his place at the Council fire of the Pawnees, for from this moment he is the friend of a Chief."

Quoniam bowed to the Indian, and warmly returned the pressure of his hand.

"I am only a poor black," he said, "but my heart is pure, and the blood is as red in my veins as if I were Indian or white; both of you have a right to ask my life of me, and I will give it you joyfully."

After this mutual exchange of assurances of friendship, the three men sat down on the ground, and began their breakfast.

Owing to the excitement of the morning, the three adventurers had a ferocious appetite; they did honour to the buffalo hump, which disappeared almost entirely before their repeated attacks, and which they washed down with a few horns of water mixed with rum, of which liquor Tranquil had a small stock in a gourd, hanging from his waist belt.

When the meal was ended, pipes were lighted, and each began smoking, silently, with the gravity peculiar to men who live in the woods.

When the Chief's pipe was ended, he shook out the ashes on his left thumbnail, passed the stem through his belt, and turned to Tranquil,

"Will my brothers hold a council?" he asked.

"Yes," the Canadian answered: "when I left you on the Upper Missouri, at the end of the Moon of the burned fruit (July), you gave me the meeting at the creek of the dead oaks of the Elk River, on the tenth day of the Moon of the falling leaves (September), two hours before sunrise: both of us were punctual, and I am now waiting till it please you to explain to me, Chief, why you gave me this meeting."

"My brother is correct, Black-deer will speak."

After uttering these words, the Indian's face seemed to grow dark, and he fell into a profound reverie, which his comrades respected by patiently waiting till he spoke again.

At length, after about a quarter of an hour, the Indian Chief passed his hand over his brow several times, raised his head, took a searching glance around, and made up his mind to speak, though in a low and restrained voice, as if, even on the desert, he feared lest his words might fall on hostile ears.

"My brother the hunter has known me since child-hood," he said, "for he was brought up by the Sachems of my nation: hence I will say nothing of myself. The great Paleface hunter has an Indian heart in his breast; Black-deer will speak to him as a brother to a brother. Three moons ago, the Chief was following with his friend the elks and the deer on the prairies of the Missouri, when a Pawnee warrior arrived at full speed, took the Chief aside, and spoke with him privately for long hours; does my brother remember this?"

"Perfectly, Chief; I remember that after the conversation Blue Fox, for that was the name of the Chief, set off as rapidly as he had come, and my brother, who till then had been gay and cheerful, became suddenly sad. In spite of the questions I addressed to my brother he could not tell me the cause of this sudden grief, and on the morrow, at sunrise, he left me, giving me the meeting here for this day."

"Yes," the Indian said, "that is exact. Things happened so; but what I could not then tell, I will now impart to my brother."

"My ears are open," the hunter replied, with a bow. "I fear that, unfortunately, my brother has only bad news to tell me."

"My brother shall judge," he said. "This is what Blue Fox came to tell me. One day a Paleface of the Long Knives of the West arrived on the banks of Elk River, where stood the village of the Snake Pawnees, followed by some thirty warriors of the Palefaces, several women, and large medicine lodges, drawn by buffaloes without humps or manes. This Paleface halted two arrow shots' lengths from the village of my nation, on the opposite bank, lit his fires, and camped. My father, as my brother knows, was the first sachem of the tribe. He mounted his horse and, followed by several

warriors, crossed the river and presented himself to the stranger, in order to bid him welcome on the hunting grounds of our nation, and offer him the refreshments he might have need of.

"This Paleface was a man of lofty stature, with harsh and marked features. The snow of several winters had whitened his scalp. He began laughing at my father's words, and replied to him – 'Are you the chief of the Redskins of this village?' 'Yes,' said my father. Then the Paleface took from his clothes a great necklace, on which strange figures were drawn, and showing it to my father, said, 'Your Pale Grandfather of the United States has given me the property in all the land stretching from Antelope's Fall to Buffalo Lake. This,' he added, as he struck the necklace with the back of his hand, 'proves my title.'

"My father and the warriors who accompanied him burst into a laugh.

"Our Pale Grandfather,' he answered, 'cannot give what does not belong to him. The land of which you speak has been the hunting ground of my nation ever since the great tortoise came out of the sea to support the world on its shell.'

"I do not understand what you say to me,' the Paleface continued. 'I only know that this land has been given to me; and that, if you do not consent to withdraw and leave me to the full enjoyment of it, I possess the means to compel you.'"

"Yes," Tranquil interrupted, "such is the system of those men – murder and rapine."

"My father retired," the Indian continued, "under the blow of this threat. The warriors immediately took up arms, the women were hidden in a cave, and the tribe prepared for resistance. The next morning, at daybreak, the Palefaces crossed the river and attacked the village. The fight was long and obstinate. It lasted the whole period contained between two suns. But what could poor Indians do against Palefaces armed with rifles? They were conquered and forced to take to flight. Two hours later, their village was reduced to ashes, and the bones of their ancestors cast to the four winds. My father was killed in the battle."

"Oh!" the Canadian exclaimed, sadly.

"That is not all," the Chief went on. "The Palefaces discovered the cave where the women of my tribe were sheltered; and nearly all – for about a dozen contrived to escape with their papooses – were coldly massacred, with all the refinements of the most horrible barbarity."

After uttering these words, the Chief hid his head on his buffalo robe, and his comrades heard the sobs he tried in vain to stifle.

"Such," he went on a moment later, "was the news Blue Fox communicated to me. 'My father died in his arms, leaving his vengeance as my inheritance. My brothers, pursued like wild beasts by their ferocious enemies, and compelled to hide themselves in the most impenetrable forests, had elected me as Chief. I accepted, making the warriors of my nation swear to avenge themselves on the Palefaces, who had seized our village and massacred our brothers. Since our parting, I have not lost a moment in collecting all the means of revenge. To-day all is ready. The Palefaces have gone to sleep in a deceitful security, and their awakening shall be terrible. Will my brother follow me?'"

"Yes, by Heaven! I will follow you, Chief, and help you with all my ability," Tranquil answered, resolutely, "for your cause is just; but on one condition."

"My brother can speak."

"The law of the desert says, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth,' it is true; but you can avenge yourself without dishonouring your victory by useless barbarity. Do not follow the example given you, but be humane, Chief; and the Great Spirit will smile on your efforts and be favourable to you."

"Black-deer is not cruel," the Chief answered. "He leaves that to the Palefaces. He only wishes to be just."

"What you say is noble, Chief; and I am happy to hear you speak thus; but are your measures well taken? Is your force large enough to ensure success? You know that the Palefaces are numerous, and never allow one aggressor to pass unpunished. Whatever may happen, you have to expect terrible reprisals."

The Indian smiled disdainfully. "The Long Knives of the West are cowardly dogs and rabbits. The squaws of the Pawnees will make them petticoats," he answered. "Black-deer will go with his tribe to settle on the great prairies of the Comanches, who will receive them as brothers, and the Palefaces of the West will not know where to find them."

"That is a good idea, Chief; but, since you have been driven from your village, have you not kept spies round the Americans, in order to be informed of their actions? that was important for the success of your further plans."

Black-deer smiled, but made no other answer, whence the Canadian concluded that the Redskin had, with the sagacity and prudence which characterize his race, taken all the necessary precautions to insure the success of the blow he was about to deal at the new clearing.

Tranquil, owing to his semi-Indian education, and the hereditary hatred which, as a true Canadian, he bore to the Anglo-Saxon race, was perfectly well inclined to help the Pawnee Chief in taking an exemplary vengeance on the Americans for the insults he had received at their hands; but with that correctness of judgment which formed the basis of his character, he did not wish to let the Indians indulge in those atrocious cruelties, to which they only too often yield in the first intoxication of victory. Hence the determination he formed had a double object – in the first place, to insure as far as he could the success of his friends, and, secondly, to employ all the influence he possessed over them, to restrain them after the battle, and prevent them satiating their vengeance on the conquered, and, above all, on the women and children.

As we have seen, he did not attempt to conceal his object from Black-deer, and laid down as the first condition of his co-operation, which the Indians would be delighted to receive, that no unnecessary cruelty should be committed.

Quoniam, for his part, did not make any stipulation; a natural enemy of the Whites, and specially of the North Americans, he eagerly seized the occasion of dealing them as much injury as possible, and avenging himself for the ill treatment he had experienced, without taking the trouble to reflect that the people he was about to fight were innocent in the matter of his wrong; these individuals were North Americans, and that reason was more than sufficient to justify, in the sight of the vindictive Negro, the conduct he proposed to carry out when the moment arrived.

After a few minutes the Canadian spoke again.

"Where are your warriors?" he asked the Chief.

"I left them three suns' march from the spot where we now are; if my brother has nothing to keep him longer here, we will set out immediately, in order to join them as soon as possible, for my return is impatiently expected by the warriors."

"Let us go," the Canadian said; "the day is not yet far advanced, and it is needless for us to waste our time in chattering like curious old women."

The three men rose, drew on their belts, walked hastily along the path formed by the manada through the forest, and soon disappeared under its covert.

CHAPTER VI

THE CLAIM

We will now leave our three travellers for a while, and employing our privilege of narrator, transfer the scene of our story a few hundred miles away, to a rich and verdant valley of the Upper Missouri, that majestic river, with its bright and limpid waters, on the banks of which now stand so many flourishing towns and villages, and which magnificent steamboats furrow in every direction, but which, at the period when our story opens, was almost unknown, and only reflected in the mirror of its waters the lofty and thick frondage of the gloomy and mysterious virgin forests that covered its banks.

At the extremity of a fork, formed by two rather large affluents of the Missouri, stretches out a vast valley, bordered on one side by abrupt mountains, and on the other by a long line of wooded hills.

This valley, almost entirely covered with thick forests, full of game of every description, was a favourite gathering-place of the Pawnee Indians, a numerous tribe of whom, the Snakes, had established their abode in the angle of the fork, in order to be nearer their hunting-grounds. The Indian village was rather large, for it counted nearly three hundred and fifty fires, which is enormous for Redskins, who usually do not like to collect in any considerable number, through fear of suffering from famine. But the position of the village was so well chosen, that in this instance the Indians had gone out of their usual course; in fact, on one side the forest supplied them with more game than they could consume; on the other, the river abounded with deliciously tasted fish of every description; while the surrounding prairies were covered throughout the year with a tall close grass, that supplied excellent pasturage for their horses.

For several centuries the Snake Pawnees had been settled in this happy valley, which, owing to its sheltered position on all sides, enjoyed a soft climate, exempt from those great atmospheric perturbations which so frequently disturb the high American latitudes. The Indians lived there quiet and unknown, occupying themselves with hunting and fishing, and sending annually small bodies of their young men to follow the war-trail, under the most renowned chiefs of the nation.

All at once this peaceful existence was hopelessly disturbed; murder and arson spread like a sinister winding-sheet over the valley; the village was utterly destroyed, and the inhabitants were pitilessly massacred.

The North Americans had at length gained knowledge of this unknown Eden, and, in their usual way announced their presence on this remote nook of earth, and their taking possession of it by theft, rapine, and assassination.

We will not repeat here the story Black-deer told the Canadian, but confine ourselves to the assertion that it was in every point true, and that the Chief, in telling it, far from rendering it more gloomy by emphatic exaggeration, had, on the contrary, toned it down with uncommon justice and impartiality.

We will enter this valley three months after the arrival of the Americans which proved so fatal to the Redskins, and describe, in a few words, the way in which they formerly had established themselves on the territory from which they so cruelly expelled the legitimate owners.

Hardly had they become uncontested owners of the soil, than they commenced what is called a clearing.

The government of the United States had, about forty years ago, and probably still has, a habit of requiring the services of old officers, by making them concessions of land on those frontiers of the Republic most threatened by the Indians. This custom had the double advantage of gradually extending the limits of the American territory by driving back the Indians into the desert, and of not abandoning in their old days soldiers who during the greater portion of their life had shed their blood nobly for their country.

Captain James Watt was the son of an officer who distinguished himself in the war of Independence. Colonel Lionel Watt, aide-de-camp to Washington, had fought by the side of that celebrated founder of the Republic in all the battles against the English. Seriously wounded at the siege of Boston, he had been, to his great regret, compelled to retire into private life; but, faithful to his principles, so soon as his son James reached his twentieth year, he made him take his place under the flag.

At the period when we bring him on the scene, James Watt was a man of about five-and-forty, although he appeared at least ten years older, owing to the incessant fatigue of the exacting profession in which his youth had been passed.

He was a man of five feet eight, powerfully built, with broad shoulders, dry, muscular, and endowed with an iron health; his face, whose lines were extremely rigid, was imprinted with that expression of energetic will, blended with carelessness, which is peculiar to those men whose existence has been only one continual succession of dangers surmounted. His short grey hair, his bronzed complexion, black and piercing eyes, his well-chiselled mouth, gave his face an expression of inflexible severity, which was not deficient in grandeur.

Captain Watt, who had been married for two years past to a charming young lady he adored, was father of two children, a son and daughter.

His wife, Fanny by name, was a distant relation of his. She was a brunette, with exquisite blue eyes, and was most gentle and modest. Although much younger than her husband, for she was not yet two-and-twenty, Fanny felt for him the deepest and sincerest affection.

When the old soldier found himself a father, and began to experience the intimate joys of a family life, a revolution was effected in him; he suddenly took a disgust to his profession, and only desired the tranquil joys of home.

James Watt was one of those men with whom it is only one step from the conception to the execution of a plan. Hence, no sooner had the idea of retiring from the service occurred to him than he at once carried it out, resisting all the objections and remonstrances his friends raised.

Still, although the Captain was inclined to retire into private life, he did not mean to put off military harness and assume a citizen's coat. The monotonous life of Union towns had nothing very seductive for an old soldier, for whom excitement and movement had been the normal condition almost from his birth.

Consequently, after ripe reflection, he stopped half way, which, in his opinion, would remedy the excessive simplicity and peace a citizen life might have for him.

This was to be effected by asking for a claim on the Indian border, clearing it with the help of his servants, and living there happy and busy, like a mediæval lord among his vassals.

This idea pleased the Captain the more, because he fancied that in this way he should still be serving his country, as he would lay the foundation of future prosperity, and develop the first traces of civilization in a district still given up to all the horrors of barbarity.

The Captain had long been engaged with his company in defending the frontier of the Union against the incessant depredations of the Redskins, and preventing their incursions; hence he had a knowledge – superficial it is true, but sufficient – of Indian manners, and the means he must employ not to be disturbed by these restless neighbours.

During the course of the numerous expeditions which the service had compelled him to make, the Captain had visited many fertile valleys, and many territories, the appearance of which had pleased him; but there was one above all, the memory of which had been obstinately engraved on his mind – a delicious valley he had seen one day as in a dream, after a hunting expedition, made in company of a wood-ranger – an excursion which lasted three weeks, and had insensibly taken him further into the desert than ever civilized man had gone before.

Though he had not seen this valley again for more than twenty years, he remembered it as if he had seen it but yesterday – recalling it, as it were, in its minutest details. And this obstinacy of his

memory in constantly bringing before him this nook of earth, had ended by affecting the Captain's imagination to such a degree, that when he resolved to leave the service and ask for a claim, it was to this place and no other that he was determined to go.

James Watt had numerous friends in the offices of the Presidency; besides, the services of his father and himself spoke loudly in his favour: hence he experienced no difficulty in obtaining the claim he requested.

Several plans were shewn him, drawn up by order of government, and he was invited to select the territory that suited him best.

But the Captain had chosen the one he wanted long before; he rejected the plans shewn him, produced from his pocket a wide slip of tanned elk hide, unrolled it, and shewed it to the Commissioner of Claims, telling him he wanted this, and no other.

The Commissioner was a friend of the Captain, and could not refrain from a start of terror on hearing his request.

This claim was situated in the heart of the Indian territory, more than four hundred miles from the American border. The Captain wished to commit an act of madness, of suicide; it would be impossible for him to hold his ground among the warlike tribes that would surround him on all sides; a month would not elapse ere he would be piteously massacred, as must be his family and those servants who were mad enough to follow him.

To all these objections, which his friend piled up one atop of the other, in order to make him change his opinion, the Captain only replied by a shake of the head, accompanied by a smile, which proved that his mind was irrevocably made up.

At length, the Commissioner being driven into his last intrenchments, told him point-blank that it was impossible to grant him this claim, as the territory belonged to the Indians, and, moreover, a tribe had built its village there since time immemorial.

The Commissioner had kept this argument to the last, feeling convinced that the Captain could find no answer, and would be compelled to change, or, at least, modify his plans.

He was mistaken; the worthy Commissioner was not so well acquainted with his friend's character as he might fancy.

The latter, not at all affected by the triumphant gesture with which the Commissioner concluded his speech, coolly drew from another pocket a second slip of tanned deer-hide, which he handed his friend, without saying a word.

The latter took it with an inquiring glance, but the Captain merely nodded to him to look at it.

The Commissioner unrolled it with marked hesitation; from the old soldier's behaviour he suspected that this document contained a peremptory answer.

In fact, he had scarce looked at it, ere he threw it on the table with a violent movement of ill humour.

This slip of deer-skin contained the sale of the valley and the surrounding territory made by Itsichaichè or Monkey-face, one of the principal sachems of the Snake Pawnees, in his name and that of the other chiefs of the nation, in exchange for fifty muskets, fourteen dozen scalping-knives, sixty pounds of gunpowder, sixty pounds of bullets, two barrels of whisky, and twenty-three complete militia uniforms.

Each of the chiefs had placed his hieroglyphic at the foot of the deed, beneath that of Monkey-face.

We will say at once that this deed was false, and the Captain in the affair was the perfect dupe of Monkey-face.

This chief, who had been expelled from the tribe of Snake Pawnees for various causes, as we shall reveal at the proper moment, had forged the deed, first to rob the Captain, and next to avenge himself on his countrymen; for he knew perfectly well that if the Captain received authority from his government he would seize the valley, whatever the consequences of this spoliation might be. The

only condition the Captain made was, that the Redskin should act as his guide, which he consented to do without any hesitation.

When the deed of sale was laid before him, the Commissioner was forced to confess himself beaten, and *nolens volens* grant the authority so obstinately solicited by the Captain.

When all the documents were duly registered, signed, and sealed, the Captain began his preparations for departure without further delay.

Mrs. Watts loved her husband too well to offer any objections to the execution of his plans. Brought up herself on a clearing at no great distance from the Indian border, she had become familiarized with the savages, whom the habit of constantly seeing caused her no longer to fear them; besides, she cared little where she lived, so long as she had her husband by her side.

Quite calm as regarded his wife, the Captain therefore set to work with all that feverish activity which distinguished him.

America is a land of prodigies; it is, perhaps, the only country in the world where it is possible to find between to-day and the morrow the men and things indispensable for carrying out the maddest and most eccentric projects.

The Captain did not deceive himself in the slightest as to the probable consequences of the resolution he had formed; hence he wished, as far as was possible, to guard against any eventualities, and ensure the security of the persons who would accompany him to his claim, the first among these being his wife and children.

His selection, however, did not take him long: among his old comrades many wished for nothing better than to follow him, at the head of them being an old sergeant of the name of Walter Bothrel, who had served under him for more than fifteen years, and who, at the first news of his Chief's retirement, went to him and said that as his Captain was leaving the service, he did not care to remain in it, and the only favour he asked was leave to accompany him wherever he went.

Bothrel's offer was gladly accepted by the Captain, for he knew the value of the sergeant, who was a sort of bull-dog for fidelity, a man of tried courage, and one on whom he could entirely count.

To the sergeant Captain Watt entrusted the duty of enrolling the detachment of hunters he intended to take with him, in order to defend the new colony, if the Redskins took it into their head to attack it.

Bothrel carried out his instructions with the intelligent consciousness he displayed in all matters, and he soon found in the Captain's own company thirty resolute and devoted men, only too glad to follow the fortunes of their ex-Chief, and attach themselves to him.

On his side, the Captain had engaged some fifteen workmen of every description, blacksmiths, carpenters, &c., who signed an undertaking to serve him five years, after which they would become tenants at a small rental of farms the Captain would give them, and which would become their own property on the expiration of a further term of years.

All the preparations being at length terminated, the colonists, amounting to fifty men, and about a dozen females, at length set out for the claim in the middle of May, taking with them a long pile of waggons loaded with stores of every description, and a large herd of cattle, intended to provision the colony, as well as for breeding purposes.

Monkey-face acted as guide, as had been arranged. To do the Indian the justice due to him, we will say that he conscientiously performed the duty he undertook; and that during a journey of nearly three months across a desert infested by wild beasts and traversed in every direction by Indian hordes, he managed to save those he led from the majority of the dangers that menaced them at each step.

CHAPTER VII

MONKEY-FACE

We have seen in what summary manner the Captain seized on the territory conceded to him. We will now explain how he established himself there, and the precautions he took not to be disturbed by the Indians he had so brutally dispossessed, and who, he judged from his knowledge of their vindictive character, would probably not yet consider themselves beaten, but might begin at any moment the attempt to take a sanguinary and terrible vengeance for the insults put upon them.

The fight with the Indians had been rude and obstinate, but, thanks to Monkey-face, who revealed to the Captain the weakest points of the village, and especially the superiority of the American fire-arms, the Indians were at length compelled to take to flight, and abandon all they possessed to the conquerors.

It was a wretched booty, consisting only of animal skins, and a few vessels made of coarse clay.

The Captain, no sooner master of the place, began his work, and laid the foundation stone of the new colony; for he understood the necessity of protecting himself as quickly as possible against a *coup-de-main*.

The site of the village was completely freed from the ruins that encumbered it; the labourers then began levelling the ground, and digging a ditch six yards wide, and four deep, which was connected on one side by means of a drain with the affluent of the Missouri, on the other with the river itself; behind this ditch, and on the wall formed of the earth dug out of it, a line of stakes was planted, twelve feet high, and fastened together by iron bands, almost invisible interstices being left, through which a rifle barrel could be thrust and discharged under covert. In this entrenchment a gate was made large enough for a waggon to pass, and which communicated with the exterior by a drawbridge, which was pulled up at sunset.

These preliminary precautions taken, an extent of about four thousand square yards was thus surrounded by water, and defended by palisades on all sides, excepting on the face turned to the Missouri, for the width and depth of that river offered a sufficient guarantee of security.

It was in the free space to which we have just alluded, that the Captain began building the houses and offices for the colony.

At the outset these buildings were to be made of wood, as is usually the case in all clearings, that is to say, of trees with the bark left on them; and there was no lack of wood, for the forest was scarce a hundred yards from the colony.

The works were pushed on with such activity, that two months after the Captain's arrival at the spot all the buildings were finished, and the interior arrangements almost completed.

In the centre of the colony, on an elevation made for the purpose, a species of octagonal tower, about seventy feet in height, was erected, of which the roof was flat, and which was divided into three storeys. At the bottom were the kitchen and offices, while the upper rooms were allotted to the members of the family, that is to say, the Captain and his lady, the two nursemaids, young and hearty Kentuckians, with rosy and plump cheeks, called Betsy and Emma; Mistress Margaret, the cook, a respectable matron entering on her ninth lustre, though she only confessed to five-and-thirty, and still had some pretence to beauty, and, lastly, to Sergeant Bothrel. This tower was closed with a stout iron-lined door, and in the centre was a wicket to reconnoitre visitors.

About ten yards from the tower, and communicating with it by a subterraneous passage, were the log huts of the hunters, the workmen, the neatherds, and labourers.

After these, again came the stables and cow houses.

In addition, scattered here and there, were large barns and granaries intended to receive the produce of the colony.

But all these different buildings were arranged so as to be isolated, and so far from each other, that in the event of fire, the loss of one building need not absolutely entail that of the rest; several wells were also dug at regular distances, so as to have abundance of water, without the necessity of fetching it from the river.

In a word, we may say that the Captain, as an old experienced soldier, accustomed to all the tricks of border warfare, had taken the minutest precautions to avoid not merely an attack, but a surprise.

Three months had elapsed since the settlement of the Americans; this valley, hitherto uncultivated, and covered with forests, was now in great part ploughed up; clearings effected on a large scale had removed the forest more than a mile from the colony; all offered the image of prosperity and comfort at a spot where, so shortly before, the carelessness of the Redskins allowed nature to produce at liberty the small stock of fodder needed for their beasts.

Inside the colony, all offered the most lively and busy sight; while outside, the cattle pastured under the care of mounted and well-armed herds, and the trees fell beneath the blows of the axemen; inside, all the workshops were in full activity, long columns of smoke rose from the forges, the noise of hammers was mingled with the whirring of the saw; on the river bank, enormous piles of planks stood near others composed of fire-wood; several boats were tied up, and from time to time the shots of the hunters could be heard, who were carrying out a battue in the woods in order to stock the colony with deer-meat.

It was about four in the afternoon, and the Captain, mounted on a magnificent black horse, with four white stockings, was ambling across a freshly-cleared prairie.

A smile of quiet satisfaction played over the old soldier's stern face at the sight of the prodigious change his will and feverish activity had effected in so short a time on this unknown corner of earth, which must, however, in no remote future, acquire a great commercial importance, owing to its position; he was approaching the colony, when a man, hitherto hidden behind a pile of roots and bushes heaped up to dry, suddenly appeared at his side.

The Captain repressed a start of anger on perceiving this man, in whom he recognised Monkey-face.

We will say here a few words about this man, who is destined to play a rather important part in the course of our narrative.

Itsichaichè was a man of forty, tall, and well proportioned; he had a crafty face, lit up by two little gimlet eyes; his vulture-beaked nose, his wide mouth, with its thin and retiring lips, gave him a cunning and ugly look, which, in spite of the cautious and cat-like obsequiousness of his manner, and the calculated gentleness of his voice, inspired those whom accident brought in contact with him with an impulsive repugnance which nothing could overcome.

Contrary to the usual state of things, the habit of seeing him, instead of diminishing, and causing this unpleasant feeling to disappear, only increased it.

He had conscientiously and honestly performed his contract in leading the Americans, without any obstacle, to the spot they wished to reach; but, since that period, he had remained with them, and had, so to speak, foisted himself on the colony, when he came and went as he pleased, and no one paid any attention to his actions.

At times, without saying anything, he would disappear for several days, then suddenly return, and it was impossible to obtain any information from him as to where he had been and what he had been doing during his absence.

Still, there was one person to whom the Indian's gloomy face constantly caused a vague terror, and who had been unable to overcome the repulsion with which he inspired her, although she could give no explanation of the feeling: this person was Mrs. Watt. Maternal love produces clear-sightedness: the young lady adored her children, and when at times the Redskin by chance let

a careless glance fall on the innocent creatures, the poor mother shivered in all her limbs, and she hastily withdrew from the sight of the man the two beings who were all in all to her.

At times she tried to make her husband share her fears, but to all her remarks the Captain merely replied by a significant shrug of his shoulders, supposing that with time this feeling would wear off and disappear. Still, as Mrs. Watt constantly returned to the charge with the obstinacy and perseverance of a person whose ideas are positively formed and cannot change, the Captain, who had no cause or plausible reason to defend against the wife he loved and respected, a man for whom he did not profess the slightest esteem, at length promised to get rid of him. As, moreover, the Indian had been absent from the colony for several days, he determined immediately on his return to ask for an explanation of his mysterious conduct, and if the other did not reply in a plain and satisfactory manner, to tell him that he would not have him any longer about the settlement, and the sooner he took himself off the better for all parties.

Such was the state of the Captain's feelings toward Monkey-face, when accident brought him across his path at the moment he least expected him.

On seeing the Indian, the Captain checked his horse.

"Is my father visiting the valley?" the Pawnee asked.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Oh!" the Indian went on as he looked around him, "All has greatly changed since the beasts of the Long Knives of the West have been grazing peacefully on the territories of which they dispossessed the Snake Pawnees."

The Indian uttered these words in a sad and melancholy voice, which caused the Captain some mental anxiety.

"Is that a regret you are giving vent to, Chief?" he asked him. "If so, it seems to me very unsuitable from your lips, since it was you who sold me the territory I occupy."

"That is true," the Indian said with a shake of his head. "Monkey-face has no right to complain, for it was he who sold to the Palefaces of the West the ground where his fathers repose, and where he and his brothers so often hunted the elk and the jaguar."

"Hum, Chief, I find you very sad to-day; what is the matter with you? Did you, on waking this morning find yourself lying on your left side?" he said, alluding to one of the most accredited superstitions among the Indians.

"No," he continued, "the sleep of Monkey-face was exempt from evil omens, nothing arrived to alter the calmness of his mind."

"I congratulate you, Chief."

"My father will give tobacco to his son, in order that he may smoke the calumet of friendship on his return."

"Perhaps so, but first I have a question to ask of you."

"My father can speak, his son's ears are open."

"It is now a long time, Chief," the Captain continued, "since we have been established here."

"Yes, the fourth moon is beginning."

"Since our arrival, you have left us a great many times without warning us."

"Why should I do so? Air and space do not belong to the Palefaces, I suppose; the Pawnee warrior is at liberty to go where he thinks proper; he was a renowned Chief in his tribe."

"All that may be true, Chief, and I do not care about it; but what I do care about is the safety of my family and the men who accompanied me here."

"Well," the Redskin said, "in what way can Monkey-face injure that safety?"

"I will tell you, Chief; listen to me attentively, for what you have to hear is serious."

"Monkey-face is only a poor Indian," the Redskin answered, ironically; "the Great Spirit has not given him the clear and subtle mind of the Palefaces, still he will try to understand my father."

"You are not so simple as you choose to appear at this moment, Chief; I am certain you will perfectly understand me, if you only take the trouble."

"The Chief will try."

The Captain repressed a movement of impatience.

"We are not here in one of the great cities of the American Union, where the law protects the citizens and guarantees their safety; we are, on the contrary, on the Redskin territory, far from any other protection than our own; we have no help to expect from anyone, and are surrounded by vigilant enemies watching a favourable moment to attack us and massacre us if they can; it is therefore our duty to watch over our own safety with the utmost vigilance, for the slightest imprudence would gravely compromise us. Do you understand me, Chief?"

"Yes, my father has spoken well; his head is grey; his wisdom is great."

"I must therefore carefully watch," the Captain continued, "the movements of all the persons who belong nearly or remotely to the colony; and when their movements appear to me suspicious, to ask those explanations which they have no right to refuse me. Now, I am compelled to confess to you, Chief, with extreme regret, that the life you have been leading for some time past seems to me more than suspicious. It has, therefore, attracted my attention, and I expect a satisfactory answer from you."

The Redskin had stood unmoved; not a muscle of his face moved; and the Captain, who watched him closely, could not notice the slightest trace of emotion on his features. The Indian had expected the question asked him, and was prepared to answer it.

"Monkey-face led my father and his children from the great stone villages of the Long-knives of the West to the spot. Has my father had any cause to reproach the Chief?"

"None, I am bound to allow," the Captain answered, frankly; "you did your duty honestly."

"Why, then, does a skin now cover my father's heart? and why has suspicion crept into his mind about a man against whom, as he says himself, he has not the slightest reproach to bring? Is that the justice of the Palefaces?"

"Let us not drift from the question, Chief, or change it, if you please. I could not follow you through all your Indian circumlocution; I will, therefore, confine myself to saying that, unless you consent to tell me frankly the cause of your repeated absences, and give me assured proof of your innocence, I will have you turned out of the colony, and you shall never set foot again on the territory I occupy."

A gleam of hatred flashed from the Redskin's eye; but, immediately recalling it, he replied, in his softest voice —

"Monkey-face is a poor Indian; his brothers have rejected him on account of his friendship with the Palefaces. He hoped to find among the Long-knives of the west, in the absence of friendship, gratitude for service rendered. He is mistaken."

"That is not the question," the Captain continued impatiently; "will you answer Yes or No?"

The Indian drew himself in, and walked up to the speaker close enough to touch him.

"And if I refuse?" he said, as he gave him a glance of defiance and fury.

"If you refuse, scoundrel! I forbid you ever appearing again before me; and if you disobey me, I will chastise you with my dog-whip!"

The Captain had hardly uttered these insulting words ere he repented of them. He was alone, and unarmed, with a man whom he had mortally insulted; hence he tried to arrange matters.

"But Monkey-face," he went on, "is a chief; he is wise; he will answer me — for he knows that I love him."

"You lie, dog of the Palefaces!" the Indian yelled, as he ground his teeth in fury; "you hate me almost as much as I hate you!"

The Captain, in his exasperation, raised the switch he carried in his hand; but, at the same moment, the Indian, with a panther-leap, bounded on to his horse's croup, dragged the Captain out of his stirrups, and rudely hurled him to the ground.

"The Palefaces are cowardly old women," he said; "the Pawnee warriors despise them, and will send them petticoats."

After uttering these words with a sarcastic accent impossible to describe, the Indian bent over the horse's neck, let loose the rein, uttered a fierce yell, and started at full speed, not troubling himself further about the Captain, whom he left severely bruised by his fall.

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