

Aimard Gustave

The Missouri Outlaws



Gustave Aimard

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NOTICE

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

PREFACE

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narratives written by GUSTAVE AIMARD are equal in freshness and vigour to "The Missouri Outlaws," hitherto unpublished in this country.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

PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

London: *February, 1877.*

CHAPTER I. THE GOOD SHIP PATRIOT

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

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

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

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

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

These were Captain Pierre Durand, a young man, with regular but rather effeminate features, and yet a look of frank honesty, to which his sparkling eyes, his broad forehead, his long waving hair, gave an appearance of singular energy. Though every inch a sailor, there was a refinement about him not generally found in his class.

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

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

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

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

"Then why sulk with your friend?"

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

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

Both drank after touching glasses, and then silence again ensued.

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

"You remember our conversation at Brest?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How you suffer!" sighed his friend.

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

"Not if it makes you suffer."

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

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

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

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

"Accommodating husband," sneered Durand.

"Just so. But, unfortunately for me, I became older, curious, was always turning up when not wanted, and saying things which were not required. It was decided that I was an incorrigible scamp, and must be sent away."

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

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

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

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

"As I see," answered Durand.

"I was first boy on board a herring boat, where I had to endure the brutality and insolence of a low drunkard, who never spoke except with an oath from his mouth, accompanying it with a blow from his cane. My apprenticeship was one long terror. Sometimes a whaler, sometimes a cod fisher, sometimes a slaver. I have been five or six times round the world; abandoned on the wildest coast of America, I was a long time prisoner; shipwrecked on an island in the Pacific, I wonder I did not die of misery and despair."

"Poor Oliver!"

"But bad as was my life, I everywhere in savage lands found some friend; but in France, from which I was ignominiously expelled eleven years ago, I found on my return two implacable foes – Calumny and Hatred. I was a very sharp boy, and trusted wholly to strangers. I could not help hearing

many things I should not have heard. I discovered the secret of my birth, who were my father and mother, their exact names, and their position in society. One day, in a moment of frenzy – and you know I am extremely violent – I was foolish enough to let out the fact that I knew all. From that day a vow was made to accomplish my ruin; the most calumnious reports pursued me; I was accused behind my back and in the dark of the most horrible crimes. It is to me still a wonder how I have escaped all the ambushes laid for me. My foes hesitated at nothing. They tried to assassinate me. Is it not horrible? Well, having failed in the ordinary way, they bribed the captain of a ship I had joined to maroon me on the coast of New Mexico, where dwell the most ferocious Indian tribes."

"And the captain did this?"

"Pardieu!" cried Oliver; "He was a poor man, and the father of a family. I was cast on shore stupefied by laudanum. When I recovered the ship was already out of sight. I expected to be killed by the savages or to die of hunger. How neither happened is too long a story to tell now. But the end of all is, I have determined on an eternal exile. Never again will I place myself in the power of my foes, who live rich, happy, and respected in France."

"You will establish yourself in Boston?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As soon as they were alone the captain spoke.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Musing thus Oliver strolled about, looking listlessly at the streets, the shops, and particularly selecting those which, by-and-by, he would have to visit for the purpose of his outfit, which he would have to purchase after breakfast.

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

"Now let us chat," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, only I wondered."

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

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

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

"There shall be none," answered Oliver.

"Have you much money?" asked Durand.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Don't be downhearted. Perhaps we may meet sooner than either of us expect," retorted Oliver.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Certainly, without hesitation, my friend."

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

"What can you mean? Provided my outfit!"

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

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

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

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

"Get out of that and wait a little longer. As you seriously wish to adopt savage life, at all events you must be rigged out accordingly," he added, laughing. "This is a hunting knife, which you put in your belt; these pistols are to be placed in the holsters; that sword is perhaps one of the best cavalry swords I have ever seen. What, more! Oh, yes. This portmanteau, which is neither too large nor too small, in which you will find shirts and other necessities. Then some pipes, tobacco, flint and steel, and a dozen boxes of preserves, in case you may someday be short of provisions. I think, on my honour, that is all. No, I had forgotten: paper, pens, ink, and pencils. And now my watch as a last remembrance."

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

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

And the two Frenchmen embraced.

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

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

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

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

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

The captain burst out laughing.

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

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

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

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

"You seem to know all about it."

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

"It is yours," said Durand.

"What do you mean?"

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

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

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

"But there are two horses," he cried.

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

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

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

"Straight forward," replied Oliver.

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

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

CHAPTER II.

SAMUEL DICKSON GIVES ADVICE TO HIS BROTHER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, Massa Samuel, dem all dere."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It is nothing at all," she said, "only a slight feeling of sickness, which will soon pass away."

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

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

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

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

"Thank you; I am not hungry."

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

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

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

"Let me ask you where are you going?"

"Northward, to the great lakes."

"What is the meaning of this?"

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

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

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

"Have you seen this beautiful country?"

"No; but I know all about it."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Were you unable to sell your produce?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Good!" cried Joshua, laughing.

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

"I will embark on one of the rivers."

"And where will you land?"

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

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

"I am determined."

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

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

Samuel Dickson, putting his hands behind his back, walked across the room with great strides, backwards and forwards, watching his niece curiously under his eyes.

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

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

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

"You know how much I love you."

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

"Hem! But –"

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

"But when?" cautiously asked the emigrant.

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

"That is a long delay," continued Joshua.

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

"As you will, my brother," sighed Joshua; "I give you my word to wait until the day after tomorrow at seven o'clock in the morning – no later."

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

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

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

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

"He is your brother," she replied.

"Our only relative," murmured Diana.

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

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

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

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

He came face to face with Samuel Dickson, who had just been admitted by the sleepy innkeeper.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Look out of window," drily answered Samuel.

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

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

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

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

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

Uncle Samuel was adored by all the family, everyone was delighted, while Diana was radiant.

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

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

Two hours later the double caravan started on its way.

CHAPTER III. A QUEER CUSTOMER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Before him was a valley through which flowed two rivers, which after some time joined and fell into the Missouri, whose vast lake surface appeared like a white vapoury line on the distant horizon. Upon a promontory projecting into the first river was a superb bosquet of palms and magnolias; the latter, shaped like a perfect cone, stood in lustrous verdure against the dazzling whiteness of the flowers, which, despite the season, were still blooming. These flowers were so large that Oliver could see them a mile off.

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

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

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

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

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

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

No matter whether he was to meet friends or foes, he was not sorry to see a human face; for a week, not a white man, Métis, or Indian had fallen across his path, and, despite himself, this complete silence and absolute solitude began to tell upon him, though he would not own it even to himself.

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

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

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

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

He pushed aside some branches that checked his progress, and found himself face to face with a young man, who, seated on the grass by the riverside, near a glowing fire, was dipping biscuit in the water with one hand, while with the other, in which he held a knife, he dipped into a tin containing sardines.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ten if you like – nay, fifty."

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

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

"Then of course you are French?"

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

"I am also French," said Oliver.

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

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

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

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

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

"I am sure of it," responded Oliver.

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

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

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

"I am attention," said Oliver.

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

"Good. I hate politics."

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

"So it seems."

"A true daughter of Caudebec, handsome, attractive, and good, adored by her husband, and respected by all who knew her. It appears that the English soldier had seen her through the open door."

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

He at once entered with a conquering air, and began to make love to the pretty young person he had noticed performing her maternal office. It was an unfortunate idea for him. My grandfather lifted him up and threw him through the window on to the stones outside. He was dead. My grandfather then turned round and spoke of something else."

"A tough old gentleman!"

"Pretty solid. He even had Indian blood – "

"You spoke of Domfront."

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

"Very natural," said Oliver.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And your grandfather?"

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

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

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

Then a shot was heard.

CHAPTER IV. AN ALLIANCE OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Go on, my friend."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I shall be delighted to hear your story," cried the Canadian, with evident delight.

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

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

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

"Sad story, indeed," he cried, when the other had concluded; "how you must have suffered from the unjust hatred of these people! Alone in the world, without any to interest himself in you;

surrounded by hostile or indifferent people; compelled to suffer from dark and insidious foes; capable of great things – young, strong, and intelligent, yet reduced to fly into the desert, and separate yourself from your fellows. Pardon if my cruel curiosity has reopened the wound which long since should have been cauterised."

He paused, keenly watching the other's face.

"Will you be my friend?" he suddenly cried. "I already feel for you an affection I can scarcely explain."

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

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

"I swear it," resumed Oliver.

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

"I thank heaven we have met."

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

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

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

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

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

"I am convinced of it," said Oliver.

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

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

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

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

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

"You are quite right."

"To pass the time I will prepare supper."

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

"He is a young man like ourselves, grandson of Kouha-hande. He is himself a chief, and a noted brave. Though young, his reputation is immense. He is tall, athletic, and even elegant of face. His features are handsome, even to effeminacy. His glance, gentle in repose as that of a dove, is, when his anger is aroused, so terrible that few can face it. His physical force is stupendous, his cunning sublime. But you will soon judge for yourself. His enemies call him Kristikam-Seksenan, or Black Thunder; his friends call him Numank-Charake, the brave man, in consequence of his mighty deeds."

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

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

"I am extremely anxious to do so."

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

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

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

"A summary excuse, truly," said Oliver.

"Listen," cried Bright-eye.

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

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

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

The rider was very much as Bright-eye had described him. There was about him, moreover, an air of grandeur, a majesty which inspired respect without repelling sympathy. One glance sufficed to fix him as a man of superior nature.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER V. A GREAT MEDICINE COUNCIL

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

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

All the time the Canadian went on with his cooking, while the chief gave fodder to the horses. "Supper is ready," suddenly cried Bright-eye, laughing, "let us eat."

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

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

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

The meal, which was washed down by several draughts of French brandy, was merry, enlivened by jokes and witticisms. The Indians are always thus among themselves. It is only when in the presence of the whites, whom they hate, that they are grave, silent, and sullen, never unbending except under the influence of drink, when their conduct is that of beings under the influence of delirium tremens.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We listen," added Oliver, bowing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This formality over he replaced his calumet and sat down.

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

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

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

"When I was near her the young girl spread out her arms towards me, and then made a step forward. I paused, and waited. 'Numank is a great warrior,' she said, modestly lowering her eyes; 'his hut is lined with the scalps of his foes, he has rich skins of every kind of beast, his ball never misses; happy will be the woman whom he loves.'"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My brother is right," said the chief; "I will tell him the whole expedition. Before starting, the turf was taken off a considerable square of earth, the mould being made soft and pliable with the hands. It was then surrounded by stakes. When all was ready I went in and sat at the end opposed to the direction in which the enemy lived. After singing and praying, I put on the edge of the open space two little white stones."

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

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

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

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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