

Kingston William Henry Giles

**The Perils and Adventures of
Harry Skipwith by Land and
Sea**



William Kingston

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W.H.G. Kingston

The Perils and Adventures of Harry Skipwith by Land and Sea

Chapter One

My first Adventure – Programme of Travel – Off across the Atlantic – The Mississippi – How we got snagged – I save Peter Roberts – The Cayman’s Company – The Island Refuge

The love of travel was a family instinct, and was born with me. My maternal grandfather went to Central Africa – at least, he left us intending to do so, but never came back again. I had a great uncle who voyaged three times round the world, and one sailor uncle who, half a century ago, spent a winter at the North Pole along with Parry and Franklin. Then I had a cousin who was very ambitious of reaching the moon, and spent his life in studying its maps and making preparations for the journey, which, however, he never accomplished. When asked when he was going to start, he always replied that he had deferred his journey for six months – circumstances requiring his longer sojourn on this planet Tellus; but he never expressed the slightest doubt about his being able ultimately to accomplish his proposed journey. I held him in great respect (which was more than any of the rest of the family did); but as my ambition never soared beyond an expedition round this sublunary globe, I resolved as soon as possible to commence my travels in the hopes of having the start of him.

My voluntary studies were of a character to feed my taste. The travels of the famed Baron Munchausen, “Gulliver’s Travels,” those of Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo, were read by me over and over again. I procured others of a more modern date, and calculated to give more correct information regarding the present state of the world; but I stuck to my old friends, and pictured the globe to myself much in the condition in which they described it. Not having the patience to wait till I grew up, I resolved at the commencement of my summer holidays to start by myself, hoping to come back before their termination, having a full supply of adventures to narrate. I was some days maturing my plans and making preparations for my journey. I had denied myself such luxuries as had been brought to our school by the pieman, and had saved up my pocket-money – an exercise of self-denial which proved the earnestness of my resolve. I had had too several presents made to me by relations and friends who happened to be in the house. I paid a visit also to my cousin, Booby Skipwith, as he was called. I did not confide to him all my plans; but I hinted that I had one of great importance in hand, and, to my great delight, he presented me with a five-pound note, observing that he believed that such things were not current in the moon, and that, therefore, he could dispense with them. I hinted that if such was the case he might hand me out a few more, for that where I was going they would be greatly in demand; but it proved that this was the only one of which he was possessed.

I had got a small portmanteau, into which I packed all my best clothes and valuables, with a few glass beads and knives which I had purchased to bestow on any savages I might encounter. I had a lance-head brought home by my great uncle. With this I purposed manufacturing a lance for my defence. I knew that, as England is an island, I must cross the water. My idea, when on the other side, whether north, south, east, or west I did not care, was to purchase two steeds – one for myself and another for my luggage and a squire, whom I intended to find. I was certain that he would turn up somewhere, and be very faithful and brave. The first, thing, however, was to get away from home. I wrote an affectionate letter to my father, telling him that I was going on my travels as my ancestor

had done, and that I should be back, I hoped, by the end of the holidays; that if I was not, it could not much signify, as I should be gaining more information from my intercourse with the great world than I could possibly hope to reap from the instruction of Dr Bumpus.

This done, one very fine morning I crept out of the house with my portmanteau on my shoulders, and getting over the park palings, so as not to be seen by the lodge-keeper, I stood ready for a coach that would pass by, I had ascertained, about that time. I waited anxiously, thinking that it must have already passed. At last I saw it coming along the road in a cloud of dust. I hailed it in a knowing way, handed up my portmanteau to be placed by the coachman in the boot under his feet, and climbing up behind in a twinkling before any questions were asked, away we bowled at a famous rate. "All right," I thought; "I am now fairly off on my travels." We had twenty miles to get to the railway station. Once in the train, I should be beyond pursuit. I had no fear of that, however. I should not be missed for some hours, and then no one would know in what direction I had gone.

We approached the station near Burton. My heart throbbed with eagerness. In a few minutes the train would be starting. The coach stopped before the hotel. At that a moment a gentleman on horseback was passing. He saw me before I had time to hide my face.

"Why, Harry, where are you going?" he exclaimed. It was my uncle, Roland Skipwith, the arctic voyager. He looked into the coach, expecting to see some one. "What, are you all alone? Where are you going, boy?"

"On my travels, uncle," I answered, boldly, hoping that he might approve of my purpose, seeing that he was himself a great traveller. "You will not stop me, I know."

"We'll see about that," he answered, in a tone I did not quite like. "Get down, youngster. I'll give you a little advice on the subject. You can't go by this train, that's certain."

While I reluctantly obeyed, he inquired of Tomkins, the coachman, how he came to bring me away from home. Tomkins apologised – thought that I was going on a visit to my aunt, Miss Rebecca Skipwith, who lived at Burton, and finished by handing out my portmanteau, and receiving my fare to Burton in exchange.

I was sold, that was clear enough. The portmanteau was deposited in the bar till the coach would return soon after noon.

"Come along," said my uncle, who had given his horse to the hostler. "I have ridden over to breakfast with your Aunt Rebecca, so we'll hear what she has to say on the matter."

I felt rather foolish as he took my hand and led me away.

We soon reached Aunt Becky's neat trim mansion. My uncle had time to say a few words to her before she saw me. She received me with her usual cordiality, for I was somewhat of a pet of hers. I was desperately hungry, and was soon seated at a table well spread with all sorts of appetising luxuries. My uncle, after a little time, when I had taken the edge off my hunger, began to question me as to my proposed plans, to an account of which he and Aunt Becky listened with profound gravity. I began to hope that he was going to approve of them, till suddenly he burst out laughing heartily. Aunt Becky joined him. I found that they had been hoaxing me. I was sold again. This was the last attempt I made during that period of my existence to commence my travels.

On arriving at manhood, and having just quitted college and had an independence left me, the desire once more came strongly on me to see the world – not the fashionable world, as an infinitesimal portion of the human race delight to call themselves, but the great big round globe, covered with our fellow-creatures of varied colours, languages, customs, and religions.

"Good-bye, Aunt Becky! I really and truly am off this time," I exclaimed, as I rushed into my dear, good old aunt's drawing-room at Burton, she looking as neat and trim as ever, being the perfection of nice old-maidenism, not a whit older than when, some thirteen years before, I had been brought there a prisoner by my uncle.

"Where are you going to, my dear?" asked Aunt Becky, lifting up her spectacles from her nose with a look of surprise.

“Oh, only just across the Atlantic, to take a run up and down North and South America, as a kind of experiment before I attempt a tour, by land and water, to China and Japan, and home again by way of Australia, New Zealand, and Tahiti, by the Panama route, which I mean to do some of these days.”

“Well, well,” said Aunt Becky, “you are a true Skipwith, and if that Captain Grant hadn’t got the start of you, I suppose you would have discovered the source of the Nile and the snow mountains under the equator, and, like Hercules, in that gem on my finger, which I wear for the sake of an old friend, have come home with a lion’s skin across your shoulder, or dressed up like an ape, as Monsieur de Chaillu did sometime ago. However, I shall wish, Harry, if you ever want an additional hundred pounds or so, draw on me; I have always some spare cash at the banker’s. But you’ll never come back if you attempt half you talk of doing. You’ll be scalped by Indians, or roasted and eaten by other savages; or be tossed by buffaloes, or lost in the snow; or be blown up in one of those dreadful American steamers, which seem to do nothing else; or you’ll catch a fever, or be cast away on a desolate island, and we shall never hear anything more of you; or something else dreadful will happen to you, I am certain.”

“Never mind, Aunt Becky; I shall be embalmed in your memory, at all events,” I answered; “and besides, I am going to have a companion to look after me.”

“Who can he be who would venture to accompany such a harum-scarum fellow as you are, Harry?” said my aunt, looking more satisfied.

“One who has ever proved faithful, aunt: his name is Ready.”

“Why, he’s your dog, Harry!” she exclaimed, disappointed.

“Could I have a more trustworthy and, at the same time, active and intelligent follower?” I asked. “I had thought of taking Bunbry,” (he was my father’s old butler, and remarkable for his obesity and laziness); “but you see, aunt, in the first place, my father could not spare him; and, in the second, he could not exactly keep up with me on a day’s march of thirty or forty miles, and would certainly be nowhere when chasing wild buffaloes, or hunting panthers or grizzly bears. So I gave up the idea of having a servant at all; and as for a friend, I don’t happen to be supplied with one ready to go, and I hope to find plenty on the way.”

Having at length consoled Aunt Becky, by assuring her that I would take very good care of myself, and promising to bring her home trophies from all the lands I should visit, I gave her a parting kiss, in return for her blessing, and a few days afterwards I found myself, with Liverpool astern, sailing down the Mersey on board the good ship *Liberty*, bound for New Orleans, which the people on board pronounced New Orle-e-ens.

The striped and starry banner waved over our heads. “There, now, that’s the flag of flags,” said the skipper, pointing to it. “You Britishers talk of your flag which has ‘braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze,’ but I guess that flag of ours will be flying proudly in every quarter of the globe when your old obsolete government will have come to a consummate smash.” He looked so savage at me, that Ready would have flown at his leg, had I not held him back.

I was determined not to be put out of temper, so I answered quietly —

“Now, captain, I should be very happy to suppose that your stars and stripes will fly to the end of the world; but I do not see why the banner of old England should not be allowed to wave as long. There’s room for both of us, surely. It’s my principle to live and let live.”

“Why, stranger, because you are not a nation of free men, you don’t know what true liberty is,” he replied, gnashing his teeth in a way which made Ready show his in return.

“Our old obsolete government showed that it appreciated liberty when, at a vast cost, it knocked off the shackles from every slave owned by a Briton,” I observed, calmly.

“I guess you’d better not touch on that there subject, stranger, when you get to New Orle-e-ens, or Judge Lynch may have a word to say to you,” croaked out the skipper, curling his nose, and giving

a malicious wink at me while he squirted a stream of tobacco juice into the eye of poor Ready, who went howling round the deck with pain.

I took the hint, and held my tongue on the dark subject. It's ill to talk of the gallows to a man whose father has been hung, and none but a Knight of La Mancha runs a tilt against windmills when travelling in foreign lands. Still, I say, do not do at Rome as Rome does, but protest, if not loudly, silently – by your conduct – against vice and immorality, and all the abominations you may meet with.

We had a large number of emigrants on board, who were fully persuaded that they were going to enjoy not only the most perfect government under the sun, but every blessing this world can supply. Poor people! how different did they find the reality. We kept to the southward of that mighty stream which, coming out of the Gulf of Mexico, sweeps away north, across the Atlantic, and, with its well-heated waters, adds considerably to the warmth of our shores at home. We saw neither floating icebergs, whales, nor sea serpents, but had several births and deaths, and at last made the island of St. Thomas, which appeared floating like a blue cloud on the ocean. As we drew nearer, a vast mountain rose before us, seemingly, directly out of the water, having a sterile summit, sprinkled round with spots of refreshing verdure. The harbour is in the form of an amphitheatre, and the land round, with its glittering white town on three hills, its old fort advancing into the sea, its green valleys, groves of cocoa-nuts, and fields of sugar-cane, is a highly picturesque spot. We put in to get a supply of water, fruit, vegetables, and fresh provisions; but, as the yellow fever was at the time carrying off about twenty of the inhabitants a day, negroes and mulattoes as well as white people, I was satisfied with admiring its beauties at a distance. Putting to sea again as fast as we could, we weathered the north-western point of Cuba, and entered the Gulf of Mexico, between that island and Florida.

About a week afterwards vast numbers of logs of wood, floating in yellow water, indicated that we were at the mouths of the Mississippi, for, of course, a mighty stream a thousand miles long, would not be content with one mouth, like our poor little humble Thames. The scenery, consisting of mud-banks and swamps, as far as the eye can reach, is not very attractive. It is curious to look back after making numerous windings, and to observe the sea over the mud-banks, considerably lower than the water on which the ship is floating. With a fair wind stemming the stream for a hundred and thirty miles, we found ourselves amid a crowd of vessels of all nations off New Orleans, the capital of Louisiana. It is a large handsome looking city, but, as the ground on which it stands is lower than the surface of the river, I could not help feeling, while I was there, that some night I might find myself washed out of my bed by its muddy waters.

Intending to return to New Orleans, I left my traps at my hotel, and embarked with Ready on board a huge steamer bound up the Mississippi. A cockney might describe her as like a Thames wherry with an omnibus on the top of it, and vast paddles outside all. I found that passengers could only ascend to the upper saloon, which ran the whole length of the vessel, the roof being of necessity sacred to the officers and crew. There were numerous galleries, however, on each side of the paddle-boxes, and forward and aft, whence I could observe the scenery. It was not very attractive, consisting chiefly of low swamps – the habitations of alligators and rattlesnakes. Here and there were more elevated spots, on which villages were perched, and patches where once the forest grew, but which were now covered with fields of sugar-cane, maize, and cotton bushes.

We were dashing on at a prodigious rate – I fancy the engineer must have been sitting on the safety-valve – when, feeling a dreadful concussion, and being thrown forward with my nose on the deck, I heard those around me exclaim, “Snagged!” “We are sinking!” A snag is a log of timber stuck sloping in the mud. Against one of these snags we had run. Down, down sank the huge machine. “Aunt Becky forgot to mention this, among the other modes of losing my life which she enumerated,” I thought to myself. “She forgot that Mississippi steamers could sink as well as blow up.” However, I had no intention of going out of the world just then, if I could help it.

The river was at that part very wide and shallow; but I observed an island not far off, and I hoped to reach it. If there were any boats round the vessel, there was no time to lower them. The

awful plunge came. Some hundred human beings were hurled amid the turbid waters. Many were carried down with the vessel; others were shrieking piteously, and struggling for life. The weather was intensely hot. I had on but little clothing. I struck out towards the island. As I did so, the thought occurred to me, "For what purpose was my great strength given me? Surely to be of use to my fellow-creatures. I can save one of these poor people at all events." I turned back. The first person I saw was a poor lad, who had been my fellow-passenger on board the *Liberty*. I had more than once spoken to him. His name was Peter. "Help, help!" he shrieked out. "Oh, Mr Skipwith, save me." I caught him by the collar, and threw him on to my back. "There, Peter," said I, "cling on, but don't touch my arms, and, with Heaven's support, I'll carry you on shore." The lad made no answer, but did as I bade him, and away Ready and I swam towards the island. I cannot forget the shrieks and cries for help of the unfortunate beings drowning round me. Now an arm was lifted up; now two hands in the attitude of supplication. Now the countenance of some strong man full of horror and despair came into view. Women and children were floating about, held up for a while by their clothes, and others were clinging to chairs, and stools, and bits of the wreck, which had risen to the surface. I felt many clutch at me. A sad necessity compelled me to shake them off. I should have endangered Peter's life, as well as my own, had I attempted to help them.

It was no easy work. The current was strong, and there were eddies which whirled me round and round, while Mississippi's muddy waters were less buoyant than those of the ocean. The island for which I was making was lower down than where the steamer had struck, or I doubt if I should have been saved. As I approached the bank, I saw that there were numerous reeds flinging it, which I doubted if I could penetrate. Still the attempt must be made. I looked about, till I saw a space which appeared more clear, and I swam at it to force my way through. The reeds seemed to grow thicker and thicker. It became very heavy work, and I feared that I should get my legs entangled, and be held fast. At last I saw a thick log of wood floating a little way on.

"I will let Peter rest on it while I make my way to the shore, and, after recovering my strength, I will go off and tow him in," I thought to myself: and then I told him what I proposed doing. I swam up to the log, lifted Peter off with my left hand, and had placed him on it, while I kept myself afloat with my right, when Ready began to bark furiously, turning round his head at the log, and swimming off in an opposite direction. I thought this odd, when suddenly the log began to move. A vast pair of jaws, with long rows of formidable teeth, opened, but instead of snapping at me, the alligator (for such it was, and of prodigious size) swam away after my faithful Ready. I eased poor Peter, who, terror-stricken, was about to take a most uncomfortable ride on the alligator's back, and dragging him off before the creature had towed us many yards, I succeeded, by efforts which the greatest alarm alone could have enabled me to make, in reaching the shore. I climbed up the bank myself, and was dragging up poor Peter, when the alligator, disappointed in catching the sagacious Ready, who was safe on land, furiously barking at him, made a dash towards us. I had just time to draw the boy up by a violent jerk, when the monster's long jaws closed with a loud clack close to his heels. Peter shrieked out, believing that he was caught, but I soon reassured him, and, by setting him on his legs, proved that he had retained them. The alligator, or cayman, was, however, not to be balked of his prey, and, not being aware of the number of people floating away helplessly down the stream, he began to climb up the bank with the intention of catching one of us at least. The island was of about twenty acres in extent, with a clump of cypress trees and a palm or two in the centre; but the ground of the greater portion was soft and boggy, and covered with reeds, and long grass springing up among logs of timber, in all stages of decay, which had been washed up during the floods of spring. This was not very convenient ground for active operations; yet still the alligator took care that we should be actively employed. As we had no arms with which to assail him, we could only act on the defensive.

The alligator soon got up the bank, and then stopped and eyed us all three, meditating, apparently, which he should first devour. I had made Peter move a little way off on one side of me, while Ready ran about on the other. The brute was hungry, and, seeing that I was the largest animal,

he made up his mind to have me first; so on he waddled through the grass, at so rapid a rate, that the consequences, had I tumbled, would have been very serious.

Ready played his part admirably, and directly he saw that the cayman was running at me, he began to bark more furiously than ever, so as to distract the monster's attention. He succeeded, for the alligator stopped several times to look at him, but his mouth was watering with the anticipation of the *bonne bouche* my substantial carcass would prove, and he again made chase after me. I shouted to the lad to run for the clump of trees. He obeyed my directions as well as he could, but twice he fell and disappeared between some logs, and I was afraid he was lost, but he scrambled out and ran on. I had to keep my eyes about me, as I leaped from log to log, watching the alligator, and looking to see where I was going. I had got more than half way to the clump of trees, when I heard a loud hissing, and looking down, I found that I was about to leap into a nest of snakes. Mrs Snake put up her head, of flat, venomous form, and I thought would have flown at me, but I sprang on one side with more agility than ever. I had not much fear of the cayman, but no courage, strength, or activity would avail against a single serpent, and the island, I suspected, swarmed with them. It would not, however, have done to stop, as the alligator, having no dread of the snakes, did not. Peter had reached the clump, and had wisely begun to climb a tree. I dashed after him, kicking up several rattlesnakes who had not time to bite me, Ready running by my side, and our pursuer, as the ground was smoother, following faster than ever. I seized Ready in my arms, and threw him up to Peter, who caught him, and placed him safely on a branch, while I sprang up after him, and the alligator, who darted on, snapped his jaws within a foot of my legs as I swung them up out of his way. A pretty predicament we were in, perched on the branch of a cypress tree with the monster cayman leering up at us from below, and thinking it very hard, after all the trouble he had taken, that we should have escaped his jaws. Still I felt how much better off we were than the several hundred human beings who had so suddenly met a watery grave. I looked out from our perch towards the spot where the steamer had gone down. Not a creature could I see: the pieces of wreck, with people floating on them, had been carried out of sight down the stream, but whether any were likely to reach the shore I could not tell. I thought that some might; but I pictured them roaming about through those vast swamps, without food, far from human habitations, till at length they fell a prey to alligators, or were killed by serpents, or sank down and died from hunger and fatigue. Our position was not very pleasant either, for the river was so wide that I was not at all certain that we should be seen by vessels passing up and down; and I dreaded that we might be starved before we could get off. I grew very hungry, for I had been waiting to rush into dinner when the vessel sank. Peter had scarcely spoken; indeed, I was uncertain whether or not he was grateful to me for saving him; but he was evidently not a lad of words. I remarked that I had had nothing to eat since breakfast.

"What, haven't you had your dinner, sir?" he exclaimed, in a tone of surprise. "Well, things always turn out lucky with me. Here, sir."

Diving into his coat-pockets, he produced some meat and cheese, and two large lumps of bread, which, however, were rather mashed by the soaking they had got.

"There, take that; it will do you good; you want something after that long swim," said he.

"Thank you, I will take a piece of bread and meat gladly," I answered. "You, Peter, keep the rest for yourself."

"No, no, it's yours, sir. I'll not touch it," he replied in a determined, steady tone. I ate a small portion, and begged him to keep the rest.

"There's another friend wants something," he remarked, cutting off a piece of the cheese rind and some gristle from the meat, and giving them to Ready, who had looked up wistfully at him as he was handing me the food. "There, old fellow, you deserve it, I am sure you do," said he, patting the dog's head.

I had little doubt after this that Peter's heart was in the right place. Night, was coming on, and the danger of our position increased. When the sun went down, the mosquitoes attacked us furiously,

and ran their huge probosces into our skins, till there was scarcely a spot without a wound. The only satisfaction was that they kept us awake; for had we gone to sleep, we might have fallen off the bough; and had we fallen off the bough, we should have tumbled into the jaws of the alligator, waiting anxiously below to devour us. Such were the not over-pleasant prospects for the approaching night.

Chapter Two

Mosquitoes – A Runaway Slave – I am wounded – The Struggle, and Ready and Peter come to the Rescue – Peace Negotiations – Treaty of Alliance, Defensive and Offensive – The Canoe Voyage – Marcus’s Story

We sat up in the tree, wishing that the alligator would betake himself to the waters of the Mississippi; but he seemed resolved to make his supper off one of us, and in this neither of us was willing to indulge him. Peter made no remarks, but Ready, every now and then, gave a growl of disapprobation; indeed, I believe, had I allowed him, he would have jumped down and done battle with the monster. I did not suppose that the cayman would catch him; but I knew that he could not by any possibility hurt the cayman, so I kept him safe up on the branch beside me. The mosquitoes continued as active as ever, and as Peter and I had only each of us a hand at liberty, we could but partially defend ourselves from their attacks. Hour after hour passed by.

“I wonder whether it will ever be morning!” observed the poor lad, giving himself, for the thousandth time, a slap on the cheek.

“We are not the first people who have wished for the return of day, my boy,” said I. “But hark –”

There was a slight sound as of an oar dipped in the water. It approached the island. It ceased, and I felt sure that the person or persons in the boat had landed. I listened. I could hear the sound of a canoe or boat being hauled up, and soon a light bursting forth showed me that a fire had been kindled, for the purpose probably of cooking. The alligator heard the sounds also, I suspect; for finding that we were not likely to come down to satisfy his appetite, he wheeled round and began to crawl back to the other spot whence the sounds proceeded. I suspected that he had not seen the fire, which, from our higher position we had observed, and I knew that he was not likely to approach it. I should otherwise have shouted out to warn whoever might be there of the approach of the monster. As soon as the brute had moved off, Peter, Ready, and I jumped down to the ground and advanced towards the spot where we had seen the fire. It had now burnt up brightly, and between us and it I observed the huge form of the alligator crawling on. He must have suddenly become aware of the fire, for I saw him, much to my satisfaction, scramble off as fast as he could on one side, and the sound of a heavy plunge assured me that he had once more taken to the water. Peter and Ready followed at my heels. I slowly advanced, and in a short time I saw a man sitting down on his hams before the fire, at which he was cooking a fish. He was a negro, a big athletic-looking fellow, with a bare woolly head, and naked to the waist, round which he wore a belt, and in it were stuck a brace of pistols and a long bowie-knife. The noise of the river rushing by and the crackling of the burning sticks had prevented him from hearing our approach. He turned his head – the glance of the fire fell on us. In a moment he was on his feet, and, drawing a pistol from his belt, he levelled it at my head.

“I am a friend,” I shouted out as rapidly as I could, but the black had not time to change the impulse given to his finger. There was a flash, a report, and a sharp stinging sensation in my neck told me that the bullet had taken effect. To save my life I sprang forward, and throwing myself with all my might on the stranger, I grasped his arm as he was drawing a second pistol, and bearing him down we both rolled over together to the ground and very nearly into the water. He was as strong as I was, and being naked I had great difficulty in holding his arms and preventing him from drawing his knife, which he made strenuous efforts to do, while at the same time he was evidently endeavouring to roll off the bank into the river, and to drag me with him. I could not help thinking of my friend, the cayman, who would probably have most largely benefited by the success of his attempt. When people go to fisty-cuffs, there are seldom wanting alligators to profit by their quarrels. Had I been

alone, strong and active as I was, I scarcely know what would have been the result; but I had two trusty friends at hand. We had not been struggling many moments, when Ready, having laid his plans for the campaign, flew at the negro's legs, one of which he gripped so firmly that the poor fellow roared out with pain; while Peter, after hesitating an instant, caught him by his woolly head and tugged away manfully in an opposite direction. In our struggles we all rolled into the fire – black, boy, dog, and I; and had not our clothes been still somewhat damp, we should have been quickly in flames, and, had the alligator come back, all ready cooked for his supper. As it was, we kicked about the burning ashes, tossing them into the air, when they came down in showers upon us, till, what with the singeing he was undergoing, the biting of the dog, and the pulling of his hair, the negro cried out lustily for mercy.

“Well, I have no wish to hurt you,” said I, still holding down his arms. “Don't attempt again to shoot me, and I will very gladly be your friend. Off, Ready! let go dog! Don't pull the man's hair any more, boy.”

Peter and the dog obeyed me, and the man, getting up and shaking himself, began to scrape the ashes together, and then, looking for his fish, stuck it on a stick to roast as if nothing particular had occurred.

“You are a cool hand, my friend,” said I, sitting down opposite to him. “You might have killed me just now.”

“Of course; I took you for an enemy,” he answered.

“What enemies have you to fear?” I asked.

“Slave-hunters,” he answered, grinding his teeth and uttering a fearful oath.

“But how do you know that we are not searching for a runaway slave?” I asked.

“Because you are an Englishman,” he replied.

“Why do you fancy that?” said I.

“From the way you spoke to your boy and dog,” he observed with a fierce laugh. “There would have been a kick and a curse had you belonged to this country; but, though you gripped me hard, and well-nigh squeezed the breath out of me, I know you to be a man, and I trust you.”

“I am obliged to you for your confidence, and I will not betray it; though, as it may be better, I will ask no questions.”

“That's wise; but I must ask you one,” said the negro. “How came you here?”

I told him. He was silent for some time, turning his fish on the spit, while my companions, imitating my example, seated themselves beside me. Peter sat gaping with mute astonishment, Ready's lips and eye showed that he still looked on the big negro rather as an enemy than a friend. The excitement had hitherto prevented me from feeling the wound in my neck. The pain and a sensation of blood flowing down my shoulder reminded me of it, and I was about to call Peter to my aid, when the negro looked up and said —

“Stranger, you believe that all men have sprung from the same parents?”

“Certainly, my friend,” I replied. “I have not the slightest doubt about the matter.”

“Then, do you think that one portion has the right to keep another in bondage, to spit upon them, to beat and abuse them, and to treat them as brute beasts without souls?”

He ground his teeth as he continued speaking. I saw that he was working himself up into a fury, so I interrupted him:

“Assuredly not, my friend,” I said. “No man has a right to keep another in slavery; but slavery is a fact, and facts are stubborn things, not to be got rid of.”

“I don't quite understand you, stranger,” he replied. “But, from what you say, I believe that you would help a slave to escape from his bonds, if you had the opportunity?”

This was a most disagreeable question. I had resolved, when I entered the slave states, not to interfere in the slightest way with the subject of slavery, and now I was asked to commit the most atrocious crime against the white community of which I could possibly be guilty.

“Do you ask me to help you?” said I.

“I do,” was the answer.

“What claim have you on me?” I demanded.

“That of one man on another,” said the negro, rising unconsciously, and stretching out his hand over the fire. “That of one immortal soul on its fellow, who must both stand, some day, before the judgment-seat of Heaven, to be judged of the deeds done in the flesh. If you have the feelings of a true man, the conscience of a living soul, you dare not refuse my appeal.”

“I will not,” I exclaimed, rising also and taking the negro’s hand. “I will aid you at every risk, to the best of my power.”

“Stranger,” said the black, wringing my hand, while his voice trembled with emotion, “your words may prevent me from doing many a fierce deed, which I otherwise should have committed; from turning my hand against every man’s; from believing that every man with a white skin is a demon in human shape.”

He came round to me, and sat himself down by my side.

“But you are hurt,” he observed, in a tone of concern, “and I, in my fear, did it. You have a handkerchief. It is only a flesh wound; I will bind it up. I wish I could do more.”

Ready growled when he saw my late antagonist touching me, but proceeded no further in his hostilities. Peter brought some water in a pannikin, which the negro had with him, and my wound, being bathed freely, was bound up: and we sat down to discuss the fish, and another brought from the canoe, of which the negro insisted that we should partake, Ready coming in for the heads and bones. No one would have supposed that we and our entertainer had just before been engaged in a deadly struggle. I observed that the black man yawned and appeared very weary.

“I should like to sleep for a short time,” he said. “You took something away from my strength. I have had also a long row, and have a longer before me. I know not when the chase after me may begin; but I do know that the blood-hounds will not give it up till they run me to earth, or till they are sure I have escaped them.”

“I will gladly watch over you while you sleep,” said I. “How long do you wish to rest?”

“Half-an-hour will be enough. That tussle with you wearied me more than all my previous exertions. Just keep the fire alight, or we may have more snakes and alligators visiting us than would be pleasant.”

I promised to follow his wishes, and having reloaded the pistol he had fired at me, stretching himself on the ground, in an instant he showed me by his heavy breathing that he was fast asleep. What surprised me most about the man was the way in which he spoke. The remarks he made caused me to suspect that he possessed a higher amount of education than I should have expected to find in a negro. I felt gratified, too, at the perfect confidence he placed in me. He was, at all events, evidently a man far above the common order, and I hoped to learn more about him before we separated. I employed Peter in collecting drift-wood, of which there was a plentiful supply on the island. The fire kept the mosquitoes off, and from the quiet I thus obtained I had the greatest difficulty in not going to sleep. The moment Peter sat down he fell off, and even Ready shut his eyes, though, if I moved in the slightest degree, he was awake again in an instant. I knew that I could depend on him for giving me timely notice of the approach of an enemy of any description; but still I did my utmost to keep my senses alive. By degrees, however, I began to see all sorts of curious shapes in the fire, and to hear strange noises; and wild unearthly shrieks struck on my ear, and snakes seemed to be crawling in and out among the embers, and then I suddenly found myself at the dear old hall, my home, with my feet on the parlour fender, while Bunbry’s voice informed me that tea was in the drawing-room. I started up, and saw the negro watching me across the expiring embers of the fire.

“Pardon me, friend,” said I. “Most unintentionally I went to sleep.”

“I could not expect aught else,” he answered, in a tone which made me feel rather ashamed of myself. “It is time for me to be moving. What do you wish to do?”

“To get away from this island. We shall be starved if we remain here,” was my answer.

“I will take you,” said the negro. “Step into the canoe – quick – all of you. Stay! I will put out the fire. It might betray me, should I be pursued.”

He threw some water on the ashes, and scattered them about.

The canoe was what is called a “dug-out” – a hollowed trunk of a tree fashioned into a boat shape. Though narrow and light, it was long, and capable of carrying three or four people. Peter and I stepped in, followed by Ready. The negro, taking his seat in the centre, turned to me and asked if I could row. I told him that I could.

“Then I will thank you to take one of the paddles and help me. I have a long voyage before me. We will go up the stream.”

We paddled rapidly along. The negro steered, keeping out of the strength of the current. He seemed to know the river well. I was curious to ascertain something about the man. That he was a common plantation negro I did not think possible.

“You have travelled, friend?” I observed.

“I have. I have visited your country. I have trod a free soil. I have read much. I know the rights of man, and I resolved no longer to be a slave,” he answered, with a rapid utterance. “I remembered, too, the days of my childhood, when I roamed free in my native woods on the shores of Africa, the son of a powerful chief. Indistinctly at first, but afterwards clearly as I dwelt upon them, those times came back upon me, and I could bear my chains and degradation no longer. You are surprised at my telling you that I have read much. In my youth I accompanied my master to England. He was a kind man. He allowed me to be instructed in reading. I learned rapidly. My master, on leaving England, persuaded me to accompany him, promising legally to manumit me on our arrival in the States. In England I had become a free man. I had almost forgotten what slavery was. My master died on the voyage. I apprehended no danger, though, for prudence sake, I contemplated returning to England; but scarcely had I set foot on shore, than I was seized by the captain of the ship which brought me, and claimed as a slave. I was carried off to my master’s heir. He has taken care to make me feel what slavery is. I will not tell you what I have borne – how my purest and best feelings have been outraged – how one I loved was torn from me – how – But to go on would unman me; and I have need of all my coolness and self-possession. About four miles from this there is a village. I will land you there, and we must part. I shall not tell you what course I intend to pursue: it may be better for you not to know.”

I agreed with him in this, but at the same time I had become so interested in the fate of the poor fellow, that I was willing to run any risk to assist him. I told him so. He thanked me, but said that he would not allow me.

“And by what name shall I remember you?” I asked.

“I have been called Marcus – Marcus the slave. I do not boast of any other,” he answered bitterly. “Dogs and negroes have seldom more than one name.”

“Marcus, I shall never forget you. I hope we may meet again,” said I. “Our first introduction was somewhat unpleasant, but we part as friends.” He leaned forward, and grasped my hand.

“Hark!” he whispered, suddenly. “There is the sound of paddles in the water.” His quick ear had detected the sound before I had done so. I could hear nothing. “I am certain of it,” he exclaimed, with a groan. He was right.

“Here, take my paddle, and let the boy use yours; it is my only chance should my pursuers be at hand. I will lay down at the bottom of the canoe. Now, round with her; and pull down the stream to meet them. The best way to escape danger is boldly to face it. I may be supposed to be a wounded or a dead man.” The change of places was quickly effected, and turning round the canoe, Peter and I paddled down the stream, with Ready standing in the bows, looking out ahead. I could now hear the sound of paddles in the water. Already the first streaks of dawn had appeared in the eastern sky. Our only chance of escape was to pass the strangers before the light should show them the canoe, or, should they discover us, before they could see that there was any one in her besides Peter, Ready, and

me. We paddled on steadily. The men in the approaching canoe were talking, and, from the words which reached my ears, I could have little doubt that they were in search of the fugitive slave.

Chapter Three

The Pursuit – The Fight and Victory – We dispose of our Prisoners – The Black Dwarf – The City of Themistocles – We part Company – I go with Peter and Ready aboard the wondrous Highflier

Happily, I was well accustomed to the use of a paddle; Peter was not. I therefore told him to lay his down, while I steered the canoe with as little noise as possible, inclining towards the opposite bank near which I fancied the slave-hunters were working their way up the stream.

The light was increasing, – the voices grew louder. I guessed that the other canoe must be about abreast of us. “A few minutes more, and we shall be free of her,” I thought to myself, when I observed that Ready was throwing up his nose and stretching out his neck. I tried by a low whisper to tranquillise him. In vain. He ran to the side nearest the other canoe and gave a furious bark. It was immediately responded to by another dog, and a vehement exchange of fierce growls and barkings ensued.

“Who goes there?” shouted some one in a surly voice. “Answer, or I’ll fire.”

“Don’t do that same, friend,” I replied in as calm a tone as I could command. “I’ve just escaped drowning, and I’ve no fancy to be shot. You haven’t heard, then, that the Mighty Go-ahead has gone down, and to the best of my knowledge every soul has perished, except a boy I picked up, and two or three people I saw floating down the stream, and who may possibly have reached the shore in safety.”

“Not very likely that,” observed another man, with a savage laugh. “The Mississippi isn’t famous for helping people to swim ashore.”

The first speaker now inquired how the accident had happened, and how I had escaped. I told him.

“Then it was daylight when the Mighty Go-ahead went down,” remarked another man. “What have you been doing with yourself ever since, stranger?”

I replied that I had spent part of the night up a tree, till, coming down, I had discovered the canoe in which I had embarked, and was on my way back to New Orleans. By this time I could see the other canoe and the people in her. There were three of them. Their dog, a large bloodhound, and mine continued to exchange fierce barks and growls, in spite of our mutual endeavours to silence them. This was an advantage to me. It gave me time to consider what I should say. I was very anxious, not on my own account, but for the sake of Marcus. Still should it come to a tussle, in which our antagonists might not have the advantage of their firearms, I thought very probably Marcus, Peter, and I might come off victorious, and I felt sure that Ready would give some account of the other dog. It was, however, more than possible, should we begin to fight, that our canoes would be upset, and that we might all be drowned together. I did not wish to show the slightest unwillingness to approach the other canoe, lest I might raise the suspicions of the men in her, so we gradually dropped nearer together. The closer we got, the more furiously did our dogs bark. The other dog seemed scarcely able to keep himself in the canoe, as he ran backwards and forwards in an ungovernable rage. I was in hopes that the men had finished questioning me, and would allow me to proceed. I gave a flourish with my paddle, and had made a stroke with it which sent the canoe ahead, when one of the men cried out —

“You don’t happen to have seen a darkie, as you came along, stranger, have you?”

“Not very likely that I should have seen one in the dark. His colour would not be favourable for that,” I replied, evasively.

“But Sharpfangs smells him, though,” exclaimed one of the other men, with a terrible oath. “Seize him!”

What else was said I scarcely heard. I thought that it was all over with Marcus, and probably with myself. To attempt escaping a conflict seemed hopeless. Marcus did not stir; but I heard the click of a pistol. The other canoe, the bloodhound standing ready for a spring, dashed alongside ours. I had no time for considering how I should act. Still Marcus did not move. As the sides of the two canoes touched, up he rose with his gleaming dagger in his hand. The furious dog flew at him; but he was prepared, and, striking the brute full in the chest, he hurled it from him overboard, and in another instant a bullet from his pistol had gone through the head of one of the men, who fell backward into the stream. Another of the men was lifting his rifle to fire; but the negro, quick as lightning, sprang on board the canoe, and wrenching it from him, he cast it into the water.

On this the man drew a long bowie-knife from his belt; but before he could strike with it, Marcus had seized him by the wrist, and the two closed in a deadly struggle. I had wished not to interfere; but when I saw the other white man draw his knife, evidently with the intention of striking Marcus, I could not resist springing into the canoe, when, grasping his arm, I bore him down to the bottom of it. It is surprising that we did not upset the canoe, which was, however, a large and broad one. Peter, with much forethought, before attempting to come to my assistance, lashed the two canoes together. Ready, however, the instant the man fell, springing into the canoe, seized his left arm, and held him down so tightly that he could make no effectual resistance. He struggled, however, and endeavoured, as we rolled about in the bottom of the canoe, to strike his knife into me. As soon, therefore, as Peter was at liberty, I told him to try and wrench the knife out of the man's hand. This he did, and then he gave me a piece of rope, which, with his help, I passed rapidly round my antagonist's wrists, while I kept him down by kneeling on his chest, and very nearly squeezing the breath out of his body.

All this time the canoe was rocking so violently from side to side that I expected every instant to find myself struggling in the water. The same idea probably occurred to my antagonist, and this, as very likely he could not swim, paralysed his efforts more than it did mine. At all events, in a few minutes I found myself the victor, and, leaving Peter and Ready in charge of my conquered foe, I was able to go to the assistance of Marcus, at the other end of the canoe.

The man with whom he was struggling was little less inferior in strength to himself, and, had I not been able to help him, the issue might have been doubtful. By stepping into our canoe I got at the man's arms, and held them down, while Marcus, still kneeling on his body, lashed them securely together, and prevented him from making any further resistance.

"You'll not let that damned darkie murder me, stranger?" said the man, in a humbled tone.

"Do you think the scars of your merciless lash have yet disappeared from my shoulders?" said the negro, grinding his teeth. "Can you restore those you tore from me and delivered over to worse than death? Am I to forget the curses, the insults, you have heaped on me?"

He seized the man and shook him, as a savage dog does an animal he has conquered. I dreaded that he was about to throw the overseer – for such I supposed the man to be – into the water.

"Hold, Marcus!" I exclaimed. "I cannot stand by and allow murder to be committed. These men are now in our power, and we may dispose of them as may be necessary for our safety; but we must not take their lives."

"To kill them will be the only safe way of disposing of them," he answered, in a hoarse voice. "What else but death can such vermin expect at my hands?"

I was in hopes that he said this to frighten the men, rather than with an intention of murdering them. At the same time I well knew that, even had he not killed their companion, he could expect no mercy at their hands. I remembered, also, that, having participated, as it would be called, in the crime, though my conscience was free from guilt, I should certainly share the consequences. Probably, if caught, we should both of us, and very likely Peter and Ready also, be hung up from the nearest tree. How to dispose of our prisoners was therefore the question. Of course the tempter, ever ready to instigate men to do evil, whispered, "Kill them;" and the cowardice in our hearts added, "It will be the safest course." But I had been taught some maxims, when I was a boy, which I did not forget.

They were, "Do right, whatever comes of it;" "Never do wrong in the hopes of avoiding a possible evil." Accordingly I entreated Marcus to refrain from injuring the men, and to come into our canoe, and talk the matter over.

Having thrown all the arms overboard, except a rifle which lay loaded at the bottom of the boat, we stepped back into our canoe, followed by Peter and Ready, and paddled away out of earshot of our prisoners. Marcus suggested various plans for their disposal. Although but a few minutes had elapsed since I caught the first glimpse of the other canoe, the dawn had increased so much that we could already see the shore on either hand. Marcus stood up and looked about him.

"I see where we are," he whispered as he sat down.

"I have a friend who lives not far off. We will blindfold the eyes of the men, and leave them under his charge. He will take good care that they do not escape till we have had time to get out of their reach."

The plan seemed good; so dropping alongside the canoe, we took the men's handkerchiefs from their pockets and secured them over their eyes. I observed that Marcus went to the man whose eyes I had bound, and tightened the handkerchief. The man groaned.

"Ah! it is not pleasant, but you might be seeing things you should not, if it slipped," said the black, between his teeth. "Be silent; we are not going to kill you, as you deserve."

We now took the smaller canoe in tow, and paddled rapidly on. We had need of haste, for the steamers and other craft might be moving up and down the river, and we might be discovered. We crossed to the opposite or west side of the river, to a spot where a wide stream ran into it. We pulled up a little way, with dark woods on either side of us, till we came to a small island, on which Marcus ran the canoe on shore. Putting his finger to his lips to enjoin silence on Peter and me, he stepped on shore, and disappeared amidst the tangled underwood. I sat watching our captives, and wondering what was to be done with them. One of them was working his head about, evidently with the hopes of loosening the handkerchief. I gave him a touch with the paddle, and Ready, who seemed to consider that he was to keep watch and ward over the vanquished, uttered a fierce growl, which made the man keep perfectly still, though he groaned in his rage and fear. In a short time Marcus returned with a companion, another negro, but very unlike himself. The new-comer was short, and out of all proportion broad; indeed he was a dwarf Hercules, for the appearance of his head and shoulders showed that he possessed immense muscular power. He soon gave proof of his strength, for, looking into the canoe, he stooped down, and lifting one of the men up, he carried him off on his back, with as much ease as if he had been an infant. The man shrieked out with pain, for the cords cut his wrists; but the dwarf only uttered a hoarse peal of laughter and walked on, more than once striking the unfortunate wretch against the trees as he passed. He soon returned for the other, whom he treated in the same way. I observed that Marcus removed everything from the larger canoe into ours. By the time this was done, the dwarf came back again, and, nodding to his companion, lifted the canoe bodily up out of the water, and carried it off on his shoulders among the bushes.

"Come, it is time that we were away," said Marcus.

Once more we all three resumed our seats in our canoe. Ready took his place in the bow, and away we paddled as before. I could scarcely persuade myself that the fierce tragedy in which I had just taken a part had really occurred. All seemed like some dreadful dream. I said nothing; I could not speak. Marcus was silent. We paddled on out of the river, and into the Mississippi, nearly to the middle of it. There he looked around him, and then dropped the articles he had taken out of the other canoe, one after the other, into the water. The rifle and other heavy things sank; the rest floated down the stream.

"If they are seen, so much the better," observed Marcus. "It will be supposed that the canoe was upset, and the men were drowned."

"But surely their lives are safe?" I observed, with some doubt in my tone, for I could not help thinking of the ferocious countenance of the man in whose power we had left them.

“Safe enough, but not agreeable,” he answered. “Ah! if you knew all I have suffered from those men, you would own that I have treated them mildly. I spared their lives for your sake, and partly that I did not wish to have more blood on my hands than I have already; and yet, to effect my purpose, how much deeper may I have to dye them! Every man’s hand is against me, and mine must be against every man. Alas, alas! hard is my lot! Oh! stranger, be thankful to Heaven that you have a white skin and are a free man!”

He spoke in a tone of the bitterest anguish. I tried to console him. Too true, every man’s hand in that country would be against him; not because he had killed a fellow-creature, but because he was attempting to escape from bondage and degradation.

We continued paddling on for some time without speaking, till we came in sight of a collection of log-huts and a landing-place. It was a city, he told me – or at least a city that was to be – with a very fine name – the City of Themistocles, if I recollect rightly.

“I’ll put you on shore there, stranger,” he observed. “There is no one on the quay. They are not early-risers in that place. You can expect no better opportunity of being free of me. There, leap on shore. Say that a negro, in a canoe, took you off an island to which you had swum when the steamer went down, and that after he had landed you here he went on his way. Be wise; say nothing more. The boy understands me?”

Peter nodded.

“Farewell!”

Marcus put out his hand. I shook it warmly. We exchanged no other words. I sprang on shore, followed by Peter and Ready, and the canoe glided away down the stream, and was soon out of sight. We sat down on some logs piled up ready for the steamers, and Ready, conceiving that he had for the present done his duty, coiled himself at my feet, and went to sleep. I was too anxious to do the same, though I leaned back against the logs to rest my weary frame. It must be remembered that, since the steamer went down, the only rest I had enjoyed was while sitting over the fire with Marcus. I had had a fatiguing swim, a run from an alligator, a climb up a tree, to the branches of which I had had to hang on for some hours, a desperate struggle for life, a long paddle, a second fierce conflict, and another paddle, not to speak of the anxiety to which I had all the time been subject. I had not rested long, when Ready started up and uttered a warning bark, and I saw a couple of men lazily sauntering down from the huts towards the quay, and rubbing their eyes as if just awoke out of sleep.

“Well, and where do you come from, stranger?” was the very natural question they put to me, and which I willingly answered by telling them of the loss of the *Mighty Go-ahead*, and of most, if not all, of her crew and passengers.

“Then that’s the shouts we heard last night,” observed one of the men to the other.

The men, I found, were overseers of some gangs of negroes, a number of whom soon appeared, some loaded with bales of merchandise, and others with logs of wood. They came stumbling along, laughing and chattering in spite of their burdens. Several, however, relaxing in their efforts, when their taskmasters’ whips descended on their shoulders, howled with pain, but they were very speedily again shouting and talking as merrily as before. The overseers were evidently not satisfied with my account of myself. I looked anxiously up the river for the steamer coming down on her passage to New Orleans, but I found that she was not expected for another hour. I would have tried to obtain some refreshment, but I knew that if I went to the huts I should be subjected to more inquiries, so I told my companion that we would wait till we got on board the steamer for breakfast. While waiting, I gathered from the conversation of the overseers that Marcus’s pursuers had actually touched there on their way up, and had left a full description of him. I felt thankful that no one had been about when he put us on shore. As it was, I could not help fancying that the overseers associated us in some way with him.

It was a great relief to my mind when I caught sight of the huge steamer afar off, gliding rapidly along over the bosom of the mighty stream, her white paint glistening in the beams of the morning sun,

and contrasting with the dark foliage of the trees which lined the bank. The negroes stood marshalled ready with their loads to rush on board. Her tinkling bell gave notice to the engineers to stop. She came alongside the quay. Peter, Ready, and I sprang into her vast interior, among casks and chests and bales, and soon found our way into the saloon above, and on to the platform abaft, where I hoped Ready would be allowed to remain. Once more the bell tinkled. The huge wheels of the *Wondrous Highflier* began to revolve, and away she glided down the Mississippi.

Chapter Four

Arrive at New Orleans, and off to Galveston in Texas – A Hurricane and worse – The Pirate – A Fight for it – We are lost – An unexpected Friend – The black Fins – Marcus has Charge of the Pirates' Prize, and lands us at Galveston

The quay was still in sight, and I saw several men rushing along it, waving their hands, and apparently shouting at the top of their voices; but the paddles made too much noise to allow of their being heard, while, as the master and crew of the steamer were looking ahead, they were not seen. I had an idea that they wanted to say something about me, and I was very glad when the *Wondrous Highflier* had run the City of Themistocles out of sight. We reached New Orleans without any adventure, and I was not sorry to get a shave and to change my clothes, which were not improved by the adventures I had gone through. I took Peter regularly into my service, for, poor fellow, he had no one else on whom to depend, and I thus obtained an attendant on whose fidelity I could perfectly rely.

I had now to consider in which direction I should next bend my steps. It was a question with me whether I should make another attempt to ascend the Mississippi or steer my course to the westward. I was, I found, more knocked up than I had at first supposed, and required some days' rest. A week or more passed before I again went out. The second or third day after this, I was sauntering along, when I encountered a negro staggering under what seemed a very heavy load. Presently he came directly against me, and as his white eyes rolled round, I heard him say —

“Massa, you Harry Skipwith? Den cut away from here, or you no live to-morrow. You know Marcus. Dat's 'nough!”

On went the negro, staggering as before under his load, and I soon lost sight of him among the motley crowd of that capital of the South. After all I had heard it would have been madness to have neglected the warning, so on my way to my hotel I inquired at a ship-broker's if any vessel was ready to sail for Galveston, the chief port of Texas.

“The steamer goes in three days,” was the answer.

“Yes, but I have a fancy to go by a sailing vessel.”

“Oh, if that's it, there's a fine brig, the *Shaddock*, Captain Buckwheat, sails this evening. If you can be ready, I will ask the captain if he can give you a berth.”

I did not wish to appear too eager, so I said I would try to get ready, and, if I succeeded, I would take a passage in the *Shaddock*.

I had never shrank from danger when I could meet it face to face, but the uncertain character of that which now threatened me made me unusually nervous.

I hurried back to my hotel, and, after packing up my luggage, I ordered some negro porters to convey it down to the wharf where the schooner was lying, telling Peter to accompany them, while Ready and I followed at a distance.

I had a notion that the men whom Marcus and I had encountered on the river had escaped, and in each white man I met I expected to recognise one of them. Of course I knew their features better than they could know mine, for it was still dusk when our struggle took place; but then I had told them that I had escaped from the *Mighty Go-ahead*. That was a sufficient clue for them to trace me; and that they would attempt to do so, and not rest till they had wreaked a bitter vengeance on my head, I felt very sure.

I was walking leisurely along, when I felt some one brush by. A voice said, “Quick, massa, quick!” It was the same black who had in the morning given me the friendly warning. I hurried on, and reached the *Shaddock* without interruption.

“You’re just in time; we should have sailed without you, if you hadn’t come,” said Captain Buckwheat, as I stepped on board. “We were all ready ten minutes ago; the wind is fair, and we can’t afford to lose time in this country, whatever’s your fashion in the Old World.”

I heartily agreed with my friend in this instance, and was not sorry to see that the last warp was being cast off, and that the topsails were loosed. I recognised the friendly negro watching the brig at a distance, as she slowly glided out from among the other vessels. Once free of them, aided by the current, we made rapid progress down the river. I could not help frequently looking astern, to ascertain if we were followed; and though I had done nothing of which my conscience accused me, I had a pretty vivid notion of the feelings which must animate a culprit endeavouring to escape from the hands of justice. When clear of the yellow-mouthed Mississippi, the wind fell, and the brig lay rolling on, the glassy yet undulating surface of the ocean. The sun, casting a blood-red hue on the water, was just sinking behind a dark mound of vapour to the west, while in the east vast masses of ensanguined clouds floated slowly across the sky. I had never felt the air so hot and oppressive. Even Ready lay gasping at my feet, looking up inquiringly into my countenance, with his tongue out.

“There’s something coming,” observed the skipper, and he ordered every stitch of canvas to be furled, and the topmasts to be struck. There was indeed something coming. Scarcely was the vessel made snug, than down came the hurricane on us with terrific violence. Away we drove helplessly before it, like a mere straw on the water. Happily it was from the westward, or we should have driven on shore. Away we scudded, out of our course, but that could not be helped. When the hurricane ceased, we found that we had been whisked off some two or three hundred miles nearer Cuba than we were when it began. The wind subsided towards evening, and though the little vessel tumbled about a good deal, we were once more able to make sail. Two days after that, I was awoke soon after daybreak, by a loud exclamation uttered by the captain, who had entered the cabin. I saw him busily employed in stowing away some papers and bags, which he had taken out of a chest, in a hole under his bed-place.

“What is the matter?” I asked.

“Matter! why that a pirate is close aboard us, and that the chances are we all have our throats cut before ten minutes are over. That’s something the matter, I guess.”

I agreed with him, and slipping into my clothes, hurried on deck. There, about two hundred yards off, on our quarter, coming fast up with us, was a long, low, black schooner, the very beau-ideal of a pirate. Her decks were crowded with men, all black, and a very villainous-looking crew they appeared to be. At that moment, that we might have no doubt as to her character, up went a black flag at her peak, and a shot from a gun in her bows came whizzing between our masts.

While the black schooner approached, the crew of the *Shaddock* were employed in making sail, but I saw at a glance that we had not the slightest chance of escaping; still I have always held that while there is life we should never despair, so I lent a hand with all my might at pulling and hauling. Peter followed my example. Ready took the end of the ropes in his mouth and hauled too, but I cannot say that he did much good.

“Will those black chaps aboard there really cut all our throats, as the captain says?” asked Peter, looking up at me. “We’ll stand up and fight them before we give in, I hope, sir!”

“I hope so too, Peter,” I answered. “But our two guns cannot do much against the six or eight they carry, besides that long fellow amidships.”

“Hip, hurrah! there is the captain casting loose our little barkers – we are not to yield without a blow.”

By this time all sail was set – the guns were manned, and the captain now served out arms to all on board.

The pirates, however, on seeing that notwithstanding all our efforts we could not escape them, did not again fire. Our two guns could do very little harm to them till they got nearer. They were run over on the starboard side, on which the schooner was approaching.

“Aim high, lads,” said the captain to his two mates who had charge of them. “Our best chance will be to knock away some of his spars.”

“Ay, aye, sir,” was the answer, given in a cheerful voice, which, at all events, betrayed no fear.

It was satisfactory to feel that we were to have a stroke for life, and yet, as the schooner drew near, and I observed through my glass the villainous-looking, well-armed fellows who crowded her decks, and saw the size of her guns, I felt that we had but little chance of escaping.

“Now, lads, see what you can do,” cried the captain, who was narrowly watching the schooner.

Our two pop-guns gave out their puffs of smoke, and a couple of holes in the enemy’s sails showed that the aim had not been bad, but no other damage was done.

Still the schooner did not fire, but came silently and stealthily gliding on in a way which was much more calculated to try our courage than if her crew had been shouting and gesticulating. It showed that they had perfect confidence in their own power. The mates loaded and fired their guns again. An after mainbrace aboard the schooner was shot away, and it made her head incline a little more towards us.

We were now almost within pistol-shot of each other, when I saw some thirty muskets levelled at us, and the next instant a rattling shower of bullets came whistling round our heads. Several of our poor fellows fell: the rest fired in return, but before the smoke cleared away, with a loud crash the pirate ran us aboard, and fifty fierce-looking desperadoes sprang shouting on our deck.

I had armed myself with a cutlass, resolving to fight to the last, though fully expecting to be cut to pieces. Ready stood barking furiously on one side of me; Peter kept on the other. Captain Buckwheat proved that he was a man, but he was cut down by a pirate’s sword, as was one of the mates close to me, and in less than a minute half our crew lay bleeding on the deck. Our opponents were mostly blacks – though there were brown fellows also – and as they were shouting in English, I concluded that they were either runaway American slaves or vagabond negroes from the West India Islands. Not that I thought much about what they were at the time; indeed, the grinding of the two vessels together, the cries and shrieks of the combatants, the smoke and rattle of firearms, and the fall of spars and blocks from aloft completely bewildered me, besides which all my energies were required for my own defence.

Scarcely an instant after the pirates had reached our decks, I found myself set on by a huge brown fellow, who had led the boarders, and was apparently an officer among them. He was a good swordsman, and had not Ready flown at his legs, and Peter kept poking at him with a boarding-pike, he would soon have put me *hors de combat*. With their aid I managed to defend myself till several other fellows set upon me, and, overmatched, the big pirate had his sword uplifted to cut me down, when a black man sprang forward and interposed his own weapon between it and my head, shouting at the same time —

“Back, all of you. That man’s life is sacred, and the lad’s too. You’ll own it when I tell you.”

It was a thoroughly melodramatic position. Though he was now dressed as an officer, I instantly recognised in my deliverer, Marcus, the slave, whose life I had assisted to save.

The pirates, who were about to hack me to pieces, now surrounded me with friendly gestures, and I felt that I was safe. When, however, I looked about me, I saw with regret that not a single man of the crew had escaped: a few were gasping out their heart’s blood on deck; the rest were dead. I should by that time have been in the same condition had not Marcus interposed to save me. Ready recognised him immediately, but he snapped and growled at the other blacks as they passed. Poor Peter kept close to my side; though so ready at first to fight, he was unaccustomed to scenes of slaughter, and was terror-stricken with the horrors he had witnessed.

Marcus kept near us, sword in hand, evidently uncertain how the pirates might treat us, and prepared, if necessary, to do battle in our cause. I wished to address him – I scarcely knew how.

“Marcus,” I said at length, “I am grateful to you for saving my life, but I little expected to find you in such company.”

“Misfortune introduces us to strange bedfellows’ is an old saying,” he answered. “And most decidedly my misfortunes have given me some roughish companions; but you see I have already gained some influence over them; and of one thing be assured, your life and that of the lad are safe. When I tell them what you have done for me, there is not a man of all this lawless band who would not be ready to die for you. One hideous monster, slavery, has made them all what they are; and when they know how you hate it, they will love you.”

While Marcus was speaking, the pirates were unceremoniously pitching the dead bodies of my shipmates overboard – all of them yet warm – some who had scarcely ceased to breathe. Two or three, though badly wounded, were yet fully capable of comprehending their position. They begged – they entreated for life.

“What are you – Englishmen or Americans?”

Two owned that they were Americans from the Northern States.

“Then overboard with them,” shouted the captain. “We’ll not deprive the sharks of their share of the booty.”

One man declared that he was an Englishman, but a tin case was found on him, containing a certificate of his being a citizen of the United States. I was certain, from some remarks which he had let fall, that the man had run from a British man-of-war. In vain he protested that he hated slavery and the people of the States, that he was a true-born Briton – in vain he shrieked out and entreated for mercy. In spite of his desperate struggles, he was lifted up and thrown among the shoal of black-finned monsters which surrounded the vessel. I cannot dwell longer on these horrors – I would gladly shut them out from my thoughts as I would then have done from my sight.

The schooner’s crew were sufficiently numerous to man the brig more strongly than before; some more guns were sent on board her, that part of her cargo which seemed useless thrown overboard, and the two vessels then made sail together. I was allowed to retain my cabin, and Peter had one awarded him aft, that he might be near me.

Marcus came on board as one of the officers of the prize. I asked him how he came to know enough of nautical affairs to take a command among the pirates.

“I picked up my knowledge on my voyage to England,” he answered. “Besides, a very small amount of knowledge makes me superior to most of my companions. Only two or three know anything of navigation, and that very imperfectly. The captain knows most, and he is jealous of any equal. If he were to be killed, the rest would scarcely find their way into a port; but for that he does not care.”

“But, Marcus,” said I, “how can you, a man capable of better things, endure such a life?”

“I hate it,” he answered bitterly. “Recollect, though, what drove me to it. To escape from the lash and chains, from indignities and insults, what will not a man endure?”

“Will you leave it?” I asked.

“Yes, certainly, if I have the means,” he answered.

“I will afford them if I have the power,” I answered. “Trust to me; think on the subject, but do not allow your comrades to suspect your intentions, nor to observe that we have any secrets between us.”

Marcus walked forward. The two vessels made sail to the westward. A mulatto acted as captain of the brig. He seemed to be a smart seaman, but knew very little of navigation. I now had practical experience of the advantage of never losing an opportunity of gaining knowledge. Whenever I had been at sea I had always endeavoured to pick up as much nautical information as possible, and had learnt to take an observation and to work a day’s work with perfect ease. I therefore offered my services to navigate the brig to any port to which the pirates wished to proceed, intimating that I should prefer being set on shore on the mainland.

“You were bound for Galveston, and we will go there,” said Marcus. “We will put you on shore on the island; and should the truth be suspected, we can be far away before any vessel is sent in pursuit of us.”

Marcus afterwards told me that he arranged with his shipmates to do as I wished. It was wonderful what influence he had in a short time gained over those lawless characters. It was the triumph of mind over brute strength. He had, I learned, however, known several of his present comrades before, and they had spoken in his praise to the rest. Cruel wretches as the pirates had become, they treated me with every consideration, and supplied me with all the luxuries at their command. Light and contrary winds delayed our progress, so that ten days passed before we made the low sandy shore of Galveston Island.

The sky was of intense blue, the ocean, smooth as glass, shone with brilliant lustre, and the sun's rays darted down on our deck, making the pitch in the seams bubble and hiss, while a line of white sand was the only soil on which I could hope to land – terra-firma it certainly was not.

The atmosphere sparkled with heat – the sand almost blinded me, and I expected to be thoroughly cooked before I reached Galveston. Still my desire to be free of the pirates overcame every other consideration. The two vessels stood in. There was nothing suspicious about the brig, and the schooner was made to look as innocent as possible. How my followers and I were to get on shore was now the question. At length we made out some canoes with Indians in them fishing. We made a signal, and one of them paddled towards us. The people in her held up the fish they had caught and offered them for sale, thinking that was what we wanted. They seemed rather astonished when they saw that Peter and I were the only white people on board. The captain took the fish, paid them liberally, and then told them that they must take some passengers, who wanted to land at Galveston, as he was bound elsewhere. After some bargaining, the Indians agreed to do as we desired.

I took the opportunity, while the captain was bargaining with the Indians, to ask Marcus how he purposed to quit the pirate band.

“If you remain willingly among evil companions, you cannot avoid being responsible for their crimes,” I observed.

“I must bide my time,” he answered. “I have promised you that I will do my best to quit them, and I never break my word.”

I knew that I could trust him. My parting with the pirates was brief. Marcus was the only man on board with whom I could bring myself to shake hands. Scarcely had I and Peter and Ready taken our seats in the narrow canoe, with my very moderate amount of luggage between my knees, than, a breeze springing up, the two vessels stood away from the land. The canoe's head was put towards the north end of the island on which Galveston stands. Our crew were of a peculiarly unhealthy-looking olive-colour, their faces being covered with wrinkled parchment-like skin. A straw hat and a shirt and belt formed their costume. They understood a little English, but I judged it better not to enter into conversation with them, lest they should ask inconvenient questions; and so almost in silence, except when they exchanged a few remarks with each other in their native tongue, we glided over the sparkling water. At length, when we had rounded the north end of the island, they ran the canoe on to the beach, and told me to get out, as they were going no further. I expostulated, but they said that they had performed their contract, and had their reasons for not going to the town with such suspicious people as we were. Against this I had nothing to say. I thus had practical experience of the inconvenience of having been seen in bad company. Though a reason, it is the lowest for avoiding it. How to get my baggage into the town was a puzzle, till I bethought me of slinging it on a long pole, one end of which Peter carried on his shoulder, and the other I placed under my arm, and thus we began our march towards the town.

Chapter Five

Off by Steamer to Houston – Ants, and how to avoid them – By Waggon through Forests – Silas Slag, our Kentuckian Driver – I buy Horses and engage an Indian Guide – The Prairie – Two Human Skulls – The Comanches

The founders of Galveston must have been very fond of sand. It stands on sand, is surrounded by sand, and in high winds almost covered with sand. We could scarcely get along: We sank over our ankles at every step. I heard Peter groan frequently, and poor Ready dragged his weary legs after my heels with his tongue out, till I began to be afraid that he would go mad with the heat. As to fresh water, that seemed an impossibility, and there was nothing cooling in the appearance of the bright shining surface of the surrounding ocean. Still to stop would positively have been death, so on we trudged, I doing my best to keep up the spirits of my two-legged as well as four-legged companion. At last, in no very dignified guise, we entered among the streets of wooden houses, bordered by odoriferous and flowering trees, which compose Galveston. Two white people carrying a load was a sight rarely seen, and when we reached the door of an hotel the clerk and waiters looked at me with so supercilious an air, that I saw it would be necessary to assume an authoritative manner.

“Here, some of you lend a hand,” I exclaimed. “A pretty country this of yours, where a gentleman on landing can find neither porter nor carriage to convey his baggage! All I can hope is that your hotel will make some amends for the inconvenience I have suffered.”

The people, as I knew they would, began to defend their country, to assert that there was not a finer in the world; and then, to prove that their hotel was a good one, gave me one of the best rooms.

Galveston struck me as remarkable for the pungent sting of the mosquitoes, the undrinkable nature of the water, and the number of vociferating negroes, though there were some tolerable buildings and broadish streets. Perhaps I was prejudiced, for, not feeling very comfortable as to my safety, I was anxious to get out of the place again.

Having got a bill cashed at a somewhat high discount, and written home an account of my adventures to Aunt Becky, with a request that my epistle might be sent the round of the family, I put myself, with Peter and Ready, on board a steamer bound for Houston, the capital of Texas. We crossed the straits which separate Galveston from the mainland, and entering the Buffalo River found ourselves between lofty banks, covered in the richest profusion with magnolias and other flowering shrubs, and groves of lofty trees, among which flitted birds of the gayest plumage, while squirrels sported and leaped from branch to branch. Houston is picturesquely situated, and will, I have no doubt, become an important place, as it already shows signs of the enterprise of its Anglo-Saxon inhabitants. I slept there only one night. My room was on the ground floor. I found the four legs of my bed placed in as many basins of water. I inquired the reason, and was informed that it was to prevent the ants, which are not nautically inclined, from getting into it and devouring the inhabitant in his sleep. Peter’s bed, which was in the corner of the room, was similarly guarded, and Ready very wisely jumped up and slept on the foot of it.

The next morning Peter got up to procure water for me for washing, and to perform other duties of a valet; but scarcely had he donned his clothes than I saw him jumping and twisting about, and slapping himself in the most eccentric manner.

“Oh dear! oh dear! I shall be eaten, I shall be eaten!” he exclaimed, slapping himself harder and harder.

Ready barked, not knowing what to make of it, and jumped back on the bed again. Peter set to work to tear off his clothes, which he had placed on a chair, and of which a colony of ants had

taken possession. He shook them out by hundreds, and then rushing out, he returned with a broom, with which he cleared the boards. The people of the house were rather astonished at my insisting on having a tub of cold water, which Peter at length brought me, and I managed to dress without being devoured by the ants.

Two hours after this we were rattling away along the corduroy road in a mail waggon, with a Kentuckian driver, through the forests of Texas. It was not altogether a pleasant style of locomotion, for we were bumped about terribly, our vehicle being innocent of springs; but it had the advantage of novelty. We stopped at nights at settlers' huts, and slept on the roughest of rough beds, and sometimes without any beds at all except the bare boards and our cloaks; but I had made up my mind to grumble at nothing short of being scalped or positively starved. I had brought a saddle with me from England, and had procured another at Galveston for Peter, with the intention of purchasing at the first opportunity horses for riding and for carrying the luggage and tent, and starting away across country. I mentioned my intention to my Kentuckian driver, Silas Slag by name.

"Then I guess, stranger, that you don't care very much about your scalp," he observed, with a wink of his eye, as he made a significant gesture round his head.

"Why, who do you suppose would venture to take my scalp?" I asked, thinking that he was quizzing me, and wishing to turn the tables on him. "Don't you know that if any one injures an Englishman, the British government will hunt him out, in whatever part of the world he may be, and make him pay dearly for his folly?"

"I guess, stranger, that the Comanches, or any other Redskin varmint, care no more for your British government than I do, and that is about as much as that panther there does for your dog."

As Silas spoke, he pointed to a huge creature, which, half concealed by the tangled underwood of a tropical forest, lay crouching down about twenty yards ahead of us, and apparently prepared to spring out as we passed.

I had turned Ready out to stretch his legs, and he, unconscious of danger, was running on in high glee, abreast of the horses. In another instant he would have been in the jaws of the wild beast. I called to him to come to me, and at the same time lifted my rifle from the bottom of the waggon to be ready to fire. Silas whipped on his horses in the hopes of passing the creature before he could make his spring, but the animals, aware of the approach of an enemy, began to plunge and kick, and drove the waggon against some stumps of trees amid which the road wound, with a force which sent Peter sprawling at the bottom of it, and at the same instant the panther, with a tremendous bound, sprang on one of the leaders. The poor brute struggled so violently, that I was afraid of wounding it instead of killing the panther if I fired. At last I got a fair aim at the wild beast's head, and to my infinite satisfaction over he rolled dead. The horses stood trembling in every limb, but I was afraid that they would dash on, before we could put the harness to rights, and leave us in the lurch. Once more, however, we were on the road, through a forest composed of oaks, maples, acacias, sycamores, and other trees with which I was familiar, and many others to be found in the tropics alone, interlaced with all sorts of creepers. On either side were a vast variety of flowers of every bright hue, but the most attractive were the red and white blossoms of the cotton trees, which, waving to and fro in the breeze, were dazzling to look at, while humming-birds, butterflies, and insects innumerable made the air appear as if filled with the most gorgeous gems. All this sort of scenery was very interesting, but I was not sorry when we reached the town of Billyville, I think it was called, bordering the prairies, where I was told that I could purchase horses, and find a trustworthy guide for my farther progress.

The name of Billyville was not significant of a very important place, nor had the town any great pretension of any sort, as it consisted of a few rough huts, while the surrounding fields were full of the stumps of the trees which had been cut down. I bought the horses required, and on the evening of my arrival a thin wiry little fellow presented himself, saying that his occupation was that of a hunter, and that he could guide me safely through any part of the North American continent. Whether he considered himself a white man or a Redskin I could not tell, while he spoke English, Spanish, and

French with great volubility, though absurd as to correctness, and asserted that there was not an Indian dialect with which he was not acquainted. His garments were of fine tanned leather and ornamented with coloured threads and beads, while a straw hat covered his head. I inquired of Silas Slag if he knew anything of him. He said that he believed that he was honest, and that he had the character of being a very brave fellow and a successful hunter. He was the sort of man I wanted, so I engaged Mr Jack Lion, as he called himself in English, with an Indian to assist in taking care of the horses. An old man and a young one now joined our party, and took our vacated places in the waggon.

We were to accompany the mail another day's journey before we turned off to the north, where Mr Lion informed me I should find numbers of buffaloes and other large game.

"Well, I shall be sorry to part from you, stranger," said Silas Slag, as I rode alongside him on my trusty little steed. "I hope you'll come to no harm, but you'll just remember that while you're shooting buffaloes there'll be people maybe looking out to shoot you. Those Comanches are terrible wild chaps, and you never know where they may turn up."

We had now entered a most desolate-looking prairie country. We had lost sight of the forest through which we had been travelling, and there appeared before us only one uniform level of dry waving grass. As we rode on, I saw some white objects glittering in the sun ahead. Getting up to them, I found that they were two human skulls and other bones. There they lay grinning at each other. Near one was the barrel and look of a gun. Close to the other was a hatchet and a scalping-knife, and several tips of arrows. A tale was thus told me of how a white man and an Indian had met, and fought, and died on that spot. I had dismounted to examine these miserable relics, speaking of human sin and folly, when Silas cried out —

"Look there, stranger; look there Jack Lion! What do you say to those black spots out there? Are they birds, buffaloes, or Redskins?"

The hunter stood up in his stirrups and took a long steady gaze in the direction Silas pointed, just as a sailor does when he is looking out for an enemy's cruiser at sea. Suddenly dropping into his saddle, he exclaimed, "Comanches! And they are coming this way."

"Then they'll scalp every mother's son of us," cried Silas, lashing on his horses.

"Keep together, my men, at all events," I exclaimed, as my companions began to move on; and away we dashed at a rapid rate.

We had not gone far, however, when, on turning my head, I discovered that we were pursued, and that the strangers were coming up with us. I desired Lion to take another look at them, and to tell me what he thought they were.

"Comanches," he answered, "Comanches, there's no doubt about it."

"Is there any place we can hope to reach where we can defend ourselves better than in the open plain?" I asked.

"None, none that I know of," was the answer.

"Then let us halt at once, before we have exhausted our strength, and fight it out like men," said I.

My companions listened to my appeal. Silas stopped his horses, and unharnessing them, placed them at one end of the waggon, while we secured our steeds at the other end. A few boxes and bales which the waggon contained, with some stout poles ready in case of necessity to repair it, were tumbled out, and with them we formed a very imperfect barricade for our defence. Scarcely were our fortifications finished than the hoarse voices of the Indians uttering their war-whoops were borne down to our ears on the breeze. They approached. There could be no doubt about their intentions. They were in their war-paint. Brandishing their gaily ornamented spears with horrible shrieks, which I own, in spite of my resolution, made me feel very uncomfortable, on they came on their mustangs at full tilt towards us. We cocked our rifles and stood ready to receive them, resolving if they wanted our scalps to make them pay dearly before they got them.

Chapter Six

On they come – Order of Battle – Numbers prevail – Ready and Peter save my Scalp – Unlooked-for Aid – Our Wounds are dressed – Shelter on the Verge of Civilisation

The two skulls were still in view, as the shrieks of the Comanches grew louder and louder, and the sight of these mouldering relics determined our party to conquer or to perish in the attempt. On came the Comanches, their mustangs at full gallop, and their gay trappings fluttering in the breeze. Their object was, apparently, to alarm and unnerve us before they approached. I looked round at the countenances of my companions, to judge how far I could depend on them. Ready was the most pugnacious, as he stood up with his front paws on a chest, growling and snarling. There was a dogged resolution in Peter's face, which satisfied me that he would fight to the death; while Silas Slag and Senior Jack Lion were sufficiently cool and determined to make me feel I could depend on them. The other men looked as if they wished that they were anywhere else, but at the same time would stand to their colours if their comrades did.

"Now, lads, reserve your fire till I give the word," I exclaimed. "Let each of you select his man. Fire one after the other, not all together on any account, and it will be hard if each of us don't hit his man. Load again as fast as you can, and be ready for the rest who may venture to come on."

What I said encouraged my companions, and the plan which had at that moment suggested itself to me gave me a confidence I had not before felt.

"Now, all steady," I cried. "You, Silas Slag, will fire first, Jack Lion next, I will take the third and fourth shots with my double-barrel. Peter, you follow me, Sam Noakes next, and, Paul, don't fire till your father has shot his man."

The Indians had got within fifty yards of us, imagining that they would make us an easy prey. I gave the word. Silas looked calmly along his rifle. He fired, and as the smoke cleared away, an Indian was seen to fall from his horse. Jack Lion's trigger was pulled an instant afterwards, with the same success. I felt terribly cool; not at all as if I was about to take the life of one or more human beings. I have been far more flurried when a pheasant has got up close under my nose. Two of our enemies had fallen. I fired both my barrels, and two more mustangs were galloping away without riders. Still the Indians came on. Peter showed that my instructions had not been thrown away on him. He fired with steadiness, and though the Indian at whom he aimed still sat his horse, the lance he held fell from his hand. One of our party missed altogether, but the rest hit, if they did not kill, the Indians they had picked out. Silas, Lion, and I had our pieces reloaded before our enemies were upon us. With terrific shrieks they came close up to us, when we each knocked over another of the yelping band. This was more than they expected, and having endeavoured in vain to leap their steeds over the barricade which protected us, they wheeled round and galloped off to a distance.

Our party shouted with satisfaction, but we soon perceived that our foes had not retreated. After hovering about for some time, and apparently consulting together, they again formed a dense body and advanced at full speed towards us. Hoping that the same plan we had before adopted would succeed, we were waiting to fire, when the horsemen, separating, swept round to the right and left with the evident intention of taking us in the rear. Though there was no barricade on that side, we had the waggon to protect us; but then our horses were exposed, and might either be killed or carried off.

"We are in a fix, I guess," exclaimed Silas Slag; "but never say die, lads; I have been in a worse one than this, and am still alive." This address infused new courage into the rest of the men.

The Indians, finding that our small band was far more formidable than they expected, had become very wary, and kept hovering around on every side, just beyond reach of our rifles. Bound and round they swept, making various feints, for the purpose of wearing out our courage, I suppose. This, however, gave us time to make further preparations for their reception.

By cutting some holes in the awning of the waggon, and replacing a few chests and bags on one side of it, we turned it into a little fortress, likely to prove of service against enemies on horseback, armed only with spears and bows and arrows. Our chief cause for fear was, that some of them might dismount, when they would be much more formidable at close quarters. They did not, however, seem inclined to attempt such a proceeding. Now with loud shrieks they advanced, and then wheeling round, off they went as if in fall flight, but in another moment they were again advancing towards us with threatening gestures. I thought they would turn, but no; on they came from each quarter of the compass, shouting, shrieking, and flourishing their spears. The next instant a flight of arrows came flying among us, compelling us to sink down under our barricade to avoid them. This was no easy matter. One grazed my shoulder, and another went through Peter's hat, and for a moment I thought he was wounded.

"Fire, lads!" I shouted, "steady as before." I, with two of the men, sprang into the waggon to receive our enemies, and as they approached, we fired in quick succession; but, very naturally, our aim was not so steady as before, and still on they came, shrieking terrifically.

As the Indians got within thirty paces of us, without stopping the speed of their mustangs, they for an instant dropped their lances, and grasping their bows, let fly another shower of arrows. Then on they came more rapidly than before. I did not look round to see who was struck. I felt a sharp pang in my side where an arrow was quivering. I trusted that it was not poisoned; it had come through the tilt of the waggon. I had no time to draw it out, for the point of a red warrior's spear was close to me. I had fired one barrel, but I had the second loaded. I pulled the trigger. The Indian sprang forward, the spear passed on one side, and he fell dead at my feet, while his horse, turning aside, galloped off.

Our men had all fired, and three Indians lay dead in front of us. But though the front rank had wheeled round, the rest were coming on with furious gestures of vengeance. Our little band was also sadly diminished.

For an instant, not hearing Silas Slag's voice, I turned my head. He lay writhing on the ground, with an arrow through his breast, which he was in vain attempting to drag out, while another man, though he still stood at his post, seemed badly wounded with a spear-thrust in his neck. The pain in my side was increasing so much, that I every instant expected to drop fainting to the ground.

I got out of the waggon, for in a hand-to-hand encounter I could fight longest in an open space. I knew that it would be destruction to yield, so I instantly began reloading my rifle, while I shouted to my companions to struggle to the last. They were doing their best to keep the Indians at bay while I reloaded. Again I fired; my aim was unsteady; and I killed the horse instead of the rider. The animal fell directly in front of me, and served as a barricade, but the Indian, disengaging himself, drew his scalping-knife from his girdle and sprang towards me.

Weak, and suffering intense pain, I could do little to help myself, and thought that my last moments had come when, just as the Redskin was about to plunge his weapon in my breast, Ready, who had been watching by my side, with a fierce growl flew at his throat, and compelled him to turn the intended blow on one side, and the next moment the butt of Peter's musket came crashing down on his head and stunned him. The rest of the party, still able to stand up, were engaged in single combat with the more daring of our adversaries, while other Indians were flocking round, either thrusting at us with their spears, or with arrows in the string, standing ready to shoot as opportunity might offer.

Now, indeed, I had lost all hope of escaping. More Indians were galloping up, when, through a gap in their ranks, as I stood with one foot on the dead horse, I caught sight in the distance of another body of horsemen moving at full speed across the prairie.

Had I till now entertained even the slightest hopes of resisting our foes, this circumstance made me feel that such hopes were vain; still “the never-say-die principle” made me resolve to fight to the last, and my companions, I saw, were resolved to do the same.

We were, indeed, in a desperate plight. One man was killed outright, Silas appeared to be mortally wounded, and I expected every instant to drop. I heard the Indians shouting to each other – I thought probably to make short work of us. Suddenly they wheeled round and galloped off, as I concluded, to wait till they were joined by the fresh band we saw approaching, when they would again come on and crush us at once. Again I loaded and fired, but it was a last effort; overcome with pain and loss of blood, I fell fainting behind the dead horse, which had served as a barricade.

In vain I tried to rise. I heard the men about me shouting and firing; then there was a loud tramping of horses; the shouts grew louder. In another instant I expected to feel my scalp whipped off my head. In that moment I lived an age. I should have been glad to have lost all consciousness. Had I been able to fight bravely, even against odds so fearful, I should have been content; but to lie helpless at the mercy of savages was terrible. I had heard of the tortures they were wont to inflict on their captives, and I expected to have to endure some such ordeal to try my courage.

On came the horsemen. Voices struck my ear, but they were familiar sounds. The words were mostly English. I opened my eyes. They fell not on Redskin savages, but on a party of white men, well aimed with rifles and pistols, and broadswords or cutlasses.

“On after the varmint!” shouted one, who seemed to be the leader. “Some of you lads stay by these people. Doctor, there’s work for you, I guess.”

While most of the horsemen, to the number of fifty at least, galloped after the flying Indians, some few dismounted and came within our camp.

“Why, lads, you seem to be in a bad way,” observed one of them.

“I guess if you hadn’t come, we shouldn’t have had a scalp on the top of our heads,” was the answer. “There’s the captain dead, and Silas Slag, the next best man, no better off; for, if he isn’t dead, he’ll be before many minutes are over.”

“We’ll see,” said a stranger, whom I guessed to be a surgeon, approaching the spot where poor Silas lay groaning with agony. “Take your hands off the arrow, boy. You’ll not get it out that way. Many a man has lived with a worse wound than that through him. Here, some of you, lend a hand.”

I just lifted myself on my side, and saw the young surgeon engaged with his instrument in cutting out the arrow from Silas’s body. The poor fellow groaned, but did his utmost to refrain from giving full expression to the agony he was undergoing.

“It will be my turn next,” I thought to myself. “I must nerve myself for the suffering I must endure.”

I waited till the wounds of all the men had been attended to.

“There’s the dead captain on the other side,” said one. I had been dubbed captain by my companions.

The surgeon came up to me.

“I’m not quite dead yet,” I murmured. “Just pull this ugly stick out of me, and I hope to do well.”

“No fear of that, captain,” said the stranger. “Here, lads, some of you hold him down. It’s an unpleasant operation, but it’s necessary.”

The surgeon was skilful, but I own that my nerves got such a twinge that I would rather not dwell on the subject.

Our new friends now set to work to get us into marching order. One of our party had been killed, and another wounded, besides Silas Slag, who was in a very precarious condition, and I was very considerably hurt. The Indians had carried off four of our horses, but as six of their number lay dead on the field, and others were badly wounded, they had paid dearly for their success. Fortunately none of the waggon horses were missing. They were harnessed, and we began to move. Silas Slag and another man who had been hurt were placed in the waggon with me. Some spirits was poured

down my throat, and after a time I recovered sufficiently to ask questions. I found that the horsemen who had arrived so opportunely to our rescue were in search of the very band of Comanches that had attacked us. Those predatory Redskins had attacked a party of Texians travelling across the prairie, and were said to have killed all the men, and to have carried off a white girl as prisoner. She was the daughter of one of the murdered men, an old officer of the United States army, and, I was told, was possessed of great personal attractions.

On hearing this, all the romance in my composition was instantly aroused. I regretted my wound more because it kept me a prisoner than on any other account, and longed to be in the saddle and in pursuit of the savages to aid in rescuing the poor girl. We were on our way back to the settlement to which she belonged, but of those who had come to our rescue, the doctor and the greater number were pushing forward after their companions. They had vowed vengeance on the marauders, and were likely to execute it in a terrible manner if they succeeded in overtaking them.

It was dark before we reached the nearest shelter. It was a farm-house on the very verge of civilisation, surrounded with stockades to guard against a sudden attack of Indians. The inhabitants, who were of German descent, though speaking English, received us with kind expressions, and had Silas and me and the other wounded man carried into their largest sleeping-room, where beds were placed for us, into which we were put at once. The mistress of the house then came with ointments, and with the greatest tenderness dressed our wounds, and afterwards brought us some light and nourishing food, of which we stood in great need.

“I can feel for you, stranger,” she remarked to me, as she sat watching like a mother by my bedside. “I had a son wounded by the Redskins many years ago. He came home, poor boy, to die. The young girl, too, carried off by the savages, is a relation. I tremble to think what her fate may be. All the men of our family, even my husband, old as he is, and my sons and grandsons, are gone in pursuit of the enemy. Altogether there are twenty of them from this farm alone. Ah me! I shall rejoice when they come back. It is anxious work waiting for them. I have lost in my time so many kindred and acquaintance through the treachery of these Redskins, that I always dread what may happen.”

I did my best to comfort the kind old lady, and told her that as our small party had been able to keep them so long at bay, there could be little doubt that a well-armed band, such as her friends formed, would have little difficulty in conquering them.

The night, however, passed away, and nothing was heard of the party. Neither the following day were any tidings received. The anxiety of the poor women, of whom there were a considerable number in and about the farm, became very great. People from various other locations also came crowding in, chiefly women, whose husbands and sons had gone on the expedition, to make inquiries. Some, indeed, began to express their fears that the party had fallen into an ambush and been cut off. Such things had occurred before. I was already better, and only wanted strength. I offered, if men could be found, to head a party to go out in search of the missing band.

“They will be here by nightfall,” said the old lady, trying to comfort herself.

I felt, from the remarks I had heard made, considerable doubt about this, and could not help fearing that some catastrophe had occurred. Two whole days passed away, and still there was no tidings of the missing ones.

Chapter Seven

Our Deliverers pursue the Comanches, but fail to return – I am Convalescent and head a Party in Search – There is a Lady in the Case – Stores for Camp – Tony Flack’s Tale of the “Injuns.”

Day after day passed away, and no tidings of the expedition. Under the care of my kind hostess I quickly recovered from the effects of my wound, from which I suffered wonderfully little, and I began to hope that in another day or two I might be fit to mount a horse, and set off to the assistance of the settlers. While I lay on my bed I had plenty of time for thinking. Among other things, I began to regret that I had been turned aside from my original purpose of ascending the Mississippi. I never like to be thwarted in anything I undertake, and on this occasion I felt that I had allowed fear to influence me. I thought this so unworthy of me that, “so soon as I have brought my present adventure to a conclusion,” I said to myself, “I will go back and steam up the mighty river; and any slave-owner or slave-dealer who dares to stop me shall pay dear for his temerity.” I told Peter and Ready of my determination. The latter wagged his tail and seemed highly pleased, though I suspect he thought I was speaking of going home. The former said that he was willing to go wherever I wished, and, if needs be, would fight by my side as long as he could stand up.

“I know you would, Peter,” said I. “Indeed we shall probably have something to try your courage before then.”

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