Reid Mayne

Osceola the Seminole: or, The Red Fawn of the Flower Land

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Содержание

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Preface

The Historical Novel has ever maintained a high rank – perhaps the highest – among works of fiction, for the reason that while it enchants the senses, it improves the mind, conveying, under a most pleasing form, much information which, perhaps, the reader would never have sought for amid the dry records of the purely historic narrative.

This fact being conceded, it needs but little argument to prove that those works are most interesting which treat of the facts and incidents pertaining to our own history, and of a date which is yet fresh in the memory of the reader.

To this class of books pre-eminently belongs the volume which is here submitted to the American reader, from the pen of a writer who has proved himself unsurpassed in the field which he has, by his various works, made peculiarly his own.

The brief but heroic struggle of the celebrated Chief, Osceola, forms the groundwork of a narrative which is equal, if not superior, to any of Mr Reid's former productions; and while the

reader's patriotism cannot fail to be gratified at the result, his sympathy is, at the same time, awakened for the manly struggles and untimely fate of the gallant spirit, who fought so nobly for the freedom of his red brethren and the preservation of their cherished hunting-grounds.

Chapter One
The Flowery Land

Linda Florida! fair land of flowers!

Thus hailed thee the bold Spanish adventurer, as standing upon the prow of his caravel, he first caught sight of thy shores.

It was upon the Sunday of Palms – the festival of the flowers – and the devout Castilian beheld in thee a fit emblem of the day. Under the influence of a pious thought, he gave thee its name, and well deservedst thou the proud appellation.

That was three hundred years ago. Three full cycles have rolled past, since the hour of thy baptismal ceremony; but the title becomes thee as ever. Thy floral bloom is as bright at this hour as when Leon landed upon thy shores – ay, bright as when the breath of God first called thee into being.

Thy forests are still virgin and inviolate; verdant thy savannas; thy groves as fragrant as ever – those perfumed groves of aniseed and orange, of myrtle and magnolia. Still sparkles upon thy plains the cerulean ixia; still gleam in thy waters the golden nymphae; above thy swamps yet tower the colossal cypress, the gigantic cedar, the gum, and the bay-tree; still over thy gentle slopes of silvery sand wave long-leaved pines, mingling their acetalous foliage with the frondage of the palm. Strange anomaly of vegetation; the tree of the north, and the tree of the south –

the types of the frigid and torrid – in this thy mild mid region, standing side by side, and blending their branches together!

Linda Florida! who can behold thee without peculiar emotion? without conviction that thou art a favoured land? Gazing upon thee, one ceases to wonder at the faith – the wild faith of the early adventurers – that from thy bosom gushed forth the fountain of youth, the waters of eternal life!

No wonder the sweet fancy found favour and credence; no wonder so delightful an idea had its crowds of devotees. Thousands came from afar, to find rejuvenescence by bathing in thy crystal streams – thousands sought it, with far more eagerness than the white metal of Mexico, or the yellow gold of Peru; in the search thousands grew older instead of younger, or perished in pursuit of the vain illusion; but who could wonder?

Even at this hour, one can scarcely think it an illusion; and in that age of romance, it was still easier of belief. A new world had been discovered, why not a new theory of life? Men looked upon a land where the leaves never fell, and the flowers never faded. The bloom was eternal – eternal the music of the birds. There was no winter – no signs of death or decay. Natural, then, the fancy, and easy the faith, that in such fair land man too might be immortal.

The delusion has long since died away, but not the beauty that gave birth to it. Thou, Florida, art still the same – still art thou emphatically the land of flowers. Thy groves are as green, thy skies as bright, thy waters as diaphanous as ever. There is no

change in the loveliness of thy aspect.

And yet I observe a change. The scene is the same, but not the characters! Where are they of that red race who were born of thee, and nurtured on thy bosom? I see them not. In thy fields, I behold white and black, but not red – European and African, but not Indian – not one of that ancient people who were once thine own. Where are they?

Gone! all gone! No longer tread they thy flowery paths – no longer are thy crystal streams cleft by the keels of their canoes – no more upon thy spicy gale is borne the sound of their voices – the twang of their bowstrings is heard no more amid the trees of thy forest: they have parted from thee far and for ever.

But not willing went they away – for who could leave thee with a willing heart? No, fair Florida; thy red children were true to thee, and parted only in sore unwillingness. Long did they cling to the loved scenes of their youth; long continued they the conflict of despair, that has made them famous for ever. Whole armies, and many a hard straggle, it cost the pale-face to dispossess them; and then they went not willingly – they were torn from thy bosom like wolf-cubs from their dam, and forced to a far western land. Sad their hearts, and slow their steps, as they faced toward the setting sun. Silent or weeping, they moved onward. In all that band, there was not one voluntary exile.

No wonder they disliked to leave thee. I can well comprehend the poignancy of their grief. I too have enjoyed the sweets of thy flowery land, and parted from thee with like reluctance. I have

walked under the shadows of thy majestic forests, and bathed my body in thy limpid streams – not with the hope of rejuvenescence, but the certainty of health and joy. Oft have I made my couch under the canopy of thy spreading palms and magnolias, or stretched myself along the greensward of thy savannas; and, with eyes bent upon the blue ether of thy heavens, have listened to my heart repeating the words of the eastern poet:

> "Oh! if there can be an Elysium on earth,
> It is this – it is this!"

Chapter Two
The Indigo Plantation

My father was an indigo planter; his name was Randolph. I bear his name in full – George Randolph.

There is Indian blood in my veins. My father was of the Randolphs of Roanoke – hence descended from the Princess Pocahontas. He was proud of his Indian ancestry – almost vain of it.

It may sound paradoxical, especially to European ears; but it is true, that white men in America, who have Indian blood in them, are proud of the taint. Even to be a "half-breed" is no badge of shame – particularly where the *sang mêlé* has been gifted with fortune. Not all the volumes that have been written bear such strong testimony to the grandeur of the Indian character as this one fact – we are not ashamed to acknowledge them as ancestry!

Hundreds of white families lay claim to descent from the Virginian princess. If their claims be just, then must the fair Pocahontas have been a blessing to her lord.

I think my father *was* of the true lineage; at all events, he belonged to a proud family in the "Old Dominion;" and during his early life had been surrounded by sable slaves in hundreds. But his rich patrimonial lands became at length worn-out – profuse hospitality well-nigh ruined him; and not brooking an inferior

station, he gathered up the fragments of his fortune, and "moved" southward – there to begin the world anew.

I was born before this removal, and am therefore a native of Virginia; but my earliest impressions of a home were formed upon the banks of the beautiful Suwanee in Florida. That was the scene of my boyhood's life – the spot consecrated to me by the joys of youth and the charms of early love.

I would paint the picture of my boyhood's home. Well do I remember it: so fair a scene is not easily effaced from the memory.

A handsome "frame"-house, coloured white, with green Venetians over the windows, and a wide verandah extending all round. Carved wooden porticoes support the roof of this verandah, and a low balustrade with light railing separates it from the adjoining grounds – from the flower parterre in front, the orangery on the right flank and a large garden on the left. From the outer edge of the parterre, a smooth lawn slopes gently to the bank of the river – here expanding to the dimensions of a noble lake, with distant wooded shores, islets that seem suspended in the air, wild-fowl upon the wing, and wild-fowl in the water.

Upon the lawn, behold tall tapering palms, with pinnatifid leaves – a species of *oreodoxia*– others with broad fan-shaped fronds – the *palmettoes* of the south; behold magnolias, clumps of the fragrant illicium, and radiating crowns of the *yucca gloriosa*– all indigenous to the soil. Another native presents itself to the eye – a huge live-oak extending its long horizontal boughs,

covered thickly with evergreen coriaceous leaves, and broadly shadowing the grass beneath. Under its shade behold a beautiful girl, in light summer robes – her hair loosely coifed with a white kerchief, from the folds of which have escaped long tresses glittering with the hues of gold. That is my sister Virginia, my only sister, still younger than myself. Her golden hair bespeaks not her Indian descent, but in that she takes after our mother. She is playing with her pets, the doe of the fallow deer, and its pretty spotted fawn. She is feeding them with the pulp of the sweet orange, of which they are immoderately fond. Another favourite is by her side, led by its tiny chain. It is the black fox-squirrel, with glossy coat and quivering tail. Its eccentric gambols frighten the fawn, causing the timid creature to start over the ground, and press closer to its mother, and sometimes to my sister, for protection.

The scene has its accompaniment of music. The golden oriole, whose nest is among the orange-trees, gives out its liquid song; the mock-bird, caged in the verandah, repeats the strain with variations. The gay mimic echoes the red cardinal and the blue jay, both fluttering among the flowers of the magnolia; it mocks the chatter of the green paroquets, that are busy with the berries of the tall cypresses down by the water's edge; at intervals it repeats the wild scream of the Spanish curlews that wave their silver wings overhead, or the cry of the tantalus heard from the far islets of the lake. The bark of the dog, the mewing of the cat, the hinny of mules, the neighing of horses, even the tones of the

human voice, are all imitated by this versatile and incomparable songster.

The rear of the dwelling presents a different aspect – perhaps not so bright, though not less cheerful. Here is exhibited a scene of active life – a picture of the industry of an indigo plantation.

A spacious enclosure, with its "post-and-rail" fence, adjoins the house. Near the centre of this stands the *pièce de résistance*– a grand shed that covers half an acre of ground, supported upon strong pillars of wood. Underneath are seen huge oblong vats, hewn from the great trunks of the cypress. They are ranged in threes, one above the other, and communicate by means of spigots placed in their ends. In these the precious plant is macerated, and its cerulean colour extracted.

Beyond are rows of pretty little cottages, uniform in size and shape, each embowered in its grove of orange-trees, whose ripening fruit and white wax-like flowers fill the air with perfume. These are the negro-cabins. Here and there, towering above their roofs in upright attitude, or bending gently over, is the same noble palm-tree that ornaments the lawn in front. Other houses appear within the enclosure, rude structures of hewn logs, with "clap-board" roofs: they are the stable, the corn-crib, the kitchen – this last communicating with the main dwelling by a long open gallery, with shingle roof, supported upon posts of the fragrant red cedar.

Beyond the enclosure stretch wild fields, backed by a dark belt of cypress forest that shuts out the view of the horizon.

These fields exhibit the staple of cultivation, the precious dye-plant, though other vegetation appears upon them. There are maize-plants and sweet potatoes (*Convolvulus batatas*) some rice, and sugar-cane. These are not intended for commerce, but to provision the establishment.

The indigo is sown in straight rows, with intervals between. The plants are of different ages, some just bursting through the glebe with leaves like young trefoil; others full-grown, above two feet in height, resemble ferns, and exhibit the light-green pinnated leaves which distinguish most of the *leguminosa*– for the indigo belongs to this tribe. Some shew their papilionaceous flowers just on the eve of bursting; but rarely are they permitted to exhibit their full bloom. Another destiny awaits them; and the hand of the reaper rudely checks their purple inflorescence.

In the inclosure, and over the indigo-fields, a hundred human forms are moving; with one or two exceptions, they are all of the African race – all slaves. They are not all of black skin – scarcely the majority of them are negroes. There are mulattoes, samboes, and quadroons. Even some who are of pure African blood are not black, only bronze-coloured; but with the exception of the "overseer" and the owner of the plantation, all are slaves. Some are hideously ugly, with thick lips, low retreating foreheads, flat noses, and ill-formed bodies! others are well proportioned; and among them are some that might be accounted good-looking. There are women nearly white – quadroons. Of the latter are several that are more than good-looking – some even beautiful.

The men are in their work-dresses: loose cotton trousers, with coarse coloured shirts, and hats of palmetto-leaf. A few display dandyism in their attire. Some are naked from the waist upwards, their black skins glistening under the sun like ebony. The women are more gaily arrayed in striped prints, and heads "toqued" with Madras kerchiefs of brilliant check. The dresses of some are tasteful and pretty. The turban-like coiffure renders them picturesque.

Both men and women are alike employed in the business of the plantation – the manufacture of the indigo. Some cut down the plants with reaping-hooks, and tie them in bundles; others carry the bundles in from the fields to the great shed; a few are employed in throwing them into the upper trough, the "steeper;" while another few are drawing off and "beating." Some shovel the sediment into the draining-bags, while others superintend the drying and cutting out. All have their respective tasks, and all seem alike cheerful in the performance of them. They laugh, and chatter, and sing; they give back jest for jest; and scarcely a moment passes that merry voices are not ringing upon the ear.

And yet these are all slaves – the slaves of my father. He treats them well; seldom is the lash uplifted: hence the happy mood and cheerful aspect.

Such pleasant pictures are graven on my memory, sweetly and deeply impressed. They formed the *mise-en-scène* of my early life.

Chapter Three
The Two Jakes

Every plantation has its "bad fellow" – often more than one, but always one who holds pre-eminence in evil. "Yellow Jake" was the fiend of ours.

He was a young mulatto, in person not ill-looking, but of sullen habit and morose disposition. On occasions he had shewn himself capable of fierce resentment and cruelty.

Instances of such character are more common among mulattoes than negroes. Pride of colour on the part of the yellow man – confidence in a higher organism, both intellectual and physical, and consequently a keener sense of the injustice of his degraded position, explain this psychological difference.

As for the pure negro, he rarely enacts the unfeeling savage. In the drama of human life, he is the victim, not the villain. No matter where lies the scene – in his own land, or elsewhere – he has been used to play the *rôle* of the sufferer; yet his soul is still free from resentment or ferocity. In all the world, there is no kinder heart than that which beats within the bosom of the African black.

Yellow Jake was wicked without provocation. Cruelty was innate in his disposition – no doubt inherited. He was a Spanish mulatto; that is, paternally of Spanish blood – maternally, negro.

His father had sold him to mine!

A slave-mother, a slave-son. The father's freedom affects not the offspring. Among the black and red races of America, the child fellows the fortunes of the mother. Only she of Caucasian race can be the mother of white men.

There was another "Jacob" upon the plantation – hence the distinctive sobriquet of "Yellow Jake." This other was "Black Jake;" and only in age and size was there any similarity between the two. In disposition they differed even more than in complexion. If Yellow Jake had the brighter skin, Black Jake had the lighter heart. Their countenances exhibited a complete contrast – the contrast between a sullen frown and a cheerful smile. The white teeth of the latter were ever set in smiles: the former smiled only when under the influence of some malicious prompting.

Black Jake was a Virginian. He was one of those belonging to the old plantation – had "moved" along with his master; and felt those ties of attachment which in many cases exist strongly between master and slave. He regarded himself as one of our family, and gloried in bearing our name. Like all negroes born in the "Old Dominion," he was proud of his nativity. In caste, a "Vaginny nigger" takes precedence of all others.

Apart from his complexion, Black Jake was not ill-looking. His features were as good as those of the mulatto. He had neither the thick lips, flat nose, nor retreating forehead of his race – for these characteristics are not universal. I have known negroes of

pure African blood with features perfectly regular, and such a one was Black Jake. In form, he might have passed for the Ethiopian Apollo.

There was one who thought him handsome – handsomer than his yellow namesake. This was the quadroon Viola, the belle of the plantation. For Viola's hand, the two Jakes had long time been rival suitors. Both had assiduously courted her smiles – somewhat capricious they were, for Viola was not without coquetry – but she had at length exhibited a marked preference for the black. I need not add that there was jealousy between the negro and mulatto – on the part of the latter, rank hatred of his rival – which Viola's preference had kindled into fierce resentment.

More than once had the two measured their strength, and on each occasion had the black been victorious. Perhaps to this cause, more than to his personal appearance, was he indebted for the smiles of Viola. Throughout all the world, throughout all time, beauty has bowed down before courage and strength.

Yellow Jake was our woodman; Black Jake, the curator of the horses, the driver of "white massa's" barouche.

The story of the two Jakes – their loves and their jealousies – is but a common affair in the *petite politique* of plantation-life. I have singled it out, not from any separate interest it may possess, but as leading to a series of events that exercised an important influence on my own subsequent history.

The first of these events was as follows; Yellow Jake, burning with jealousy at the success of his rival, had grown spiteful

with Viola. Meeting her by some chance in the woods, and far from the house, he had offered her a dire insult. Resentment had rendered him reckless. The opportune arrival of my sister had prevented him from using violence, but the intent could not be overlooked; and chiefly through my sister's influence, the mulatto was brought to punishment.

It was the first time that Yellow Jake had received chastisement, though not the first time he had deserved it. My father had been indulgent with him; too indulgent, all said. He had often pardoned him when guilty of faults – of crimes. My father was of an easy temper, and had an exceeding dislike to proceed to the extremity of the lash; but in this case my sister had urged, with some spirit, the necessity of the punishment. Viola was her maid; and the wicked conduct of the mulatto could not be overlooked.

The castigation did not cure him of his propensity to evil. An event occurred shortly after, that proved he was vindictive. My sister's pretty fawn was found dead by the shore of the lake. It could not have died from any natural cause – for it was seen alive, and skipping over the lawn but the hour before. No alligator could have done it, nor yet a wolf. There was neither scratch nor tear upon it; no signs of blood! It must have been strangled.

It *was* strangled, as proved in the sequel. Yellow Jake had done it, and Black Jake had seen him. From the orange grove, where the latter chanced to be at work, he had been witness of the tragic scene; and his testimony procured a second flogging

for the mulatto.

A third event followed close upon the heels of this – a quarrel between negro and mulatto, that came to blows. It had been sought by the latter to revenge himself, at once upon his rival in love, and the witness of his late crime.

The conflict did not end in mere blows. Yellow Jake, with an instinct derived from his Spanish paternity, drew his knife, and inflicted a severe wound upon his unarmed antagonist.

This time his punishment was more severe. I was myself enraged, for Black Jake was my "body guard" and favourite. Though his skin was black, and his intellect but little cultivated, his cheerful disposition rendered him a pleasant companion; he was, in fact, the chosen associate of my boyish days – my comrade upon the water, and in the woods.

Justice required satisfaction, and Yellow Jake caught it in earnest.

The punishment proved of no avail. He was incorrigible. The demon spirit was too strong within him: it was part of his nature.

Chapter Four
The Hommock

Just outside the orangery was one of those singular formations – peculiar, I believe, to Florida.

A circular basin, like a vast sugar-pan, opens into the earth, to the depth of many feet, and having a diameter of forty yards or more. In the bottom of this, several cavities are seen, about the size and of the appearance of dug wells, regularly cylindrical – except where their sides have fallen in, or the rocky partition between them has given way, in which case they resemble a vast honeycomb with broken cells.

The wells are sometimes found dry; but more commonly there is water in the bottom, and often filling the great tank itself.

Such natural reservoirs, although occurring in the midst of level plains, are always partially surrounded by eminences – knolls, and detached masses of testaceous rocks; all of which are covered by an evergreen thicket of native trees, as *magnolia grandiflora*, red bay, *zanthoxylon*, live-oak, mulberry, and several species of fan-palms (palmettoes). Sometimes these shadowy coverts are found among the trees of the pine-forests, and sometimes they appear in the midst of green savannas, like islets in the ocean.

They constitute the “hommocks” of Florida – famed in the

story of its Indian wars.

One of these, then, was situated just outside the orangery; with groups of testaceous rocks forming a half-circle around its edge; and draped with the dark foliage of evergreen trees, of the species already mentioned. The water contained in the basin was sweet and limpid; and far down in its crystal depths might be seen gold and red fish, with yellow bream, spotted bass, and many other beautiful varieties of the finny tribe, disporting themselves all day long. The tank was in reality a natural fishpond; and, moreover, it was used as the family bathing-place – for, under the hot sun of Florida, the bath is a necessity as well as a luxury.

From the house, it was approached by a sanded walk that led across the orangery, and some large stone-flags enabled the bather to descend conveniently into the water. Of course, only the white members of the family were allowed the freedom of this charming sanctuary.

Outside the hommock extended the fields under cultivation, until bounded in the distance by tall forests of cypress and white cedar – a sort of impenetrable morass that covered the country for miles beyond.

On one side of the plantation-fields was a wide plain, covered with grassy turf, and without enclosure of any kind. This was the *savanna*, a natural meadow where the horses and cattle of the plantation were freely pastured. Deer often appeared upon this plain, and flocks of the wild turkey.

I was just of that age to be enamoured of the chase. Like most

youth of the southern states who have little else to do, hunting was my chief occupation; and I was passionately fond of it. My father had procured for me a brace of splendid greyhounds; and it was a favourite pastime with me to conceal myself in the hommock, wait for the deer and turkeys as they approached, and then course them across the savanna. In this manner I made many a capture of both species of game; for the wild turkey can easily be run down with fleet dogs.

The hour at which I was accustomed to enjoy this amusement was early in the morning, before any of the family were astir. That was the best time to find the game upon the savanna.

One morning, as usual, I repaired to my stand in the covert. I climbed upon a rock, whose flat top afforded footing both to myself and my dogs. From this elevated position I had the whole plain under view, and could observe any object that might be moving upon it, while I was myself secure from observation. The broad leaves of the magnolia formed a bower around me, leaving a break in the foliage, through which I could make my reconnoissance.

On this particular morning I had arrived before sunrise. The horses were still in their stables, and the cattle in the enclosure. Even by the deer, the savanna was untenanted, as I could perceive at the first glance. Over all its wide extent not an antler was to be seen.

I was somewhat disappointed on observing this. My mother expected a party upon that day. She had expressed a wish to have

venison at dinner: I had promised her she should have it; and on seeing the savanna empty, I felt disappointment.

I was a little surprised, too; the sight was unusual. Almost every morning, there were deer upon this wide pasture, at one point or another.

Had some early stalker been before me? Probable enough. Perhaps young Ringgold from the next plantation; or maybe one of the Indian hunters, who seemed never to sleep? Certainly, some one had been over the ground, and frightened off the game?

The savanna was a free range, and all who chose might hunt or pasture upon it. It was a tract of common ground, belonging to no one of the plantations – government land not yet purchased.

Certainly Ringgold had been there? or old Hickman, the alligator-hunter, who lived upon the skirt of our plantation? or it might be an Indian from the other side of the swamp?

With such conjectures did I account for the absence of the game.

I felt chagrin. I should not be able to keep my promise; there would be no venison for dinner. A turkey I might obtain; the hour for chasing them had not yet arrived. I could hear them calling from the tall tree-tops – their loud "gobbling" borne far and clear upon the still air of the morning. I did not care for these – the larder was already stocked with them; I had killed a brace on the preceding day. I did not want more – I wanted venison.

To procure it, I must needs try some other mode than coursing. I had my rifle with me; I could try a "still-hunt" in the woods.

Better still, I would go in the direction of old Hickman's cabin; he might help me in my dilemma. Perhaps he had been out already? if so, he would be sure to bring home venison. I could procure a supply from him, and keep my promise. – The sun was just shewing his disc above the horizon; his rays were tingeing the tops of the distant cypresses, whose light-green leaves shone with the lines of gold.

I gave one more glance over the savanna, before descending from my elevated position; in that glance I saw what caused me to change my resolution, and remain upon the rock.

A herd of deer was trooping out from the edge of the cypress woods – at that corner where the rail-fence separated the savanna from the cultivated fields.

"Ha!" thought I, "they have been poaching upon the young maize-plants."

I bent my eyes towards the point whence, as I supposed, they had issued from the fields. I knew there was a gap near the corner, with movable bars. I could see it from where I stood, but I now perceived that the bars were in their places! The deer could not have been in the fields then? It was not likely they had leaped either the bars or the fence. It was a high rail-fence, with "stakes and riders." The bars were as high as the fence. The deer must have come out of the woods?

This observation was instantly followed by another. The animals were running rapidly, as if alarmed by the presence of some enemy.

A hunter is behind them? Old Hickman? Ringgold? Who?

I gazed eagerly, sweeping my eyes along the edge of the timber, but for a while saw no one.

"A lynx or a bear may have startled them? If so, they will not go far; I shall have a chance with my greyhounds yet. Perhaps – "

My reflections were brought to a sudden termination, on perceiving what had caused the stampede of the deer. It was neither bear nor lynx, but a human being.

A man was just emerging from out the dark shadow of the cypresses. The sun as yet only touched the tops of the trees; but there was light enough below to enable me to make out the figure of a man – still more, to recognise the individual. It was neither Ringgold nor Hickman, nor yet an Indian. The dress I knew well – the blue cottonade trousers, the striped shirt, and palmetto hat. The dress was that worn by our woodman. The man was Yellow Jake.

Chapter Five
Yellow Jake

Not without some surprise did I make this discovery. What was the mulatto doing in the woods at such an hour? It was not his habit to be so thrifty; on the contrary, it was difficult to rouse him to his daily work. He was not a hunter – had no taste for it. I never saw him go after game – though, from being always in the woods, he was well acquainted with the haunts and habits of every animal that dwelt there. What was he doing abroad on this particular morning?

I remained on my perch to watch him, at the same time keeping an eye upon the deer.

It soon became evident that the mulatto was not after these; for, on coming out of the timber, he turned along its edge, in a direction opposite to that in which the deer had gone. He went straight towards the gap that fed into the maize-field.

I noticed that he moved slowly and in a crouching attitude. I thought there was some object near his feet: it appeared to be a dog, but a very small one. Perhaps an opossum, thought I. It was of whitish colour, as these creatures are; but in the distance I could not distinguish between an opossum and a puppy. I fancied, however, that it was the pouched animal; that he had caught it in the woods, and was leading it along in a string.

There was nothing remarkable or improbable in all this behaviour. The mulatto may have discovered an opossum-cave the day before, and set a trap for the animal. It may have been caught in the night, and he was now on his way home with it. The only point that surprised me was, that the fellow had turned hunter; but I explained this upon another hypothesis. I remembered how fond the negroes are of the flesh of the opossum, and Yellow Jake was no exception to the rule. Perhaps he had seen, the day before, that this one could be easily obtained, and had resolved upon having a roast?

But why was he not carrying it in a proper manner? He appeared to be leading, or dragging it rather – for I knew the creature would not be led – and every now and then I observed him stoop towards it, as if caressing it.

I was puzzled; it could not be an opossum.

I watched the man narrowly till he arrived opposite the gap in the fence. I expected to see him step over the bars – since through the maize-field was the nearest way to the house. Certainly he entered the field; but, to my astonishment, instead of climbing over in the usual manner, I saw him take out bar after bar, down to the very lowest. I observed, moreover, that he flung the bars to one side, leaving the gap quite open!

He then passed through, and entering among the corn, in the same crouching attitude, disappeared behind the broad blades of the young maize-plants —

For a while I saw no more of him, or the white object that he

"toated" along with him in such a singular fashion.

I turned my attention to the deer: they had got over their alarm, and had halted near the middle of the savanna, where they were now quietly browsing.

But I could not help pondering upon the eccentric manoeuvres I had just been witness of; and once more I bent my eyes toward the place, where I had last seen the mulatto.

He was still among the maize-plants. I could see nothing of him; but at that moment my eyes rested upon an object that filled me with fresh surprise.

Just at the point where Yellow Jake had emerged from the woods, something else appeared in motion – also coming out into the open savanna. It was a dark object, and from its prostrate attitude, resembled a man crawling forward upon his hands, and dragging his limbs after him.

For a moment or two, I believed it to be a man – not a white man – but a negro or an Indian. The tactics were Indian, but we were at peace with these people, and why should one of them be thus trailing the mulatto? I say "trailing" for the attitude and motions, of whatever creature I saw, plainly indicated that it was following upon the track which Yellow Jake had just passed over.

Was it Black Jake who was after him?

This idea came suddenly into my mind: I remembered the *vendetta* that existed between them; I remembered the conflict in which Yellow Jake had used his knife. True, he had been punished, but not by Black Jake himself. Was the latter now

seeking to revenge himself in person?

This might have appeared the easiest explanation of the scene that was mystifying me; had it not been for the improbability of the black acting in such a manner. I could not think that the noble fellow would seek any mean mode of retaliation, however revengeful he might feel against one who had so basely attacked him. It was not in keeping with his character. No. It could not be he who was crawling out of the bushes.

Nor he, nor any one.

At that moment, the golden sun flashed over the savanna. His beams glanced along the greensward, lighting the trees to their bases. The dark form emerged from out of the shadow, and turned head towards the maize-field. The long prostrate body glittered under the sun with a sheen like scaled armour. It was easily recognised. It was not negro – not Indian – not human: it was the hideous form of an alligator!

Chapter Six
The Alligator

To one brought up – born, I might almost say – upon the banks of a Floridian river, there is nothing remarkable in the sight of an alligator. Nothing very terrible either; for ugly as is the great saurian – certainly the most repulsive form in the animal kingdom – it is least dreaded by those who know it best. For all that, it is seldom approached without some feeling of fear. The stranger to its haunts and habits, abhors and flees from it; and even the native – be he red, white, or black – whose home borders the swamp and the lagoon, approaches this gigantic lizard with caution.

Some closet naturalists have asserted that the alligator will not attack man, and yet they admit that it will destroy horses and horned cattle. A like allegation is made of the jaguar and vampire bat. Strange assertions, in the teeth of a thousand testimonies to the contrary.

It is true the alligator does not always attack man when an opportunity offers – nor does the lion, nor yet the tiger – but even the false Buffon would scarcely be bold enough to declare that the alligator is innocuous. If a list could be furnished of human beings who have fallen victims to the voracity of this creature, since the days of Columbus, it would be found to be something

enormous – quite equal to the havoc made in the same period of time by the Indian tiger or the African lion. Humboldt, during his short stay in South America, was well informed of many instances; and for my part, I know of more than one case of actual death, and many of lacerated limbs, received at the jaws of the American alligator.

There are many species, both of the caïman or alligator, and of the true crocodile, in the waters of tropical America. They are more or less fierce, and hence the difference of "travellers' tales" in relation to them. Even the same species in two different rivers is not always of like disposition. The individuals are affected by outward circumstances, as other animals are. Size, climate, colonisation, all produce their effect; and, what may appear still more singular, their disposition is influenced by the character of the race of men that chances to dwell near them!

On some of the South-American rivers – whose banks are the home of the ill-armed apathetic Indian – the caimans are exceedingly bold, and dangerous to approach. Just so were their congeners, the alligators of the north, till the stalwart backwoodsman, with his axe in one hand, and his rifle in the other, taught them to fear the upright form – a proof that these crawling creatures possess the powers of reason. Even to this hour, in many of the swamps and streams of Florida, full-grown alligators cannot be approached without peril; this is especially the case daring the season of the sexes, and still more where these reptiles are encountered remote from the habitations of man. In

Florida are rivers and lagoons where a swimmer would have no more chance of life, than if he had plunged into a sea of sharks.

Notwithstanding all this, use brings one to look lightly even upon real danger – particularly when that danger is almost continuous; and the denizen of the *cyprière* and the *white cedar* swamp is accustomed to regard without much emotion the menace of the ugly alligator. To the native of Florida, its presence is no novelty, and its going or coming excites but little interest – except perhaps in the bosom of the black man who feeds upon its tail; or the alligator-hunter, who makes a living out of its leather.

The appearance of one on the edge of the savanna would not have caused me a second thought, had it not been for its peculiar movements, as well as those I had just observed on the part of the mulatto. I could not help fancying that there was *some connexion between them*; at all events it appeared certain, that the reptile was following the man!

Whether it had him in view, or whether trailing him by the scent, I could not tell. The latter I fancied to be the case; for the mulatto had entered under cover of the maize-plants, before the other appeared outside the timber; and it could hardly have seen him as it turned towards the gap. It might, but I fancied not. More like, it was trailing him by the scent; but whether the creature was capable of doing so, I did not stay to inquire.

On it crawled over the sward – crossing the corner of the meadow, and directly upon the track which the man had taken. At intervals, it paused, flattened its breast against the earth, and

remained for some seconds in this attitude, as if resting itself. Then it would raise its body to nearly a yard in height, and move forward with apparent eagerness – as if in obedience to some attractive power in advance of it? The alligator progresses but slowly upon dry ground – not faster than a duck or goose. The water is its true element, where it makes way almost with the rapidity of a fish.

At length it approached the gap; and, after another pause, it drew its long dark body within the enclosure. I saw it enter among the maize-plants, at the exact point where the mulatto had disappeared! Of course, it was now also hidden from my view.

I no longer doubted that the monster was following the man; and equally certain was I that the latter *knew* that he was followed! How could I doubt either of these facts? To the former, I was an eye-witness; of the latter, I had circumstantial proofs. The singular attitudes and actions of the mulatto; his taking out the bars and leaving the gap free; his occasional glances backward – which I had observed as he was crossing the open ground – these were my proofs that he knew what was coming behind him – undoubtedly he knew.

But my conviction upon these two points in nowise helped to elucidate the mystery – for a mystery it had become. Beyond a doubt, the reptile was drawn after by some attraction, which it appeared unable to resist – its eagerness in advancing was evidence of this, and proved that the man was exercising some influence over it that lured it forward.

What influence? Was he beguiling it by some charm of Obeah?

A superstitious shudder came over me, as I asked myself the question. I really had such fancies at the moment. Brought up, as I had been, among Africans, dandled in the arms – perhaps nourished from the bosom – of many a sable nurse, it is not to be wondered at that my young mind was tainted with the superstitions of Bonny and Benin. I knew there were alligators in the cypress swamp – in its more remote recesses, some of enormous size – but how Yellow Jake had contrived to lure one out, and cause it to follow him over the dry cultivated ground, was a puzzle I could not explain to myself. I could think of no natural cause; I was therefore forced into the regions of the weird and supernatural.

I stood for a long while watching and wondering. The deer had passed out of my mind. They fed unnoticed: I was too much absorbed in the mysterious movements of the half-breed and his amphibious follower.

Chapter Seven
The Turtle-Crawl

So long as they remained in the maize-field, I saw nothing of either. The direction of my view was slightly oblique to the rows of the plants. The corn was at full growth, and its tall culms and broad lanceolate leaves would have overtopped the head of a man on horseback. A thicket of evergreen trees would not have been more impenetrable to the eye.

By going a little to the right, I should have become aligned with the rows, and could have seen far down the avenues between them; but this would have carried me out of the cover, and the mulatto might then have seen *me*. For certain reasons, I did not desire he should; and I remained where I had hitherto been standing.

I was satisfied that the man was still making his way up the field, and would in due time discover himself in the open ground.

An indigo flat lay between the hommock and the maize. To approach the house, it would be necessary for him to pass through the indigo; and, as the plants were but a little over two feet in height, I could not fail to observe him as he came through. I waited, therefore, with a feeling of curious anticipation – my thoughts still wearing a tinge of the weird!

He came on slowly – very slowly; but I knew that he was

advancing. I could trace his progress by an occasional movement which I observed among the leaves and tassels of the maize. The morning was still – not a breath of air stirred; and consequently the motion must have been caused by some one passing among the plants – of course by the mulatto himself. The oscillation observed farther off, told that the alligator was still following.

Again and again I observed this movement among the maize-blades. It was evident the man was not following the direction of the rows, but crossing diagonally through them! For what purpose? I could not guess. Any one of the intervals would have conducted him in a direct line towards the house – whither I supposed him to be moving. Why, then, should he adopt a more difficult course, by crossing them? It was not till afterwards that I discovered his object in this zigzag movement.

He had now advanced almost to the nether edge of the cornfield. The indigo flat was of no great breadth, and he was already so near, that I could hear the rustling of the cornstalks as they switched against each other.

Another sound I could now hear; it resembled the howling of a dog. I heard it again, and, after an interval, again. It was not the voice of a full-grown dog, but rather the weak whimper of a puppy.

At first, I fancied that the sounds came from the alligator: for these reptiles make exactly such a noise – but only when young. The one following the mulatto was full-grown; the cries could not proceed from it. Moreover, the sounds came from a point nearer

me – from the place where the man himself was moving.

I now remembered the white object I had observed as the man was crossing the corner of the savanna. It was not an opossum, then, but a young dog.

Yes. I heard the cry again: it was the whining of a whelp – nothing else.

If I could have doubted the evidence of my ears, my eyes would soon have convinced me; for, just then, I saw the man emerge from out the maize with a dog by his side – a small white cur, and apparently a young one. He was leading the creature upon a string, half-dragging it after him. I had now a full view of the individual, and saw to a certainty that he was our woodman, Yellow Jake.

Before coming out from the cover of the corn, he halted for a moment – as if to reconnoitre the ground before him. He was upon his feet, and in an erect attitude. Whatever motive he had for concealment, he needed not to crouch amid the tall plants of maize; but the indigo did not promise so good a shelter, and he was evidently considering how to advance through it without being perceived. Plainly, he had a motive for concealing himself – his every movement proved this – but with what object I could not divine.

The indigo was of the kind known as the "false Guatemala." There were several species cultivated upon the plantation; but this grew tallest; and some of the plants, now in their full purple bloom, stood nearly three feet from the surface of the soil. A

man passing through them in an erect attitude, could, of coarse, have been seen from any part of the field; but it was possible for one to crouch down, and move, between the rows unobserved. This possibility seemed to occur to the woodman; for, after a short pause, he dropped to his hands and knees, and commenced crawling forward among the indigo.

There was no fence for him to cross – the cultivated ground was all under one enclosure – and an open ridge alone formed the dividing-line between the two kinds of crop.

Had I been upon the same level with the field, the skulker would have been now hidden from my sight; but my elevated position enabled me to command a view of the intervals between the rows, and I could note every movement he was making.

Every now and then he paused, caught up the cur, and held it for a few seconds in his hands – during which the animal continued to howl as if in pain!

As he drew nearer, and repeated this operation, I saw that he was *pinching its ears*!

Fifty paces in his rear, the great lizard appeared coming out of the corn. It scarcely made pause in the open ground, but still following the track, entered among the indigo.

At this moment, a light broke upon me; I no longer speculated on the power of Obeah. The mystery was dissolved: the alligator was lured forward by the cries of the dog!

I might have thought of the thing before, for I had heard of it before. I had heard from good authority – the alligator-hunter

himself, who had often captured them by such a decoy – that these reptiles will follow a howling dog for miles through the forest, and that the old males especially are addicted to this habit. Hickman's belief was that they mistake the voice of the dog for that of their own offspring, which these unnatural parents eagerly devour.

But, independently of this monstrous propensity, it is well-known that dogs are the favourite prey of the alligator; and the unfortunate beagle that, in the heat of the chase, ventures across creek or lagoon, is certain to be attacked by these ugly amphibia.

The huge reptile, then, was being lured forward by the voice of the puppy; and this accounted for the grand overland journey he was making.

There was no longer a mystery – at least, about the mode in which the alligator was attracted onward; the only thing that remained for explanation was, what motive had the mulatto in carrying out this singular manoeuvre?

When I saw him take to his hands and knees, I had been under the impression that he did so to approach the house, without being observed. But as I continued to watch him, I changed my mind. I noticed that he looked oftener, and with more anxiety *behind* him, as if he was only desirous of being concealed from the eyes of the alligator. I observed, too, that he changed frequently from place to place, as if he aimed at keeping a screen of the plants between himself and his follower. This would also account for his having crossed the rows of the maize-

plants, as already noticed.

After all, it was only some freak that had entered the fellow's brain. He had learned this curious mode of coaxing the alligator from its haunts – perhaps old Hickman had shown him how – or he may have gathered it from his own observation, while wood-chopping in the swamps. He was taking the reptile to the house from some eccentric motive? – to make exhibition of it among his fellows? – to have a "lark" with it? or a combat between it and the house-dogs? or for some like purpose?

I could not divine his intention, and would have thought no more of it, had it not been that one or two little circumstances had made an impression upon me. I was struck by the peculiar pains which the fellow was taking to accomplish his purpose with success. He was sparing neither trouble nor time. True, it was not to be a work-day upon the plantation; it was a holiday, and the time was his own; but it was not the habit of Yellow Jake to be abroad at so early an hour, and the trouble he was taking was not in consonance with his character of habitual *insouciance* and idleness. Some strong motive, then, must have been urging him to the act. What motive?

I pondered upon it, but could not make it out.

And yet I felt uneasiness, as I watched him. It was an undefined feeling, and I could assign no reason for it – beyond the fact that the mulatto was a bad fellow, and I knew him to be capable of almost any wickedness. But if his design was a wicked one, what evil could he effect with the alligator? No one would

fear the reptile upon dry ground? – it could hurt no one?

Thus I reflected, and still did I feel some indefinite apprehensions.

But for this feeling I should have given over observing his movements, and turned my attention to the herd of deer – which I now perceived approaching up the savanna, and coming close to my place of concealment.

I resisted the temptation, and continued to watch the mulatto a little longer.

I was not kept much longer in suspense. He had now arrived upon the outer edge of the hommock, which he did not enter. I saw him turn round the thicket, and keep on towards the orangery. There was a wicket at this corner which he passed through, leaving the gate open behind him. At short intervals, he still caused the dog to utter its involuntary howlings.

It no longer needed to cry loudly, for the alligator was now close in the rear.

I obtained a full view of the monster as it passed under my position. It was not one of the largest, though it was several yards in length. There are some that measure more than a statute pole. This one was full twelve feet, from its snout to the extremity of its tail. It clutched the ground with its broad webbed feet as it crawled forward. Its corrugated skin of bluish brown colour was coated with slippery mucus, that glittered under the sun as it moved; and large masses of the swamp-slime rested in the concavities between its rhomboid scales. It seemed greatly

excited; and whenever it heard the voice of the dog, exhibited fresh symptoms of rage. It would erect itself upon its muscular arms, raise its head aloft – as if to get a view of the prey – lash its plaited tail into the air, and swell its body almost to double its natural dimensions. At the same time, it emitted loud noises from its throat and nostrils, that resembled the rumbling of distant thunder, and its musky smell filled the air with a sickening effluvium. A more monstrous creature it would be impossible to conceive. Even the fabled dragon could not have been more horrible to behold.

Without stopping, it dragged its long body through the gate, still following the direction of the noise. The leaves of the evergreens intervened, and hid the hideous reptile from my sight.

I turned my face in the opposite direction – towards the house – to watch the further movements of the mulatto. From my position, I commanded a view of the tank, and could see nearly all around it. The inner side was especially under my view, as it lay opposite, and could only be approached through the orangery.

Between the grove and the edge of the great basin, was an open space. Here there was an artificial pond only a few yards in width, and with a little water at the bottom, which was supplied by means of a pump, from the main reservoir. This pond, or rather enclosure, was the "turtle-crawl," a place in which turtle were fed and kept, to be ready at all times for the table. My father still continued his habits of Virginian hospitality; and in Florida these aldermanic delicacies are easily obtained.

The embankment of this turtle-crawl formed the direct path to the water-basin; and as I turned, I saw Yellow Jake upon it, and just approaching the pond. He still carried the cur in his arms; I saw that he was causing it to utter a continuous howling.

On reaching the steps, that led down, he paused a moment, and looked back. I noticed that he looked back in both ways – first towards the house, and then, with a satisfied air, in the direction whence he had come. No doubt he saw the alligator close at hand; for, without further hesitation, he flung the puppy far out into the water; and then, retreating along the embankment of the turtle-crawl, he entered among the orange-trees, and was out of sight.

The whelp, thus suddenly plunged into the cool tank, kept up a constant howling, at the same time beating the water violently with its feet, in the endeavour to keep itself afloat.

Its struggles were of short duration. The alligator, now guided by the well-known noise of moving water, as well as the cries of the dog, advanced rapidly to the edge; and without hesitating a moment, sprang forward into the pond. With the rapidity of an arrow, it darted out to the centre; and, seizing the victim between its bony jaws, dived instantaneously under the surface.

I could for some time trace its monstrous form far down in the diaphanous water; but guided by instinct, it soon entered one of the deep wells, amidst the darkness of which it sank out of sight.

Chapter Eight
The King Vultures

"So, then, my yellow friend, that is the intention! – a bit of revenge after all. I'll make you pay for it, you spiteful ruffian! You little thought you were observed. Ha! you shall rue this cunning deviltry before night."

Some such soliloquy escaped my lips, as soon as I comprehended the design of the mulatto's manoeuvre – for I now understood it – at least I thought so. The tank was full of beautiful fish. There were gold fish and silver fish, hyodons, and red trout. They were my sister's especial pets. She was very fond of them. It was her custom to visit them daily, give them food, and watch their gambols. Many an aquatic *cotillon* had she superintended. They knew her person, would follow her around the tank, and take food out of her fingers. She delighted in thus serving them.

The revenge lay in this. The mulatto well knew that the alligator lives upon fish – they are his natural food; and that those in the tank, pent up as they were, would soon become his prey. So strong a tyrant would soon ravage the preserve, killing the helpless creatures by scores – of course to the chagrin and grief of their fond mistress, and the joy of Yellow Jake.

I knew that the fellow disliked my little sister. The spirited part she had played, in having him punished for the affair with Viola,

had kindled his resentment against her; but since then, there had been other little incidents to increase it. She had favoured the suit of his rival with the quadroon, and had forbidden the woodman to approach Viola in her presence. These circumstances had certainly rendered the fellow hostile to her; and although there was no outward show of this feeling – there dared not be – I was nevertheless aware of the fact. His killing the fawn had proved it, and the present was a fresh instance of the implacable spirit of the man.

He calculated upon the alligator soon making havoc among the fish. Of course he knew it would in time be discovered and killed; but likely not before many of the finest should be destroyed.

No one would ever dream that the creature had been *brought* there – for on more than one occasion, alligators had found their way into the tank – having strayed from the river, or the neighbouring lagoons – or rather having been guided thither by an unexplained instinct, which enables these creatures to travel straight in the direction of water.

Such, thought I, were the designs and conjectures of Yellow Jake.

It proved afterwards that I had fathomed but half his plan. I was too young, too innocent of wickedness, even to guess at the intense malice of which the human heart is capable.

My first impulse was to follow the mulatto to the house – make known what he had done – have him punished; and then

return with a party to destroy the alligator, before he could do any damage among the fish.

At this crisis, the deer claimed my attention. The herd – an antlered buck with several does – had browsed close up to the hommock. They were within two hundred yards of where I stood. The sight was too tempting. I remembered the promise to my mother; it must be kept; venison must be obtained at all hazards!

But there was no hazard. The alligator had already eaten his breakfast. With a whole dog in his maw, it was not likely he would disturb the finny denizens of the tank for some hours to come; and as for Yellow Jake, I saw he had proceeded on to the house; he could be found at any moment; his chastisement could stand over till my return.

With these reflections passing through my mind, I abandoned my first design, and turned my attention exclusively to the game.

They were too distant for the range of my rifle; and I waited a while in the hope that they would move nearer.

But I waited in vain. The deer is shy of the hommock. It regards the evergreen islet as dangerous ground, and habitually keeps aloof from it. Natural enough, since there the creature is oft saluted by the twang of the Indian bow, or the whip-like crack of the hunter's rifle. Thence often reaches it the deadly missile.

Perceiving that the game was getting no nearer, but the contrary, I resolved to course them; and, gliding down from the rock, I descended through the copsewood to the edge of plain.

On reaching the open ground, I rushed forward – at the same

time unleashing the dogs, and crying the "view hilloo."

It was a splendid chase – led on by the old buck – the dogs following tail-on-end. I thought I never saw deer run so fleetly; it appeared as if scarcely a score of seconds had transpired while they were crossing the savanna – more than a mile in width. I had a full and perfect view of the whole; there was no obstruction either to run of the animals or the eye of the observer; the grass had been browsed short by the cattle, and not a bush grew upon the green plain; so that it was a trial of pure speed between dogs and deer. So swiftly ran the deer, I began to feel apprehensive about the venison.

My apprehensions were speedily at an end. Just on the farther edge of the savanna, the chase ended – so far at least as the dogs were concerned, and one of the deer. I saw that they had flung a doe, and were standing over her, one of them holding her by the throat.

I hurried forward. Ten minutes brought me to the spot; and after a short struggle, the quarry was killed, and bled.

I was satisfied with my dogs, with the sport, with my own exploits. I was happy at the prospect of being able to redeem my promise; and with the carcass across my shoulders, I turned triumphantly homeward.

As I faced round, I saw the shadow of wings moving over the sunlit savanna. I looked upward. Two large birds were above me in the air; they were at no great height, nor were they endeavouring to mount higher. On the contrary, they were

wheeling in spiral rings, that seemed to incline downward at each successive circuit they made around me.

At first glance, the sun's beams were in my eyes, and I could not tell what birds were flapping above me. On facing round, I had the sun in my favour; and his rays, glancing full upon the soft cream-coloured plumage, enabled me to recognise the species – they were *king vultures*– the most beautiful birds of their tribe, I am almost tempted to say the most beautiful birds in creation; certainly they take rank, among those most distinguished in the world of ornithology.

These birds are natives of the flowery land, but stray no farther north. Their haunt is on the green "everglades" and wide savannas of Florida, on the llanos of the Orinoco, and the plains of the Apure. In Florida they are rare, though not in all parts of it; but their appearance in the neighbourhood of the plantations excites an interest similar to that which is occasioned by the flight of an eagle. Not so with the other vultures —*Cathartes aura* and *atratus*– both of which are as common as crows.

In proof that the king vultures are rare, I may state that my sister had never seen one – except at a great distance off; yet this young lady was twelve years of age, and a native of the land. True, she had not gone much abroad – seldom beyond the bounds of the plantation. I remembered her expressing an ardent desire to view more closely one of these beautiful birds. I remembered it that moment; and at once formed the design of gratifying her wish.

The birds were near enough – so near that I could distinguish the deep yellow colour of their throats, the coral red upon their crowns, and the orange lappets that drooped along their beaks. They were near enough – within half reach of my rifle – but moving about as they were, it would have required a better marksman than I to have brought one of them down with a bullet.

I did not think of trying it in that way. Another idea was in my mind; and without farther pause, I proceeded to carry it out.

I saw that the vultures had espied the body of the doe, where it lay across my shoulders. That was why they were hovering above me. My plan was simple enough. I laid the carcass upon the earth; and, taking my rifle, walked away towards the timber.

Trees grew at fifty yards' distance from where I had placed the doe; and behind the nearest of these I took my stand.

I had not long to wait. The unconscious birds wheeled lower and lower, and at length one alighted on the earth. Its companion had not time to join it before the rifle cracked, and laid the beautiful creature lifeless upon the grass.

The other, frighted by the sound, rose higher and higher, and then flew away over the tops of the cypresses.

Again I shouldered my venison; and carrying the bird in my hand started homeward.

My heart was full of exultation. I anticipated a double pleasure – from the double pleasure I was to create. I should make happy the two beings that, of all on earth, were dearest to me – my fond mother, my beautiful sister.

I soon recrossed the savanna, and entered the orangery. I did not stay to go round by the wicket, but climbed over the fence at its lower end. So happy was I that my load felt light as a feather. Exultingly I strode forward, dashing the loaded boughs from my path. I sent their golden globes rolling hither and thither. What mattered a bushel of oranges?

I reached the parterre. My mother was in the verandah; she saw me as I approached, and uttered an exclamation of joy. I flung the spoils of the chase at her feet. I had kept my promise.

"What is that? – a bird?"

"Yes the king vulture – a present for Virgine. Where is she? Not up yet? Ha! the little sluggard – I shall soon arouse her. Still abed and on such a beautiful morning!"

"You wrong her, George; she has been up on hour or more. She has been playing; and has just this moment left off."

"But where is she now? In the drawing-room?"

"No; she has gone to the bath."

"To *the bath*!"

"Yes, she and Viola. What – "

"O mother – mother – "

"Tell me, George – "

"O heavens —*the alligator*!"

Chapter Nine
The Bath

"Yellow Jake! the alligator!"

They were all the words I could utter. My mother entreated an explanation; I could not stay to give it. Frantic with apprehension, I tore myself away, leaving her in a state of terror that rivalled my own.

I ran towards the hommock – the bath. I wait not to follow the devious route of the walk, but keep straight on, leaping over such obstacles as present themselves. I spring across the paling, and rush through the orangery, causing the branches to crackle and the fruit to fall. My ears are keenly bent to catch every sound.

Behind are sounds enough: I hear my mother's voice uttered in accents of terror. Already have her cries alarmed the house, and are echoed and answered by the domestics, both females and men. Dogs, startled by the sudden excitement, are baying within the enclosure, and fowls and caged birds screech in concert.

From behind come all these noises. It is not for them my ears are bent; I am listening *before* me.

In this direction I now hear sounds. The plashing of water is in my ears, and mingling with the tones of a clear silvery voice – it is the voice of my sister! "Ha, ha, ha!" The ring of laughter! Thank Heaven, she is safe!

I stay my step under the influence of a delicate thought; I call aloud:

"Virgine! Virgine!"

Impatiently I wait the reply. None reaches me; the noise of the water has drowned my voice!

I call again, and louder: "Virgine! sister! Virgine!"

I am heard, and hear:

"Who calls? You, Georgy?"

"Yes; it is I, Virgine."

"And pray, what want you, brother?"

"O sister! come out of the bath."

"For what reason should I? Our friends come? They are early: let them wait, my Georgy. Go you and entertain them. I mean to enjoy myself this most beautiful of mornings; the water's just right – delightful! Isn't it, Viola? Ho! I shall have a swim round the pond: here goes?"

And then there was a fresh plashing in the water, mingled with a cheerful abandon of laughter in the voices of my sister and her maid.

I shouted at the top of my voice:

"Hear me, Virgine, dear sister! For Heaven's sake, come out! come – "

There was a sudden cessation of the merry tones; then came a short sharp ejaculation, followed almost instantaneously by a wild scream. I perceived that neither was a reply to my appeal. I had called out in a tone of entreaty sufficient to have raised

apprehension; but the voices that now reached me were uttered in accents of terror. In my sister's voice I heard the words:

"See, Viola! O mercy – the monster! Ha! he is coming this way! O mercy! Help, George, help! Save – save me!"

Well knew I the meaning of the summons; too well could I comprehend the half-coherent words, and the continued screaming that succeeded them.

"Sister, I come, I come!"

Quick as thought, I dashed forward, breaking through the boughs that still intercepted my view.

"Oh, perhaps I shall be too late! She screams in agony; she is already in the grasp of the alligator?"

A dozen bounds carried me clear of the grove; and, gliding along the embankment of the turtle-crawl, I stood by the edge of the tank. A fearful tableau was before me.

My sister was near the centre of the basin, swimming towards the edge. There stood the quadroon – knee deep – screeching and flinging her arms frantically in the air. Beyond, appeared the gigantic lizard; his whole body, arms, hands, and claws clearly traceable in the pellucid water, above the surface of which rose the scaly serrature of his back and shoulders. His snout and tail projected still higher; and with the latter he was lashing the water into white froth, that already mottled the surface of the pond. He was not ten feet from his intended victim. His gaunt jaws almost touched the green baize skirt that floated train-like behind her. At any moment, he might have darted forward and seized her.

My sister was swimming with all her might. She was a capital swimmer; but what could it avail? Her bathing-dress was impeding her; but what mattered that? The alligator might have seized her at any moment; with a single effort, could have caught her, and yet he had not made it.

I wondered why he had not; I wondered that he still held back. I wonder to this hour, for it is not yet explained. I can account for it only on one supposition: that he felt that his victim was perfectly within his power; and as the cat cajoles with the mouse, so was he indulging in the plenitude of his tyrant strength.

These observations were made in a single second of time – while I was cocking my rifle.

I aimed, and fired. There were but two places where the shot could have proved fatal – the eye or behind the forearm. I aimed for the eye. I hit the shoulder; but from that hard corrugated skin, my bullet glinted as from a granite rock. Among the rhomboid protuberances it made a whitish score, and that was all.

The play of the monster was brought to a termination. The shot appeared to have given him pain. At all events, it roused him to more earnest action, and perhaps impelled him to the final spring. He made it the instant after.

Lashing the water with his broad tail – as if to gain impetus – he darted forward; his huge jaw hinged vertically upward, till the red throat showed wide agape; and the next moment the floating skirt – and oh! the limbs of my sister, were in his horrid gripe!

I plunged in, and swam towards them. The gun I still carried in

my grasp. It hindered me. I dropped it to the bottom, and swam on.

I caught Virgine in my arms. I was just in time, for the alligator was dragging her below.

With all my strength, I held her up. It needed all to keep us above the surface. I had no weapon; and if I had been armed, I could not have spared a hand to strike.

I shouted with all my voice, in the hope of intimidating the assailant, and causing him to let go his hold. It was to no purpose: he still held on.

O Heavens! we shall both be dragged under – drowned – devoured —

A plunge, as of one leaping from a high elevation into the pond – a quick, bold swimmer from the shore – a dark-skinned face, with long black hair that floats behind it on the water – a breast gleaming with bright spangles – a body clad in bead-embroidered garments – a man? a boy!

Who is this strange youth that rushes to our rescue?

He is already by our side – by the side of our terrible antagonist. With all the earnest energy of his look, he utters not a word. He rests one hand upon the shoulder of the huge lizard, and with a sudden spring places himself upon its back. A rider could not have leaped more adroitly to the saddle.

A knife gleams in his uplifted hand. It descends – its blade is buried in the eye of the alligator!

The roar of the saurian betokens its pain. The earth vibrates

with the sound; the froth flies up under the lashings of its tail, and a cloud of spray is flung over us. But the monster has now relaxed its gripe, and I am swimming with my sister to the shore.

A glance backward reveals to me a strange sight – I see the alligator diving to the bottom with the bold rider upon its back! He is lost – he is lost!

With painful thoughts, I swim on. I climb out, and place my fainting sister upon the bank. I again look back.

Joy, joy! the strange youth is once more above the surface, and swimming freely to the shore. Upon the further side of the pond, the hideous form is also above water, struggling by the edge – frantic and furious with the agony of its wounds.

Joy, joy! my sister is unharmed. The floating skirt has saved her; scarcely a scratch shows upon her delicate limbs; and now in tender arms, amidst sweet words and looks of kind sympathy, she is borne away from the scene of her peril.

Chapter Ten
The "Half-Blood."

The alligator was soon clubbed to death, and dragged to the shore – a work of delight to the blacks of the plantation.

No one suspected how the reptile had got to the pond – for I had not said a word to any one. The belief was that it had wandered there from the river, or the lagoons – as others had done before; and Yellow Jake, the most active of all in its destruction, was heard several times repeating this hypothesis! Little did the villain suspect that his secret was known. I thought that besides himself I was the only one privy to it; in this, however, I was mistaken.

The domestics had gone back to the house, "toating" the huge carcass with ropes, and uttering shouts of triumph. I was alone with our gallant preserver. I stayed behind purposely to thank him.

Mother, father, all had given expression to their gratitude; all had signified their admiration of his gallant conduct: even my sister, who had recovered consciousness before being carried away, had thanked him with kind words.

He made no reply, further than to acknowledge the compliments paid him; and this he did either by a smile or a simple inclination of the head. With the years of a boy, he

seemed to possess the gravity of a man.

He appeared about my own age and size. His figure was perfectly proportioned, and his face handsome. The complexion was not that of a pure Indian, though the style of his dress was so. His skin was nearer brunette than bronze: he was evidently a "half-blood."

His nose was slightly aquiline, which gave him that fine eagle-look peculiar to some of the North American tribes; and his eye, though mild in common mood, was easily lighted up. Under excitement, as I had just witnessed, it shone with the brilliancy of fire.

The admixture of Caucasian blood had tamed down the prominence of Indian features to a perfect regularity, without robbing them of their heroic grandeur of expression; and the black hair was finer than that of the pure native, though equally shining and luxuriant. In short, the *tout ensemble* of this strange youth was that of a noble and handsome boy that another brace of summers would develop into a splendid-looking man. Even as a boy, there was an individuality about him, that, when once seen, was not to be forgotten.

I have said that his costume was Indian. So was it – purely Indian – not made up altogether of the spoils of the chase, for the buckskin has long, ceased to be the wear of the aborigines of Florida. His moccasins alone were of dressed deer's hide; his leggings were of scarlet cloth; and his tunic of figured cotton stuff – all three elaborately beaded and embroidered. With these

he wore a wampum belt, and a fillet encircled his head, above which rose erect three plumes from the tail of the king vulture – which among Indians is an *eagle*. Around his neck were strings of party-coloured beads, and upon his breast three demi-lunes of silver, suspended one above the other.

Thus was the youth attired, and, despite the soaking which his garments had received, he presented an aspect as once noble and picturesque.

"You are sure you have received no injury?" I inquired for the second time.

"Quite sure – not the slightest injury."

"But you are wet through and through; let me offer you a change of clothes: mine, I think, would about fit you."

"Thank you. I should not know how to wear them. The sun is strong: my own will soon be dry again."

"You will come up to the house, and eat something?"

"I have eaten but a short while ago. I thank you. I am not in need."

"Some wine?"

"Again I thank you – water is my only drink."

I scarcely knew what to say to my new acquaintance. He refused all my offers of hospitality, and yet he remained by me. He would not accompany me to the house; and still he showed no signs of taking his departure.

Was he expecting something else? A reward for his services? Something more substantial than complimentary phrases?

The thought was not unnatural. Handsome as was the youth, he was but an Indian. Of compliments he had had enough. Indians care little for idle words. It might be that he waited for something more; it was but natural for one in his condition to do so, and equally natural for one in mine to think so.

In an instant my purse was out; in the next it was in his hands – and in the next it was at the bottom of the pond!

"I did not ask you for money," said he, as he flung the dollars indignantly into the water.

I felt pique and shame; the latter predominated. I plunged into the pond, and dived under the surface. It was not after my purse, but my rifle, which I saw lying upon the rocks at the bottom. I gained the piece, and, carrying it ashore, handed it to him.

The peculiar smile with which he received it, told me that I had well corrected my error, and subdued the capricious pride of the singular youth.

"It is my turn to make reparation," said he. "Permit me to restore you your purse, and to ask pardon for my rudeness."

Before I could interpose, he sprang into the water, and dived below the surface. He soon recovered the shining object, and returning to the bank, placed it in my hands.

"This is a splendid gift," he said, handling the rifle, and examining it – "a splendid gift; and I must return home before I can offer you aught in return. We Indians have not much that the white man values – only *our lands*, I have been told," – he uttered this phrase with peculiar emphasis. "Our rude manufactures,"

continued he, “are worthless things when put in comparison with those of your people – they are but curiosities to you at best. But stay – you are a hunter? Will you accept a pair of moccasins and a bullet-pouch? Maümee makes them well – ”

“Maümee?”

“My sister. You will find the moccasin better for hunting than those heavy shoes you wear: the tread is more silent.”

“Above all things, I should like to have a pair of your moccasins.”

“I am rejoiced that it will gratify you. Maümee shall make them, and the pouch too.”

“Maümee!” I mentally echoed. “Strange, sweet name! Can it be she?”

I was thinking of a bright being that had crossed my path – a dream – a heavenly vision – for it seemed too lovely to be of the earth.

While wandering in the woods, amid perfumed groves, had this vision appeared to me in the form of an Indian maiden. In a flowery glade, I saw her – one of those spots in the southern forest which nature adorns so profusely. She appeared to form part of the picture.

One glance had I, and she was gone. I pursued, but to no purpose. Like a spirit she glided through the daedalian aisles of the grove, and I saw her no more. But though gone from my sight, she passed not out of my memory; ever since had I been dreaming of that lovely apparition. “Was it Maümee?”

"Your name?" I inquired, as I saw the youth was about to depart.

"I am called Powell by the whites: my father's name – he was white – he is dead. My mother still lives; I need not say she is an Indian."

"I must be gone, sir," continued he after a pause. "Before I leave you, permit me to put a question. It may appear impertinent, but I have good reason for asking it. Have you among your slaves one who is very bad, one who is hostile to your family?"

"There is such a one. I have reason to believe it."

"Would you know his tracks?"

"I should."

"Then follow me!"

"It is not necessary. I can guess where you would lead me. I know all: he lured the alligator hither to destroy my sister."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the young Indian, in some surprise. "How learned you this, sir?"

"From yonder rock, I was a witness of the whole transaction. But how did *you* come to know of it?" I asked in turn.

"Only by following the trail – the man – the dog – the alligator. I was hunting by the swamp. I saw the tracks. I suspected something, and crossed the fields. I had reached the thicket when I heard cries. I was just in time. Ugh!"

"You were in good time, else the villain would have succeeded in his intent. Fear not, friend, he shall be punished."

“Good – he should be punished. I hope you and I may meet again.”

A few words more were exchanged between us, and then we shook hands, and parted.

Chapter Eleven
The Chase

About the guilt of the mulatto, I had no longer any doubt. The mere destruction of the fish could not have been his design; he would never have taken such pains to accomplish so trifling a purpose. No; his intent was far more horrid; it comprehended a deeper scheme of cruelty and vengeance; its aim was my sister's life! – Viola's! – perhaps both?

Awful as was such a belief, there was no room left to doubt it; every circumstance confirmed it. Even the young Indian had formed the opinion that such was the design. At this season, my sister was in the habit of bathing almost every day; and that this was her custom was known to all upon the plantation. *I* had not thought of it when I went in pursuit of the deer, else I should in all probability have acted in a different manner. But who could have suspected such dire villainy?

The cunning of the act quite equalled its malice. By the merest accident, there were witnesses; but had there been none, it is probable the event would have answered the intention, and my sister's life been sacrificed.

Who could have told the author of the crime? The reptile would have been alone responsible. Even suspicion would not have rested upon the mulatto – how could it? The yellow villain

had shown a fiendish craft in his calculation.

I was burning with indignation. My poor innocent sister! Little did she know the foul means that had been made use of to put her in such peril. She was aware that the mulatto liked her not, but never dreamed she that she was the object of such a demoniac spite as this.

The very thoughts of it fired me as I dwelt upon them. I could restrain myself no longer. The criminal must be brought to punishment, and at once. Some severe castigation must be inflicted upon him – something that would place it beyond his power to repeat such dangerous attempts.

How he would be dealt with, I could not tell – that must be left to my elders to determine. The lash had proved of no avail; perhaps the chain-gang would cure him – at all events, he must be banished the plantation.

In my own mind, I had not doomed him to death, though truly he deserved it. Indignant as I felt, I did not contemplate this ultimate punishment of crime; used to my father's mild rule, I did not. The lash – the county prison – the chain-gang at Saint Marks or San Augustine: some of these would likely be his reward.

I knew it would not be left to the lenient disposition of my father to decide. The whole community of planters was interested in a matter of this kind. An improvised jury would soon assemble. No doubt harsher judges than his own master would deal with the guilty man.

I stayed not longer to reflect; I was determined his trial should

be immediate. I ran towards the house with the intention of declaring his guilt.

In my haste, as before, I did not follow the usual path, which was somewhat circumambient: I made direct through the grove.

I had advanced only a few paces, when I heard a rustling of the leaves near me. I could see no one, but felt sure that the noise was caused by some person skulking among the trees. Perhaps one of the field-hands, taking advantage of the confusion of the hour, and helping himself to a few oranges.

Compared with my purpose, such slight dereliction was a matter of no importance, and I did not think worth while to stay and hinder it. I only shouted out; but no one made answer, and I kept on.

On arriving at the rear of the house, I found my father in the enclosure by the grand shed – the overseer too. Old Hickman, the alligator-hunter, was there, and one or two other white men, who had casually come upon business.

In the presence of all, I made the disclosure; and, with as much minuteness as the time would permit, described the strange transaction I had witnessed in the morning.

All were thunderstruck. Hickman at once declared the probability of such a manoeuvre, though no one doubted my words. The only doubt was as to the mulatto's intent. Could it have been human lives he designed to sacrifice? It seemed too great a wickedness to be believed. It was too horrible even to be imagined!

At that moment all doubts were set at rest. Another testimony was added to mine, which supplied the link of proof that was wanting. Black Jake had a tale to tell, and told it.

That morning – but half an hour before – he had seen Yellow Jake climb up into a live-oak that stood in one corner of the enclosure. The top of this commanded a view of the pond. It was just at the time that "white missa" and Viola went to the bath. He was quite sure that about that time they must have been going into the water, and that Yellow Jake *must have seen them*.

Indignant at his indecorous conduct, the black had shouted to the mulatto to come down from the tree, and threatened to complain upon him. The latter made answer that he was only gathering acorns – the acorns of the live-oak are sweet food, and much sought after by the plantation-people. Black Jake, however, was positive that this could not be Yellow Jake's purpose; for the former still continuing to threaten, the latter at length came down, and Black Jake saw no acorns – not one!

"Twan't acorn he war arter, Massa Randoff: daat yaller loafa wan't arter no good – daat he wan't sure sartin."

So concluded the testimony of the groom.

The tale produced conviction in the minds of all. It was no longer possible to doubt of the mulatto's intention, horrible as it was. He had ascended the tree to be witness of the foul deed; he had seen them enter the basin; he knew the danger that was lurking in its waters; and yet he had made no movement to give the alarm. On the contrary, he was among the last who had

hastened towards the pond, when the screaming of the girls was summoning all the household to their assistance. This was shown by the evidence of others. The case was clear against him.

The tale produced a wild excitement. White men and black men, masters and slaves, were equally indignant at the horrid crime; and the cry went round the yard for "Yellow Jake!"

Some ran one way, some another, in search of him – black, white, and yellow ran together – all eager in the pursuit – all desirous that such a monster should be brought to punishment.

Where was he? His name was called aloud, over and over again, with commands, with threats; but no answer came back. Where was he?

The stables were searched, the shed, the kitchen, the cabins – even the corn-crib was ransacked – but to no purpose. Where had he gone?

He had been observed but the moment before – he had assisted in dragging the alligator. The men had brought it into the enclosure, and thrown it to the hogs to be devoured. Yellow Jake had been with them, active as any at the work. It was but the moment before he had gone away; but where? No one could tell!

At this moment, I remembered the rustling among the orange-trees. It might have been he! If so, he may have overheard the conversation between the young Indian and myself – or the last part of it – and if so, he would now be far away.

I led the pursuit through the orangery: its recesses were searched; he was not there.

The hommock thickets were next entered, and beaten from one end to the other; still no signs of the missing mulatto.

It occurred to me to climb up to the rock, my former place of observation. I ascended at once to its summit, and was rewarded for my trouble. At the first glance over the fields, I saw the fugitive. He was down between the rows of the indigo plants, crawling upon hands and knees, evidently making for the maize.

I did not stay to observe further, but springing back to the ground, I ran after him. My father, Hickman, and others followed me.

The chase was not conducted in silence – no stratagem was used, and by our shouts the mulatto soon learned that he was seen and pursued. Concealment was no longer possible; and rising to his feet, he ran forward with all his speed. He soon entered the maize-field, with the hue and cry close upon his heels.

Though still but a boy, I was the fastest runner of the party. I knew that I could run faster than Yellow Jake, and if I could only keep him in sight, I should soon overtake him. His hopes were to get into the swamp, under cover of the palmetto thickets; once there, he might easily escape by hiding – at all events, he might get off for the time.

To prevent this, I ran at my utmost speed, and with success; for just upon the edge of the woods, I came up with the runaway, and caught hold of the loose flap of his jacket.

It was altogether a foolish attempt upon my part. I had not reflected upon anything beyond getting up with him. I had never

thought of resistance, though I might have expected it from a desperate man. Accustomed to be obeyed, I was under the hallucination that, as soon as I should come up, the fellow would yield to me; but I was mistaken.

He at once jerked himself free of my hold, and easily enough. My breath was gone, my strength exhausted – I could not have held a cat.

I expected him to run on as before; but instead of doing so, he stopped in his tracks, turned fiercely upon me, and drawing his knife, he plunged it through my arm. It was my heart he had aimed at; but by suddenly throwing up my arm, I had warded off the fatal thrust.

A second time his knife was upraised – and I should have had a second stab from it – but, just then, another face showed itself in the fray; and before the dangerous blade could descend, the strong arms of Black Jake were around my antagonist.

The fiend struggled fiercely to free himself; but the muscular grasp of his old rival never became relaxed until Hickman and others arrived upon the ground; and then a fast binding of thongs rendered him at once harmless and secure.

Chapter Twelve
A Severe Sentence

Such a series of violent incidents of course created excitement beyond our own boundaries. There was a group of plantations upon the river lying side by side, and all having a frontage upon the water; they formed the "settlement." Through these ran the report, spreading like wildfire; and within the hour, white men could be seen coming from every direction. Some were on foot – poor hunters who dwelt on the skirts of the large plantations; others – the planters themselves, or their overseers – on horseback. All carried weapons – rifles and pistols. A stranger might have supposed it the rendezvous of a militia "muster," but the serious looks of those who assembled gave it a different aspect: it more resembled the gathering of the frontier men upon the report of some Indian invasion.

In one hour, more than fifty white men were upon the ground – nearly all who belonged to the settlement.

A jury was quickly formed, and Yellow Jake put upon his trial. There was no law in the proceedings, though legal formality was followed in a certain rude way. These jurors were themselves sovereign – they were the lords of the land, and, in cases like this, could easily *improvise* a judge. They soon found one in planter Ringgold, our adjoining neighbour. My father declined to take

part in the proceedings.

The trial was rapidly gone through with. The facts were fresh and clear; I was before their eyes with my arm in a sling, badly cut. The other circumstances which led to this result were all detailed. The chain of guilt was complete. The mulatto had attempted the lives of white people. Of course, death was the decree.

What mode of death? Some voted for hanging; but by most of these men, hanging was deemed too mild. *Burning* met the approbation of the majority. The judge himself cast his vote for the severer sentence.

My father plead mercy – at least so far as to spare the torture – but the stern jurors would not listen to him. They had all lost slaves of late – many runaways had been reported – the proximity of the Indians gave encouragement to defection. They charged my father with too much leniency – the settlement needed an example – they would make one of Yellow Jake, that would deter all who were disposed to imitate him. His sentence was, that he should be *burnt alive*!

Thus did they reason, and thus did they pronounce.

It is a grand error to suppose that the Indians of North America have been peculiar in the habit of torturing their captive foes. In most well-authenticated cases, where cruelty has been practised by them, there has been a provocative deed of anterior date – some grievous wrong – and the torture was but a retaliation. Human nature has yielded to the temptings of revenge

in all ages – and ferocity can be charged with as much justice against white skin as against red skin. Had the Indians written the story of border warfare, the world might have modified its belief in their so called cruelty.

It is doubtful if, in all their history, instances of ferocity can be found that will parallel those often perpetrated by white men upon blacks – many of whom have suffered mutilation – torture – death – for the mere offence of a word! certainly often for a blow, since such is a written law!

Where the Indians have practised cruelty, it has almost always been in retaliation; but civilised tyrants have put men to the torture without even the palliating apology of vengeance. If there was revenge, it was not of that natural kind to which the human heart gives way, when it conceives deep wrong has been done; but rather a mean spite, such as is often exhibited by the dastard despot towards some weak individual within his power.

No doubt, Yellow Jake deserved death. His crimes were capital ones; but to *torture* him was the will of his judges.

My father opposed it, and a few others. They were outvoted and overruled. The awful sentence was passed; and they who had decreed it at once set about carrying it into execution.

It was not a fit scene to be enacted upon a gentleman's premises; and a spot was selected at some distance from the house, further down the lake-edge. To this place the criminal was conducted – the crowd of course following.

Some two hundred yards from the bank, a tree was chosen

as the place of execution. To this tree the condemned was to be bound, and a log-fire kindled around him.

My father would not witness the execution; I alone of oor family followed to the scene. The mulatto saw me, and accosted me with words of rage. He even taunted me about the wound he had given, glorying in the deed. He was no doubt under the belief that I was one of his greatest foes. I had certainly been the innocent witness of his crime, and chiefly through my testimony, he had been condemned; but I was not revengeful. I would have spared him the terrible fate he was about to undergo – at least its tortures.

We arrived upon the ground. Men were already before us, collecting the logs, and piling them up around the trunk of the tree; others were striking a fire. Some joked and laughed; a few were heard giving utterance to expressions of hate for the whole coloured race.

Young Ringgold was especially active. This was a wild youth – on the eve of manhood, of somewhat fierce, harsh temper – a family characteristic.

I knew that the young fellow affected my sister Virginia; I had often noticed his partiality for her; and he could scarcely conceal his jealousy of others who came near her. His father was the richest planter in the settlement; and the son, proud of this superiority, believed himself welcome everywhere. I did not think he was very welcome with Virgine, though I could not tell. It was too delicate a point upon which to question her, for the

little dame already esteemed herself a woman.

Ringgold was neither handsome nor graceful. He was sufficiently intelligent, but overbearing to those beneath him in station – not an uncommon fault among the sons of rich men. He had already gained the character of being resentful. In addition to all, he was dissipated – too often found with low company in the forest cock-pit.

For my part, I did not like him. I never cared to be with him as a companion; he was older than myself, but it was not that – I did not like his disposition. Not so my father and mother. By both was he encouraged to frequent our house. Both probably desired him for a future son-in-law. They saw no faults in him. The glitter of gold has a blinding influence upon the moral eye.

This young man, then, was one of the most eager for the punishment of the mulatto, and active in the preparations. His activity arose partly from a natural disposition to be cruel. Both he and his father were noted as hard task-masters, and to be "sold to Mass' Ringgold" was a fate dreaded by every slave in the settlement.

But young Ringgold had another motive for his conspicuous behaviour: he fancied he was playing the knight-errant, by this show of friendship for our family – for Virginia. He was mistaken. Such unnecessary cruelty to the criminal met the approbation of none of us. It was not likely to purchase a smile from my good sister.

The young half-blood, Powell, was also present. On hearing

the hue and cry, he had returned, and now stood in the crowd looking on, but taking no part in the proceedings.

Just then the eye of Ringgold rested upon the Indian boy, and I could perceive that it was instantly lit up by a strange expression. He was already in possession of all the details. He saw in the dark-skinned youth, the gallant preserver of Virginia's life, but it was not with gratitude that he viewed him. Another feeling was working in his breast, as could plainly be perceived by the scornful curl that played upon his lips.

More plainly still by the rude speech that followed:

"Hilloa! redskin!" he cried out, addressing himself to the young Indian, "you're sure *you* had no hand in this business? eh, redskin?"

"Redskin!" exclaimed the half-blood in a tone of indignation, at the same time fronting proudly to his insulter – "Redskin you call me? My skin is of better colour than yours, you white-livered lout!"

Ringgold was rather of a sallow complexion. The blow hit home. Not quicker is the flash of powder than was its effect; but his astonishment at being thus accosted by an Indian, combined with his rage, hindered him for some moments from making reply.

Others were before him and cried out:

"O Lordy! such talk from an Injun!"

"Say that again!" cried Ringgold, as soon as he had recovered himself.

"Again if you wish – white-livered lout!" cried the half-blood, giving full emphasis to the phrase.

The words were scarcely out before Ringgold's pistol cracked; but the bullet missed its aim; and next moment the two clinched, seizing each other by the throats.

Both came to the ground, but the half-blood had the advantage. He was uppermost, and no doubt would quickly have despatched his white antagonist – for the ready blade was gleaming in his grasp – but the knife was struck out of his hand; and a crowd of men rushing to the spot, pulled the combatants apart.

Some were loud against the Indian lad, and called for his life; but there were others with finer ideas of fair play, who had witnessed the provocation, and despite the power of the Ringgolds, would not suffer him to be sacrificed. I had resolved to protect him as far as I was able.

What would have been the result, it is difficult to guess; but, at that crisis, a sudden diversion was produced by the cry – that *Yellow Jake had escaped*!

Chapter Thirteen
The Chase

I looked around. Sure enough the mulatto was making off.

The rencontre between Ringgold and the Indian monopolised attention, and the criminal was for the moment forgotten. The knife knocked out of Powell's hand had fallen at the feet of Yellow Jake. Unobserved in the confusion he had snatched it up, cut the fastenings from his limbs, and glided off before any one could intercept him. Several clutched at him as he passed through the straggled groups; but, being naked, he was able to glide out of their grasp, and in a dozen bounds he had cleared the crowd, and was running towards the shore of the lake.

It seemed a mad attempt – he would be shot down or overtaken. Even so; it was not madness to fly from certain death – and such a death.

Shots were ringing; at first they were the reports of pistols. The guns had been laid aside, and were leaning against trees and the adjacent fence.

Their owners now ran to seize them. One after another was levelled; and then followed a sharp rapid cracking, like file-firing from a corps of riflemen.

There may have been good marksmen among the party – there were some of the best – but a man running for his life, and

bounding from side to side, to avoid the stumps and bushes, offers but a very uncertain mark; and the best shot may miss.

So it appeared on this occasion. After the last rifle rang, the runaway was still seen keeping his onward course, apparently unscathed.

The moment after, he plunged into the water, and swam boldly out from the shore.

Some set to reloading their guns; others, despairing of the time, flung them away; and hastily pulling off hats, coats, boots, rushed down to the lake, and plunged in after the fugitive.

In less than three minutes from the time that the mulatto started off, a new tableau was formed. The spot that was to have been the scene of execution was completely deserted. One half the crowd was down by the shore, shouting and gesticulating; the other half – full twenty in all – had taken to the water, and were swimming in perfect silence – their heads alone showing above the surface. Away beyond – full fifty paces in advance of the foremost – appeared that solitary swimmer – the object of pursuit; his head of black tangled curls conspicuous above the water, and now and then the yellow neck and shoulder, as he forged forward in the desperate struggle for life.

Strange tableau it was; and bore strong resemblance to a deer-hunt – when the stag, close-pressed, takes to the water; and the hounds, in full cry, plunge boldly after – but in this chase were the elements of a still grander excitement – both the quarry and the pack were human.

Not all human – there were dogs as well – hounds and mastiffs mingled among the men – side by side with their masters in the eager purpose of pursuit. A strange tableau indeed!

Stray shots were still fired from the shore. Rifles had been reloaded by those who remained; and now and then the plash of the tiny pellet could be seen, where it struck the water far short of the distant swimmer. He needed no longer have a dread of danger from that source; he was beyond the range of the rifles.

The whole scene had the semblance of a dream. So sudden had been the change of events, I could scarcely give credit to my senses, and believe it a reality. But the moment before, the criminal lay bound and helpless, beside him the pile upon which he was to be burnt – now was he swimming far and free, his executioners a hopeless distance behind him. Rapid had been the transformation – it hardly appeared real. Nevertheless, it *was* real – it was before the eyes.

A long time, too, before our eyes. A chase in the water is a very different affair from a pursuit on dry land; and, notwithstanding there was life and death on the issue, slow was the progress both of pursuers and pursued. For nearly half an hour we who remained upon the shore continued spectators of this singular contest.

The frenzy of the first moments had passed away; but there was sufficient interest to sustain a strong excitement to the last; and some continued to shout and gesticulate, though neither their cries nor actions could in anywise influence the result. No

words of encouragement could have increased the speed of the pursuers; no threats were needed to urge forward the fugitive.

We who remained inactive had time enough to reflect; and upon reflection, it became apparent why the runaway had taken to the water. Had he attempted to escape by the fields, he would have been pulled down by the dogs, or else overtaken by swift runners, for there were many swifter than he. There were few better swimmers, however, and he knew it. For this reason, then, had he preferred the water to the woods, and certainly his chances of escape seemed better.

After all, he could *not* escape. The island for which he was making was about half a mile from the shore; but beyond was a stretch of clear water of more than a mile in width. He would arrive at the island before any of his pursuers; but what then? Did he purpose to remain there, in hopes of concealing himself among the bushes? Its surface of several acres was covered with a thick growth of large trees. Some stood close by the shore, their branches draped with silvery tillandsia, overhanging the water. But what of this? There might have been cover enough to have given shelter to a bear or a hunted wolf, but not to a hunted man – not to a slave who had drawn the knife upon his master. No, no. Every inch of the thicket would be searched: to escape by concealing himself he might not.

Perhaps he only meant to use the island as a resting-place; and, after breathing himself, take once more to the water, and swim for the opposite shore. It was possible for a strong swimmer to

reach it; but it would not be possible for *him*. There were skiffs and *pirogues* upon the river, both up and down. Men had already gone after them; and, long before he could work his way across that wide reach, half-a-dozen keels would be cutting after him. No, no – he could not escape: either upon the island, or in the water beyond, he would be captured.

Thus reasoned the spectators, as they stood watching the pursuit.

The excitement rose higher as the swimmers neared the island. It is always so at the approach of a crisis; and a crisis was near, though not such a one as the spectators anticipated. They looked to see the runaway reach the island, mount up the bank, and disappear among the trees. They looked to see his pursuers climb out close upon his heels, and perhaps hear of his capture before he could cross through the timber, and take to the water on the other side.

Some such crisis were they expecting; and it could not be distant, for the mulatto was now close into the edge of the island; a few strokes would bring him to the shore; he was swimming under the black shadows of the trees – it seemed as if the branches were over his head – as if he might have thrown up his hands and clutched them.

The main body of his pursuers was still fifty yards in his rear; but some, who had forged ahead of the rest, were within half that distance. From where we viewed them, they seemed far nearer; in fact, it was easy to fancy that they were swimming alongside,

and could have laid hands on him at any moment.

The crisis was approaching, but not that which was looked for. The pursuit was destined to a far different ending from that anticipated either by spectators or pursuers. The pursued himself little dreamed of the doom that was so near – a doom awfully appropriate.

The swimmer was cleaving his way across the belt of black shadow; we expected next moment to see him enter among the trees, when all at once he was seen to turn side towards us, and direct his course along the edge of the island!

We observed this manoeuvre with some astonishment – we could not account for it; it was clearly to the advantage of his pursuers, who now swam in a diagonal line to intercept him.

What could be his motive? Had he failed to find a landing-place? Even so, he might have clutched the branches, and by that means drawn himself ashore.

Ha! our conjectures are answered; yonder is the answer; yonder brown log that floats on the black water is *not* the trunk of a dead tree. It is not dead; it has life and motion. See! it assumes a form – the form of the great saurian – the hideous alligator!

Its gaunt jaws are thrown up, its scolloped tail is erect, its breast alone rests upon the water. On this as a pivot it spins round and round, brandishing its tail in the air, and at intervals lashing the spray aloft. Its bellowing is echoed back from the distant shores; the lake vibrates under the hoarse baritone, the wood-birds flutter and cry, and the white crane mounts screaming into

the air.

The spectators stand aghast; the pursuers have poised themselves in the water, and advance no farther. One solitary swimmer is seen struggling on; it is he who swims for his life.

It is upon him the eyes of the alligator are fixed. Why upon him more than the others! They are all equally near. Is it the hand of God who takes vengeance?

Another revolution, another sweep of its strong tail, and the huge reptile rushes upon its victim.

I have forgotten his crimes – I almost sympathise with him. Is there no hope of his escape?

See! he has grasped the branch of a live-oak; he is endeavouring to lift himself up – above the water – above the danger. Heaven strengthen his arms!

Ah! he will be too late; already the jaws – That crash?

The branch has broken!

He sinks back to the surface – below it. He is out of sight – he has gone to the bottom! and after him, open-mouthed and eager, darts the gigantic lizard. Both have disappeared from our view.

The froth floats like a blanket upon the waves, clouting the leaves on the broken branch.

We watch with eager eyes. Not a ripple escapes unnoted; but no new movement stirs the surface, no motion is observed, no form comes up; and the waves soon flatten over the spot.

Beyond a doubt the reptile has finished its work.

Whose work? Was it the hand of God who took vengeance?

So they are saying round me.

The pursuers have faced back, and are swimming towards us. None cares to trust himself under the black shadows of those island oaks. They will have a long swim before they can reach the shore, and some of them will scarcely accomplish it. They are in danger; but no – yonder come the skiffs and pirogues that will soon pick them up.

They have seen the boats, and swim slowly, or float upon the water, waiting their approach.

They are taken in, one after another; and all – both dogs and men – are now carried to the island.

They go to continue the search – for there is still some doubt as to the fate of the runaway.

They land – the dogs are sent through the bushes, while the men glide round the edge to the scene of the struggle. They find no track or trace upon the shore.

But there is one upon the water. Some froth still floats – there is a tinge of carmine upon it – beyond a doubt it is the blood of the mulatto.

"All right, boys!" cries a rough fellow; "that's blueskin's blood, I'll sartify. He's gone under an' no mistake. Darn the varmint! it's clean spoilt our sport."

The jest is received with shouts of boisterous laughter.

In such a spirit talked the man-hunters, as they returned from the chase.

Chapter Fourteen
Ringgold's Revenge

Only the ruder spirits indulged in this ill-timed levity; others of more refined nature regarded the incident with due solemnity – some even with a feeling of awe.

Certainly it seemed as if the hand of God had interposed, so appropriate had been the punishment – almost as if the criminal had perished by his own contrivance.

It was an awful death, but far less hard to endure than that which had been decreed by man. The Almighty had been more merciful: and in thus mitigating the punishment of the guilty wretch, had rebuked his human judges.

I looked around for the young Indian: I was gratified to find he was no longer among the crowd. His quarrel with Ringgold had been broken off abruptly. I had fears that it was not yet ended. His words had irritated some of the white men, and it was through his being there, the criminal had found the opportunity to get off. No doubt, had the latter finally escaped, there would have been more of it: and even as matters stood, I was not without apprehensions about the safety of the bold half-blood. He was not upon his own ground – the other side of the river was the Indian territory; and, therefore, he might be deemed an intruder. True, we were at peace with the Indians; but for all that, there

was enough of hostile feeling between the two races. Old wounds received in the war of 1818 still rankled.

I knew Ringgold's resentful character – he had been humiliated in the eyes of his companions; for, during the short scuffle, the half-blood had the best of it. Ringgold would not be content to let it drop – he would seek revenge.

I was glad, therefore, on perceiving that the Indian had gone away from the ground. Perhaps he had himself become apprehensive of danger, and recrossed the river. There he would be safe from pursuit. Even Ringgold dare not follow him to the other side, for the treaty laws could not have been outraged with impunity. The most reckless of the squatters knew this. An Indian war would have been provoked, and the supreme government, though not over scrupulous, had other views at the time.

I was turning to proceed homeward, when it occurred to me that I would accost Ringgold, and signify to him my disapproval of his conduct. I was indignant at the manner in which he had acted – just angry enough to speak my mind. Ringgold was older than myself, and bigger; but I was not afraid of him. On the contrary, I knew that he was rather afraid of *me*. The insult he had offered to one who, but the hour before, had risked his life for us, had sufficiently roused my blood, and I was determined to reproach him for it. With this intention, I turned back to look for him. He was not there.

"Have you seen Arens Ringgold?" I inquired of old Hickman.

"Yes – jest gone," was the reply.

"In what direction?"

"Up-river. See 'im gallop off wi' Bill Williams an' Ned Spence – desprit keen upon somethin' they 'peered."

A painful suspicion flashed across my mind.

"Hickman," I asked, "will you lend me your horse for an hour?"

"My old critter? Sartin sure will I: a day, if you wants him. But, Geordy, boy, you can't ride wi' your arm that way?"

"O yes; only help me into the saddle."

The old hunter did as desired; and after exchanging another word or two, I rode off in the up-river direction.

Up the river was a ferry; and at its landing it was most likely the young Indian had left his canoe. In that direction, therefore, he should go to get back to his home, and in that direction Ringgold should *not* go to return to his, for the path to the Ringgold plantation led in a course altogether opposite. Hence the suspicion that occurred to me on hearing that the latter had gone up the river. At such a time it did not look well, and in such company, still worse; for I recognised in the names that Hickman had mentioned, two of the most worthless boys in the settlement. I knew them to be associates, or rather creatures, of Ringgold.

My suspicion was that they had gone after the Indian, and of course with an ill intent. It was hardly a conjecture; I was almost sure of it; and as I advanced along the river road, I became confirmed in the belief. I saw the tracks of their horses along the

path that led to the ferry, and now and again I could make out the print of the Indian moccasin where it left its wet mark in the dust. I knew that his dress had not yet dried upon him, and the moccasins would still be saturated with water.

I put the old horse to his speed. As I approached the landing, I could see no one, for there were trees all around it; but the conflict of angry voices proved that I had conjectured aright.

I did not stop to listen; but urging my horse afresh, I rode on. At a bend of the road, I saw three horses tied to the trees. I knew they were those of Ringgold and his companions, but I could not tell why they had left them.

I stayed not to speculate, but galloped forward upon the ground. Just as I had anticipated, the three were there – the half-blood was in their hands!

They had crept upon him unawares – that was why their horses had been left behind – and caught him just as he was about stepping into his canoe. He was unarmed – for the rifle I had given him was still wet, and the mulatto had made away with his knife – he could offer no resistance, and was therefore secured at once.

They had been quick about it, for they had already stripped off his hunting-shirt, and tied him to a tree. They were just about to vent their spite on him – by flogging him on the bare back with cowhides which they carried in their hands. No doubt they would have laid them on heavily, had I not arrived in time.

"Shame, Arens Ringgold! shame!" I cried as I rode up. "This

is cowardly, and I shall report it to the whole settlement."

Ringgold stammered out some excuse, but was evidently staggered at my sudden appearance.

"The darned Injun desarves it," growled Williams.

"For what, Master Williams?" I inquired.

"For waggin his jaw so imperent to white men."

"He's got no business over here," chimed in Spence; "he has got no right to come this side of the river."

"And you have no right to flog him, whether on this side or the other – no more than you have to flog me."

"Ho, ho! That might be done, too," said Spence, in a sneering tone, that set my blood in a boil.

"Not so easily," I cried, leaping from the old horse, and running forward upon the ground.

My right arm was still sound. Apprehensive of an awkward affair, I had borrowed old Hickman's pistol, and I held it in my hand.

"Now, gentlemen," said I, taking my stand beside the captive, "go on with the flogging; but take my word for it, I shall send a bullet through the first who strikes!"

Though they were but boys, all three were armed with knife and pistol, as was the custom of the time. Of the three, Spence seemed most inclined to carry out his threat; but he and Williams saw that Ringgold, their leader, had already backed out, for the latter had something to lose, which his companions had not. Besides, he had other thoughts, as well as fears for his personal

safety.

The result was, that all three, after remonstrating with me for my uncalled-for interference *in a quarrel that did not concern me*, made an angry and somewhat awkward exit from the scene.

The young Indian was soon released from his unpleasant situation. He uttered few words, but his looks amply expressed his gratitude. As he pressed my hand at parting, he said:

"Come to the other side to hunt whenever you please – no Indian will harm you – in the land of the red men *you* will be welcome."

Chapter Fifteen
Maümee

An acquaintance thus acquired could not be lightly dropped. Should it end otherwise than in friendship? This half-blood was a noble youth, the germ of a gentleman. I resolved to accept his invitation, and visit him in his forest home.

His mother's *cabin*, he said, was on the other side of the lake, not far off. I should find it on the bank of a little stream that emptied into the main river, above where the latter expands itself.

I felt a secret gratification as I listened to these directions. I knew the stream of which he was speaking; lately, I had sailed up it in my skiff. It was upon its banks I had seen that fair vision – the wood-nymph whose beauty haunted my imagination. Was it Maümee?

I longed to be satisfied. I waited only for the healing of my wound – till my arm should be strong enough for the oar. I chafed at the delay; but time passed, and I was well.

I chose a beautiful morning for the promised visit, and was prepared to start forth. I had no companion – only my dogs and gun.

I had reached my skiff, and was about stepping in, when a voice accosted me; on turning, I beheld my sister.

Poor little Virgine! she had lost somewhat of her habitual

gaiety, and appeared much changed of late. She was not yet over the terrible fright – its consequences were apparent in her more thoughtful demeanour.

"Whither goest thou, Georgy?" she inquired as she came near.

"Must I tell, Virgine?"

"Either that or take me with you."

"What! to the woods?"

"And why not? I long for a ramble in the woods. Wicked brother! you never indulge me."

"Why, sister, you never asked me before."

"Even so, you might know that I desired it. Who would not wish to go wandering in the woods? Oh! I wish I were a wild bird, or a butterfly, or some other creature with wings; I should wander all over those beautiful woods, without asking you to guide me, selfish brother."

"Any other day, Virgine, but to-day – "

"Why, but? Why not this very day? Surely it is fine – it is lovely!"

"The truth, then, sister – I am not exactly bound for the woods to-day."

"And whither bound? whither bound, Georgy? – that's what they say in ships."

"I am going to visit young Powell at his mother's cabin. I promised him I should."

"Ha!" exclaimed my sister, suddenly changing colour, and remaining for a moment in a reflective attitude.

The name had recalled that horrid scene. I was sorry I had mentioned it.

"Now, brother," continued she, after a pause; "there is nothing I more desire to see than an Indian cabin – you know I have never seen one. Good Georgy! good Georgy! pray take me along with you!"

There was an earnestness in the appeal I could not resist, though I would rather have gone alone. I had a secret that I would not have trusted even to my fond sister. I had an indefinite feeling, besides, that I ought not to take her with me, so far from home, into a part of the country with which I was so little acquainted.

She appealed a second time.

"If mother will give her consent – "

"Nonsense, Georgy – mamma will not be angry. Why return to the house? You see I am prepared; I have my sun-bonnet. We can be back before we are missed – you've told me it was not far."

"Step in, sis! Sit down in the stern. There – yo ho! we are off!"

There was not much strength in the current, and half an hour's rowing brought the skiff to the mouth of the creek. We entered it, and continued upward. It was a narrow stream, but sufficiently deep to float either skiff or canoe. The sun was hot, but his beams could not reach us; they were intercepted by the tupelo trees that grew upon the banks – their leafy branches almost meeting across the water.

Half a mile from the mouth of the creek, we approached

a clearing. We saw fields under cultivation. We noticed crops of maize, and sweet potatoes, with capsicums, melons, and calabashes. There was a dwelling-house of considerable size near the bank, surrounded by an enclosure, with smaller houses in the rear. It was a log structure – somewhat antique in its appearance, with a portico, the pillars of which exhibited a rude carving. There were slaves at work in the field – that is, there were black men, and some red men too – Indians!

It could not be the plantation of a white man – there were none on that side the river. Some wealthy Indian, we conjectured, who is the owner of land and slaves. We were not surprised at this – we knew there were many such.

But where was the cabin of our friend? He had told me it stood upon the bank of the stream not more than half a mile from its mouth. Had we passed without seeing it? or was it still higher up?

"Shall we stop, and inquire, Virgine?"

"Who is it standing in the porch?"

"Ha! your eyes are better than mine, sis – it is the young Indian himself. Surely he does not live *there*? That is not a cabin. Perhaps he is on a visit? But see! he is coming this way."

As I spoke, the Indian stepped out from the house, and walked rapidly towards us. In a few seconds, he stood upon the bank, and beckoned us to a landing. As when seen before, he was gaily dressed, with plumed "toque" upon his head, and garments richly embroidered. As he stood upon the bank above us, his fine form outlined against the sky, he presented the appearance of

a miniature warrior. Though but a boy, he looked splendid and picturesque. I almost envied him his wild attire.

My sister seemed to look on him with admiration, though I thought I could trace some terror in her glance. From the manner in which her colour came and went, I fancied that his presence recalled that scene, and again I regretted that she had accompanied me.

He appeared unembarrassed by our arrival. I have known it otherwise among whites; and those, too, making pretensions to *haut ton*. This young Indian was as cool and collected as though he had been expecting us, which he was not. He could not have expected both.

There was no show of coldness in our reception. As soon as we approached near enough, he caught the stem of the skiff, drew her close up to the landing, and with the politeness of an accomplished gentleman, assisted us to debark.

"You are welcome," said he – "welcome!" and then turning to Virginia with an inquiring look, he added:

"I hope the health of the señorita is quite restored. As for yours, sir, I need not inquire: that you have rowed your skiff so far against the current, is a proof you have got over your mishap."

The word "señorita" betrayed a trace of the Spaniards – a remnant of those relations that had erewhile existed between the Seminole Indians and the Iberian race. Even in the costume of our new acquaintance could be observed objects of Andalusian origin – the silver cross hanging from his neck, the sash of

scarlet silk around his waist, and the bright triangular blade that was sheathed behind it. The scene, too, had Spanish touches. There were exotic plants, the China orange, the splendid papaya, the capsicums (chilés), and love-apples (tomatoes); almost characteristics of the home of the Spanish colonist. The house itself exhibited traces of Castilian workmanship. The carving was not Indian.

"Is this your home?" I inquired with a little embarrassment.

He had bid us welcome, but I saw no cabin; I might be wrong.

His answer set me at rest. It was his home – his mother's house – his father was long since dead – there were but the three – his mother, his sister, himself.

"And these?" I inquired, pointing to the labourers.

"Our slaves," he replied, with a smile. "You perceive we Indians are getting into the customs of civilisation."

"But these are not all negroes? There are red men; are *they* slaves?"

"Slaves like the others. I see you are astonished. They are not of our tribe – they are *Yamassees*. Our people conquered them long ago; and many of them still remain slaves."

We had arrived at the house. His mother met us by the door – a woman of pure Indian race – who had evidently once possessed beauty. She was still agreeable to look upon – well-dressed, though in Indian costume – maternal – intelligent.

We entered – furniture – trophies of the chase – horse accoutrements in the Spanish style – a guitar – ha! books!

My sister and I were not a little surprised to find, under an Indian roof, these symbols of civilisation.

"Ah!" cried the youth, as if suddenly recollecting himself, "I am glad you are come. Your moccasins are finished. Where are they, mother? Where is she? Where is Maümee?"

He had given words to my thoughts – their very echo.

"Who is Maümee?" whispered Virgine.

"An Indian girl – his sister, I believe."

"Yonder – she comes!"

A foot scarce a span in length; an ankle that, from the broidered flap of the moccasin, exhibits two lines widely diverging upward; a waist of that pleasing flexure that sweeps abruptly inward and out again; a bosom whose prominence could be detected under the coarsest draping; a face of rich golden brown; skin diaphanous; cheeks coral red; lips of like hue; dark eyes and brows; long crescent lashes; hair of deepest black, in wantonness of profusion!

Fancy such a form – fancy it robed in all the picturesque finery that Indian ingenuity can devise – fancy it approaching you with a step that rivals the steed of Arabia, and you may fancy – no, you may not fancy Maümee.

My poor heart – it was she, my wood-nymph!

I could have tarried long under the roof of that hospitable home; but my sister seemed ill at ease – as if there came always recurring to her the memory of that unhappy adventure.

We stayed but an hour; it seemed not half so long – but short

as was the time, it transformed me into a man. As I rowed back home, I felt that my boy's heart had been left behind me.

Chapter Sixteen
The Island

I longed to revisit the Indian home; and was not slow to gratify my wish. There was no restraint upon my actions. Neither father nor mother interfered with my daily wanderings: I came and went at will; and was rarely questioned as to the direction I had taken. Hunting was supposed to be the purpose of my absence. My dogs and gun, which I always took with me, and the game I usually brought back, answered all curiosity.

My hunting excursions were always in one direction – I need hardly have said so – always across the river. Again and again did the keel of my skiff cleave the waters of the creek – again and again, till I knew every tree upon its banks.

My acquaintance with young Powell soon ripened into a firm friendship. Almost daily were we together – either upon the lake or in the woods, companions in the chase; and many a deer and wild turkey did we slaughter in concert. The Indian boy was already a skilled hunter; and I learned many a secret of woodcraft in his company.

I well remember that hunting less delighted me than before. I preferred that hour when the chase was over, and I halted at the Indian house on my way home – when I drank the honey-sweetened *conti* out of the carved calabash – far sweeter from

the hands out of which I received the cup – far sweeter from the smiles of her who gave it – Maümee.

For weeks – short weeks they seemed – I revelled in this young dream of love. Ah! it is true there is no joy in afterlife that equals this. Glory and power are but gratifications – love alone is bliss – purest and sweetest in its virgin bloom.

Often was Virginia my companion in these wild wood excursions. She had grown fond of the forest – she said so – and willingly went along. There were times when I should have preferred going alone; but I could not gainsay her. She had become attached to Maümee. I did not wonder.

Maümee, too, liked my sister – not from any resemblance of character. Physically, they were unlike as two young girls could well be. Virginia was all blonde and gold; Maümee, damask and dark. Intellectually they approached no nearer. The former was timid as the dove; the latter possessed a spirit bold as the falcon. Perhaps the contrast drew closer the ties of friendship that had sprung up between them. It is not an anomaly.

Far more like an anomaly was my feeling in relation to the two. I loved my sister for the very softness of her nature. I loved Maümee for the opposite; but, true, these loves were very distinct in kind – unlike as the objects that called them forth.

While young Powell and I hunted, our sisters stayed at home. They strolled about the fields, the groves, the garden. They played and sang and *read*, for Maümee – despite her costume – was no savage. She had books, a guitar, or rather a bandolin

– a Spanish relic – and had been instructed in both. So far as mental cultivation went, she was fit society even for the daughter of a proud Randolph. Young Powell, too; was as well, or better educated than myself. Their father had not neglected his duty.

Neither Virginia nor I ever dreamed of an inequality. The association was by us desired and sought. We were both too young to know aught of *caste*. In our friendships we followed only the prompting of innocent nature; and it never occurred to us that we were going astray.

The girls frequently accompanied us into the forest; and to this we, the hunters, made no objection. We did not always go in quest of the wide-ranging stag. Squirrels and other small game were oftener the objects of our pursuit; and in following these we needed not to stray far from our delicate companions.

As for Maümee, she was a huntress – a bold equestrian, and could have ridden in the "drive." As yet, my sister had scarcely been on horseback.

I grew to like the squirrel-shooting the best; my dogs were often left behind; and it became a rare thing for me to bring home venison.

Our excursions were not confined to the woods. The water-fowl upon the lake, the ibises, egrets, and white cranes, were often the victims of our hunting ardour.

In the lake, there was a beautiful island – not that which had been the scene of the tragedy, but one higher up – near the widening of the river. Its surface was of large extent, and rose to

a summit in the centre. For the most part, it was clad with timber, nearly all evergreen – as the live-oak, magnolia, illicium, and the wild orage – indigenous to Florida. There was zanthoxylon trees, with their conspicuous yellow blossoms; the perfumed flowering dogwood, and sweet-scented plants and shrubs – the princely palm towering high over all, and forming, with its wide-spread umbels, a double canopy of verdure.

The timber, though standing thickly, did not form a thicket. Here and there, the path was tangled with epiphytes or parasites – with enormous gnarled vines of the fox-grape – with bignonias – with china and sarsaparilla briers – with bromilias and sweet-scented orchids; but the larger trees stood well apart; and at intervals there were openings – pretty glades, carpeted with grass, and enamelled with flowers.

The fair island lay about half-way between the two homes; and often young Powell and I met upon it, and made it the scene of our sport. There were squirrels among the trees, and turkeys – sometimes deer were found in the glades – and from its covered shores we could do execution among the water-fowl that sported upon the lake.

Several times had we met on this neutral ground, and always accompanied by our sisters. Both delighted in the lovely spot. They used to ascend the slope, and seat themselves under the shade of some tall palms that grew on the summit; while we, the hunters, remained in the game-frequented ground below, causing the woods to ring with the reports of our rifles. Then it was our

custom, when satiated with the sport, also to ascend the hill, and deliver up our spoils, particularly when we had been fortunate enough to procure some rare and richly plumed bird – an object of curiosity or admiration.

For my part, whether successful or not, I always left off sooner than my companion. I was not so keen a hunter as he; I far more delighted to recline along the grass where the two maidens were seated: far sweeter than the sound of the rifle was it to listen to the tones of Maümee's voice; far fairer than the sight of game was it to gaze into the eyes of Maümee.

And beyond this, beyond listening and looking, my love had never gone. No love-words had ever passed between us; I even knew not whether I was beloved.

My hours were not all blissful; the sky was not always of rose colour. The doubts that my youthful passion was returned were its clouds; and these often arose to trouble me.

About this time, I became unhappy from another cause. I perceived, or fancied, that Virginia took a deep interest in the brother of Maümee, and that this was reciprocated. The thought gave me surprise and pain. Yet why I should have experienced either, I could not tell. I have said that my sister and I were too young to know ought of the prejudices of rank or caste; but this was not strictly true. I must have had some instinct, that in this free association with our dark-skinned neighbours we were doing wrong, else how could it have made me unhappy? I fancied that Virginia shared this feeling with me. We were both ill at ease,

and yet we were not confidants of each other. I dreaded to make known my thoughts even to my sister, and she no doubt felt a like reluctance to the disclosing of her secret.

What would be the result of these young loves if left to themselves? Would they in due time die out? Would there arrive an hour of satiety and change? or, without interruption would they become perpetual? Who knows what might be their fate, if permitted to advance to perfect development. But it is never so – they are always interrupted.

So were ours – the crisis came – and the sweet companionship in which we had been indulging was brought to a sudden close. We had never disclosed it to our father or mother, though we had used no craft to conceal it. We had not been questioned, else should we certainly have avowed it; for we had been taught strictly to regard truth. But no questions had been asked – no surprise had been expressed at our frequent absences. Mine, as a hunter, were but natural; the only wonderment was that Virginia had grown so found of the forest, and so often bore me company; but this slight surprise on the part of my mother soon wore off, and we went freely forth, and as freely returned, without challenge of our motives.

I have said that we used no art to conceal who were our associates in these wild wanderings. That again is not strictly true. Our very silence was craft. We must both have had some secret perception that we were acting wrongly – that our conduct would not meet the approval of our parents – else why should we have

cared for concealment.

It was destined that this repose should not be of long continuance. It ended abruptly – somewhat harshly.

One day we were upon the island, all four as usual. The hunt was over, and Powell and I had rejoined our sisters upon the hill. We had stretched ourselves under the shade, and were indulging in trivial conversation, but I far more in the mute language of love. My eyes rested upon the object of my thoughts, too happy that my glances were returned. I saw little besides: I did not notice that there was a similar exchange of ardent looks between the young Indian and my sister. At that moment I cared not; I was indifferent to everything but the smiles of Maümee.

There were those who did observe the exchange of glances, who saw all that was passing. Anxious eyes were bent upon the tableau formed by the four of us, and our words, looks, and gestures were noted.

The dogs rose with a growl, and ran outward among the trees. The rustling branches, and garments shining through the foliage, warned us that there were people there. The dogs had ceased to give tongue, and were wagging their tails. They were friends, then, who were near.

The leaves sheltered them no longer from our view: behold my father – my mother!

Virginia and I were startled by their appearance. We felt some apprehension of evil – arising no doubt, from our own convictions that we had not been acting aright. We observed that the brows

of both were clouded. They appeared vexed and angry.

My mother approached first. There was scorn upon her lips. She was proud of her ancestry, even more than the descendant of the Randolphs.

"What!" exclaimed she – "what, my children, these your companions? Indians?"

Young Powell rose to his feet, but said nothing in reply. His looks betrayed what he felt; and that he perfectly understood the slight.

With a haughty glance towards my father and mother, he beckoned to his sister to follow him, and walked proudly away.

Virginia and I were alarmed and speechless. We dared not say adieu.

We were hurried from the spot; and homeward Virginia went with my father and mother. There were others in the boat that had brought them to the island. There were blacks who rowed; but I saw white men there too. The Ringgolds – both father and son – were of the party.

I returned alone in the skiff. While crossing the lake, I looked up. The canoe was just entering the creek. I could see that the faces of the half-blood and his sister were turned towards us. I was watched, and dared not wave an adieu, although there was a sad feeling upon my heart – a presentiment that we were parting for long – perhaps for ever!

Alas! the presentiment proved a just one. In three days from that time I was on my way to the far north, where I was entered

as a cadet in the military academy of West Point. My sister, too, was sent to one of those seminaries, in which the cities of the Puritan people abound. It was long, long before either of us again set eyes upon the flowery land.

Chapter Seventeen
West Point

The military college of West Point is the finest school in the world. Princes and priests have there no power; true knowledge is taught, and must be learned, under penalty of banishment from the place. The graduate comes forth a scholar, not, as from Oxford and Cambridge, the pert parrot of a dead language, smooth prosodian, mechanic rhymster of Idyllic verse; but a linguist of living tongues – one who has studied science, and not neglected art – a botanist, draughtsman, geologist, astronomer, engineer, soldier – all; in short, a man fitted for the higher duties of social life – capable of supervision and command – equally so of obedience and execution.

Had I been ever so much disinclined to books, in this institution I could not have indulged in idleness. There is no "dunce" in West Point. There is no favour to family and fortune: the son of the President would be ejected, if not able to dress up with the rank; and under the dread of disgrace, I became, perforce, a diligent student – in time a creditable scholar.

The details of a cadet's experience possess but little interest – a routine of monotonous duties – only at West Point a little harder than elsewhere – at times but slightly differing from the slave-life of a common soldier. I bore them bravely – not that I

was inspired by any great military ambition, but simply from a feeling of rivalry: I scorned to be the laggard of my class.

There were times, however, when I felt weariness from so much restraint. It contrasted unfavourably with the free life I had been accustomed to; and often did I feel a longing for home – for the forest and the savanna – and far more, for the associates I had left behind.

Long lingered in my heart the love of Maümee – long time unaffected by absence. I thought the void caused by that sad parting would never be filled up. No other object could replace in my mind, or banish from my memory the sweet souvenirs of my youthful love. Morning, noon, and night, was that image of picturesque beauty outlined upon the retina of my mental eye – by day in thoughts, by night in dreams.

Thus was it for a long while – I thought it would never be otherwise! No other could ever interest me, as she had done. No new joy could win me to wander – no Lethe could bring oblivion. Had I been told so by an angel, I would not, I could not, have believed it.

Ah! it was a misconception of human nature. I was but sharing it in common with others, for most mortals have, at some period of life, laboured under a similar mistake. Alas! it is too true – love *is* affected by time and absence. It will not live upon memory alone. The capricious soul, however delighting in the ideal, prefers the real and positive. Though there are but few *lovely* women in the world, there is no one lovelier than all the

rest – no man handsomer than all his fellows. Of two pictures equally beautiful, that is the more beautiful upon which the eye is gazing. It is not without reason that lovers dread the parting hour.

Was it books that spoke of lines and angles, of bastions and embrasures – was it drill, drill, drill by day, or the hard couch and harder guard *tour* by night – was it any or all of these that began to infringe upon the exclusivism of that one idea, and at intervals drive it from my thoughts? Or was it the pretty faces that now and then made their appearance at the "Point" – the excursionary belles from Saratoga and Ballston, who came to visit us – or the blonde daughters of the patroons, our nearer neighbours – who came more frequently, and who saw in each coarse-clad cadet the chrysalis of a hero – the embryo of a general?

Which of all these was driving Maümee out of my mind?

It imports little what cause – such was the effect. The impression of my young love became less vivid on the page of memory. Each day it grew fainter and fainter, until it was attenuated to a slim retrospect.

Ah! Maümee! in truth it was long before this came to pass. Those bright smiling faces danced long before my eyes ere thine became eclipsed. Long while withstood I the flattery of those siren tongues; but my nature was human, and my heart yielded too easily to the seduction of sweet blandishments.

It would not be true to say that my first love was altogether gone: it was cold, but not dead. Despite the fashionable flirtations of the hour, it had its seasons of remembrance and return. Oft

upon the still night's guard, home-scenes came flitting before me; and then the brightest object in the vision-picture was Maümee. My love for her was cold, not dead. Her presence would have re-kindled it – I am sure it would. Even to have heard from her – of her – would have produced a certain effect. To have heard that she had forgotten me, and given her heart to another, would have restored my boyish passion in its full vigour and entirety; I am sure it would.

I could not have been indifferent then? I must still have been in love with Maümee.

One key pushes out the other; but the fair daughters of the north had not yet obliterated from my heart this dark-skinned damsel of the south.

During all my cadetship, I never saw her – never even heard of her. For five years I was an exile from home – and so was my sister. At intervals during that time we were visited by our father and mother, who made an annual trip to the fashionable resorts of the north – Ballston Spa, Saratoga, and Newport. There, during our holidays, we joined them; and though I longed to spend a vacation at home – I believe so did Virginia – the "mother was steel and the father was stone," and our desires were not gratified.

I suspected the cause of this stern denial. Our proud parents dreaded the danger of a *mésalliance*. They had not forgotten the tableau on the island.

The Ringgolds met us at the watering-places; and Arens was still assiduous in his attentions to Virginia. He had become

a fashionable exquisite, and spent his gold freely – not to be outdone by the *ci-devant* tailors and stock-brokers, who constitute the "upper ten" of New York. I liked him no better than ever, though my mother was still his backer.

How he sped with Virginia, I could not tell. My sister was now quite a woman – a fashionable dame, a belle – and had learnt much of the world, among other things, how to conceal her emotions – one of the distinguished accomplishments of the day. She was at times merry to an extreme degree; though her mirth appeared to me a little artificial, and often ended abruptly. Sometimes she was thoughtful – not unfrequently cold and disdainful. I fancied that in gaining so many graces, she had lost much of what was in my eyes more valuable than all, her gentleness of heart. Perhaps I was wronging her.

There were many questions I would have asked her, but our childish confidence was at an end, and delicacy forbade me to probe her heart. Of the past we never spoke: I mean of *that* past – those wild wanderings in the woods, the sailings over the lake, the scenes in the palm-shaded island.

I often wondered whether she had cause to remember them, whether her souvenirs bore any resemblance to mine!

On these points, I had never felt a definite conviction. Though suspicious, at one time even apprehensive – I had been but a blind watcher, a too careless guardian.

Surely my conjectures had been just, else why was she now silent upon themes and scenes that had so delighted us both? was

her tongue tied by the after-knowledge that we had been doing wrong – only known to us by the disapproval of our parents? Or, was it that in her present sphere of fashion, she disdained to remember the humble associates of earlier days?

Often did I conjecture whether there had ever existed such a sentiment in her bosom; and, if so, whether it still lingered there? These were points about which I might never be satisfied. The time for such confidences had gone past.

"It is not likely," reasoned I; "or, if there ever was a feeling of tender regard for the young Indian, it is now forgotten – obliterated from her heart, perhaps from her memory. It is not likely it should survive in the midst of her present associations – in the midst of that *entourage* of perfumed beaux who are hourly pouring into her ears the incense of flattery. Far less probable *she* would remember than I; and have not I forgotten?"

Strange, that of the four hearts I knew only my own. Whether young Powell had ever looked upon my sister with admiring eyes, or she on him, I was still ignorant, or rather unconvinced. All I knew was by mere conjecture – suspicion – apprehension. What may appear stranger, I never knew the sentiment of that other heart, the one which interested me more than all. It is true, I had chosen to fancy it in my own favour. Trusting to glances, to gestures, to slight actions, never to words, I had hoped fondly; but often too had I been the victim of doubt. Perhaps, after all, Maümee had never loved me!

Many a sore heart had I suffered from this reflection. I could

now bear it with more complacency; and yet, singular to say, it was this very reflection that awakened the memory of Maümee; and, whenever I dwelt upon it, produced the strongest revulsions of my own spasmodic love!

Wounded vanity! powerful as passion itself! thy throes are as strong as love. Under their influence, the chandeliers grow dim, and the fair forms flitting beneath lose half their brilliant beauty. My thoughts go back to the flowery land – to the lake – to the island – to Maümee.

Five years soon flitted past, and the period of my cadetship was fulfilled. With some credit, I went through the ordeal of the final examination. A high number rewarded my application, and gave me the choice of whatever arm of the service was most to my liking. I had a penchant for the rifles, though I might have pitched higher into the artillery, the cavalry, or engineers. I chose the first, however, and was gazetted brevet-lieutenant, and appointed to a rifle regiment, with leave of absence to revisit my native home.

At this time, my sister had also "graduated" at the Ladies' Academy, and carried off her "diploma" with credit; and together we journeyed home.

There was no father to greet us on our return: a weeping and widowed mother alone spoke the melancholy welcome.

Chapter Eighteen
The Seminoles

On my return to Florida, I found that the cloud of war was gathering over my native land. It would soon burst, and my first essay in military life would be made in the defence of hearth and home. I was not unprepared for the news. War is always *the* theme of interest within the walls of a military college; and in no place are its probabilities and prospects so folly discussed or with so much earnestness.

For a period of ten years had the United States been at peace with all the world. The iron hand of "Old Hickory" had awed the savage foe of the frontiers. For more than ten years had the latter desisted from his chronic system of retaliation, and remained silent and still. But the pacific *status quo* came to an end. Once more the red man rose to assert his rights, and in a quarter most unexpected. Not on the frontier of the "far west," but in the heart of the flowery land. Yes, Florida was to be the theatre of operations – the stage on which this new drama was to be enacted.

A word historical of Florida, for this writing is, in truth, a history.

In 1821, the Spanish flag disappeared from the ramparts of San Augustine and Saint Marks, and Spain yielded up possession

of this fair province – one of her last footholds upon the continent of America. Literally, it was but a foothold the Spaniards held in Florida – a mere nominal possession. Long before the cession, the Indians had driven them from the field into the fortress. Their haciendas lay in ruins – their horses and cattle ran wild upon the savannas; and rank weeds usurped the sites of their once prosperous plantations. During the century of dominion, they had made many a fair settlement, and the ruins of buildings – far more massive than aught yet attempted by their Saxon successors – attest the former glory and power of the Spanish nation.

It was not destined that the Indians should long hold the country they had thus conquered. Another race of white men – their equals in courage and strength – were moving down from the north; and it was easy prophecy to say that the red conquerors must in turn yield possession.

Once already had they met in conflict with the pale-faced usurpers, led on by that stern soldier who now sat in the chair of the president. They were defeated, and forced further south, into the heart of the land – the centre of the peninsula. There, however, they were secured by treaty. A covenant solemnly made, and solemnly sworn to, guaranteed their right to the soil, and the Seminole was satisfied.

Alas! the covenants between the strong and the weak are things of convenience, to be broken whenever the former wills it – in this case, shamefully broken.

White adventurers settled along the Indian border; they

wandered over Indian ground – not wandered, but went; they looked upon the land; they saw that it was good – it would grow rice and cotton, and cane and indigo, the olive and orange; they desired to possess it, more than desired – they resolved it should be theirs.

There was a treaty, but what cared they for treaties? Adventurers – ruined planters from Georgia and the Carolinas, "negro traders" from all parts of the south; what were covenants in their eyes, especially when made with redskins? The treaty must be got rid of.

The "Great Father," scarcely more scrupulous than they, approved their plan.

"Yes," said he, "it is good – the Seminoles must be dispossessed; they must remove to another land; we shall find them a home in the west, on the great plains; there they will have wide hunting-grounds, their own for ever."

"No," responded the Seminoles; "we do not wish to move; we are contented here: we love our native land; we do not wish to leave it; we shall stay."

"Then you will not go willingly? Be it so. We are strong, you are weak; we shall force you."

Though not the letter, this is the very spirit of the reply which Jackson made to the Seminoles!

The world has an eye, and that eye requires to be satisfied. Even tyrants dislike the open breach of treaties. In this case, political party was more thought of than the world, and a show

of justice became necessary.

The Indians remained obstinate – they liked their own land, they were reluctant to leave it – no wonder.

Some pretext must be found to dispossess them. The old excuse, that they were mere idle hunters, and made no profitable use of the soil, would scarcely avail. It was not true. The Seminole was not exclusively a hunter; he was a husbandman as well, and tilled the land – rudely, it may be, but was this a reason for dispossessing him?

Without this, others were easily found. That cunning commissioner which their "Great Father" sent them could soon invent pretexts. He was one who well knew the art of muddying the stream upwards, and well did he practise it.

The country was soon filled with rumours of Indians – of horses and cattle stolen, of plantations plundered, of white travellers robbed and murdered – all the work of those savage Seminoles.

A vile frontier press, ever ready to give tongue to the popular furor, did not fail in its duty of exaggeration.

But who was to gazette the provocations, the retaliations, the wrongs and cruelties inflicted by the other side? All these were carefully concealed.

A sentiment was soon created throughout the country – a sentiment of bitter hostility towards the Seminole.

"Kill the savage! Hunt him down! Drive him out! Away with him to the west!" Thus was the sentiment expressed. These

became the popular cries.

When the people of the United States have a wish, it is likely soon to seek gratification, particularly when that wish coincides with the views of its government; in this case, it did so, the government itself having created it.

It would be easy, all supposed, to accomplish the popular will, to dispossess the savage, hunt him, drive him out. Still there was a treaty. The world had an eye, and there was a thinking minority not to be despised who opposed this clamorous desire. The treaty could not be broken under the light of day; how then, was this obstructive covenant to be got rid of?

Call the head men together, cajole them out of it; the chiefs are human, they are poor, some of them drunkards – bribes will go far, fire-water still farther; make a new treaty with a double construction – the ignorant savages will not understand it; obtain their signatures – the thing is done!

Crafty commissioner! yours is the very plan, and you the man to execute it.

It *was* done. On the 9th of May, 1832, on the banks of the Oclawaha, the chiefs of the Seminole nation in full council assembled bartered away the land of their fathers!

Such was the report given to the world.

It was *not* true.

It was not a full council of chiefs; it was an assembly of traitors bribed and suborned, of weak men flattered and intimidated. No wonder the nation refused to accede to this surreptitious

covenant; no wonder they heeded not its terms; but had to be summoned to still another council, for a freer and fuller signification of their consent.

It soon became evident that the great body of the Seminole nation repudiated the treaty. Many of the chiefs denied having signed it. The head chief, Onopa, denied it. Some confessed the act, but declared they had been drawn into it by the influence and advice of others. It was only the more powerful leaders of clans – as the brothers Omatla, Black Clay, and Big Warrior – who openly acknowledged the signing.

These last became objects of jealousy throughout the tribes; they were regarded as traitors, and justly so. Their lives were in danger; even their own retainers disapproved of what they had done.

To understand the position, it is necessary to say a word of the political *status* of the Seminoles. Their government was purely republican – a thorough democracy. Perhaps in no other community in the world did there exist so perfect a condition of freedom; I might add happiness, for the latter is but the natural offspring of the former. Their state has been compared to that of the clans of Highland Scotland. The parallel is true only in one respect. Like the Gael, the Seminoles were without any common organisation. They lived in "tribes" far apart, each politically independent of the other; and although in friendly relationship, there was no power of coercion between them. There was a "head chief" – king he could not be called – for "Mico," his Indian

title, has not that signification. The proud spirit of the Seminole had never sold itself to so absurd a condition; they had not yet surrendered up the natural rights of man. It is only after the state of nature has been perverted and abased, that the "kingly" element becomes strong among a people.

The head "mico" of the Seminoles was only a head in name. His authority was purely personal: he had no power over life or property. Though occasionally the wealthiest, he was often one of the poorest of his people. He was more open than any of the others to the calls of philanthropy, and ever ready to disburse with free hand, what was in reality, not his people's, but his own. Hence he rarely grew rich.

He was surrounded by no retinue, girt in by no barbarian pomp or splendour, flattered by no flunkey courtiers, like the rajahs of the east, or, on a still more costly scale, the crowned monarchs of the west. On the contrary, his dress was scarcely conspicuous, often meaner than those around him. Many a common warrior was far more *gaillard* than he.

As with the head chief, so with the chieftains of tribes; they possessed no power over life or property; they could not decree punishment. A jury alone can do this; and I make bold to affirm, that the punishments among these people were in juster proportion to the crimes than those decreed in the highest courts of civilisation.

It was a system of the purest republican freedom, without one idea of the levelling principle; for merit produced distinction

and authority. Property was *not* in common, though labour was partially so; but this community of toil was a mutual arrangement, agreeable to all. The ties of family were as sacred and strong as ever existed on earth.

And these were *savages* forsooth – red savages, to be dispossessed of their rights – to be driven from hearth and home – to be banished from their beautiful land to a desert wild – to be shot down and hunted like beasts of the field! The last in its most literal sense, for dogs were to be employed in the pursuit!

Chapter Nineteen
An Indian Hero

There were several reasons why the treaty of the Oclawaha could not be considered binding on the Seminole nation. First, it was not signed by a majority of the chiefs. Sixteen chiefs and sub-chiefs appended their names to it. There were five times this number in the nation.

Second, it was, after all, no treaty, but a mere conditional contract – the conditions being that a deputation of Seminoles should first proceed to the lands allotted in the west (upon White River), examine these lands, and bring back a report to their people. The very nature of this condition proves that no contract for removal could have been completed, until the exploration had been first accomplished.

The examination was made. Seven chiefs, accompanied by an agent, journeyed to the far west, and made a survey of the lands.

Now, mark the craft of the commissioner! These seven chiefs are nearly all taken from those friendly to the removal. We find among them both the Omatlas, and Black Clay. True, there is Hoitle-mattee (jumper), a patriot, but this brave warrior is stricken with the Indian curse – he loves the fire-water; and his propensity is well-known to Phagan, the agent, who accompanies them.

A *ruse* is contemplated, and is put in practice. The deputation is hospitably entertained at Fort Gibson, on the Arkansas. Hoitle-mattee is made merry – the contract for removal is spread before the seven chiefs – they all sign it: and the juggle is complete.

But even this was no fulfilment of the terms of the Oclawaha covenant. The deputation was to return with their report, and ask the will of the nation. That was yet to be given; and, in order to obtain it, a new council of all the chiefs and warriors must be summoned.

It was to be a mere formality. It was well-known that the nation as a body disapproved of the facile conduct of the seven chiefs, and would not endorse it. They were not going to "move."

This was the more evident, since other conditions of the treaty were daily broken. One of these was the restoration of runaway slaves, which the signers of the Oclawaha treaty had promised to send back to their owner. No blacks were sent back; on the contrary, they now found refuge among the Indians more secure than ever.

The commissioner knew all this. He was calling the new council out of mere formality. Perhaps he might persuade them to sign – if not, he intended to awe them into the measure, or force them at the point of the bayonet. He had said as much. Troops were concentrating at the agency – Fort King – and others were daily arriving at Tampa Bay. The government had taken its measures; and coercion was resolved upon.

I was not ignorant of what was going on, nor of all that

had happened during my long years of absence. My comrades, the cadets, were well versed in Indian affairs, and took a lively interest in them – especially those who expected soon to escape from the college walls. "Black Hawk's war," just terminated in the west, had already given some a chance of service and distinction, and young ambition was now bending its eyes upon Florida.

The idea, however, of obtaining glory in such a war was ridiculed by all. "It would be too easy a war – the foe was not worth considering. A mere handful of savages," asserted they; "scarcely enough of them to stand before a single company. They would be either killed or captured in the first skirmish, one and all of them – there was not the slightest chance of their making any protracted resistance —*unfortunately*, there was not."

Such was the belief of my college companions; and, indeed, the common belief of the whole country, at that time. The army, too, shared it. One officer was heard to boast that he could march through the whole Indian territory with only a corporal's guard at his back; and another, with like bravado, wished that the government would give him a charter of the war, on his own account. He would finish it for 10,000 dollars!

These only expressed the sentiments of the day. No one believed that the Indians would or could sustain a conflict with us for any length of time; indeed, there were few who could be brought to think that they would resist at all: they were only holding out for better terms, and would yield before coming to

blows.

For my part, I thought otherwise. I knew the Seminoles better than most of those who talked – I knew their country better; and, notwithstanding the odds against them – the apparent hopelessness of the struggle – I had my belief that they would neither yield to disgraceful terms, nor yet be so easily conquered. Still, it was but a conjecture; and I might be wrong. I might be deserving the ridicule which my opposition to the belief of my comrades often brought upon me.

The newspapers made us acquainted with every circumstance. Letters, too, were constantly received at the "Point" from old graduates now serving in Florida. Every detail reached us, and we had become acquainted with the names of many of the Indian chieftains, as well as the internal *politique* of the tribe. It appeared they were not united. There was a party in favour of yielding to the demands of our government, headed by one *Omatla*. This was the traitor party, and a minority. The patriots were more numerous, including the head "mico" himself, and the powerful chiefs Holata, *Coa hajo*, and the negro Abram.

Among the patriots there was one name that, upon the wings of rumour, began to take precedence of all others. It appeared frequently in the daily prints, and in the letters of our friends. It was that of a young warrior, or sub-chief, as he was styled, who by some means or other had gained a remarkable ascendency in the tribe. He was one of the most violent opponents of the "removal;" in fact, the leading spirit that opposed it; and chiefs

much older and more powerful were swayed by his counsel.

We cadets much admired this young man. He was described as possessing all the attributes of a hero – of noble aspect, bold, handsome, intelligent. Both his physical and intellectual qualities were spoken of in terms of praise – almost approaching to hyperbole. His form was that of an Apollo, his features Adonis or Endymion. He was first in everything – the best shot in his nation, the most expert swimmer and rider – the swiftest runner, and most successful hunter – alike eminent in peace or war – in short, a Cyrus.

There were Xenophons enough to record his fame. The people of the United States had been long at peace with the red men. The romantic savage was far away from their borders. It was rare to see an Indian within the settlements, or hear aught of them. There had been no late deputations from the tribes to gratify the eyes of gazing citizens; and a real curiosity had grown up in regard to these children of the forest. An Indian hero was wanted, and this young chief appeared to be the man.

His name was Osceola.

Chapter Twenty.
Frontier Justice

I was not allowed long to enjoy the sweets of home. A few days after my arrival, I received an order to repair to Fort King, the Seminole agency, and head-quarters of the army of Florida. General Clinch there commanded. I was summoned upon his staff.

Not without chagrin, I prepared to obey the order. It was hard to part so soon from those who dearly loved me, and from whom I had been so long separated. Both mother and sister were overwhelmed with grief at my going. Indeed they urged me to resign my commission, and remain at home.

Not unwillingly did I listen to their counsel: I had no heart in the cause in which I was called forth; but at such a crisis I dared not follow their advice: I should have been branded as a traitor – a coward. My country had commissioned me to carry a sword. I must wield it, whether the cause be just or unjust – whether to my liking or not. This is called *patriotism*!

There was yet another reason for my reluctance to part from home. I need hardly declare it. Since my return, my eyes had often wandered over the lake – often rested on that fair island. Oh, I had not forgotten her!

I can scarcely analyse my feelings. They were mingled

emotions. Young love triumphant over older passions – ready to burst forth from the ashes that had long shrouded it – young love penitent and remorseful – doubt, jealousy, apprehension. All these were active within me.

Since my arrival, I had not dared to go forth. I observed that my mother was still distrustful. I had not dared even to question those who might have satisfied me. I passed those few days in doubt, and at intervals under a painful presentiment that all was not well.

Did Maümee still live? Was she true? True! Had she reason? Had she ever loved me?

There were those near who could have answered the first question; but I feared to breathe her name, even to the most intimate.

Bidding adieu to my mother and sister, I took the route. These were not left alone: my maternal uncle – their guardian – resided upon the plantation. The parting moments were less bitter, from the belief that I should soon return. Even if the anticipated campaign should last for any considerable length of time, the scene of my duties would lie near, and I should find frequent opportunities of revisiting them.

My uncle scouted the idea of a campaign, as so did every one. “The Indians,” he said, “would yield to the demands of the commissioner. Fools, if they didn’t!”

Fort King was not distant; it stood upon Indian ground – fourteen miles within the border, though further than that from

our plantation. A day's journey would bring me to it; and in company of my cheerful "squire," Black Jake, the road would not seem long. We bestrode a pair of the best steeds the stables afforded, and were both armed *cap-à-pié*.

We crossed the ferry at the upper landing, and rode within the "reserve"[1]. The path – it was only a path – ran parallel to the creek, though not near its banks. It passed through the woods, some distance to the rear of Madame Powell's plantation.

When opposite to the clearing, my eyes fell upon the diverging track. I knew it well: I had oft trodden it with swelling heart.

I hesitated – halted. Strange thoughts careered through my bosom; resolves half-made, and suddenly abandoned. The rein grew slack, and then tightened. The spur threatened the ribs of my horse, but failed to strike.

"Shall I go? Once more behold her. Once more renew those sweet joys of tender love? Once more – Ha, perhaps it is too late! I might be no longer welcome – if my reception should be hostile? Perhaps – "

"Wha' you doin' dar, Massr George? Daat's not tha' road to tha fort."

"I know that, Jake; I was thinking of making a call at Madame Powell's plantation."

"Mar'm Powell plantayshun! Gollys! Massr George – daat all you knows 'bout it?"

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[1] That portion of Florida *reserved* for the Seminoles by the treaty of Moultrie Creek made in 1823. It was a large tract, and occupied the central part of the peninsula.

"About what?" I inquired with anxious heart.

"Dar's no Mar'm Powell da no more; nor hain't a been, since better'n two year – all gone clar 'way."

"Gone away? Where?"

"Daat dis chile know nuffin 'bout. S'pose da gone some other lokayshun in da rezav; made new clarin somewha else."

"And who lives here now?"

"Dar ain't neery one lib tha now: tha ole house am desarted."

"But why did Madame Powell leave it?"

"Ah – daat am a quaw story. Gollys! you nebber hear um, Massr George?"

"No – never."

"Den I tell um. But s'pose, massr, we ride on. I am a gettin' a little lateish, an' 'twont do nohow to be cotch arter night in tha woods."

I turned my horse's head and advanced along the main road, Jake riding by my side. With aching heart, I listened to his narrative.

"You see, Massr George, 'twar all o' Massr Ringgol – tha ole boss[2] daat am – an' I blieve tha young 'un had 'im hand in dat pie, all same, like tha ole 'un. Waal, you see Mar'm Pow'll she loss some niggas dat war ha slaves. Dey war stole from ha, an' wuss dan stole. Dey war tuk, an' by white men, massr. Tha be folks who say dat Mass' Ringgol – he know'd more 'n anybody

[2] Master or proprietor; universally in use throughout the Southern States. From the Dutch "baas."

else 'bout tha whole bizness. But da rubb'ry war blamed on Ned Spence an' Bill William. Waal, Mar'm, Powell she go to da law wi' dis yar Ned an' Bill; an' she 'ploy Massr Grubb tha big lawyer dat lib down tha ribba. Now Massr Grubb, he great friend o' Massr Ringgol, an' folks *do* say dat boaf de two put tha heads together to cheat dat ar Indyen 'ooman."

"How?"

"Dis chile don't say for troof, Massr George; he hear um only from da black folks: tha white folks say diffrent. But I hear um from Mass' Ringgol's own nigga woodman – Pomp, you know Massr, George? an' he say that them ar two bosses *did* put tha heads together to cheat dat poor Indyen 'ooman."

"In what way, Jake?" I asked impatiently.

"Waal, you see, Massr George, da lawya he want da Indyen sign ha name to some paper – power ob 'turney, tha call am, I believe. She sign; she no read tha writin. Whuch! daat paper war no power ob 'turney: it war what tha lawyas call a 'bill ob sale'."

"Ha!"

"Yes, Massr George, dat's what um war; an' by dat same bill ob sale all Mar'm Pow'll's niggas an' all ha plantation-clarin war made ober to Massr Grubb."

"Atrocious scoundrel?"

"Massr Grubb he swar he bought 'em all, an' paid for 'em in cash dollar. Mar'm Pow'll she swar de berry contr'y. Da judge he decide for Massr Grubb, 'kase great Massr Ringgoh he witness; an' folks *do* say Massr Ringgol now got dat paper in um own safe

keeping an' war at tha bottom ob tha whole bizness."

"Atrocious scoundrels! oh, villains! But tell me, Jake, what became of Madame Powell?"

"Shortly arter, tha all gone 'way – nob'dy know wha. Da mar'm haself an' dat fine young fellur you know, an' da young Indyen gal dat ebbery body say war so good-lookin' – yes, Massr George, tha all gone 'way."

At that moment an opening in the woods enabled me to catch a glimpse of the old house. There it stood in all its grey grandeur, still embowered in the midst of beautiful groves of orange and olive. But the broken fence – the tall weeds standing up against the walls – the shingles here and there missing from the roof – all told the tale of ruin.

There was ruin in my heart, as I turned sorrowing away.

Chapter Twenty One
Indian Slaves

It never occurred to me to question the genuineness of Jake's story. What the "black folks" said was true; I had no doubt of it. The whole transaction was redolent of the Ringgolds and lawyer Grubbs – the latter a half planter, half legal practitioner of indifferent reputation.

Jake further informed me that Spence and Williams had disappeared during the progress of the trial. Both afterwards returned to the settlement, but no ulterior steps were taken against them, as there was no one to prosecute!

As for the stolen negroes, they were never seen again in that part of the country. The robbers had no doubt carried them to the slave-markets of Mobile or New Orleans, where a sufficient price would be obtained to remunerate Grubbs for his professional services, as also Williams and Spence for theirs. The land would become Ringgold's, as soon as the Indians could be got out of the country – and this was the object of the "bill of sale."

A transaction of like nature between white man and white man would have been regarded as a grave swindle, an atrocious crime. The whites affected not to believe it; but there were some who knew it to be true, and viewed it only in the light of a clever *ruse*!

That it was true, I could not doubt. Jake gave me reasons that

left no room for doubt; in fact it was only in keeping with the general conduct of the border adventures towards the unfortunate natives with whom they came in contact.

Border adventures did I say? Government agents, members of the Florida legislature, generals, planters, rich as Ringgold, all took part in similar speculations. I could give names. I am writing truth, and do not fear contradiction.

It was easy enough, therefore, to credit the tale. It was only one of twenty similar cases of which I had heard. The acts of Colonel Gad Humphreys, the Indian agent – of Major Phagan, another Indian agent – of Dexter, the notorious negro-stealer – of Floyd – of Douglass – of Robinson and Millburn, are all historic – all telling of outrages committed upon the suffering Seminole. A volume might be filled detailing such swindles as that of Grubbs and Ringgold. In the mutual relations between white man and red man, it requires no skillful advocate to shew on which side must lie the wrongs unrepaired and unavenged. Beyond all doubt, the Indian has ever been the victim.

It is needless to add that there were retaliations: how could it be otherwise?

One remarkable fact discloses itself in these episodes of Floridian life. It is well-known that slaves thus stolen from the Indians *always returned to their owners whenever they could*! To secure them from finding their way back, the Dexters and Douglasses were under the necessity of taking them to some distant market, to the far "coasts" of the Mississippi – to Natchez

or New Orleans.

There is but one explanation of this social phenomenon; and that is, that the slaves of the Seminole were *not* slaves. In truth they were treated with an indulgence to which the helot of other lands is a stranger. They were the agriculturists of the country, and their Indian master was content if they raised him a little corn – just sufficient for his need – with such other vegetable products as his simple *cuisine* required. They lived far apart from the dwellings of their owners. Their hours of labour were few, and scarcely compulsory. Surplus product was their own; and in most cases they became rich – far richer than their own masters, who were less skilled in economy. Emancipation was easily purchased, and the majority were actually free – though from such claims it was scarcely worth while to escape. If slavery it could be called, it was the mildest form ever known upon earth – far differing from the abject bondage of Ham under either Shem or Japheth.

It may be asked how the Seminoles became possessed of these black slaves? Were they "runaways" from the States – from Georgia and the Carolinas, Alabama, and the plantations of Florida? Doubtless a few were from this source; but most of the runaways were not claimed as property; and, arriving among the Indians, became free. There was a time when by the stern conditions of the Camp Moultrie Covenant these "absconding" slaves were given up to their white owners; but it is no discredit to the Seminoles, that they were always *remiss* in the observance

of this disgraceful stipulation. In fact, it was not always possible to surrender back the fugitive negro. Black communities had concentrated themselves in different parts of the Reserve, who under their own leaders were socially free, and strong enough for self-defence. It was with these that the runaways usually found refuge and welcome. Such a community was that of "Harry" amidst the morasses of Pease Creek – of "Abram" at Micosauky – of "Charles" and the "mulatto king."

No; the negro slaves of the Seminoles were *not* runaways from the plantations; though the whites would wish to make it appear so. Very few were of this class. The greater number was the "genuine property" of their Indian owners, so far as a slave can be called *property*. At all events, they were *legally* obtained – some of them from the Spaniards, the original settlers, and some by fair purchase from the American planters themselves.

How purchased? you will ask. What could a tribe of savages give in exchange for such a costly commodity? The answer is easy. Horses and horned cattle. Of both of these the Seminoles possessed vast herds. On the evacuation by the Spaniards the savannas swarmed with cattle, of Andalusian race – half-wild. The Indians caught and reclaimed them – became their owners.

This, then, was the *quid pro quo*– quadrupeds in exchange for bipeds!

The chief of the crimes charged against the Indians was the *stealing of cattle*– for the white men had their herds as well. The Seminoles did not deny that there were bad men amongst them

– lawless fellows difficult to restrain. Where is the community without scamps?

One thing was very certain. The Indian chiefs, when fairly appealed to, have always evinced an earnest desire to make restoration: and exhibited an energy in the cause of justice, entirely unknown upon the opposite side of their border.

It differed little how they acted, so far as regarded their character among their white neighbours. These had made up their mind that the dog should be hanged; and it was necessary to give him a bad name. Every robbery, committed upon the frontier was of course the act of an Indian. White burglars had but to give their faces a coat of Spanish brown, and justice could not see through the paint.

Chapter Twenty Two
A Circuitous Transaction

Such were my reflections as I journeyed on – suggested by the sad tale to which I had been listening.

As if to confirm their correctness, an incident at that moment occurred exactly to the point.

We had not ridden far along the path, when we came upon the tracks of cattle. Some twenty head must have passed over the ground going in the same direction as ourselves —*towards* the Indian "Reserve."

The tracks were fresh – almost quite fresh. I was tracker enough to know that they must have passed within the hour. Though cloistered so long within college walls, I had not forgotten all the forest craft taught me by young Powell.

The circumstance of thus coming upon a cattle-trail, fresh or old, would have made no impression upon me. There was nothing remarkable about it. Some Indian herdsmen had been driving home their flock; and that the drivers *were* Indians, I could perceive by the moccasin prints in the mud. It is true, some frontiersmen wear the moccasin; but these were not the foot-prints of white men. The turned-in toes[3], the high instep, other trifling signs which, from early training, I knew how to translate,

[3] It is art, not nature, that causes this peculiarity; it is done in the cradle.

proved that the tracks were Indian.

So were they agreed my groom, and Jake was no "slouch" in the ways of the woods. He had all his life been a keen 'coon-hunter – a trapper of the swamp-hare, the "possum," and the "gobbler." Moreover, he had been my companion upon many a deer-hunt – many a chase after the grey fox, and the rufous "cat." During my absence he had added greatly to his experiences. He had succeeded his former rival in the post of woodman, which brought him daily in contact with the denizens of the forest, and constant observation of their habits had increased his skill.

It is a mistake to suppose that the negro brain is incapable of that acute reasoning which constitutes a cunning hunter. I have known black men who could read "sign" and lift a trail with as much intuitive quickness as either red or white. Black Jake could have done it.

I soon found that in this kind of knowledge he was now my master; and almost on the instant I had cause to be astonished at his acuteness.

I have said that the sight of the cattle-tracks created no surprise in either of us. At *first* it did not; but we had not ridden twenty paces further, when I saw my companion suddenly rein up, at the same instant giving utterance to one of those ejaculations peculiar to the negro thorax, and closely resembling the "wugh" of a startled hog.

I looked in his face. I saw by its expression that he had some revelation to make.

"What is it, Jake?"

"Golly! Massr George, d'you see daat?"

"What?"

"Daat down dar."

"I see a ruck of cow-tracks – nothing more."

"Doant you see dat big 'un?"

"Yes – there is one larger than the rest."

"By Gosh! it am de big ox Ballface – I know um track anywha – many's tha load o' cypress log dat ar ox hab toated for ole massr."

"What? I remember Baldface. You think the cattle are ours?"

"No, Massr George – I 'spect tha be da lawya Grubb's cattle. Ole massr sell Ballface to Massr Grubb more'n a year 'go. Daat am Bally's track for sartin."

"But why should Mr Grubb's cattle be here in Indian ground, and so far from his plantation? – and with Indian drivers, too?"

"Dat ere's just what dis chile can't clarly make out, Massr George."

There was a singularity in the circumstance that induced reflection. The cattle could not have strayed so far of themselves. The voluntary swimming of the river was against such a supposition. But they were not *straying*. They were evidently *concluded*– and by Indians. Was it a *raid*? – were the beeves being stolen?

It had the look of a bit of thievery, and yet it was not crafty enough. The animals had been driven along a frequented path,

certain to be taken by those in quest of them; and the robbers – if they were such – had used no precaution to conceal their tracks.

It looked like a theft, and it did not; and it was just this dubious aspect that stimulated the curiosity of my companion and myself – so much so that we made up our minds to follow the trail, and if possible ascertain the truth.

For a mile or more the trail coincided with our own route; and then turning abruptly to the left, it struck off towards a track of "hommock" woods.

We were determined not to give up our intention lightly. The tracks were so fresh, that we knew the herd must have passed within the hour – within the quarter – they could not be distant. We could gallop back to the main road, through some thin pine timber we saw stretching away to the right; and with these reflections, we turned head along the cattle-trail.

Shortly after entering the dense forest, we heard voices of men in conversation, and at intervals the routing of oxen.

We alit, tied our horses to a tree, and moved forward afoot.

We walked stealthily and in silence, guiding ourselves by the sounds of the voices, that kept up an almost continual clatter. Beyond a doubt, the cattle whose bellowing we heard were those whose tracks we had been tracing; but equally certain was it, that the voices we now listened to were *not* the voices of those who had driven them!

It is easy to distinguish between the intonation of an Indian and a white man. The men whose conversation reached our ears

were whites – their language was our own, with all its coarse embellishments. My companion's discernment went beyond this – he recognised the individuals.

"Golly! Massr George, it ar tha two dam ruffins – Spence and Bill William!"

Jake's conjecture proved correct. We drew closer to the spot. The evergreen trees concealed us perfectly. We got up to the edge of an opening; and there saw the herd of beeves, the two Indians who had driven them, and the brace of worthies already named.

We stood under cover watching and listening; and in a very short while, with the help of a few hints from my companion, I comprehended the whole affair.

Each of the Indians – worthless outcasts of their tribe – was presented with a bottle of whisky and a few trifling trinkets. This was in payment for their night's work – the plunder of lawyer Grubb's pastures.

Their share of the business was now over; and they were just in the act of delivering up their charge as we arrived upon the ground. Their employers, whose droving bout was here to begin, had just handed over their rewards. The Indians might go home and get drunk: they were no longer needed. The cattle would be taken to some distant part of the country – where a market would be readily found – or, what was of equal probability, they would find their way back to lawyer Grubb's own plantation, having been rescued by the gallant fellows Spence and Williams from a band of Indian rievers! This would be a fine tale for the plantation

fireside – a rare chance for a representation to the police and the powers.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.