

THE PATHFINDER.

A leading if not the leading characteristic of Mr. Cooper's fictions, is to render some national class and some natural features a main, instead of a subordinate object. Indian, border, or nautical life, as in his best fictions—the alleged peculiarity of the Venetian oligarchy, in his *Bravo*—the operation of social prejudices, if a dislike to an executioner is to be accounted one, in his *Headsman*—together with the distinguishing characters of the scenery, and of the manners of the people amongst which the scenes are laid—seem always to have been his first thought; his story only the second. Hence, in despite of all his merits—and he has the very considerable merits of consistency, truth, reality, and character—there is a heaviness about his stories which causes them to drag in the perusal. We are called upon to admire landscapes, battles, fires, wrecks, tempests, savages, and savage warfare, as well as to listen to dialogue intended to develop character, whilst the fortunes of individuals are suspended. Nor is this all. The purpose of the writer being something different from the true end of fiction, his choice of a story is frequently defective, either in the subject itself, or in its being unequal to the length to which he spins it, or the importance he endeavours to lend to it.

The *Pathfinder* partakes of the defect arising from this error; the interest of the tale itself being too slight, and the accessories having too much resemblance to those of similar tales, for the space they are made to fill; expanded as they are by digression, extraneous discourse, and a style of narrative or description too critical in its exposition of causes to carry the reader along with the results. This might not have been felt had *The Pathfinder* been the first book of its class; but, independently of Mr. Cooper's own novels, several other American writers have painted the character of the Red men, with the incidents of frontier war; and their varieties being few, or the Pale Faces' knowledge too scanty to mark them, the subject has the effect of an exhausted one. The novelist, indeed, has attempted to relieve this by the introduction of two peculiar characters. An old, obstinate, prejudiced tar, is brought into juxtaposition with the fresh-water sailors of the Lakes, and the Lakes themselves: in the *Pathfinder*, so named from his skill in tracking, we have the picture of a just man—a philosopher of the woods, ignorant, simple, and confiding, in all beyond hunting and Indian warfare, but with a mind trained to natural piety by solitude and the vast woods, and sturdily bent upon doing right under all circumstances. These, however, do not thoroughly fulfil the intention of the writer. The first is somewhat long-winded; and his contempt of landsmen and inland waters is not the mere effect of a "sea change," but of sea prejudices operating upon a crabbed and carping nature; so that he is as often disagreeable as ludicrous. The moral peculiarities of the *Pathfinder* place him in a certain degree above, and therefore beyond our sympathy.

The story of *The Pathfinder* is simple; turning upon the love of a young man and the redoubted hero himself for the same girl. The latter is urged on to the match by Mabel's father—a Sergeant in the frontier regiment, and an old companion of the huntsman. Besides his claims for having saved the life of the father, he also renders a similar service to the daughter more than once: in the moment of peril she promises her hand; and, from her own sense of right, and her respect for the *Pathfinder*'s character, is ready to fulfil her pledge, and the Sergeant on his deathbed joins their hands. But the right-minded woodman doubts the disparity of his years and manners; and, discovering the passion of Jasper for Mabel, he resigns her to his rival, though with it he resigns the happiness of his life.

This tale, though prettily managed, and with characters truly drawn, is, however, only a vehicle for displaying American scenery, and Indian and frontier manners before the Revolution. The greater part of the first volume consists of a journey through the wilderness to the garrison where the Sergeant is stationed; the travellers being tracked by hostile Indians: and some of the passages of their imminent dangers and hairbreadth escapes are of a breathless interest. Passing over garrison life in a fort, with a shooting-match, the next great scene is a voyage and a storm on Lake Ontario; the danger being aggravated by the obstinacy of Old Cap the sailor. An attack upon an outpost by Indians, with the horrors of scalping and the excitement of danger and desperate defence, occupies the third volume, and prepares for the catastrophe.

In each of these three great acts the heroes and the heroine are of course engaged, either doing or suffering; but, though elaborately drawn, it does not strike us that they are equal to some of the other characters, unless where they exhibit their professional skill, personifying as it were their *caste*. The Sergeant, in his military reserve and dignity, but his deep feeling—the treacherous Tuscarora chief and his submissive wife—and Captain Sanglier, the

French adventurer, with his natural and acquired hardness and indifference, but with a conscience and a point of honour, though all slight and subordinate persons, have more of ease and individuality.

During the earlier part of the journey, an amusement of *Pathfinder* is to try the mettle of the Old Sailor by carrying him down a waterfall in a canoe. For this purpose, the Indians and women are landed; but Cap was stimulated to remain with the two boatmen, who wished to avoid a portage.

SHOOTING A FALL.

The injunction was obeyed, and in a few minutes the whole party had left the canoe, with the exception of *Pathfinder* and the two sailors. Notwithstanding his professional pride, Cap would have gladly followed; but he did not like to exhibit so unequivocal a weakness in the presence of a fresh-water sailor.

"I call all hands to witness," he said, as those who had landed moved away, "that I do not look on this affair as any thing more than canoeing in the woods. There is no seamanship in tumbling over a waterfall, which is a feat the greatest lubber can perform as well as the oldest mariner."

"The canoe was leaving the shore, as he concluded, while Mabel went hurriedly and trembling to the rock that had been pointed out, talking to her companion of the danger her uncle so unnecessarily ran, while her eyes were rivetted on the agile and vigorous form of Eau-douce, as he stood erect in the stern of the light boat, governing its movements. As soon, however, as she reached a point where she got a view of the fall, she gave an involuntary but suppressed scream, and covered her eyes. At the next instant the latter were again free, and the entranced girl stood immovable as a statue, a scarcely breathing observer of all that passed. The two Indians seated themselves passively on a log, hardly looking towards the stream, while the wife of Arrowhead came near Mabel, and appeared to watch the motions of the canoe with some such interest as a child regards the leaps of a tumbler.

"As soon as the boat was in the stream, *Pathfinder* sunk on his knees continuing to use the paddle, though it was slowly, and in a manner not to interfere with the efforts of his companion. The latter still stood erect; and as he kept his eye on some object beyond the fall, it was evident that he was carefully looking for the spot proper for their passage.

"Further west, boy, further west," muttered *Pathfinder*; "there where you see the water foam. Bring the top of the dead oak in a line with the stem of the blasted hemlock."

"Eau-douce made no answer; for the canoe was in the centre of the stream, with its head pointed towards the fall, and it had already begun to quicken its motion by the increased force of the current. At that moment, Cap would cheerfully have renounced every claim to glory that could possibly be acquired by the fact, to have been safe again on shore. He heard the roar of the water, thundering as it might be, behind a screen, but becoming more and more distinct, louder and louder; and before him he saw its line cutting the forest below, along which the green and angry element seemed stretched and shining, as if the particles were about to lose their principle of cohesion.

"Down with your helm, down with your helm, man!" he exclaimed, unable any longer to suppress his anxiety, as the canoe glided towards the fall.

"Ay, ay, down it is, sure enough," answered *Pathfinder*, looking behind him for a single instant, with his silent joyous laugh—"down we go of a sartainty. Heave her starn up, boy; further up with her starn."

"The rest was like the passage of the viewless wind. Eau-douce gave the required sweep with his paddle, the canoe glanced into the channel, and for a few moments it seemed to Cap that he was tossing in a caldron. He felt the bow of the canoe tip, saw the raging foaming water careering madly by his side, was sensible that the light fabric in which he floated was tossed about like an egg-shell, and then, not less to his great joy than to his surprise, he discovered that it was gliding across the basin of still water below the fall, under the steady impulse of Jasper's paddle."

Cap now gave a tremendous heave, felt for his queue, as if to ascertain its safety, and then looked back in order to examine the danger he had gone through. His safety is easily explained. Most of the river fell perpendicularly ten or twelve feet; but near its centre the force of the current had so far worn away the rock, as to permit the water to shoot through a narrow passage at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Down this ticklish descent the canoe had glanced, amid fragments of broken rock, whirlpools, foam, and furious tossing of the element, which an un instructed eye would believe menaced inevitable destruction to an object so fragile. But the very lightness of the canoe had favoured its descent; for, borne

on the crests of the waves, and directed by a steady eye and an arm full of muscle, it had passed like a feather from one pile of foam to another, scarcely permitting its glossy side to be wetted. There were a few rocks to be avoided, the proper direction was to be rigidly observed, and the fierce current did the rest."

Here is a specimen of Uncle Cap in his milder moods.

A TAR UPON LAKE ONTARIO.

"A charming sunset, Mabel," said the hearty voice of her uncle, so close to the ear of our heroine as to cause her to start; "a charming sunset, girl, for a fresh-water concern, though we should think but little of it at sea."

"And is not nature the same on shore or at sea? on a lake like this or on the ocean? does not the sun shine on all alike, dear uncle? and can we not feel gratitude for the blessings of Providence, as strongly on this remote frontier as in our own Manhattan?"

"The girl has fallen in with some of her mother's books, though I should think the Sergeant would scarcely make a second march with such trumpery among his baggage. Is not nature the same indeed! Now, Mabel, do you imagine that the nature of a soldier is the same as that of a sea-faring man? You've relations in both callings, and you ought to be able to answer."

"But, uncle, I mean human nature—"

"So do I, girl; the human nature of a seaman and the human nature of a one of these fellows of the Fifty-fifth, not even excepting your own father. Here have they had a shooting-match—target-firing I should call it—this day; and what a different thing has it been from a target-firing afloat. There we should have sprung our broadside, sported with round-shot, at an object half a mile off, at the very nearest; and the potatoes, if there happened to be any on board as quite likely would not have been the case, would have been left in the cook's coppers. It may be an honourable calling, that of a soldier, Mabel; but an experienced hand sees many follies and weaknesses in one of these forts. As for that bit of a lake, you know my opinion of it already, and I wish to disparage nothing. No real seafarer disparages any thing; but I don't regard this here Ontario, as they call it, as more than so much water in a ship's scuttle-butt. Now, look you here, Mabel, if you wish to understand the difference between the ocean and a lake, I can make you comprehend it with a single look: this is what one may call a calm, seeing that there is no wind; though, to own the truth, I do not think the calms are as calm as them we get outside."

"Uncle, there is not a breath of air. I do not think it possible for the leaves to be more immovably still, than those of the entire forest are at this very moment."

"Leaves, what are leaves, child? there are no leaves at sea. If you wish to know whether it is a dead calm or not, try a mould candle—your dips flaring too much; and then you may be certain whether there is or is not any wind. If you were in a latitude where the air was so still that you found a difficulty in stirring it to draw it in breathing, you might fancy it a calm. People are often on a short allowance of air in the calm latitudes. Here, again, look at the water. It is like milk in a pan, with no more motion, now, than there is in a full hogshead before the bung is started. On the ocean the water is never still, let the air be as quiet as it may."

"The water of the ocean never still, Uncle Cap? not even in a calm?"

"Bless your heart, no, child. The ocean breathes like a living being, and its bosom is always heaving, as the poetizers call it, though there be no more air than is to be found in a siphon. No man ever saw the ocean still, like this lake; but it heaves and sets, as if it had lungs."

UNCLE CAP IN AN ASSAULT UPON A FORT.

Cap preserved his coolness admirably. He had a profound and increasing respect for the power of the savages, and even for the majesty of fresh-water, it is true; but his apprehensions of the former proceeded more from his dread of being scalped and tortured, than from any unmanly fear of death; and as he was now on the deck of a house, if not on the deck of a ship, and knew that there was little danger of boarders, he moved about with a fearlessness, and a rash exposure of his person, that *Pathfinder*, had he been aware of the fact, would have been the first to condemn. Instead of keeping his body covered, agreeably to the usages of Indian warfare, he was seen on every part of the roof, dashing the water right and left, with the apparent steadiness and unconcern he would have manifested had he been a sail-trimmer exercising his art in a battle afloat. His appearance was one of the causes of the extraordinary clamour among the assailants; who, unused to see their enemies so reckless, opened upon him with their tongues, like a