

THE WHITE SWALLOW.

A TALE OF BRITISH AMERICA.

I.—THE DOG-RIBBED INDIANS.

Far away to the west, and in a very high northern latitude, dwelt, towards the latter end of the last century, a small tribe of Indians. Their numbers were few, their characters simple and unwarlike. Not being celebrated in arms, they had, while residing farther to the south, been so often a prey to their fiercer neighbours, that they had gradually retreated northwards, in the hope of escaping from the forays of their enemies. Matonaza, a young chief of twenty summers only, commanded the reduced tribe, and had pitched his wigwam near the waters of a lake. A renowned and indefatigable hunter, full of energy and perseverance, he owed his power as much to his individual merits as to the renown of his father; and now that seven-and-twenty men alone remained of all his race, and that misfortune and the disasters of war had driven them to regions less productive in game than their former residence, his sway was unbounded. Matonaza was as yet without a wife; but the most lovely girl of his tribe, the White Swallow, was to be his when his twenty-first summer was concluded, when she herself would attain the age of sixteen.

In general the Dog-ribbed Indians at that date—it was about 1770*—had had little communication with the white man. Their knives were still of bone and flint, their hatchets of horn, their arrow-heads of slate, while the beaver's tooth was the principal material of their working tools; but Matonaza himself had travelled and had visited Prince of Wales Fort, where he had been well received by Mr. Moses Northon, the governor, himself an Indian, educated in England. Admitted into the intimacy of this person, Matonaza had acquired from him considerable knowledge without contracting any of the vices which disgraced the career of the civilised Red Man. He had learned to feel some of the humanising influences of civilisation, and held women in a superior light to his brethren, who pronounce the condemnation of savage life by making the female part of the creation little better than beasts of burthen. He had hoped for great advantage to his tribe from trade with the Pale Faces; but the enmity of the Athapascow Indians had checked all his aspirations, and he had been compelled to make a long and hasty retreat towards the north, to save the remnant of his little band from annihilation. In all probability it is to similar warlike persecutions that the higher northern regions owe their having been peopled by the race whence are descended the Esquimaux.

The exigencies of the chase and the fishery, more than any inherent taste for the picturesque, had fixed Matonaza in a lovely spot.

* The historical facts of this narrative are to be found in the travels of Samuel Hearne, the first white man who traversed the Territory to the Arctic Ocean.