

wall, not being able to carry it down with the other things, and when I went back a minute or two ater, drot me if some tarnation rascal hadn't stole it.

"And if you had the British rascal on t'other shore, you wouldn't be long in tucking a knife into his gizzard, would you?" asked Middlemore, in a nearly verbatim repetition of the horrid oath originally uttered by Desborough, "I see nothin' to warrant our interfering with him," he continued in an under tone to his companion.

Not a little surprised to hear his words repeated, the Yankee lost somewhat of his confidence as he replied, "well now surely, you officers didn't think nothing o' that—I expect I was in a mighty rage to find my small bore gone, and I did curse a little hearty to be sure."

"The small bore multiplied in your absence," observed Grantham; "when I looked at the hut there was two."

"Then maybe you can tell who was the particular d——d rascal that stole them," said the settler eagerly.

Middlemore laughed heartily at his companion, who observed:

"The particular d——d rascal who removed, not stole them thence, stands before you."

Again the Yankee looked disconcerted. After a moment's hesitation, he continued, with a forced grin, that gave an atrocious expression to his whole countenance:

"Well now, you officers are playing a purty considerable spy trick—it's a good lark I calculate—but you know, as the saying is, enough's as good as a feast. De tell me, Mr. Grantham," and his discordant voice became more offensive in its effort at a tone of entreaty, "do tell where you've hid my small bore—you little think," he concluded, with an emphasis then unnoticed by the officers, but subsequently remembered to have been perfectly ferocious, "what reason I have to vally it."

"We never descend to larks of the kind," coolly observed the youth, "but as you say you value your rifle, it shall be restored to you on one condition."

"And what may that be?" asked the settler, somewhat startled at the serious manner of the officer.

"That you show us what your canoe is freighted with. Here in the bows I mean."

"Why," rejoined the Yankee quickly, but as if without design, intercepting the officers' nearer approach, "that bag, I calculate, contains my provisions, and these here blankets that you see, peepin' like from under the sail, are what I makes my bed of while out huntin'."

"And are you quite certain there is nothing under those blankets?—nay do not protest—you cannot answer for what may have occurred while your back was turned, on your way to the hut for the rifles."

"By Gosh," exclaimed the settler, blusteringly,

"were any man to tell me, Jeremiah Desborough, there was any thin' beside them blankets in the canoe, I would lick him into a jelly, even though he could whip his own weight in wild cats."

"So is it? Now then, Jeremiah Desborough, although I have never yet tried to whip my own weight in wild cats, I tell you there is something more than those blankets; and what is more, I insist upon seeing what that something is."

The settler stood confounded. His eye rolled rapidly from one to the other of the officers at the boldness and determination of this language. Singly, he could have crushed Harry Grantham in his gripe, even as one of the bears of the forest, near the outskirts of which they stood; but there were two, and while attacking the one, he was sure of being assailed by the other; nay, what was worse, the neighbourhood might be alarmed. Moreover, although they had kept their cloaks carefully wrapped around their persons, there could be little doubt that both officers were armed, not, as they had originally given him to understand, with fowling pieces, but with (at present close quarters at least) far more efficient pistols. He was relieved from his embarrassment by Middlemore exclaiming:

"Nay, do not press the poor devil, Grantham, I dare say the story of his hunting is all a hum, and that the fact is, he is merely going to earn an honest penny in one of his free commercial speculations—a little contraband," pointing with his finger to the bows, "is it not Desborough?"

"Why now, officer," said the Yankee, rapidly assuming a dogged air, as if ashamed of the discovery that had been so acutely made, "I expect you won't hurt a poor fellow for doin' a little in this way. Drot me, these are hard times, and this here war jist beginin', quite pits one to one's shifts."

"This might do, Desborough, were your present freight an arrival instead of departure, but we all know that contraband is imported, not exported."

"Mighty cute you are, I guess," replied the settler, warily, with something like the savage grin of the wild cat, to which he had so recently alluded, "but I expect it would be none so strange to have packed up a few dried hog skins to stow away the goods I am goin' for."

"I should like to try the effect of a bullet among the skins," said Grantham, leisurely drawing forth and cocking a pistol, after having whispered something in the ear of his companion.

"Nay, officer," said Desborough, now for the first time manifesting serious alarm—"you surely dont mean to bore a hole through them innocent skins?"

"True," said Middlemore, imitating, "if he fires, the hole will be something more than skin deep I reckon—these pistols, to my knowledge, send a bullet through a two inch board at twenty paces."