

We thankfully accepted his escort, and ran along by his side to the gate, and thence down the shady lane past Aspleigh Hall, and so on to our house; where we found that our father had returned, and had got as far as the porch on his way to search for us.

CHAPTER X.

THE BALD EAGLE ON THE WAR-PATH.

"WHY, Sebastian," began my father, advancing down the garden-walk to meet us, and grasping our companion warmly by the hand—"this is a surprise. How are you, and where have you stowed yourself away all winter? In a hollow tree, like any other old bruin—eh?"

"Been down the river," was the reply—"only got back yesterday."

"Down the river. And only got back yesterday. And pray, where did you get back to yesterday?"

"Back home, in course."

"And where do you call 'home'? Ha, ha! That's asking questions, isn't it? None of my business, I suppose. Well, you have been so long away that I thought you must have taken your departure from among us for good, and gone to the happy hunting-grounds you were telling me about one day. Come in and have dinner with us, and then we'll smoke a pipe, and have a chat together. Where did you pick up those two little tramps of mine? I am sorry to say they have been very naughty indeed, and caused their mother no end of anxiety. I was just starting out to look for them when I saw you coming down the lane. But come in and give an account of yourselves, all three of you." And so saying, my father led the way into the house.

Our guest shook hands with my mother as though she had been an intimate acquaintance of ten years' standing. She gave him a hearty welcome, and seconded my father's invitation to dinner, which was nearly ready. The Bald Eagle neither accepted the invitation nor declined it, but quietly seated himself on the edge of a chair, as though silence gave assent.

"O, Norman," said my mother, noticing the fact that our stockings and pinafores were bedaubed with mud; "where have you been, to get yourself and Mark into such a shocking state of dirt? Go into the kitchen, directly, and ask Sarah to wash you, and make you fit to sit down to table." She had been seriously alarmed at our long absence, and was too thankful at seeing us back again safe and sound to adopt very stringent measures towards us.

"You'd oughter feel devilish chipper to see 'em back agin at all, clean or dirty—that's about how it is," remarked Sebastian.

"Why, sir? Has anything happened? Have they been in any mischief?"

"Mischief! Well, I bet old Mog Two-Fish 'ud 'a' played the mischief with 'em, if it hadn't been for me. I come along an' cotched her jest about ready to slice 'em up, down there in the holler, in the Landin' road."

"The Landing road!" exclaimed my mother, holding up her hands in astonishment.

"Yes; an' if I'd been two minutes later they'd like enough 'a' been sassidge-meat afore now. Don't ye be too hard on 'em *this* time. They've been pretty considerable skeered, I tell you. An' I reckon they'll think twicest about it afore they go off on the tramp agin, gallivanting around the deestrick all by theirselves, as if they was no better nor vagabones like me.—Now; jest you hold your little jaw," continued he, playfully shaking his huge fist at my brother, who was about to speak—"I'll make everything squar' with the old folks. You be off an' git slicked up out in the kitchen."

To the kitchen my brother and I accordingly betook ourselves, and then we frightened our sister almost out of her wits by a vivid history of our morning's adventure. A plentiful application of soap and water, and the substitution of some clean clothing for our soiled garments, made us presentable in the dining-room, to which we soon returned. Sebastian had meanwhile electrified our parents by a no less glowing account of our rencontre; and mother, with overflowing eyes, clasped us both to her breast.

"O, sir, how can I ever thank you sufficiently for your protec-

tion of my darlings? And Norman—Mark—"turning from one of us to the other—"you'll never disobey me again, will you? What an escape you have had!"

"Well, you see maum," remarked our guest, "the fact o' the matter is, there's no saying for certain whether they was in any tremenjis danger or not. That darned old scalliwag hates white folks like pison; an' besides she was charged tollably full o' whiskey, an' had the debil in her as big as a two-headed woodchuck. Mebbe she only meant to skeer 'em; an' then agin, mebbe she meant to carry 'em off down to the Injun settlement. Howsomever, I gin her a pretty strong piece o' my mind, an' told her I'd make the country too hot to hold her if she ever tried it on any more. She'll be all-fired keerful about interferin' with 'em agin; so don't you worry about it maum.—I guess I'll jest step out into the kitchen an' wash my hands a spell. Tain't often as I sets down to dinner with gentry."

While our strange guest was performing his ablutions in the kitchen, we supplemented his account of the adventure by acquainting our parents with our version of the story. Sebastian had already informed them who our assailants were. The old woman who had drawn her knife upon us was the mother of that identical Joe Two-Fish mentioned in a former chapter as having committed a murder at the Landing. She was dreaded throughout the district for her ferocious temper, and for her unconquerable hatred of the pale-faces. She had more than once been in trouble for displaying her savage proclivities, and had served a term in jail at Port Burlington for stabbing a constable at the Ford, and biting his nose off. The other woman was her sister, and was a somewhat modified edition of herself. The Two-Fishes, from the oldest to the youngest, were an ill-conditioned race, and were in bad odour even among their own people. They were irreclaimable barbarians, and clung to their savage usages and traditions with a tenacity against which civilization seemed to be powerless. They were notorious thieves; and the thieving propensity seemed to be a sort of mania with them, for they had frequently been known to steal things which were of no conceivable use or value to them, apparently from the mere pleasure of wrong-doing. As for old Mog herself, the Bald Eagle was wont to declare his belief that she could drink more bad whiskey than any other member of her tribe; that she would steal anything in the world that she could lay her hands on except a red-hot cooking-stove; and that she would like to kill somebody every day of her life were it not for fear of consequences. He probably painted her in colours somewhat too strong; but even after making due allowance for exaggeration, we had abundant reason to congratulate ourselves upon having escaped out of the clutches of such an old vulture with nothing more serious than a terrible fright. We of course promised never to stray from home again; and our mother, rightly judging that we had already been sufficiently punished for our little escapade, forgave us for our disregard of her injunction.

Sebastian emerged from the kitchen with face and hands tolerably clean. Our two hired men made their appearance, and in accordance with the democratic usages of the country we all sat down to dinner together. When my father asked a blessing upon the food of which we were about to partake, our guest inclined his head reverently, and throughout the whole progress of the meal he manifested a propriety and decorum such as could scarcely have been expected from a person of his habits and mode of life. People of more fastidious tastes than we were might perhaps have taken exception to his soiled, greasy sheepskin tunic, as a garb not quite appropriate for the dinner-table; and his bare neck and breast would not have shown to advantage at a fashionable club; but his manner of conducting himself at table was certainly more in keeping with the usages of civilized life than was that of the two Jebusitical chawbacons who dined with us.

When dinner was over, Sebastian and my father lighted their pipes, and sat down in the porch to enjoy a smoke, in the course of which the former recounted his adventures subsequent to the time of his parting from us on the night of our arrival. I at first seated myself beside them, with eyes and ears open; but my father, thinking it not unlikely that some of the details might