

(ORIGINAL.)

THE HERMIT OF SAINT MAURICE.

It may be now about a dozen years since, in the course of a random ramble through Lower Canada, we found ourselves stemming the waters of the St. Maurice, towards the Falls of Shawinegam, whither we were led, as well by the renown of their romantic beauty, as by a desire to learn something of a mysterious being, who had come there, none knew whence, and had gone, none knew whither. His history was unknown, save that he was fed by the charity of the Indian hunters, who often left a share of their sylvan spoil at the door of his cell, and that his wanderings ever began with night, when his maniac shrieks were heard mingling with the hoarse thunder of the whelming waters.

Leaving the canoe at some distance, and following our Indian guide, we soon reached a spot from which we could look upon the splendid scenery of which the Falls form the principal feature, but our anxiety became more intense as we neared the hermit's haunts, and we rested not until, desiring our guide to lead on, we followed him to the cave of the recluse.

Evening was approaching, and the summer heat was lightly tempered by the life-giving breeze that sprung up as the sun gradually sunk from his burning throne, and his departing beam, mingling with the dashing spray, formed it into beautiful and fantastic shapes,—the richer only that their reign was brief.

A ravine, between two giant rocks, near the centre fall; formed a rude path to the hermit's cave. It had originally been a small fissure formed by some shock of nature, and had been fashioned by the industry of the recluse into a habitable shape. In one corner, a heap of ashes told that here his fire had been, and a few rude implements lay beside the hearth, as if they had been used for some culinary purpose—perhaps to broil the venison left at his porch by the Indian hunters, who revered him, while they shrank from all communion with him, even as he had shrunk from them.

The cell contained nought to tell whether its late lonely occupant was alive or dead—a staff, indeed, leaned against the wall, and a cap, of a fashion that had once been military, hung over the entrance, but dust and cobwebs too plainly told that they had been untouched for years. In looking upon these traces that the cell had been, at one time, tenanted by one who must have dwelt among civilized men, we sank into a strain of melancholy reflections, from which we were aroused by a cry of surprise from the Indian. He had found a narrow passage from the inner side of the cave, over which a web of moss was suspended, and had penetrated into an inner cell, where an unexpected scene met his gaze, and caused the cry that startled us—we immediately followed, and the whole mystery of the hermit's disappearance was unravelled.

The cell was lighted by a torch kindled by the Indian, and disclosed a fleshless figure lying on the floor, beside what seemed an open grave, dug, it might have been, by his own hands, for it seemed as if he had died in a vain attempt to reach it, that he might there sleep the sleep of death, after a life of misery.

On the cavern floor, lay a half open scroll, towards which the head of the skeleton was turned, as if the last look of the maniac had been fixed upon the sad record of his unhappy fate. We took it up, and leaving the Indian to gather the crumbling remnants into the open grave, we crept with a feeling of terror, to the outer cell.

Here, amid the roar of the cataract, with the traces of the victim before us, we read his melancholy tale—melancholy indeed,—the tale of one, the very playmate of utter wretchedness—the victim of a crime so dreadful, that all unconscious as he was, it shook his reason from its throne, and left remembrance but another name for woe.

There is no doubt, that surrounding circumstances lent an interest in the tale, such as it will not possess, when perused by others, but, in the hope