

never degenerates into ferocity. Now, than the custom of the Indians nothing can be more simple, more truly heroic. The man marked with scars and thrilling with the memories of danger and individual daring is a noble living poem—a breathing epic. He has arraigned himself before a tribunal whose murmured consent to what he says is fame; whose silence is twice defeat. He tells with generous ardour of the prowess of his single arm, well told by single speech. The thought occurs as I picture forth the fray amid the hills; of the “dark day,” foreknown to all; of the fatal many against the undaunted few; of the despondent, tranquil form of him vowed and glad to death; the brief comment of his friend—“you will not be far before me;” the stubborn fierceness of the strife; the laughing boy in that grim scene; the night at last whose parted curtains let forth the bleeding handful left. I see, too, that faithful wife wending her way from all of life to all of death, overtaken and reclaimed; and I think of the thoughts she never speaks, of the tears that rain in only on her heart.

Without any particular inclination here to enlarge upon the characteristics of a race seen by many, known by few, I may say, after some twenty years’ contact with Indians, that the ideal Indian is a most natural creation—an undoubted fact. Cooper and Longfellow, so far from exceeding nature, have only, with the instinct of genius, and stirred by a fine humanity, sketched slightly but faithfully in a held which to a thoughtful man is not only full of unique and graphic portraiture, but is coloured as well with a mythology which, mystic as are all religions, is yet so fresh and subtle that its simple lines blend insensibly with the tender reaching filaments with which nature seeks to surround and permeate every existence, imparting to these her children, in their primal condition, a certain knowledge which is health, certain faiths which we call superstition, but which to them are religion—nay, further, an occult faculty, which, in its display, is the wonder of the sage and the derision of the fool.

Word at last came of the envoys “camped at the mission,” and early the next morning, while the mists summoned by that autocrat, the sun, were lazily lifting in wreaths from their couch, the lake, and curtaining the hills ere melting into space, came the unwonted sounds of their approach. Soon

the buff jackets of the bluffs were flecked with a ruddier tinge, sprinkled with the red bodices whose prototypes have in so many a well-won field been deepened with a darker and more fatal hue, and soon—softened by the distance—the music of the band came stealing, swelling upon the glittering air, iaden, for the first time in uncounted ages, with so sweet a burden, pregnant with such novel charms. Oh, mystery of thought and memory! Oh, prose that bourgeons into poetry! What glamour is there in the air that makes my heart to beat, my lip to tremble, and my eyes to dim?

“What do I see? What do I not see? I see these children of the Plain among whom I stand, fade, even as fades yon lingering band of vapour hidden by absorbing power, and melt into the past, as a people that once were, but who are no more. The free, the natural life, the unbounded liberty, the plenty and the spoils of chase; the air, the water, ripe with fowl and fish; the swelling plains where dwelt the buffalo, the elk, the bear, and deer; the troops of riders, the bands of wild or waiting horses; the hunters, men whose silent, trusty bow slew just enough and no more; the vast camps—the pointed, moving cities of the Plain—with all their hopes and fears, their loves and sadness, gone even as a dream, nor trace nor stone to mark where once the nations stood.”

Nigh to this fading remnant—their horns and bugles heralding their approach—come the *avant couriers* of destiny—the strong, the conquering, the all-dominant race; the children of the northern seas; mixed Teuton and Celt, ruthless to sway, yet swaying justly; fierce, yet tender; rough, but still sincere. They come to set their seal upon the land and make it ruddy with new life. Their hands are full of the memories of home; and at the thoughts of homes of yore of this my kindred race, the music, as with a golden key, unlocked the long-closed doors of years, and showed me faces, eyes, through which souls looked full on mine, an instant, yet for ever.

Quite unmoved either by men or music, the Indians beheld the cortege cross the ford, and, recruited by a number of half-breeds on foot and horseback, approach the Company’s Fort, the head-quarters of the Commission, while the troops bearing on, halted on the borders of the lake.

The great marquee or council tent was