

After Weary Years

By MARGUERITE EVANS



LONG, long time ago, as the fairy tales say, I was spending the summer among the then largely unexplored regions of the Rocky Mountains with a party of prospectors—they in search of gold; I in search of that which is better than gold, yea, much fine gold—health. In the course of one of my rambles I came across a settlement which bore numerous marks of civilisation, although I saw no one around but Indians. I spoke to them in English, but with a very faint hope of being understood, and was much surprised at being answered in broad Scotch. I asked a great many questions, but the Indians were very uncommunicative; saying briefly that the “Doctor,” whom they seemed to regard as a very powerful and mysterious personage, had taught them to live and work like white men.

Who the “Doctor” was, I could not make out. When I asked where he lived, they pointed to a house larger and more elaborately built than the rest. When I asked if I could see him, they answered: “No! no! ye canna,” and seemed frightened. So I left them and returned to the camp, resolved, however, to not leave the neighbourhood until I had learned more of the mysterious personage called the “Doctor.”

Seated at the camp-fire that night, I related my adventure to the “sour-doughs” with whom I had cast in my lot. They exchanged significant glances, and the most talkative, carefully removing an enormous quid of tobacco from his mouth, said slowly: “So you’ve strayed into the camp of the Philistines, hev you, Doc.? Well, you kin thank your stars that the old duffer with the horns an’ hoofs didn’t git you in his clutches; an’ if you value that hide of yours, you’ll steer clear of him an’ them red imps of his; that’s all I have got to say.” And back went the quid of tobacco into his mouth and the oracle was dumb.

By dint of persistent questioning I

managed to elicit from the others the little that they knew. The Indian settlement, with its mysterious chief, had been there for a hundred years. I took this statement with several grains of salt. No one knew where they had come from. They refused to hold any communication with outsiders. They disposed of their produce and obtained supplies from no one knew where. It was said there was a church and school-house in the settlement, and that the “Doctor” preached and taught.

My curiosity, instead of being satisfied, was only rendered more keen by what I had heard; but I kept my own counsel, and next morning, as soon as I had made sure the miners were safely out of sight, I again set out for the mysterious settlement.

I found my way there without any difficulty, and was so fortunate as to reach the house in which the “Doctor” lived without meeting anyone. In response to my knock, a strong voice, with a decided Scotch accent, bade me come in. I entered not, I am ashamed now to confess, without some inward fear that I was entering a Bluebeard chamber, from whence I might presently emerge minus my head.

A strong odour of mingled tobacco smoke and whiskey was the first thing that greeted me; then a tall, muscular man, with long snowy hair flowing loosely about his shoulders and a snowy beard reaching almost to his waist, rose from a rude arm chair and looked at me in astonishment.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but what can I do for you? I thought it was one of the Indians who knocked,” he said, courteously enough, but with a somewhat forbidding look, after waiting a moment for me to speak.

“I must own to what really amounts to very little less than an impertinent curiosity, I am afraid,” I said, emboldened by seeing that the piercing, steely blue eyes under the heavy white eye-