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AN INDIAN TRADITION.

Related to the Author by one of the Prisoners taken in the year 1812.

BY JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

(Continued.)

Albert and Henry strayed one day to a corn-field nearly a mile from the village. It was at the season when the corn was green, and Henry reminded Albert of a promise he had made to make him a cornstalk fiddle, an instrument on which some of our New-England boys produce not a that would almost rival those on Paganini's time-worn violin. Albert, ever ready to oblige Henry, selected two joints of the proper size of the green and polished stalks, and, with a knife much too large for the purpose, split the delicate strings along the fibrous surface. Then having put a bridge under them at each end, he brought a smile of joy to the lips of his young brother by the agreeable tones which he produced. Albert's eyes were radiant with joy to see this change in the sad face of Henry; but the smile of the latter soon gave way to an unusually deep look of sadness, as he said, "Lucy can't hear it; I will keep it till she comes home, shan't I?" Albert, touched by this new proof of affection, could not answer, but turned from his brother, and, in his efforts to conceal his feelings, he drew the bow of his newly-constructed instrument with so much force as to sever the strings, and a curse of fearful meaning burst from his lips upon the brutal savages who had destroyed the happiness of that innocent boy; at that moment a piercing shriek from his brother attracted his attention in time to see him pointing at some distant object as he fell to the earth.

Albert turned in the direction indicated by his brother's hand, and beheld a savage coming with the speed of the wind, his tomahawk uplifted about to bury it in his own brain; he grasped his knife instinctively, and, holding it parallel with his arm, when the Indian was near enough he sprang forward, and, quickly turning it upward, as if to ward off the blow, presented the sharp edge of the knife, which, coming in contact with the wrist of the Indian, severed the tendons, released the tomahawk, which was afterwards buried three inches deep in the trunk of a tree; the savage grasped with his left hand at his own knife, but before he had time to draw it from his belt, another thrust from his antagonist had pierced his heart, and he dropped with a hideous yell at Albert's feet; who, having conquered his foe, turned to look for Henry. The brave boy, stupid with surprise, gazed on the spot where he had seen him fall; had the earth opened and received him? had the savages stolen him? or had he escaped? were questions which rapidly succeeded one another in the mind of Albert. He searched in vain—no sign of living thing was there—save a slight rustling amid the corn. With the knife still red from the blood of the Indian in his hand, he advanced cautiously to the place, and found that it was occasioned by a cow, which, unmindful of the struggle that had just taken place, was feasting upon the young and tender ears.

With a hope that Henry had escaped, after casting a glance at the relaxed features of his fallen foe, he hurried towards his home, musing upon this sudden attack upon his life; what could be the reason that his family should be singled out for destruction by these sanguinary savages? Albert knew of none, yet he was firm in his belief that the abduction of his sister, as well as the late attempt on himself, was in retaliation for some injury inflicted by some of his ancestors, or of his present family, for he well knew that the savages never forgot any act of cruelty or kindness shown to any of their kindred, and that these acts were handed down from generation to generation with their traditions, till opportunity offered to return the like: could he ascertain the offence, he then might be more certain of the fate of Henry. Many were the conjectures he formed concerning his brother, and as many were cast to the winds as idle and speculative.

In that state of mind he reached the house, anxious, yet feasting to ask if Henry had returned; his doubts were soon set at rest on that point by the mother's asking why he came home alone? and his was the dreadful necessity of informing her that only one now remained to comfort her now.

The alarm spread rapidly, for no one doubted, from the daring of the deed, that others of the savages were in the neighbourhood, and in less than two hours nearly all the villagers who were capable of bearing arms assembled on the green, were divided into squads, and went in search of the Indians. At dusk they returned, having discovered trails in various directions which indicated the number of the foe to be greater than was at first suspected.

The night sentinels were posted at convenient distances, and a portion of the armed villagers encamped on the green to be in readiness, if their services were required during the night.

But the morning came without an attack, and scouts were sent out to reconnoitre. News was brought about noon that the Indians, in great numbers, were encamped about two leagues from Fryburg; and, from a prisoner who had escaped, they learned that the savages intended to set fire to the village that night.

When this intelligence was spread abroad, there was a certainty for all to look to; and, therefore, measures were adopted for a vigorous resistance. Before, it was hoped that they were not numerous enough to attempt the destruction of the place. The drum beat to call the people together, not one half of whom were furnished with proper arms. Scythes, axes, pitchforks, and everything that could be used on the occasion, were brought by the brave fellows; even the plough was broken, and the shares usurped the place of swords, to be wielded by the strong of arm.

Among the last, though not the least, of those that came to Fryburg Corner, was the village priest. He was dressed in a suit of cloth which, in the days of his youth, had undoubtedly been black, but now it had grown gray in the old man's service. Around his waist was buckled a belt of raw hide, to which was attached a huge rusty sword, the bright edge of which showed evidently that it had already been at war with the grindstone. He was above the middle height, his figure well made, and as straight as an arrow. He was beloved by his flock, and, when he came to the place where the ill-disciplined soldiers were assembled, every hat was raised, a path cleared, and the old man requested to address the people from the top of a hoghead, put there for the purpose.

His address, which abounded in good sense, was followed by a short prayer, wherein he prayed most strenuously for the safety of the two children whose loss the brave people were going to avenge. The old parson was a picture which all present seemed to contemplate with interest not unmixed with reverence. His long silver hair was lightly tossed by the summer-breeze around his thin, pale features, while, with his mild blue eyes upraised to heaven, he prayed that those who were to go forth to battle might go with God in their hearts, and prayer on their lips. There was a fervour and enthusiasm in his words and manner which passed for inspiration among the people; and, when he said, at the conclusion of his prayer with an energy that came from the very depth of his soul, "Where there is right, then thou hast said there shall be might—then thou hast truly said we shall conquer"—the little band arose from their knees with a firm belief that what they had heard were the words of truth; and, at the command of Lovell, who had been for many years their general, they divided themselves into parties, each of which chose a leader. The young men separated from the aged, and, without a moment's hesitation, simultaneously elected Albert to lead them wherever he would. He would have declined the honour on account of his extreme youth, for most of his division were older than himself; but the general cry of "none but Albert," compelled him to take the command, which he did with becoming pride and diffi-

dence. The father then stepped forward and thanked them for the honour they had conferred upon him through his son. His few words were, "that he looked upon him as the only child now left to him. May God guide and protect him! he may never shrink from the duty you have chosen him to." Here he was interrupted by Foolish Joe, as he was most commonly called, who advanced from behind a group, where he had observed the whole proceedings, and, stepping up his low-cloth trousers, pointed to a large defect in the calf of his leg, and exclaimed, "He shrink! Why with that same knife that slew the Indian, he killed the she-bear while her teeth was in his leg! He shrink? No! Who killed the wolf in her own hole? Albert! and Al-eit never shrunk from bear, panther or wolf!" His comrades already knew what poor Joe had told them, and it was that which in all probability decided them so unanimously in their election of Albert. Lovell now proceeded to give instructions, after which the little army were dismissed till the heat of drum.

From the green the soldiers diverged to their own homes to assist the women, who were seen flying to the church, filled with consternation and terror, where it was deemed prudent that they should remain with their most valuable property, to be guarded by the men during the night. They presented a sad picture: their despondent faces were more gloomy than the starless night, that soon closed around. In the evening the soldier parson, in his military array, read a chapter from the Bible by the light of a burning pitch-pine-knot; and, after exhorting them to bear up under their trials, he offered up a prayer for their temporal and spiritual welfare. Next followed a heart-rending scene of husbands embracing their wives, and children their parents, each fearing they might never meet again. After this painful scene was over, the doors and windows of the church were barricaded, and the sentinels being posted for the night, most of the little army laid down upon the grass, close to the church, with their arms in their hands.

While the soldiers slept, the two captains were to be seen a little apart from their men, in earnest conversation, the younger asking and receiving instruction from the elder for the anticipated attack. Captain Lovell was well acquainted with the Indian mode of warfare; and, after developing his plans, he impressed upon Albert the necessity of the greatest caution in dealing with the enemy, who were as cunning as they were courageous.

The ardent youth longed for the hour when he could rush upon the savage horde, and he begged Lovell to permit him to lead his followers in search of them; but the captain stopping short, and grasping Albert firmly by the arm, replied, "Young man, you know not what you ask! Should you venture into yonder grove before the daylight dawns, not one of you would escape. I have fought the Mohawks, and lived with the Narragansetts—they are all treacherous. I tell you, Albert, be not rash: the Indians are two to one of us; they would lure you on till on a sudden they would rise from the bushes on every side, and every soul of you would be butchered."

"I fear I shall not be able to restrain my comrades," said Albert. "Had you been among them after the church was closed, it would have made your eyes glisten to have heard the earnestness with which they wished for action—they cannot bear restraint."

Before Albert had finished the last sentence, Lovell was lying with his ear to the ground, where he remained for a few minutes, when he suddenly started to his feet, and grasped his rifle. Albert saw in this sudden evolution—acquainted as he was with such movements—enough to convince him that little time was to be lost, and, had not the captain held him by force, he would have rushed to his brave boys to have made them ready.

"Keep cool—keep cool!" repeated Lovell; "we shall have notice from the outposts when they are near at hand. I know they come, but I have placed trusty fellows at those points at which I rightly supposed they would attack

us. Now I entreat you not to let one under your command move till the guns of the sentinels are heard. Yet, I would have them all awake and ready, and, when the signal is given, rise and meet the foe; therefore go carefully to each man, and impress upon him the necessity of a strict observation of this order. I need not tell you that every gun that is not already loaded, must be, and such as were loaded over night should be reprimed." This our young soldier had previously impressed upon his followers.

Captain Lovell then took the hand of Albert, and, pressing it affectionately, said, "You are chosen by nearly half of my little force to be their leader. I trust you will prove yourself worthy of your father, by whose side I fought the Nianticks. He was as brave as a lion, and the idol of his company." Here Lovell again applied his ear to the ground, and informed Albert that the foes were numerous, and not more than a half-mile distant. Then, taking from his undressed leather belt one of his rusty pistols, he presented it to the young man, saying, "This was your grandfather's. Go, Albert; bear in mind by whose hand that grandfather died. Remember your brother and sister! and should I perish, do not forget me!"

Albert stood for a moment struggling with emotion, then placing the trusty pistol in his belt, he pressed the hand of his commander, and hastened to prepare the young volunteers for the momentarily-expected attack. A deep silence succeeded the interview of the two officers, which was only broken by the cluck of the pans as the soldiers shut them on the fresh priming.

The winds were hushed, and the vast forests of majestic pines stood in awful silence, as if breathlessly expecting a fearful conflict. Presently a sound, as if a breeze was slightly stirring the distant foliage, was heard approaching nearer and nearer, till those who were not aware from what it proceeded looked up, expecting to see the nearest tree-tops waving to and fro; but the flash and report of muskets at the outposts told that it was the savage horde that came along with the speed of the wind upon the encampment, expecting to surprise the whites—uttering the war-whoop and the most fiendish yell. But the whites, instead of being found sleeping and in confusion, were fully prepared for the encounter, and repulsed them with steady valour. It was about two o'clock when the attack commenced; the clouds that had spread such universal gloom over the camp in the early part of the night had now separated, allowing the light of the stars to fall on the scene of carnage. Although the light was so far unfavourable to the whites as to show them more plainly, yet it discovered the painted savages who before would have been invisible.

For a long time it seemed doubtful which should conquer. Albert and his enthusiastic followers fought like tigers; they rushed impetuously on the foe, throwing the ground with the dead wherever they went. The brave boy, elated with the success of his little band, and seeing the chief of the Indians, sprang forward with his comrades at his heels, and, with about a dozen others, was surrounded. They soon discovered their predicament. Aware that no quarter would be given, were they disposed to ask it, they plied their weapons with almost supernatural strength; but they must inevitably have been overpowered by the superior numbers of the savages, had not some of the strongest of the villagers come to the rescue, wielding their heavy ploughshares with both hands, and felling three or four of the enemy at a time. The savages, seeing the power of the assailants, began to give way, till at length the whole body retreated into the deep shadow of the lofty wood, where they had great advantage over the whites, whose pale faces showed them to the unerring aim of the Indian rifle or their gleaming tomahawks.

It was not the policy of the veteran Lovell to follow the retreating foe; but the sanguine spirits of Albert's band led the way, and there was no alternative but for the more prudent to assist them or see them perish. The first was of course adopted, but the village