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THE LOST BRIDE.

A LEGEND OF THE WHITE MOUNTAINS.

By Mrs. Sarah J. Hale.

Concluded from page 122.

Some there were, who tried to dissuade the young husband from the attempt to recover his bride by force; as the savages, they averred always murdered their prisoners when attacked. They told him it would be best to send a messenger to the Mohawks, who would, doubtless, disclaim all knowledge of the violence which had probably been perpetrated by some stragglers from their tribe, and negotiate for the release or ransom of the captive.

Robert's blood chilled at the suggestion that his rashness might accelerate the death of his wife; but the negotiation for her ransom would be uncertain and the period of her release might be distant. He thought that she could not long survive in captivity; and he hoped to surprise her captors unawares, free her, clasp her to his heart, and hear her sweet voice pronounce his name as her deliverer. As the picture brightened beneath his fancy, he started from his seat and rushed out to see if the morning light might not be discovered. It soon dawned; and completely equipped, the Indian, with his musket and tomahawk, and Robert with a double-barrelled gun, sword, and plenty of ammunition, and each carrying a pack containing provisions and restoratives for Mary, they set off on an expedition fraught undoubtedly with more real perils than the adventures of many proud knights, whose deeds are recorded in historic legends, and emblazoned in the scutcheons of their descendants.

The adventurers entered the deep forest, and, guided by the traces of the retreating Indians, pressed forward, at first, with all the speed they could urge. But Mendowit soon checked his rapid pace, and represented to Robert that the two Mohawks were perhaps scouts from a large party; and that caution must be used, or they might unawares be caught in an ambush. Robert's impatience would never have submitted to this curb could he by any means, have avoided it; but as he could not quicken the pace of Mendowit, he was compelled to conform to it.

Cautiously, therefore, they journeyed on through the old woods, where a civilized being had never before voluntarily ventured. All was silence, save when, at long intervals, the cry of some solitary bird broke on the ear with startling shrillness; or, perhaps, a rustling among the dry branches made the wanderers pause in breathless silence, till a deer, bounding across their path, would plunge into the opposite thicket; while they did not dare to send a bullet after him, lest the report of their guns should alarm the enemy, who might even then be lurking close beside them.

There was, during the pursuit, a fearful apprehension, an undefinable horror on the heart and mind of Robert, far more terrible than the grief he would have felt had he known that Mary was no more. The tortures she might be forced to undergo, haunted his imagination till every sound seemed to warn him to hasten to her relief; and the delays and obstructions which were constantly occurring, made his blood boil with a fury he could scarcely control. His impatience greatly surprised Mendowit, who with all the philosophic calmness of a sage, would take his own time to examine the traces of their fleeing foes, calculate the distance they had gained, and the probable time they should overtake them. This would have been soon accomplished had the Mohawks proceeded straight forward. But, as if anticipating pursuit, these Indians were continually practising to elude it. They would often

trace back their own footsteps, like the doublings of a fox; and when following the course of a river, travel in the water, and cross and re-cross at places which no skill save the sagacity of a red man could have discovered.

These subtle movements convinced Mendowit that there was no large body of Indians at hand; and on the morning of the fourth day he announced that they should soon see the captive. They were approaching the Mountains, and Mendowit was eager to overtake the Indians before they entered the defile which led to the Notch. By the foot prints they ascertained that Mary did not walk, probably could not; and Robert shuddered and clenched his gun with a convulsive grasp, as, at each step, his eye searched around in every penetrable direction, dreading to meet a confirmation of his fears: yet the sight of her mangled corpse would scarcely have added to his heart's agony.

The weather, which ever since they had left Dover, and, indeed, for some time before, had been extremely dry, and hot, now suddenly changed; and they seemed transported to another region. Thick, black masses of clouds enveloped the mountains, and soon covered the whole horizon, and the darkness of night came down at once. Then the wind suddenly rose, and at intervals swept onward with the force of a tornado. It required no effort of the imagination to fancy that the old woods were trembling with the apprehension of some terrible calamity. The trunks of the largest trees quivered, and their lofty heads were bent almost to the ground, as the "mountain wind went sounding by," from a chasm far more awful than the "Roncesvalles strait."

"We must return," said Mendowit, pausing. "We cannot overtake them. The secret path of Agiocochook, Mendowit must not tread."

"You must," returned Robert, sternly, mistaking the cause of his guide's reluctance; "but you need not fight. Only show me the Mohawks, and be there two hundred instead of two, I will rescue Mary."

He was interrupted by a flash of lightning, so vivid that, for a moment, the mountains and their recesses were all revealed; their high heads that reached upward to the heavens; their yawning chasms and deep gullies; the huge rocks, some fixed as earth's foundations, and others apparently suspended in air, ready to topple on the heads of those beneath; the dark trees, their roots and fibres twisted, like serpents, amid the precipices, over which they were bending, and, as it were, clinging for safety. A tremendous peal of thunder followed, its roar shook the earth, and its echoes reverberated through the pent air with a deafening noise. It seemed to have rent the clouds, for in a moment after the rain burst in torrents.

It was vain to attempt moving forward, while the wind and rain beat so furiously; Robert asked his guide where they could shelter. Mendowit pointed to the west side of the mountain, near which they stood, and began hastily to ascend. Robert followed. The path was perilous, and required much caution: but the Indian seemed well acquainted with the way, and easily surmounted the difficulties till he reached a kind of cavern in the side of a precipice, which they both entered in safety.

They were now safe from the peltings of the storm, but not from its uproar. It seemed as if the elements of air, fire and water were allowed to wreak their fury on the shrinking and quaking earth. The lightning that blazed in one continued glare; the rolling of the thunder, that shook, to their foundation, these everlasting hills; the rain, that did not fall in drops, but poured in streams from the black clouds; the howling of the wind, as it raved from the narrow passes, or filled the hollow chasms; the frequent and loud crash of falling rocks and trees—all united

to give to the scene an awful sublimity, which the aroused soul could feel, but no language can ever communicate or describe.

Amid this wreck of matter, and what seemed as it were, the crush of worlds, Robert heeded not his own danger; he only thought of his young and tender bride. At every fresh burst of the tempest, "Oh, where is Mary now?" came over his heart till his knees smote together, and large drops of sweat started on his pale forehead. Then he would rush to the narrow entrance of the cell with clenched hands, and look abroad to see if there was any abatement of the storm; and then, in despair, he would seek the furthest gloom of the cavern, throw himself down on the damp rock, close his eyes, and struggle to banish all thought from his mind.

Thus passed the hours till after midnight, when during a pause of the wind, a strange sound was heard. It was not like a shriek or cry from any human voice, or the yell or moan from a wild beast; it was a deep, dismal sound, an unearthly tone, thrilling the listener like the warning call from some perturbed spirit.

Robert started on his feet. A bright flash of lightning showed him Mendowit rising from his recumbent posture; his hands were falling powerless by his side, and his face expressed an internal agitation and terror which a red man rarely exhibits.

"It is the voice of the Abamocho," said the Indian, in a tone that evidently trembled. "I have heard it once before. He calls for a victim."

"Who is he?" demanded Robert, unsheathing his sword.

"He is the spirit of the dark land!" said Mendowit, shrinking down as if to hide himself from some dreaded object. "He rules over these mountains; he comes in the storm, and none whom he marks for destruction can escape him."

Robert's whole soul had been so engrossed with the idea of Mary, and how to rescue her, that scarce a thought or care for any other human being had entered his mind since he left Dover. The appalling noise he had just heard, and Mendowit's singular manner, now aroused his curiosity, and he enquired of Mendowit why he was so moved at the idea of approaching Agiocochook.

Mendowit, after heaving a deep sigh, thus replied:—"These mountains belong to the evil spirit, Abamocho. This spirit always favors the Mohawks. It was to make them a path, when they were fleeing before the arrows of Tookenchosen, the great sachem of the Massachusetts, that he rent the mountains asunder. The evil spirit sat on a rock; on the highest peak of the mountain. He beckoned the Mohawks to pass by, laying his hand on his breast. They obeyed, and went through the pass in safety. But when Tookenchosen would have followed, the evil spirit threw his arms abroad, and great stones and trees were hurled upon the warriors, till all perished except the chief.

"This was many, many moons before the white men came; but none of our warriors dared venture to Agiocochook to bring away the bones of the slain. At last my father was sachem of the Massachusetts. He was a great chief. His tribe was more numerous than the leaves of the summer forest. A thousand warriors followed his steps; he said he would bring back the bones of his fathers. He called his young men; he took me that I might learn the paths of the woods. I was a child then: I could not bend a warrior's bow—but they went not to fight."

Mendowit paused; and Robert knew by the low tones of his voice, as the sentence died away, that recollections of other years pressed sadly on his mind. After a few moments of deep silence, he resumed: