

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

CHAPTER I

My ear is open, and my heart prepared ;
The worst is worldly loss thou canst unfold ;—
Say, is my kingdom lost ?

Shakespeare

It was a feature peculiar to the colonial wars of North America, that the toils and dangers of the wilderness were to be encountered before the adverse hosts could meet in murderous contact. A wide, and apparently an impervious boundary of forests, severed the possessions of the hostile provinces of France and England. The hardy colonists and the trained European who fought at his side, frequently expended months in struggling against the rapids of the streams, or in effecting the rugged passes of the mountains, in quest of an opportunity to exhibit their courage in a more martial conflict. But, emulating the patience and self-denial of the practised native warriors, they learned to overcome every difficulty ; and it would seem, that in time, there was no recess of the woods so dark, nor any secret place so lonely, that it might claim exemption from the inroads of those who had pledged their blood to satiate their vengeance, or to uphold the cold and selfish policy of the distant monarchs of Europe.

Perhaps no district, throughout the wide extent of the intermediate frontiers, can furnish a livelier picture of the cruelty and fierceness of the savage warfare of those periods than the country which lies between the head waters of the Hudson and the adjacent lakes.

The facilities which nature had there offered to the march of the combatants were too obvious to be neglected. The lengthened sheet of the Champlain stretched from the frontiers of Canada, deep within the borders of the neighbouring province of New York, forming a natural passage across half the distance that the French were compelled to master in order to strike their enemies. Near its southern termination it received the contributions of another lake, whose waters were so limpid as to have been exclusively selected by the Jesuit missionaries to perform the typical