

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE STAKE

IT was on the evening of the fifth day after her capture by the Indians that Ethel Hardy rode into a wide valley in the heart of the mountains. It was entered by a narrow gorge, through which ran a stream. Beyond this the hill receded, forming a nearly circular basin a mile in diameter, from the sides of which the rocks ascended almost perpendicularly, so that the only means of entering it was through the gorge. Clumps of trees were scattered everywhere about, and nearly in the centre stood a large Indian village, numbering about three hundred lodges, the population of which, consisting almost entirely of women and children, came out with shrill cries of welcome to meet the returning band. This was two hundred strong. Before them they drove about four hundred cattle and fifteen hundred sheep. In the midst of the band Ethel Hardy rode, apparently unwatched, and forming part of it.

The girl was very pale, and turned even more so at the wild yells of triumph which rose around her, when those who had been left behind learned how signal had been the success of their warriors, and heard that the captive in their midst was one of the family which had inflicted such terrible loss upon