

CHAPTER XXX.

O! let me only breathe the air,
The blessed air that's breathed by thee;
And whether on its wings it bear
Healing or death, 'tis sweet to me!

MOORE.

PATHFINDER was accustomed to solitude; but, when the Scud had actually disappeared, he was almost overcome with a sense of his loneliness. Never before had he been conscious of his isolated condition in the world; for his feelings had gradually been accustoming themselves to the blandishments and wants of social life; particularly as the last were connected with the domestic affections. Now, all had vanished, as it might be, in one moment; and he was left equally without companions, and without hope. Even Chingachgook had left him, though it was but temporarily; still his presence was missed at the precise instant which might be termed the most critical in our hero's life.

Pathfinder stood leaning on his rifle, in the attitude described in the last chapter, a long time after the Scud had disappeared. The rigidity of his limbs seemed permanent; and none but a man accustomed to put his muscles to the severest proof, could have maintained that posture, with its marble-like inflexibility, for so great a length of time. At length he moved away from the spot; the motion of the body being preceded by a sigh that seemed to heave up from the very depths of his bosom.

It was a peculiarity of this extraordinary being, that his senses and his limbs, for all practical purposes, were never at fault, let the mind be preoccupied with other interests as much as it might. On the present occasion neither of these great auxiliaries failed him; but, though his thoughts were exclusively occupied with Mabel, her beauty, her preference