

A MODERN MYSTIC.—XIII.

THE drive from Mowat's Rancho to Willow Bunch is most interesting. The first hills which we passed on the right are without a rival for ranching purposes. At Willow Bunch we visited Mr. Legaré's house and his fine cheese factory; we also saw the little hut which is called the police barracks. The four or five policemen here sleep in tents and tie the horses to the top rail of a fence. A large number of the half-breeds came in to see one of the party. We saw a fine herd belonging to the Franco-Canadian Cattle Company. The next day we started for Wood Mountain, driving nearly the whole time through a vast valley in the heart of Wood Mountain, which might feed the cattle of a score of ranchers. Arrived at the Wood Mountain post we had an opportunity of contrasting the trim though still modest quarters of the present day with the post of the past, a post which has a history in connection with Sitting Bull. Here Major Walsh and a few policemen had entrenched themselves against the great band of warriors who had destroyed the Seventh Cavalry under the gallant but fool-hardy Custer—the Custer massacre—and who had fled across the border from the vengeance of the United States.

Sitting Bull had no intention of doing any harm. He was not a general or a warrior but a wily statesman, and all he was anxious about was the reception he would get in British territory. Major Walsh could not know this, nor M. Louis Legaré. Mr. Legaré who negotiated the surrender of Sitting Bull displayed great diplomatic qualities which the United States have recognized. Most captivating is it to hear him tell (he had then a store at Wood Mountain) how the dusky warriors swarmed on the rising ground to the south; how the teepees rose in an order not without beauty, though perhaps falling short in numbers and in whiteness—those tents which entranced the eyes of Balaam as he stood on one of the high places of Moab: "How beautiful are thy tents, O Israel!" But they made a large and formidable Indian village or town. In the evening four Indians, armed to the teeth, walked into his house and sat down, without saying a word, their dark, furtive eyes gleaming like fire as the shades of night deepened. Mr. Legaré, who knows the Indian character well, never spoke a word to them. There they sat silent for some five hours. At last one said: "Um!" The other said: "Um!" Mr. Legaré returned the salute: "Um!" Then a conversation began in Sioux, of which he is master, and from that out he displayed the greatest coolness and judgment in dealing with them, for though Sitting Bull himself was pacific, an Indian chief has not always control over the young men—the braves.

All this delighted Gwendolen, and her "Diary" cannot fail to have been enriched by this trip. At the post there is little to be done, but two of our horses were somewhat "played," so we determined to remain a couple of days, the officer-in-command doing all he could to make it pleasant.

The second day was very hot. So we seated ourselves on the side of a vast hayrick. We were well sheltered from the sun and the bosky, beautiful valley lay before us. McKnom took out a volume of Plato; another of the party read *Æschylus*; another, one of Tolstoy's novels; and in fine we had settled ourselves down to a pleasant forenoon's reading, to be relieved by comment, or quirk of fancy, or any stray remark which association might suggest. For about a quarter of an hour we were as intent on our books as horses just got back to stable on their hay, when Captain Draynor came and said his duties for some short time were over; that he had been reading all about our discussions in *THE WEEK*, and that he had a question to propound to Mr. McKnom.

Just at this minute from behind one of the small timber buildings, a little to the right of where we sat, emerged a tall Indian woman, shapely withal, swarthy of course, and with a fine profile, which is not uncommon. "Little Child" had the face of a born leader of men and only that the jaw was too thickly set might have passed for a brother of Mr. Gladstone, who, when in his prime, had a countenance fuller of power than I ever saw before or since. This woman had an axe in her hand and she strode towards us. It may seem odd, but she brought vividly before me that awful scene in the Agammemnon where Clytemnestra comes out stained with the blood of the warrior—her husband—the Conqueror of Troy, and avows to the horror-stricken nobles of Argos the terrible deed: I involuntarily repeated a translation made in my schoolboy days of that blood-curdling speech:—

If now I unsay all I said erewhile,
No shame I feel. What shame should red his brow
Who plots a foeman 'gainst a foe? With smile
Of treacherous friendship let him make his snare
Too high to overleap. For me, for many years
With patient purpose I prepared for this—
To strive for victory. The wrestle came
At last. I stand where I struck; the deed is done
Beyond undoing; and so contrived
(This will I also own) there could not be
Resistance or escape. I set a net
Unpassable, as fishermen place round
A shoal, a rich robe deadly dyed. I smote
Him twice, and twice he shrieked; then
Down he sank,
And fallen so I gave him yet a stroke,
A votive offering to the nether god,
To Hades, Keeper dim of mortals' dead,
And there he lay and gasped away his soul,
And, spitting forth the swift sharp gush of blood,
He rained a dark and gory dew on me,
Me who rejoiced not less than corn-sown lands

When God's rich gift of blessed rain pours down,
The stalk shoots high and from the labouring sheath
The full ear gladly bursts. Since thus it stands,
Ye Argive nobles here be glad of it,
If well ye can. For me I glory in
The deed, and were libation fit above
A corpse, then were it justly poured, aye more
Than justly here; for he hath fill'd with ills
For his own home the direful cup accurs'd
Which, home-return'd, he drained.

Irene: "She was a nice woman—Lady Macbeth was weak compared with her."

The speech had an effect on the Indian woman, like to that which a dramatic recitation has on very young, bright children. She stood erect, motionless, attentive, the axe in her right hand, the embodiment of the monologue line in the above speech, where Clytemnestra's own horror of her deed comes out:—

I stand here where I struck; the deed is done
Beyond undoing.

Captain Draynor who is literary and musical, and an accomplished gentleman, but who yet knows as much about *Æschylus* as *Apollo* about the modern goose step, said:—

"Mr. McKnom, when I was at Regina, we had a bet one night respecting evil genius. We say, 'as my good genius,' or, 'as my evil genius would have it'—and we bet that the idea was Persian, and we decided to write to you. Can you tell me where it originated?"

McKnom: "The idea is undoubtedly Eastern, but to locate its origin you must refer to some man very much more learned than I could pretend to be. Plato undoubtedly held that there was a presiding power allotted to each man at his birth. That is evident from his own writings and from those of the Neo-Platonists."

Captain Draynor asked whether the young ladies sang, and on learning that they did he fetched a violin, and we had a few songs from each of the ladies; a couple of duets and a comic song from the Captain, which made the time pass pleasantly away. I know not what it was—whether the delightful air, or the wild scenery around, or the associations of the place—but as Irene and Gwendolen warbled to the Captain's accompaniment—he is a most skilful and adaptable musician—and Madame Lalage joining in at fit moments—we all seemed wrapt in a kind of ecstasy as if we had, on some happy summer day, been transported to Thracian wilds, and listened to the nightingales, born above the tomb of Orpheus, sing. I could not help noticing how Helpsam's gaze rested on Irene, and how when her very soul seemed borne aloft on the wings of her voice, her eyes would turn to where he lay. This was the solitary cloud in the joyous hour, which—so full, so clear, so pure, so far from everything sordid and worldly—seemed to enclose and over-canopy us, vast, beautiful, perfect as the blue heavens resting on the surrounding hills.

After lunch, at which we were the guests of the hospitable Captain, we again went to the haystack, and choosing another side, so as to be in the shade, began to talk of the future of the Dominion of Canada, and McKnom, Helpsam, Hale, Rectus, even Glaucus, all said, having got a glimpse of the great North-West, never again would they harbour for a moment a craven doubt as to the destiny of Canada.

"Good heavens!" said McKnom, rising from his place and looking east and west and north and south, "What might not this country do if Platonic principles prevailed! The wretched doubts which we hear at times—the want of certainty which we too surely see—the absence of elevation—the mediocrity in thought and phrase and aim—if there were *thumos*—a high and noble and courageous enthusiasm—these whisperings and wailings would be hushed. In such a country, what do people mean by discussing the future, helplessly forecasting what may happen? Let them go and act and make a great nation. If Canadians fail to make this country great, powerful, free, a blessing and a wonder to the world, history will write them down as dastards, such as never before have proved themselves unworthy of high opportunities. You want enthusiasm to create enthusiasm. Leading is everything. Great things have been done. That C.P.R. is a great work. But it is a purely material work, and greater works are yet before us. The greatest of all can only be done on Platonic principles. As in the man the *nous*, the reason, the intellect should be supreme. So, only, by having intellect supreme in a people can you make it feel the sense of oneness; give it unity, fusion, harmony, a single purpose. You may paint a piece of basswood to look like a loadstone, but it won't draw a needle to it, and you may dress and paint a cord to look like wire, but it won't bring down the fire from heaven. What is it distinguishes man from the beasts? Mainly the power of incarnating his thought in expression. In fact, he himself cannot know his thought, and, of course, it cannot be revealed to others until he has thus incarnated it, and in all nations not dead—in all nations and in young nations especially—there are great thoughts, great hopes, great desires, great resources of power—of moral power, the greatest force which has yet appeared in this world—all this must get expression or the nation languishes.

McKnom usually so calm delivered himself of the rhapsody with something like excitement.

Glaucus, who did not know whether to give way to the Trave of earnestness, to use a phrase of his own, or to be amused, said:—

"How excited they used to get in their discussions in Alexandria. Was it the Coptic blood or the air or their syncretistic philosophy, or was it that they sought knowledge rather from vanity than a love of truth?"

This was all McKnom wanted. Down he sat, drew his forefinger and thumb twice down his nose, stroked back the grey flowing locks which escaped beneath his broad-brimmed cowboy hat, a compliance with Western civilization to which we had with difficulty persuaded him, and thus began:—

But before he is suffered to proceed the reader will be dying to know how we were placed. McKnom was sitting with his back to the haystack. On his right sat Madame Lalage and at her feet reclined one of the party. Near her was Irene, and Helpsam as a matter of course was near Irene. On the left of the sage was Gwendolen and Rectus studying her countenance with as much zeal as if it was a Blue Book, or the statistical volume issued annually by Mr. Carling, a species of light literature of which he is passionately fond. Dr. Facile was not far off but looking as solemn as if he had in the morning swallowed the whole Westminster Confession, and had but indifferently digested it. Immediately in front was Glaucus wearing that peculiar expression of countenance wherein is blended a superior pity for all the world, a sort of hall mark or cachet which stamps the true Oxford man. The rest lay around.

McKnom: "Alexandria—"

Before he could utter another word Mr. Lalage said: "Well Helen, upon my honour, I think it is too bad that you had not forethought to have packed up a couple of hampers of wine."

Madame Lalage: "Why my dear is not this air all the wine anybody could desire. I never experienced anything more exhilarating; 'the pure juice of the grape,' as poor Captain Brewer, when we came on deck in mid-Atlantic, used to say the sea air was."

Glaucus: "What would you have Lalage?"

Lesbian or potent Massie
Cecuban or choice Setine,
Such as gladdened old feasts classic,
Making Pontiffs feel divine?

Then, turning to McKnom:—

Were you wiser than old Thales,
Strong Falernian you might mix,
Drink the wine from press of Cales,

Madame Lalage: "But he'd die ere ninety-six."

Glaucus: "That is better than the way I intended to clench it."

Irene: "Was Thales so old?"

Glaucus: "Yes; he never married."

Gwendolen: "Wise man."

Glaucus: "When his mother urged him to marry he would say he was over young to marry yet, and when he got between seventy and eighty he used to say he was too old, for that if he did he would be sure to marry sweet-sixteen."

Gwendolen: "No wonder he was enrolled among the seven wise men of Greece."

Hale: "I think the old heathen added—I forget where I found this—that when a man of seventy marries a girl of sixteen he courts the kitten and lives with the cat."

Madame Lalage (who married young): "Ungallant! Thales never said it. That is an invention of Hale's" (giving voice to the 'e').

Hale: "Madame you flatter me."

Glaucus: "Were I Thales I should have said the same; it is pointed if not true."

Irene: "O Mr. McKnom, what would Plato say to all this?"

McKnom: "There are times when a little nonsense does no harm; he would be amused as I am. We are all apt to abuse freedom."

We again laughed, for it was well known that Mrs. Glaucus was a great man-woman, full of life, energy and will, and with a waist to which all the skill of Olympus could not have fitted the girdle of Venus.

Madame Lalage (addressing Glaucus): "Well, you will never be included among the seven wise men of Canada."

Glaucus: "You console me."

Madame Lalage: "Were you vain enough to have fears?"

Glaucus: "I have ears, and in the march of evolution there is no saying to what length they may go."

Madame Lalage (laughing): "You deserve to have them well reddened."

Glaucus: "If I submitted to painting at all I should in the matter of locality imitate the leaders of fashion among your sex."

Madame Lalage: "A libel—a libel."

Glaucus: "Yes, it is a legal maxim, 'the greater the truth the greater the libel.'"

Madame Lalage: "I think it would be to your credit now if you even painted a blush."

Glaucus: "That would be as easy as for some of the leaders I have in my eye to turn pale."

McKnom: "This is all very excellent fooling; I see you are in no mood to continue our chat on Neo-Platonism."

Glaucus: "Well, sir, we beg your pardon."

McKnom: "Will you permit me to tell you a story?"

Dr. Facile: "Before Mr. McKnom commences I wish to point out something in regard to Party Government. Can you say it is a failure when it has done so much for this young country?"

Madame Lalage: "O well let us have Mr. McKnom's story."

The story was very amusing but it must be reserved for another chapter.

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