

The Poet's Corner.

Finish Thy Work.

Finish thy work—the time is short—
The sun is in the west
The night is coming down—till then
Think not of rest.
Finish thy work; then welcome rest;
Till then, rest never;
The rest prepared for thee by God
Is rest forever.
Finish thy work; then wipe thy brow;
Ungird thee from thy toil;
Take breath, and from each weary limb
Shake off the soil.
Finish thy work; then sit thee down,
On some celestial hill,
And of its strength reviving air
Take thou thy fill.
Finish thy work; then go in peace;
Life's battle fought and won;
Hear from the throne the Master's voice:
"Well done! Well done!"
Finish thy work; then take thy harp;
Give praise to God above;
Sing a new song of mighty joy
And endless love.
Give thanks to Him Who holds thee up,
In all thy paths below;
Who holds thee faithful unto death,
And crowns thee now.

Unlocking the Shackles.

A STORY OF A FRONTIERMAN.

The sun was just setting, at the close of a long hot day in June, when Ernest Black and myself drove our wagons up to the bank of Red River, on the Indian territory side. We were hauling freight for the United States Government, and were on our way to Texas for a load.

We signalled the ferryman, living on the Texas side, and as soon as he came over, began to cross. The boat was too small to put over both wagons at once, so I crossed first, and came back to assist Ernest.

He had two heavy boxes, which had always to be held in a ferry boat, and it sometimes took both of us to do so.

Just as the ferry boat neared the Chickasaw Nation side, a large, powerful horse, but evidently nearly exhausted came into view around a bend in the road, with a double burden on his back. A young man of noble appearance, but looking very weary and harassed, rode in front; behind, a beautiful girl, nearly white, but with sufficient Indian blood showing through the clear skin to add a piquant charm to the features.

They rode up to the wagon, and the young man without dismounting, spoke to Ernest:

"Sir, I am a white man, and some days since had a quarrel with another, in which, unfortunately, he was accidentally shot. I am pursued by his brothers, who are close behind, and who have sworn to kill me on sight. I ask your help to cross the river, if possible, unseen."

"Why do they—" began Ernest, but the stranger cut him short.

"Time presses, sir; you must answer yes or no. If not, I dislike to shed blood; but if I am too closely pursued, I will." And the gleaming of the blue eyes finished the sentence.

Ernest took another look at the open, manly face, which, whatever might be written there, showed no trace of crime.

Then he spoke, and fast, for the tramping of horses' feet, rapidly approaching, could now be heard.

"I suppose you wish to take the lady with you? Get into the wagon and under the wagon sheet, which you will find there loose. I will hide your horse in the bushes."

The young man dismounted, assisted of the girl who was riding behind him, and did as directed, cowering down in the bottom of the wagon.

After depositing the sheet so as to as if it had only been carelessly thrown in, Ernest led the horse a short distance from the road, and after taking off saddle and bridle, turned him loose and returned to his team.

I had witnessed the scene from the boat which by this time had reached the bank, and the wagon drove in. After giving the ferryman a caution to silence, Ernest turned to me:

"I may be helping a fugitive from justice to escape, but I will risk it. Loose the boat and put off, Beecher," he added, to the ferryman.

At this moment, however, a pair of horses, covered with dust and sweat came round the turn in the road, and their riders drew rein at the river side. They were two powerful, evil looking fellows, with belts stuffed full of revolvers and a rifle across the pommel of each saddle.

The elder looking one of the two addressed Ernest:

"Have you seen anything of a man and a woman on one horse anywhere here?"

As he spoke, his eyes roamed to the wagon and the sheet in it, and both men dismounted.

"Why, what do you want of them?" asked Ernest.

"He has killed a man in the Choctaw Nation, and is trying to get away, the woman with him, and I want to arrest him. If you help him to get away it will be the worse for you. I believe he is under that sheet, anyhow."

And he stepped on to the ferry boat. The other remained on the bank, with

his hand on a pistol, ready to assist his brother.

The one on the boat approached the wagon, and was about to raise the sheet when Ernest, with his eyes gleaming dangerously, spoke to him:

"This wagon is in the employ of the United States Government, and no one but a regularly authorized official can search it."

The fellow, however, persisted; but as he laid his hand on the sheet a well directed blow from Ernest felled him.

The one on the bank started to draw his revolver, but before he could do so I had him covered. One learns to be quick with the pistol on the frontier, where a man's life may depend on his getting the drop on some ruffian.

The ferryman, terrified at the scene before him, had remained quiet, but now, at a sign from Ernest, pushed the boat from the bank.

Ernest, keeping the prostrate man covered with his pistol, spoke to the one left behind:

"I shall take your companion with us, as a hostage for your good conduct. If you shoot after us, he suffers. Remember."

We crossed the river without accident, the baffled ruffian on the bank making the air resound with curses. When we reached the Texas side, Ernest turned to me:

"Frank, drive my wagon up the bank to where yours is, while I see this fellow back across the river. Beecher, take your skiff and row him over; he will hardly hurt you. If he tries, I will put a bullet through him."

After seeing his captive into the skiff, first discharging all his weapons, he spoke to the now cowed man:

"When you get to the other side, stand on the bank till the boat returns. If you attempt to get into the bushes, or try any other treachery, I will shoot you."

The ferryman put him across the river and returned, and Ernest came up the bank to where the wagons were. Meanwhile had driven up the hill and relieved the occupants of the wagon from their uncomfortable cowering.

They were nearly smothered, but had made no movement till I was safe.

The young man jumped to the ground, and with a simple grasp of the hand and the earnest words, "I thank you both," assisted his companion out.

Ernest now came up, and to him the stranger turned:

"I owe you my life, and if ever I can in some measure pay so great a debt, trust me I shall not be wanting."

"I am glad to have been of service to you," said Ernest, simply. "I think you are safe for the night. There is no other ferry within about twenty miles, and they will not cross any one after night. Red River is too high to swim over. If you remain with us to-night, we can make the lady a bed in the wagon, and the rest of us must take the ground. You can tell us, then, how you managed to get into this scrape."

After some further discussion, it was arranged, and we went into camp. Supper over, and the horses staked off, the young lady retired to one of the wagons, while the rest of us, at some little distance, reclined on the blankets and saddles, guarded by our faithful dog. Nothing could come within a hundred yards of the camp without his giving us warning.

Then the stranger, whose name was Henderson, gave us an account of how he happened to come to the river in such a plight:

"Some months since, I was in the Chickasaw Nation, buying up cattle, when I became acquainted with a Mr. Williams, who had married and settled among the Indians. I found it convenient to go very often to his house—about cattle, I persuaded myself at first; but I soon had to acknowledge that the attraction was his daughter Lily, the young lady who is with me. She is only an eighth Indian, well educated; and as to her beauty, you can see for yourself. She soon began to look with favor on me, and I asked her of her father. He was willing, and we were engaged."

"But there were three sons of the old man by a former marriage with a white woman, who hated me from the start. I think they had hoped to get possession of Lily's property, but knew that if I married her there would be little chance of that. Matters went on, however. I was too happy to care much for them, although they became more unbearable from day to day. They bore no good reputation in the country, and I was warned against them more than once."

"Three days ago the explosion came. I was walking with Lily, when the youngest of the three met us, and after a few insulting words accused me of dishonorable conduct."

"It was more than I could stand, and I sprang toward him to strike him. He attempted to draw a pistol, but I closed with him and tried to take it away. In the struggle the pistol went off, and he was shot dead. I stood for a moment, stunned with horror, when Lily's voice roused me."

"Oh, fly! fly! The others will kill you when they see you. They will swear it was no accident!"

"Not much of an accident. I saw the whole thing, and he shall swing for it," said a voice behind me.

"I turned, and there stood one of the other brothers, with levelled rifle bearing directly on me. I attempted to speak, but he would not allow it."

"March straight to the house, and if you try to get away I'll kill you like a dog. I would shoot you now, but for the pleasure of having you hung."

"My own protestations, and Lily's tears and entreaties, were of no avail; and to avoid immediate violence, I thought it best to comply. On the way to the house we were joined by the other brother, and after a few words in son language unknown to me, they both hurried me on. The old man was not at home when we reached the house, and after another consultation they chained me securely, and then made preparation for a journey."

"As I gathered from hints (purposely let drop), they intended to take me to Fort Smith to be tried. I did not exactly see the object of this, since, if the case were once brought to trial, I could easily be cleared by Lily's evidence."

"After sending some of their servants to bring in the body, they mounted me on a horse, tied my hands behind me, and with one riding before the other behind, we set out."

"Lily begged to be allowed to go, but they refused. It was a lonely country where Mr. Williams lived—no houses within twenty miles—or she would have gone for help to stop them."

"The first day's travel passed without incident. My captors were taciturn, saying nothing to me and but little to each other. At night they loosed my hands sufficiently to let me eat, which was a little more than I expected; but after supper my hands and feet were securely chained, the chain carried around a tree and fastened with a padlock. The next morning our journey was resumed. We had reached the Kin-matis Mountains, over which we were going by a bridge path—a wild, desolate and a fit place for a deed of crime. I began to fear, from the looks and words which passed from one to the other, that I would never reach Fort Smith. It would be an easy matter to kill me, cast my body down into some one of the ravines which we were constantly crossing, and invent some plausible excuse for my disappearance."

"As night came on they frequently stopped and held consultations with each other, casting the while glances of mingled hate and triumph upon me. It was easy enough to tell the meaning of this; but even if I had condescended to entreaties it would have been of no avail. Let my fate be what it might, I must meet it in silence. Many were the thoughts which passed through my mind on that hurried ride, but it is needless to dwell on them."

"The night of the second day we camped on the edge of an old field, grown over with brown grass. The same precautions were taken as on the previous night, and soon my captors were wrapped in slumber. I knew that in all probability it was my last night on earth, any many conflicting emotion filled my mind, driving away sleep. But chiefly I thought of Lily, my prairie flower, left to the mercy of these rade men."

"About midnight my meditations were interrupted by a soft rustle behind me in the bushes; but before I could speak or make a motion, a voice whose music I never expected to hear on earth again, said, 'Hush!' and in a moment Lily was beside me. Then with her arms around me, her lips close to my ear, she told that she had overheard her brothers talk of killing me on the way, being afraid to do so at home; had caught two of her own horses (the best in the country), and had followed with the hope of rescuing me."

"She had a key which she thought would open the padlock fastening the chain that held me. The padlock was one of the spring kind, with the key, a simple slip at the bottom. The key is a plain, flat bar, with various indentations in it to fit the ward of the lock, and simply pressing on it the lock flies open."

"Lily tried the key, but it would not fit. As I could see by the moonlight an expression of dismay flitted over her face, and she pressed her hands to her head as if to think. As for me, I had so long given up all hope of life, that I sat in silence, awaiting what she would do, unable to any suggestions. Then, with the murmured words, 'It might do,' she left me for a moment, going into the old field. Then she returned, bringing a handful of brown grass with her. Selecting a twig of thistle of just sufficient diameter to fill the slit in the bottom of the lock, she thrust it in perpendicularly as far as it would go, breaking it off a quarter of an inch from the lock. She did this with other staves, until the whole key-hole was full, breaking them off evenly on the outside, though of course the inside ends fitted into the wards of the lock. Then she pressed on all the ends, and the lock flew open—so quietly that not a link rattled."

"Lily unwound the chain, and I was once more free. We started for the horses, but unfortunately had gone but a few feet when I stepped on a dry stick,

which broke with a loud crack. Lily's brothers were tight sleepers, and they awoke immediately. Not seeing me, they rushed after me and thither in search, and just as we reached the horses one of them caught a glimpse of us and fired. The ball struck Lily's horse and killed it. In a moment I had seated her behind me, and concealment being no longer possible, rode away at full speed."

"They saddled and came hard after us. We kept our distance; but on account of the double burden which our horse carried, were never able to get far out of hearing, while they followed with a persistence worthy of a better cause. Not daring to stop in the Indian territory among the Chickasaw Nation, I rode straight for the river, which I fortunately reached just in time to meet you and baffle them. Our horse, good as he was, was nearly exhausted, and could not have carried us much further. Thanks to you, I hope we are safe now."

The story was ended, and we were soon asleep. In the morning we took Herndon and Miss Lily to the railroad, where they took the train for Fort Smith."

We received a letter from him afterwards. He stood his trial, came out clear, and married Miss Lily. The Williams boys were soon afterwards both killed in a drunken frolic, ending in a fight."

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