

fainter and more distinct, and finally were lost in the depths of the forest.

Hawk-eye waited until the signal from the listening Chingachgook assured him, that every sound from the retiring party was completely swallowed by the distance, when he motioned to Heyward to lead forth the horses, and to assist the sisters into their saddles. The instant this was done they issued through the broken gateway, and stealing out by a direction opposite to one by which they had entered, they quitted the spot, the sisters casting furtive glances at the silent grave and crumbling ruin, as they left the soft light of the moon, to bury themselves in the gloom of the woods.

CHAPTER XIV.

Guard.—Qui est la ?

Puc.—Paisans, pauvres gens de France.

KING HENRY VI.

During the rapid movement from the block-house, and until the party was deeply buried in the forest, each individual was too much interested in the escape, to hazard a word even in whispers. The scout resumed his post in the advance, though his steps, after he had thrown a safe distance between himself and his enemies, were more deliberate than in their previous march, in consequence of his utter ignorance of the localities of the surrounding woods. More than once he halted to consult his confederates, the Mohicans, pointing upwards at the moon, and examining the barks of trees with care. In these brief pauses, Heyward and the sisters listened, with senses rendered doubly acute by the danger, to detect any symptoms which might announce the proximity of their foes. At such moments, it seemed as if a vast range of country lay buried in eternal sleep, not the least sound arising from the forest, unless it was the distant and scarcely audible rippling of a water-course. Bird, beasts, and man appeared to slumber alike, if indeed, any of the latter were to be found in that wide tract of wilderness. But the sounds of the rivulet, feeble and murmuring as they were, relieved the guides at once from no trifling embarrassment, and towards it they immediately held their way.

When the banks of the little stream were gained, Hawk-eye made another halt; and, taking the moccasins from his feet, he invited Heyward and Gamut to follow his example. He then entered the water, and for near an hour they travelled in the bed of the brook, leaving no trail. The moon had already sunk into an immense pile of black clouds, which lay impending above the western horizon, when they issued from the low and devious water-course to rise again to the light and level of the sandy but wooded plain. Here the scout seemed to be once more at home, for he held on his way the certainty and diligence of a man who moved in the security of his own knowledge. The path soon became more uneven, and the travellers could plainly perceive that the mountains drew nigher to them on each hand, and that they were about entering one of their gorges. Suddenly, Hawk-eye made a pause, and waiting until he was joined by the whole party, he spoke, though in tones so low and cautious, that they added to the solemnity of his words, in the quiet and

darkness of the place.

"It is easy to know the pathways, and to find the licks and water-courses of the wilderness," he said; "but who that saw this spot could venture to say, that a mighty army was at rest among yonder silent trees and barren mountains?"

"We are then at no great distance from William Henry?" said Heyward advancing nigher to the scout.

"It is yet a long and weary path, and when and where to strike it, is now our greatest difficulty. See," he said, pointing through the trees towards a spot where a little basin of water reflected the stars from its placid bosom, "here is the 'bloody pond;' and I am on ground that I have not only often travelled, but over which I have fought the enemy, from the rising to the setting sun."

"Ha! that sheet of dull and dreary water, then, is the sepulchre of the brave men who fell in the contest. I have heard it named, but never have I stood on its banks before."

"Three battles did we make with the Dutch-Frenchman in a day," continued Hawk-eye, pursuing the train of his own thoughts, rather than replying to the remark of Duncan. "He met us hard by, in our outward march to ambush his advance, and scattered us, like driven deer through the defile to the shores of Horican. Then we rallied behind our fallen trees, and made head against him, under Sir William—who was made Sir William for that very deed; and well did we pay him for the disgrace of the morning. Hundreds of Frenchman saw the sun that day for the last time; and even their leader, Dieskau himself, fell into our hands, so cut and torn with the lead, that he has gone back to his own country, unfit for further acts in war."

"'Twas a noble repulse!" exclaimed Heyward in the heat of his youthful ardor; "the fame of it reached us early, in our southern army."

"Ah! but it did not end there. I was sent by Major Effingham, at Sir William's own bidding, to out-flank the French, and carry the tidings of their disaster across the portage, to the fort on the Hudson. Just hereaway, where you see the trees rise into a mountain swell, I met a party coming down to our aid, and I led them where the enemy were taking their meal, little dreaming that they had not finished the bloody work of the day."

"And you surprised them?"

"If death can be a surprise to men who are thinking only of the cravings of their appetites. We gave them but little breathing time, for they had borne hard upon us in the fight of the morning, and there were few in our party who had not lost a friend or relative by their hands. When all was over, the dead, and some say the dying, were cast into that little pond. These eyes have seen its waters colored with blood, as natural water never yet flowed from the bowels of the earth."

"It was a convenient, and, I trust, will prove a peaceful grave for a soldier. You have, then, seen much service on this frontier?"

"I!" said the scout, erecting his tall person with an air of military pride; "there are not many echoes among these hills that haven't rung with the crack of my rifle, nor is there the space

of a square mile atwixt Horican and the river, that 'Kill Deer' hasn't dropped a living body on, be it an enemy or be it a brute beast. As for the grave being as quiet as you mention, it is another matter. There are them in the camp who say and think, man, to lie still, should not be buried while the breath is in the body; and certain it is that in the hurry of that evening, the doctors had but little time to say who was living and who was dead. Hist! see you nothing walking on the shore of the pond?"

"'Tis not probable that any are as houseless as ourselves, in this dreary forest."

"Such as he may care but little for house or shelter, and night dew can never wet a body that passes its days in water," returned the scout, grasping the shoulder of Heyward with such convulsive strength as to make the young soldier painfully sensible how much superstitious terror had got the mastery of a man usually so dauntless.

"By heaven! there is a human form, and it approaches. Stand to your arms, my friends; for we know not whom we encounter."

"Qui vive?" demanded a stern, quick voice, which sounded like a challenge from another world, issuing out of that solitary and solemn place.

"What says it?" whispered the scout; "It speaks neither Indian nor English."

"Hui vive?" repeated the same voice, which was quickly followed by the rattling of arms, and a menacing attitude.

"France!" cried Heyward, advancing from the shadow of the trees to the shore of the pond, within a few yards of the sentinel.

"D'ou venez-vous—ou allez-vous, d'aussi bonne heure?" demanded the grenadier, in the language and with the accent of a man from old France.

"Je viens de la decouverte, et je vais me coucher."

"Etes-vous officier du roi?"

"Sans doute, mon camarade; me prends-tu pour un provincial. Je suis capitaine de chasseurs (Heyward well knew that the other was a regiment in the line)—j'ai ici, avec moi, les filles du commandant de la fortification. Aha! tu en as tendu parler! je les ai fait prisonnières pres de l'autre fort, et je les conduis au general."

"Ma foi! mesdames. j'en suis fache pour vous," exclaimed the young soldier, touching his cap with grace; "main—fortune de gueere! vous trouverez notre general un brave homme, et bien poli avec les dames."

"C'est le caractere des gens de guerre," said Cora, with admirable self-possession. "Adieu, mon ami; je vous souhaiterais un devoir plus agreable a remplir."

The soldier made a low and humble acknowledgement for her civility; and Heyward adding a "bonne nuit, mon camarade," they moved deliberately forward, leaving the sentinel pacing the banks of the silent pond, little suspecting an enemy of so much effrontery, and humming to himself those words, which were recalled to his mind by the sight of women, and perhaps by recollections of his own distant and beautiful France—

"Vive le vin, vive l'amour, etc., etc."

"'Tis well you understood the knave," whis-