

A LEGEND OF THE SILVER WAVE.

BY CAROLINE LEE HENTZ.

It was verging toward the evening of an autumnal day, in the year 1777. The forests began to assume the varied and magnificent tints peculiar to this season in an American climate—those rich, brilliant dyes, like the hectic glow on the cheek of consumption, which, while it deepens the charm and the interest of beauty, is yet the herald of decay. The prevailing hue was still of deep unfaded green; but the woods were girdled by a band of mingled scarlet, green and yellow, whose gorgeous rainbow-like colors might well be compared to the wampum belt of the Indian, tracing its bright outline on the dark ground-work of the aboriginal dress. These inimitable tints were reflected in that mirror which the children of the forests denominated the *Silver Wave*—known to us by the more familiar, but not less euphonious name, of the *Ohio*; but its bosom was not then covered with those floating palaces which now, winged by vapor, glide in beauty and power over the conscious stream. The bark canoe of the savage, or the ruder craft of the boatman, alone disturbed the silence of the solitary water. On the opposite bank, a rude fortification, constructed of fallen trees, rocks and earth, over which the American flag displayed its waving stripes, denoted the existence of a military band, in a region as yet uncultivated and but partially explored. Toward this fort a canoe was rapidly gliding, whose motions were watched by the young commander, as he traversed the summits of the parapet with a step which had long been regulated by the measured music of the 'ear-piercing fife and spirit-stirring drum.' The canoe approached to the shores and as Captain Stuart descended to receive his forest visitor, his eye, accustomed as it had been to the majestic lineaments of the savage chief, could not withhold its tribute of involuntary admiration, as they were now unfolded to him invested with all the pomp which marked his warlike tribe. He was indeed a noble representative of that interesting, but now degenerate race, once the sole possessors and lordly dwellers of the wilderness—now despoiled and wandering fugitives from the land chartered to them by the direct bounty of heaven. The gallant tuft of feathers which surmounted his swarthy brow, the wampum girdle which belted his waist, his deer-skin robe, ornamented with the stained ivory of the porcupine, corresponded well with the expression of his glittering eye and the proportions of his martial limbs. From the lofty glance of that eye, he had received the appellation of the Eagle; but the commander of the fort now hailed him by the name of Sakamaw, which simply signifies a chief.

'Brother,' said Sakamaw, as he leaned with stately grace on his unquivered bow, 'brother, will the pale man dwell in peace and friendship with the tribe of the Shawneese?—or shall the eagle spread its wings to the shore that lies nearer the setting sun? The Mengwe have sworn to obey the white Father, who lies far beyond the great Salt Lake: the Wolf and the Turtle have given their allegiance to him, and the Serpent and Buffalo rise up against the pale tribe that are dwelling in our wilderness. Sakamaw, the friend of the white man, comes to warn him of the snare; to know if the Eagle shall curl his talons beneath his folded plumes, or arm them with the war-bolt that shall find the heart of his enemy.'

It was not without the deepest emotion that Captain Stuart heard this intelligence, that the British army had received such powerful allies as these fierce and vindictive tribes. He felt that he occupied a perilous station; and notwithstanding the high trust he had always placed in Sakamaw, who was emphatically called the friend of the white man, as he looked upon the dark brow and giant frame of the Indian warrior, all that he had heard of the treachery and revenge of the tawny race, flashed upon his excited imagination. Captain Stuart was brave, but he was in arms against a foreign foe, who had stooped to the means of strengthening its powers by an alliance with the children of the wilderness, arming in its cause their wild, undisciplined passions, and adding all the horrors of border warfare to the desolation that hangs over the embattled field. He may be forgiven by the bravest if, for one moment, his generous blood was chilled by the tidings, and suspicion darkened the glance which he turned on the imperturbable features of the Eagle chief.

'Young man,' said the savage, pointing to the river, whose current was there quickened and swollen by the tributary waters of the Konawa, 'as the *Silver Wave* rolls troubled there by the stream that murmurs in its bosom, so does my blood chafe and foam, when its course is ruffled by passion and revenge. Feel my veins—they are calm. Look on my bosom—It is bare. Count the beatings of my heart, as it rises and falls, uncovered to the eye of the Master of life. Were Sakamaw about to do a treacherous deed, he would fold his blanket over his breast, that he might hide from the Great Spirit's view, the dark workings of his soul.'

'Forgive me, noble chief! exclaimed Stuart, extending his hand with military frankness and warmth; 'I do not distrust you: you have come to us unweaponed, and we are armed; you are alone, and we have the strength of a garrison; and more than all, you warn us of treachery and hostility on the part of other tribes, and bring us offers of continued peace from your own. I cannot—I do not doubt your faith; but as the rules of war require some pledge as a safeguard for honor, you will consent to remain a while as hostage here, secure of all the respect which brave soldiers can tender to one whose valor and worth have made the fame of this forest region.'

Sakamaw consented to this proposal with proud, unhesitating dignity, and turned to follow the young officer, whose cheek burned through the soldierly brown as he made the proposition, which military discipline required, but which he feared might be deemed an insult by the high-minded savage. Sakamaw cast his eyes for a moment on the opposite shore, where it was immediately arrested, and his foot stayed in its ascent, by the objects which there met his gaze. An Indian woman, leading by the hand a young boy, of the same tawny hue, approached to the water's side, and by impressive and appealing gestures, seemed to solicit his attention and compassion.

'Why do the doe and fawn follow the panther's path?' muttered he to himself; 'why do they leave the shelter of their own green, shady bowers, and come where the dart of the hunter may pierce them?'

He hesitated, as if resolving some doubts in his own mind; then springing into the canoe that lay beneath the land on which he stood, he pushed it rapidly over the waters to the spot where they awaited him. Whether the dark shadow of future events cast its prophetic gloom before him, softening his heart for the reception of conjugal or parental love, I know not; but there was something mysteriously tender in the manner in which he departed from the coldness and reserve peculiar to his race, and embracing his wife and son, placed them in the light bark he had just quitted, and introduced them into the presence of Stuart, who had witnessed with surprised sensibility the unwonted scene. The sensations which then moved and interested him have been since embodied in lines, whose truth the poet most eloquently felt:

'Think not the heart in desert bred,
To passion's softer touch is dead;
Or that the shadowy skin contains
No bright or animated veins,
Where, though no blush its course betrays,
The blood in all its wildness plays.'

'Sakamaw,' said he, 'you have decided well. Bring them to my cabin, and see how warm and true a welcome a soldier's wife can offer. The walls are rough: but they who share the warrior's or hunter's lot must not look for downy beds or dainty fare.'

It was a novel and interesting scene, when the wife and son of the Indian chief were presented to the youthful bride of Stuart, who, with generous, uncalculating ardor, had bound herself to a soldier's destiny and followed him to a camp where she was exposed to all the privations and dangers of a remote and isolated station. As she proffered her frank, yet bashful welcome, she could not withdraw her pleased and wonderful gaze from the dark but beautiful feature of the savage; clothed in the peculiar costume of her people, the symmetry of her figure and the grace of her movements gave a singular charm to the wild and gaudy attire. The refined eye of Augusta Stuart shrank intuitively, for a moment, from the naked arms and uncovered neck of the Indian; but there was such an expression of redeeming modesty in countenance, and her straight, glossy hair, falling in shining folds over her bosom, formed so rich a veil, that the transient disgust was lost in undisguised admiration at the beauties of a form which a sculptor might have selected as a model for his art. The dark haired daughter of the forest, to whose untutored sight the soldier's bride appeared fair and celestial as the inhabitant of a brighter sphere, returned her scrutinising gaze with one of delighted awe. Her fair locks, which art had formed into waving curls on her brow—her snowy complexion, and, eyes of heavenly blue, beamed upon her with such transcendent loveliness, that her feelings were constrained to utter themselves in such words as she had learned from her husband of the language of the whites.

'Thou art fairer than the sun, when he shines upon the *Silver Wave*,' exclaimed Lebella, such being the name of the beautiful savage; 'I have seen the moon in her brightness, the flowers in their bloom; but neither the moon when she walks over the hills of night, nor the flowers when they open their leaves to the south wind, are so fair and lovely as thou, daughter of the land of snow! The fair cheek of Augusta mantled with carnation as the low, sweet voice of Lebella breathed forth this spontaneous tribute to her

beauty. Accustomed to restrain the expression of her own feelings she dared not avow the admiration which had, however, passed from her heart into her eyes; but she knew that praise to a child was most acceptable to a mother's ear; and passing her white hand over the jetty locks of the Indian boy, she directed the attention of her husband to the deep hazel of his sparkling eye, and the symmetrical outlines of a figure which bore a marked similitude to the chiseled representations of the infant Apollo. The young Adario, however, seemed not to appreciate the favors of his lovely hostess; and shrinking from her caressing hand, accompanied his father, who was conducted by Captain Stuart to the place where he was to make his temporary abode. The romance, which gave a kind of exciting charm to the character of Augusta, had now found a legitimate object for its enthusiasm and warmth. By romance, I do not mean that sickly, morbid sensibility which turns from the realities of life with indifference or disgust, yearning after strange and *hair breadth* events—which looks on cold and unmoved while *real* misery pines and weeps, and melts into liquid pearl at the image of *fictitious* woe; I mean that elevation of feeling which lifts one above the weeds of the valley and the dust and soil of earth;—that sunny brightness of soul, which gilds the mist and the cloud while it deepens the glory and bloom of existence;—that all-pervading, life-giving, yet self-annihilating principle, which imparts its own light and energy to every thing around and about it, and animating all nature with its warmth and vitality, receives the indiscriminate bounties of heaven—the sunbeam, the gale,—the dew and the flower—as ministers of individual joy and delight. Augusta had already begun to weave a fair vision of the future, in which the gentle Lebella was her pupil as well as her companion—learning from her the elegancies and refinements of civilized life, and imparting to her something of her own wild and graceful originality. She witnessed with delight the artless expression of wonder, the simple decorations of her rude apartment, elicited from her untaught lips; for, though in the bosom of the wilderness, and dwelling in a cabin constructed of the roughest materials, the hand of feminine taste had left its embellishing traces wherever it had touched. Wild, autumnal flowers mingled their blooms and fragrance over the rustic window frame; sketches of forest scenery adorned the unplastered walls; and a guitar, lying on the table, showed that the fair mistress of the humble mansion had been accustomed to a more luxurious home and more polished scenes. I cannot but linger for a moment here, for to me it is enchanted ground;—a beautiful and accomplished woman, isolated from all the allurements of the world, far from the incense of adulation and the seductions of pleasure, shedding the light of her loveliness on the bosom of wedded love, and offering the fresh and stainless blossoms of her affections on that shrine which, next to the altar of God is holiest in her eyes. But I must turn to a darker spot—one which has left an indelible stain in the annals of our domestic history, but which is associated with so many interesting events that I would fain rescue it from oblivion.

The next morning the garrison was a scene of confusion and horror. A party of soldiers had been absent during the evening on a hunting expedition, being a favorite recreation in the bright moonlight nights. When the morning drum rolled its warning thunder, and the hunters came not, as wont, to perform their military duties, a general feeling of surprise and alarm pervaded the fort. Gilmore, the next officer in rank to Stuart, had a very young brother in this expedition; and, filled with fraternal anxiety, he collected another party, and endeavoured to follow the steps of the fugitives. After hours of fruitless search, they discovered a fatal signal, which guided their path, blood staining the herbage on which they trod; and plunging deeper into the forest, they found the bodies of the murdered victims, all bearing recent traces of the deadly scalping-knife. The soldiers gazed on the mangled and disfigured remains of their late gallant comrades with consternation and dismay; while Gilmore, rousing himself from the stunning influence, rushed forward, and raising the body of his youthful brother in his arms, defaced and bleeding as it was, he swore a terrible oath, that for every drop of blood that had been spilt, heaven should give him vengeance. The other soldiers, who had neither brother nor kindred among the ghastly slain, shrunk with instinctive loathing from their gory clay; but breathing imprecations against the savage murderers, they followed the steps of Gilmore, who weighed as he was by his lifeless burden, with rapid and unflinching course approached the fort.

'Behold!' cried he to Stuart, who recoiled in sudden horror at the spectacle thus offered to his view, 'behold!' and his voice was fearful in its deep and smothered tones, 'had he been a man—but a boy, committed to my charge with the prayers and tears of a doating father—the Benjamin of his old age—Oh! by the shed blood of innocence and youth—by the white locks of age, I swear