

CHAPTER II

and obliging vendor of such necessities. The process of transformation was simple in the extreme, nor were the implements of coinage multifarious or complex. A hammer and a smoothing-iron were all she required for the performance of the task, in the execution of which she outvalued, in rapidity, the whole machinery of the British Mint. In the present day, the species of labor in which she was engaged would be considered hazardous in the extreme; but, thirty-five years ago, the inhabitants of "The Plains," were a very primitive people, and had not such stringent modes, as they now have, at their finger's ends, for the purpose of enforcing a proper observance of the nice distinction between *meum* and *tuum* or establishing a rigid standard to which society generally was to be subjected with a pertinacity the most inexorable. No, indeed: A community that presented an admixture of lumbermen, Indians, poor mechanics, reckless adventurers, a few half-pay officers and needy gentlemen, was not likely to settle down rapidly into one solid and uniform mass, or to recognize any governing influence that would direct its scattered energies.

Each individual button, on being removed from the articles of clothing just mentioned, was laid flat on the iron, and struck once or twice on the shank, until the loop became deeply imbedded in the centre of the metal, on the completion of which, as veritable a halfpenny lay before you, as ever bore the head of King George. As this flattening did not add to the value of the novel coin, it was doubtless used as a decent observance; although some were tempted to believe, that it was adopted with the sole view of making the change lie easy in the pocket, or facilitating that gliding process of counting from the hollow of the hand through the fingers, to which "shanks" would be a deadly obstruction. Be this as it may, the few then in business, although well aware that a part of the circulating medium, was as base as base could be, were constrained to close their eyes to the fact. Silver was rare—trifles were needed, and there was scarcely any true copper currency with which to purchase them. What, then, was to be done? Just what they did do bravely and well. Like stout anti-bullionists, they mixed their veritable and spurious coppers with "shin plasters," and on grave occasions, adding a piece of more precious metal, shoved the whole from hand to hand, sooner than let the wheels of trade clog until relief came up.

At the time of which we speak, the Indians encamped in and about the little village, with their deer-knives, blanket coats, bare heads, moccasins, gaudy leggings, and the indispensable "Indian Chief" piece, with its old flint lock, and small oval silver portrait set in just behind the britch. In those days, numbers of them were terribly addicted to the use of ardent spirits. While in a state of intoxication, they occasionally exhibited some of the most ferocious traits of their character. Quarrelsome amongst themselves, when inebriated, they not unfrequently rushed from their wigwams and, with their knives unsheathed, made a feint upon the trembling emigrants that were then scattered along the brink of the river near what is, now, known as the site of the old, government house. No deeds of actual violence, however, resulted from these savage outbursts; as, in his more sober moments, the "red man" was not unfriendly to the "pale faces," and sold them his furs, baskets, head work and moccasins, in a spirit of honest simplicity, which might have put more civilized transactions to the blush. But this barbarous state of affairs, with all its trying adjuncts, has long since passed away; and Peterborough, in the possession of its unrivalled mills, fine public edifices, and beautiful private dwellings, has to the credit of its intelligent and enterprising inhabitants, become a place of great note in our midst. The splendid back country to which it may be considered the key, and the unlimited water-power at its command, have established its importance on a basis the most immovable, and marked out for it a future, the prospects of which are not second to those of any other settlement in this rising Colony.

At the close of a delightful day during the early part of the Autumn of 1825, and while the red beams of the setting sun were kindling into crimson and gold the tremulous cones of the lofty pines that scintilled the Menaghan hills, a canoe of rare beauty and workmanship was seen slowly making its way through the eddies that were whirled out of "Whitlaw's Rapids," in among the roots of the overhanging basswoods, elms and cedars that darkened the waters of the Otonabee, a short distance from the settlement, and afforded a delightful shade to those who, at the decline of day, dropped down through the "little lake," at the foot of the village, to enjoy an hour's fishing, or to lie in wait for the red deer that frequented the "salt lick" near "The Cold Springs" on the opposite bank of the stream.

This lake—which the canoe entered shortly after being discovered—was one of unrivalled beauty; and appeared to have been formed, or scooped out through a sudden obstruction to the course of the waters of the river, owing to an abrupt bend in their channel. In shape, it was inclining to oval, with the longer diameter measuring about a mile, and the shorter, something less than three quarters; and so securely did it nestle in the bosom of the forest, that you stood on its very brink before you became aware of its existence; unless, indeed, you had previously heard of the locality, or caught a glimpse of the rude but hospitable log cabin of the Rev. Mr. Croley, who was, doubtless, the first Roman Catholic clergyman that had ever settled on or near its solitary shores.

On the right hand side, as you emerged from the narrow strait through which the stream still rushes so rapidly, spread out a bright, little bay with bold steep banks, hopelessly tangled with underwood, and presenting scarcely an available foot of strand to step upon. At the lower extremity of this basin, and directly opposite the strait just mentioned, a moderately elevated promontory seemed to stretch out towards the opposite shore; although, when you reached it, you found it to be nothing more than a simple continuation of the banks of the river as they might have appeared before any sudden enlargement of its bed had taken place. To this point, the canoe now made its way, and as it touched the beach, after having shot, like an arrow, through a fringe of rushes, an Indian, with the agility of a roebuck, leaped on the glittering patch of strand at its bow, and dragged the little bark deep into the shadow of a projecting rock.

When the new-comer had thus disposed of his canoe, he grasped a heavy rifle that lay at its bottom, amongst various articles of luggage, and began ascending the precipitous bluff, until he stood upon an open space, a few yards square, that the storms of centuries had blown completely bare. Here in the deep broad splendour of the departing day, he presented an aspect the most imposing and picturesque imaginable. His erect and athletic form, towering at the height of six feet—his finely poised head and muscular chest and limbs, as well as his ample forehead and faultless nose and chin, bespoke him no ordinary man. His eyes were of a fiery darkness, and his complexion a pale olive, seemingly, however, more from constant exposure to the weather than from any natural tinge of the blood; and, although he had evidently numbered upwards of forty years, yet his hair was still as black as night, and his teeth as white and perfect as the purest ivory. What appeared inexplicable, nevertheless, was the fact of his finely curved lips, unlike those of Indians generally, being covered with a thick, glossy moustache, while his cheek bones were not in any degree prominent, or his nostrils distended in the manner of the tribes then so familiar to the settler. In short, his magnificent features and whole figure, were worthy the chisel of a Praxiteles; while his superbly pencilled eyebrows, together with his small ears, hands and feet, might have belonged to a woman, without attracting any extraordinary degree of attention.

His dress, although that of the red man, in all its ramifications, was costly of its kind,

and sat on him with a graceful negligence not to be surpassed. On his head, he wore a crimson skull-cap braided with gold, and closely decked, in front, with eagle's feathers, about half a foot long, and ingeniously inserted into the shining fillet that clasped his stately temples. His coat and outer shirt were of the finest deerskin, elaborately wrought with porcupine quills that presented all the hues of the rainbow, and ran along the seams in a manner the most artistic. His trousers were made of the same material, and ornamented similarly; while his leggings of bright scarlet cloth with silver buttons, fell loosely upon his moccasins, that literally blazed in the dying beams that still lingered at his feet. The other ornaments of his person were a rich, diamond brooch, that confined the falling collar of his shirt, and a large ring of singular beauty which shone on the forefinger of his left hand. In addition to these, a massive gold chain fell from his neck into a small pocket at his breast; while a pair of elaborately mounted pistols and a shining powder-flask were carelessly thrust into his dazzling belt, of silk and Indian grass, whose many shaded fringes reached almost to his knee. Thus he stood for a moment on the silent headland; and as his manly face caught the light that was reflected strongly by the placid waters beneath him, you perceived, at a glance, that a more perfect specimen of the handiwork of the Great Architect of the Universe, had never existed since the morning stars first sang together.

After having remained stationary for a few seconds, as in thought, he moved with a graceful and agile step towards one side of the bluff, where his quick ear caught a noise amongst some brushwood that grew at the point where the lake again narrowed into the river. In an instant, the sharp clang of his rifle rang through the surrounding dells, and, simultaneously with the report, a huge buck leaped into the air and fell dead within a few yards of the little cove where the canoe lay securely sheltered.

"Ha!" exclaimed the hunter, in excellent English, though tinged with a slight Indian accent, "just the thing for 'Daylight.' She shall command these fine antlers to be hung up in the hall, and get the skin tanned for moccasins, until it is as soft and as white as her own beautiful feet. Dear Madam Gertrude, too, will be delighted with such an opportune supply of venison; for here, decidedly, the markets are not so well stocked as those I have witnessed in her great City of London, on the other side of 'the big sea water.' But," he continued, "although I have not far to go before I reach her residence, I should not like to be so encumbered with the weight of this noble fellow. But I had better let his blood flow more freely, at once, and leave him here if Kondiaronk should fail to take the track along the bank."

He had scarcely spoken, when he was joined by another Indian who suddenly emerged from the woods, and hurried down the steep to where he now stood beside the prostrate animal.

"Ha!"—this new arrival, ejaculated in Indian—"I heard the voice of the rifle of Black Hawk, and hastened because I knew that it spoke the words of death."

"Yes, Kondiaronk," replied the Huron, "while waiting for you here, this pride of the forest crossed my path; and behold!"

"Right through the heart," returned the "Rat," as his name implied, "and would, that the Great Spirit had directed as unerringly every bullet that our fathers had sent into the midst of the accursed Iroquois."

"Aye!" observed Black Hawk, as he bent musingly over the deer that was now bleeding profusely, "but it is useless to repine. The shores and islands of some of the upper lakes are still ours; and 'Grey Eagle' had wealth enough to leave me, his son, when he departed for the bright hunting grounds of our fathers, and named the chief of his tribe."

"Well!" said Kondiaronk, "it is past. But is it not fortunate that I have found you here just now, so as that we may bear this royal buck to the log palace of Daylight from whence I can return with one of the pale faces to the canoe?"

"When I left you at the foot of the rapids until I passed the shallows," observed the chief, "I thought you might possibly follow the trail along the bank and pass here, rather than force your way through the swamp to the point where we now see the smoke rising and from whence you expect assistance regarding the contents of the canoe."

"You guessed rightly," said his companion, for the swamp is very dense, and always next to impassable, but let us, if you will, dispose of this fellow at once, as the sun is not an hour high."

This conversation, which was carried on partly in English, which Kondiaronk spoke fluently, was interrupted by a nod of assent from the Huron, and a significant wave of the hand, at which, Kondiaronk drew his tomahawk from his belt, and retired once more into the woods.

In the course of a very few minutes, the Indian re-appeared, bearing a stout iron-wood pole and some white strips of the inner bark of the basswood, that trailed along the ground. With these tough ligaments he bound the fore, as well as the hinder, legs of the deer together; and having slipped the pole lengthwise between them, he strapped it securely to the body of the animal, leaving a couple of feet projecting at either extremity, so as that the burden might rest easily on the shoulders, in the manner of the palanquins of the East. On this being accomplished, he hastily procured some branches of leafy brushwood; and concealing the canoe beneath them, so effectually as to defy the keenest observation, he looked enquiringly into the face of the chief, as in anticipation of some signal for their departure.

Kondiaronk, who had been, from his youth, a devoted follower of Black Hawk, was every inch an Indian. His long, lank and black hair, his small, dark twinkling eyes, and his stout bandy legs proclaimed his origin at once. He was much younger and shorter than his companion; and was so square and so muscularly built as to be the very personification of strength. Unlike his chief, whose beard and moustache were of a description the most superb, but a few scattered hairs were discernible on the lower part of the face; while his elastic nostrils and heavy eyebrows were noticeable for their continual restlessness, and the expressiveness with which they interpreted his feelings. He was bare headed, and wore the blanket coat, coarse cloth trousers and blue leggings common to most of his caste. His moccasins, like the rest of his habiliments, were totally devoid of ornament, and not a gleam of brightness was to be discovered about him, save that which proceeded from the oval piece of silver inserted in the stock of his gun, or the highly polished tomahawk that was again restored to its wonted resting place. Although his forehead was low and slightly retreating, there was still something frank about his face. An admixture of daring and cunning, however, seemed lurking beneath this pleasant surface; but never obtruding themselves in any degree calculated to mar it, unless provoked by deep diplomacy or the war cry of his tribe. In brief, Kondiaronk was a bundle of contradictions, with the good predominating. And seldom were the more objectionable traits of his character exhibited, save where the interests of his chief, or the fate of an enemy was at stake. At periods such as these, he was bound by no laws, and used, however questionable, the first means within his reach to accomplish his ends; and often had Black Hawk to stay his merciless arm, and endeavor to counteract his fiery designs, when his milder and now generous nature was swept turbulently aside. Such was the person that now grasped one end of the ironwood pole, while the Chief seized the other, and swung it on his shoulder; and as they both moved up the steep, with the dead animal suspended between them, they did so with an ease and rapidity which could have been based only upon strength the most Herculean.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Time is the most paradoxical of all things; the past is gone; the future isn't come, and the present becomes the past while we attempt to define it.