

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

ABOUT this time rumors were rife that the Indians were contemplating a raid on the mine, and operations were temporarily suspended. Meetings were called, and a committee of defence organized, with a view to taking such measures as would place the settlement in a position to successfully resist all, or any attempts of the savages. Those who had had any experience in Indian warfare were called to the council, and consulted on the best means to avert the impending calamity. The panic was more painfully apparent among those who had come upon the scene hampered with goods and chattels of various kinds. These worthies were brimful of wrath and whiskey, and gave free vent to the expression of their opinions regarding the outside world generally, and Indians in particular. They were fertile in suggestion; and the many schemes they advanced for the total destruction of all who threatened their private interests would have reflected credit, not to say renown, on a Don Quixote.

The thought of my enslaved wife was never absent

From my mind. Day and night, sleeping and waking, her image haunted me. I fancied her suffering every degree of misery; and the consciousness that I was powerless to snatch her from the toils of relentless captors, caused me the most poignant anguish. I had a vague, half formed notion of seeking her unaided, and by once more assuming my Indian trappings and cognomen, advance in to the Apache country, penetrate to their villages, and by a bold dash, seize my wife and bear her defiantly off in the very teeth of my adversaries. This would have been very spirited and chivalrous, no doubt, but unfortunately, the obstacles that opposed themselves to this plan were legion. No sooner did I convince myself of the impracticability of such a mode of procedure, than other plans would present themselves, which, in their turn would have to be relinquished when submitted to the rigorous test of practicability. This constant strain on my mind interposed stumbling blocks to my material prosperity, as I had no heart for my work, and wandered about the diggings aimlessly. I was rallied by my comrades on my morose temper, and recommended to try work as an effectual antidote for the causes that were preying on my health.

One balmy afternoon, as I sauntered among the working parties, gazing abstractedly at their operations, my attention was attracted to a group who seemed to be very much excited by some event. A few had gathered about an object lying upon the

ground, while others were running frantically in different directions as if they were possessed. My curiosity being excited I approached the group, and found that the cause of this alarm was one of their comrades, who had been bitten by a snake. The poor fellow was moaning piteously; and so sure was he that his death was only a matter of a few hours time, that he had begun to make the few bequests that would dispose of all his worldly goods, including the little hoard of "dust," so long and patiently sought for. One of his friends knelt at his side, and was endeavoring to pour the contents of a flask of whiskey down his throat. The poison had taken immediate effect, and he doubtless would have been a corpse in a few hours. I was immediately recognized, and one of the miners accosted me with "Hullo! Eastman, just the man we want; now is your time to produce some of those marvelous herbs you have told us about, and see what you can do for this poor fellow."

My sympathies were awakened; my mind threw off its semi-stupor; and hastily glancing about me on the ground, I sought for some of those simple herbs and plants, that I had seen so effectually used in similar cases. Hastily gathering what I needed, I soon had leaves bandaged about the swollen parts, and then turned my attention to making a decoction of the herbs. This I forced the patient to take, and after caring for him assiduously during a few hours, I had the satisfaction of noting a marked change for the

better. I was deluged with congratulations, and in a short time the fame of this new exploit in the healing art was noised abroad throughout the mine.

My new friends were not miners, in the proper sense of the term, but a party of "mountain men," who had been allured hither by exaggerated reports of the immense wealth that was represented as scattered broadcast over the surface of the earth, and was only waiting for a claimant. Arriving on the ground they had staked out a claim, and fell to work without any delay. It is needless to add that they did not realize the immense riches they had so fondly anticipated. The result was that they had sickened of their bargain, and many were for pulling up stakes and returning to the free and easy life among the mountains.

A short time after the episode just related, there came to our camp one day, a trapper, who had but just returned from his traps, and was on his way to the nearest trading post, to exchange his peltries for powder, wearing apparel, etc. From him we learned that the Indians were preparing for some extensive raid, as he had seen numerous parties who were in their war paint. Among other items, he related how he had been captured by a band of Apaches, and had remained among them eight days before he succeeded in eluding the vigilance of his guard. From him I gained the first information concerning my wife. He had been captured by some of Mahtocheega's band, and by the description he gave of the white captives

at that time in the village, I felt sure that my wife was one of the number. Learning that on his return he would proceed to the same locality in quest of "beaver plew," I determined to accompany him. About half a dozen signified their intention of following my example, and a party was soon made up. The trapper bade us adieu, promising to return as soon as his skins were traded for the supplies of which he stood in need. Gathering together what little money I had, I purchased a horse, rifle and pistol, and prepared to go in search of my lost wife.

We had not long to wait for our new friend; he returned in less than a week's time, and all being in readiness, we gathered up our traps, and took a final leave of the mine of San Ildefonso.

Passing out at the northern end of the settlement, we struck the Santa Fé road, and followed its sinuous windings for some days. We passed through the sleepy Mexican towns, that were situated along the route, without disturbing in the least degree the habitual drowsiness of their inhabitants. On the fourth day we made a stretch of sixty miles through that terror of travelers in this section—the "jornado del muerto." After having crossed in safety, we rested one day to recuperate the animals, and soon after arrived in Santa Fé, halting at the inn that had been the scene of the shooting affray on my former visit. Our stay in the capital of New Mexico was not of long duration, and once more we resumed our journey,

striking out in a westerly direction towards the mountains.

Our first encampment was on the banks of one of the tributaries of the Rio Colorado. Staking our horses out, as is the custom, we gathered around the camp fire, discussing our evening meal of fresh antelope steaks. Many were the stories told of trapper life, and as we filled our pipes for a smoke before retiring, the subject of conversation was upon food. All had some anecdote to relate, and after each had spun his yarn, Harding, who up to the present had been silent, drawled out, "Wal, I 'spect as how yer have had some tol'able bad jints in yer time, but I think I kin jest lay over anything in this yer party in the way o' supper. Howsumever, I will give yer a chance to hear how this nigger once got his supper up on the Yallerstone, last season.

"Yer see, I had been in them parts arter beaver, which war plenty, an' no mistake; an' one day, when I had gone to *cache* some skins, I left my rifle in the grass near my traps, like a gosh darned fool. Who should come along but a party of them black niggers, the Crows; and the first thing they sot eyes upon was my shootin' iron. In course, I seed it all, and jist had to lay low and cuss my tarnal stupidity, while them 'ere Crows hopped around like mad at finding my rifle and things. They was so pleased, 'peared like they forgot theirselves, and didn't foller up my trail, but galloped off, carryin' my plunder along with

them. He! he! they mount a did as well, and let ole Harding alone."

"I reckon that, too," remarked one; "'taint like they made much out of that spekalashun."

"Yer see, I war cleaned out, an' left with jest a pair o' leggins, better than two hunderd miles from anywhur. The company's post war the nearest, so I jest took down the river in that direcshun. I never seed varmint so shy. They wouldn't a been, blast 'em, if I had er had my traps; but there wa'n't a critter, from the minners to the buffler, that didn't take on as if they knowed how this nigger war fixed. I could get nothing for two days but lizard, an' scarce at that. I chawed up the old leggins, until I was as naked as Pike's Peak."

"Golly! was it winter?"

"No, 'twur calf time, and warm enuff for that matter. I didn't mind the want o' garments in that way, but I kud a eat more o' it. I soon struck a town of sand rats, and I made snares of my hair, and trapped some on 'em, but *they* grew shy, too, cuss 'em, and I had to give up that claim. This wur the third day, and I wur gettin' powerful weak. I 'gin to think this child's time had come, and I would have ter pass in my chips. 'Twur a little arter sun up, an' I wur sittin' on the bank, when I seed something cur'ous like floatin' down stream. When it kim closer, I seed it wur the karkidge of a buffler, and a of buzzarts floppin' about on the thing, pickin'

its peepers out. 'Twur far out, an' the water deep; but I said I was goin' to fetch it ashore, an' I did. I took to the water an' swum out. I could smell the animal afore I wur half way. I wur soon close up, and seen at a glimpse that the calf wur as rotten as punk. The birds, they mizzled. I wa'n't agoin' to have my swim for nothin', so I tuk the tail atween my teeth, and wagged my flippers for the shore. I hadn't made three strokes when the tail pulled out. I then swum round and pushed that 'ere thing afore me, until I had got it high and dry on a sandbar. 'Twur like to melt when I pulled it out o' the water. 'Twa'n't eatable nohow. I see the buzzarts still flying about, and fresh ones comin', an' I took a idee that I might get some, so I laid down close to the buffler, and played possum. I wa'n't long there 'fore a big cock com a floppin' up, and lit on the karkidge. I grabbed him by the leg. The cussed thing wur nearly as stinkin' as the other; but it wur die dog, buzzart, or buffler; so I skinned the buzzart."

"And ate it?" inquired one.

"No-o," slowly drawled the trapper, "it ate me." A general laugh followed this remark.

"The rest o' the birds got shy, and kept away on t'other side. 'Twa'n't no use tryin' *that* dodge over again. Jest then I 'spied a coyot comin' lopin' down the bank, an' another follerin' upon his heels, an' two or three more on the same trail. I know'd it would be no joke grippin' one o' them by the leg, but I made

up my mind to try it, an' I laid down jist as afore, 'side the calf. 'Twur no go! they smelt a rat, an' kep' cl'ar. Then I tuk a fresh idee in my head. I went for some o' the driftwood an' made a pen around the bufler; an' in the wink o' my eye I had six o' the varmints in the traps."

"Then you had 'em, eh, old boy?" said one.

"You bet; I jest took a lot of stones, clomb up on the pen, an' killed the hull kit o' them. Such a jumpin' an' yowlin, as when I peppered them varmints; he! he! he! ho! ho! Arter this I had some 'at to eat; an' in a few days reached the company's post."

"Did you ever see any of those redskins again?" I inquired.

"Wal, you jest better believe I did. Yer see those five notches on this ere rifle? wal, they stand for Crows, they do."

A general laugh followed this yarn, and all averred that his experience in the eating line was unequalled. After the trapper had finished his story, we wrapped ourselves in our blankets, and were with the exception of the horse guard, soon in a deep slumber.

The next morning we were up and moving at sunrise; and after a march of twenty miles, came to a small stream heading in the Piñon range. It was fringed with cottonwood trees, and there was grass in abundance for our horses. We made a halt for an hour, and then proceeded on our journey. We had

not gone far when we made a discovery that changed all our plans. Harding had been riding about a hundred yards ahead of the main party, when we observed him suddenly stop, bend down, and then throwing up his hands, beckon us on. We were soon up to the spot, asking in a breath what was the matter. He pointed to the ground, and sententiously replied, "*fresh Injun sign.*" A consultation was held, and after an interchange of opinions, it was agreed that the trail was made by Apaches, and that from the trampled nature of the ground, it indicated the presence of a large party. We had no doubt as to their intentions. They were evidently bound south on their annual foray. Now was my time beyond peradventure. Never could I have had such another opportunity; perhaps even if I waited patiently for years.

I briefly related to my companions the circumstances of my capture, captivity, and subsequent escape, and asked their aid in rescuing my wife. Each grasped me cordially by the hand, and expressed their willingness to "see me through;" and after a few moments more spent in consultation, we agreed on the following plan: To push on at once and as speedily as possible for the Indian village, secrete ourselves in the adjacent mountains until nightfall, and then leaving the horses concealed in the bushes that fringe the base of the mountain, advance on foot to the chief's lodge. Once within its portal, it would be the work of a moment to seek out my wife, apprise her of what

was transpiring, and quietly leading her out, hasten to our animals, mount, and ride away. This plan seemed feasible, and as moments were precious, we resumed the march.

About noon we debouched through the mountain pass into a country of "openings;" small prairies bounded by jungly forests, and interspersed with timber islands. These prairies were covered with tall grass; and buffalo signs appeared as we rode into them. We saw their "roads," "chips," and "wallows." These signs filled us with pleasurable anticipations; as who has not longed for the delicious "hump ribs," which, when once tasted in all their juicy richness, are never to be forgotten. The full-grown forms of the cacti were around us, bearing red and yellow fruit in abundance. We plucked the pears of the pita-haya, and ate them greedily; in short, we dined on fruits and vegetables of many varieties, indigenous only to this wild region. But our stomachs longed for the favorite food, and we pushed on through the openings. We had ridden about an hour among the chaparral, when Harding, who was riding in advance, pointed downward, and intimated by signs that he had struck fresh buffalo tracks. Very soon after the animals came in view, and by using the bushes as cover, we made a very effectual "surround," killing some three or four. That night we regaled ourselves on buffalo, and the following morning pushed on with renewed vigor, and in the best of spirits.

Near evening on the fourth day following, we arrived at the foot of the Sierra; and directly in front of us, about midway up the valley, or pass, more properly speaking, lay the Apache village. An exclamation of joy escaped my lips. At last, then, the hopes and longings of nine weary years were about to be satisfied. My reflections were abruptly terminated by Harding remarking that it was highly important that we seek cover and approach the village cautiously, if we expected our efforts to be crowned with success. All felt the justness of this observation, and seeking the cover of the mountain, we proceeded on our journey. In a short time we had advanced as near as we deemed it prudent, until the night should close in. Our reins were tightened, and we sat on our weary horses, looking over the plain. A magnificent panorama under any circumstances lay before us; but its interest was heightened by the peculiar circumstances under which we viewed it. The lodges were dotted over the plain in picturesque profusion, the smoke curling gracefully up in their dreamy spirals. One lodge stood apart, and from its size and decorations, we at once guessed it to be the abode of the chief. Harding confirmed our conjectures. Several droves of horses were quietly browsing on the open prairie. The sun was setting. The mountains were tinged with an amber colored light; and the quartz crystals sparkled on the peaks of the southern Sierras. It was a scene of silent beauty.

We remained for some time gazing up the valley, without any one uttering his thoughts. It was the silence that precedes resolve. An hour has fled; the sun sinks below the horizon, and the mountains take on a sombre hue. It is night. We urge our horses forward once more, keeping close to the mountain foot; conversing in whispers, we crawl around and among the loose boulders that have fallen from above, and after an hour's ride we find ourselves opposite the town.

The night passes slowly and silently; one by one the fires are extinguished, and the plain is wrapped in the gloom of a moonless night. The swan utters its wild note, the gruya whoops over the stream, and the wolf howls on the skirts of the sleeping village.

Dismounting, we gather in a little knot, and consult as to what plan we shall pursue. It is finally determined that Harding and myself shall penetrate into the village, enter the chief's lodge, abduct my wife, and hastily rejoin our comrades, who will hold themselves in readiness to cover our retreat, and, if the worst comes to the worst, keep our pursuers at bay until we have made good our escape.

Hastily divesting ourselves of all unnecessary accoutrements, we started out on the plain, and cautiously approached the chief's lodge, which loomed up in the darkness like some hideous genii.

An Indian dog that was lurking about the door gave the alarm, but Harding's knife entered his vitals ere he could repeat it.

Now was the critical moment. Drawing the flap aside that served as a door, I peered cautiously in; all was silent; a small fire was burning in the center of the lodge, its fitful gleam dimly illuminating the interior. A number of low couches were ranged around the wall.

But at this juncture a dilemma presented itself. Here were a number of women, one of whom was certainly my wife; but how was I to ascertain in which of these couches she reposed. If I should trust to chance, advance to the first one and peer in, and by so doing startle its inmate, even though that inmate were my wife, the peculiar nature of the visit would so startle her that she would not be enabled to recognize the intruder.

However, I determined to approach the first bed and trust to the chapter of accidents for the rest. Advancing noiselessly to the side of the couch, I lifted the curtain of dressed buffalo hide. The fire cast a dim light over the face of the sleeper, and, oh, joy, it was the loved features of my wife. I tried to speak, whisper her name; my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I trembled like an aspen, and had to grasp the bed for support. This movement awakened the sleeper, and with an half-suppressed exclamation, she sprung to a sitting posture.

To breathe her name, clasp her in my arms, and rush for the door, was the work of an instant, and hastily snatching a robe that was suspended from the

side of the lodge, I enveloped her in it, and rapidly gained the cover of the mountain. In a few moments our party was in full gallop down the valley.

Leaving the Indian village, we started with all speed on our return. I did not anticipate pursuit, and we made no attempt to conceal our trail.

Indeed, my mind was so occupied with the grand fact that I had recovered my long-lost darling, that I thought of nothing else. As we rode along, each recounted to the other the story of their toils, trials, and sufferings; a thousand questions were asked and answered; and in the joy of the present and hope for the future, we were for a time happy.

About the middle of the forenoon we approached a thick chaparral, and were just entering it, when a party of about sixty Apaches suddenly rushed out from its leafy coverts, and with the rapidity of thought we were surrounded and captured. My wife was able, by her influence with the leader of the party, to save us from indignity, and a lengthy parley followed. I made known to the chief my desire to recover my wife, and endeavored to arrange some terms of purchase or barter. In this I was, after a time, successful, and, after an interminable siege of pipe smoking and discussion, relative to the price, we came to terms, and in a few minutes I had *purchased* my wife at the cost of all my *worldly* possessions. But I cared not for this; on the contrary, I was only too glad to recover my wife at any cost, and felt no regret at parting

from the accumulations of two years of toil and hardship.

Resuming our journey, we reached Santa Fé in safety, in a few days, and commenced making preparations for our return to the East. The kind-hearted Mexican women overwhelmed my wife with attentions, and she was soon provided with apparel more suitable than the barbaric, although beautiful, Indian costume. My principal difficulty was the want of money, and I was much perplexed to know how to secure a sufficient sum to enable us to return to our friends. It is probable that had I freely stated our circumstances and narrated our sad story, generous hearts might have been found among the many American miners and trappers sojourning in the town; for many a noble heart beats beneath a rough and unpromising exterior; but my pride shrank from appearing in the character of a mendicant, and I finally came to the conclusion that we must remain at Santa Fé for a time, until I could find some employment by which to earn sufficient means to enable us to return to our former home. I had forgotten the fact that I possessed a warm friend in Ned Harding, or, if I had thought of him in this connection, it was not with any idea that he could aid me.

In this I was mistaken, as the sequel will show. On the third morning after my return, Ned called me out under pretence of taking a walk, and after strolling about for a time in silence, he opened his mind as fol-

lows: "Well lad, what are ye goin' to do next? I suppose you don't intend to stay here in this 'ere God forsaken hole, that these yaller-bellies calls a city; the Lord forgive their ignorance; if they could only see Lunnon, once—well, as I was a sayin', you can't stay here, and you can't take your little girl back into the mining kentry, very well; so what do you mean to do? let old Ned know, and don't go round, keepin' as close as an ister, and never sayin' nothin' to nobody." Thus admonished, I forgot my reserve, and fully explained to him my dilemma. He listened in silence until I had finished, and then broke forth with—"Why, Lord bless ye, lad, yer gettin' foolish, certain, ho! ho! yer little woman has turned yer head, sure; why, yer forgot all about the mine, and I reckon there's vally enough to that to send ye home like a nabob, if you like to travel that way."

"The mine!" I exclaimed in surprise, "why Ned, I thought we had abandoned it altogether, you don't mean to tell me that I can realize anything from the claim?"

"You bet, I mean just that;" said Harding, his features expanding into a broad grin as he marked my look of utter astonishment. "Why lad, if we were all agreed on the thing, I've got a party here that'll give us five thousand apiece for our claim—I ain't such a fool as I look, and it wa'nt for nothin' that I left Pete there a holdin' possession, and there he'll stay till he hears from me—so now if you're willin' to take five

thousand for your sher, just say the word, and we'll have it settled in no time."

Further inquiry elicited the information that during the two days previous, while I had spent my time in unprofitable cogitation, Ned had been "kinder prospectin' round among the speckilaters," as he termed it, and had found parties willing and anxious to buy the claim held jointly by Ned, Pete Jackson, and myself, for fifteen thousand dollars in cash. Ned had brought with him some specimens of the quartz which he had shown to the intending purchasers, and some of which they had subjected to assay, and the result of this had determined them to buy the claim if everything could be satisfactorily arranged.

It did not take me long to decide, in fact, I fairly jumped at the offer. The sum mentioned seemed a princely fortune at the time, and, in fact, to one in my situation it really was so, for wealth is but comparative, after all. The following morning the trade was arranged, the necessary papers drawn up, and Ned left the same afternoon for the mine in company with the buyers, to deliver the property and complete the transaction. In a few days he returned, and I soon found myself in possession of five thousand dollars in gold coin, the largest amount of money I ever owned.

I now hurried the preparations for our departure, and a few days later we joined an eastward bound train, and journeyed with it towards the rising sun! With the details of our journey I will not weary the

reader, suffice it to say that we made the trip without trouble or molestation of any sort, and reached St. Louis in safety. How strange it all seemed, to walk about the streets of the great city of the West, and as the residents fondly term it "the future great city of the world;" everything seemed so unreal, after the long years of my captivity and wild life among the mountains, that I used sometimes to fancy that it was all but a dream and I would presently awake to find myself again in the temple with Wakometkla, in that strange and far off land hidden among the mighty mountains of the Sierra Madre.

We remained but a few days in the metropolis of the West, and then journeyed to a point further eastward, where my wife had relatives living, or at least supposed that some might yet be surviving. On our arrival we found such to be the case, and a joyful reunion was the result; we being received as two risen from the dead.

And now our cup of happiness was indeed full; reunited after so long a separation and such bitter suffering we had returned at last to friends and home!

In conclusion, I can only express my thanks to those kind readers who have followed me patiently through all my wanderings, and listened to my simple, yet I hope not uninteresting narrative of the hardships and perils through which I have passed.

If the story of our captivity has proved a source of

entertainment to the reader—if it haply excites a feeling of sympathy and interest for the many wretched captives who yet remain in a servitude worse than death among the rude tribes of the West—if it renders the general public more familiar with a region of which so little is known—if should chance to afford to those officials of our government, to whom the subject is relegated, any new views in reference to the proper method of dealing with the Indians—if it accomplishes any of these ends, I shall be more than repaid for my labor in its preparation.

My thanks are also due to my kind friend, Dr. Clark Johnson, without whose opportune aid this book would never have been written.

And now kind reader, for the present at least,
farewell.

THE END.