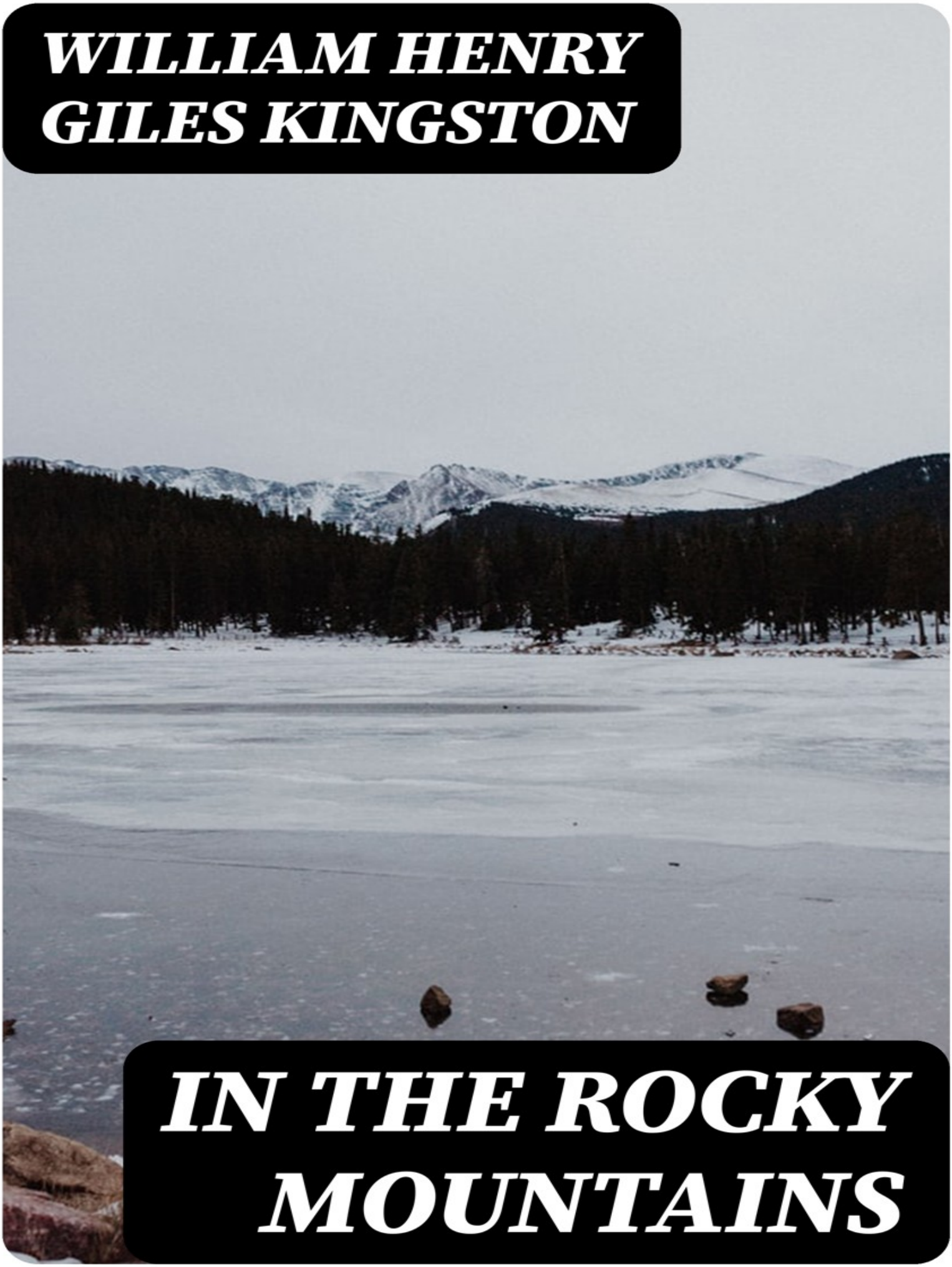
WILLIAM HENRY GILES KINGSTON



IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

William Henry Giles Kingston

In the Rocky Mountains

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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Chapter One.

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We were most of us seated round a blazing fire of pine logs, which crackled away merrily, sending the sparks about in all directions, at the no small risk of setting fire to garments of a lighter texture than ours. Although the flowers were blooming on the hill-sides, in the woods and valleys, and by the margins of the streams; humming-birds were flitting about gathering their dainty food; and the bears, having finished the operation of licking their paws, had come out in search of more substantial fare; and the buffalo had been seen migrating to the north,—the wind at

night blew keenly from off the snow-capped mountain-tops which, at no great distance, rose above us, and rendered a fire acceptable even to us hardy backwoodsmen.

Our location was far in advance of any settlement in that latitude of North America, for Uncle Jeff Crockett “could never abide,” he averred, “being in the rear of his fellow-creatures.” Whenever he had before found people gathering around him at the spot where he had pitched his tent, or rather, put up his log-hut, he had sold his property (always to advantage, however), and yoking his team, had pushed on westward, with a few sturdy followers.

On and on he had come, until he had reached the base of the Rocky Mountains. He would have gone over them, but, having an eye to business, and knowing that it was necessary to secure a market for his produce, he calculated that he had come far enough for the present. He therefore climbed the sides of the mountain for a short distance, until he entered a sort of cañon, which, penetrating westward, greatly narrowed, until it had the appearance of a cleft with lofty crags on either side,—while it opened out eastward, overlooking the broad valley and the plain beyond.

He chose the spot as one capable of being defended against the Redskins, never in those parts very friendly to white men,—especially towards those whom they found settling themselves on lands which they looked upon as their own hunting-grounds, although they could use them for no other purpose.

Another reason which had induced Uncle Jeff to select this spot was, that not far off was one of the only practicable passes through the mountains either to the north or south,

and that the trail to it led close below us at the foot of the hills, so that every emigrant train or party of travellers going to or from the Great Salt Lake or California must pass in sight of the house.

A stream, issuing from the heights above, fell over the cliffs, forming a roaring cataract; and then, rushing through the cañon, made its way down into the valley, irrigating and fertilising the ground, until it finally reached a large river, the Platte, flowing into the Missouri. From this cataract our location obtained its name of “Roaring Water;” but it was equally well-known as “Uncle Jeff’s Farm.”

Our neighbours, if such they could be called in this wild region, were “birds of passage.” Now and then a few Indian families might fix their tents in the valley below; or a party of hunters or trappers might bivouac a night or two under the shelter of the woods, scattered here and there; or travellers bound east or west might encamp by the margin of the river for the sake of recruiting their cattle, or might occasionally seek for shelter at the log-house which they saw perched above them, where, in addition to comfortable quarters, abundant fare and a hospitable welcome—which Uncle Jeff never refused to any one, whoever he might be, who came to his door—were sure to be obtained.

But it is time that I should say something about the inmates of the house at the period I am describing.

First, there was Uncle Jeff Crockett, a man of about forty-five, with a tall, stalwart figure, and a handsome countenance (though scarred by a slash from a tomahawk, and the claws of a bear with which he had had a desperate encounter). A bright blue eye betokened a keen sight, as

also that his rifle was never likely to miss its aim; while his well-knit frame gave assurance of great activity and endurance.

I was then about seventeen, and Uncle Jeff had more than once complimented me by remarking that “I was a true chip of the old block,” as like what he was when at my age as two peas, and that he had no fear but that I should do him credit; so that I need not say any more about myself.

I must say something, however, about my sister Clarice, who was my junior by rather more than a year. Fair as a lily she was, in spite of summer suns, from which she took but little pains to shelter herself; but they had failed even to freckle her clear skin, or darken her light hair—except, it might be, that from them it obtained the golden hue which tinged it. Delicate as she looked, she took an active part in all household duties, and was now busy about some of them at the further end of the big hall, which served as our common sitting-room, workshop, kitchen, and often as a sleeping-room, when guests were numerous. She was assisted by Rachel Prentiss, a middle-aged negress, the only other woman in the establishment; who took upon herself the out-door work and rougher duties, with the exception of tending the poultry and milking the cows, in which Clarice also engaged.

I have not yet described the rest of the party round the fire. There was Bartle Won, a faithful follower, for many years, of Uncle Jeff; but as unlike him as it was possible that any two human beings could be. Bartle was a wiry little fellow, with bow legs, broad shoulders (one rather higher than the other), and a big head, out of which shone a pair of

grey eyes, keen as those of a hawk—the only point in which he resembled Uncle Jeff. He was wonderfully active and strong, notwithstanding his figure; and as for fatigue, he did not know what it meant. He could go days without eating or drinking; although, when he did get food, he certainly made ample amends for his abstinence. He was no great runner; but when once on the back of a horse, no animal, however vicious and up to tricks, had been able to dislodge him.

Gideon Tuttle was another faithful follower of Uncle Jeff: he was a hardy backwoodsman, whose gleaming axe had laid many monarchs of the forest low. Though only of moderate height, few men could equal him in strength. He could fell an ox with his fist, and hold down by the horns a young bull, however furious. He had had several encounters with bears; and although on two occasions only armed with a knife, he had come off victorious. His nerve and activity equalled his strength. He was no great talker, and he was frequently morose and ill-tempered; but he had one qualification which compensated for all his other deficiencies—he was devotedly attached to Uncle Jeff.

There were engaged on the farm, besides these, four other hands: an Irishman, a Spaniard, a negro, and a half-breed, who lived by themselves in a rough hut near the house. Although Uncle Jeff was a great advocate for liberty and equality, he had no fancy to have these fellows in-doors; their habits and language not being such as to make close intimacy pleasant.

The two old followers of Uncle Jeff—although they would have laughed at the notion of being called gentlemen—were

clean in their persons, and careful in their conversation, especially in the presence of Clarice.

Just before sunset that evening, our party had been increased by the arrival of an officer of the United States army and four men, who were on their way from Fort Laramie to Fort Harwood, on the other side of the mountains; but they had been deserted by their Indian guide, and having been unable to find the entrance to the pass, were well-nigh worn out with fatigue and vexation when they caught sight of Roaring Water Farm.

The officer and his men were received with a hearty welcome.

“There is food enough in the store, and we will make a shake-down for you in this room,” said Uncle Jeff, wringing the hand of the officer in his usual style.

The latter introduced himself as Lieutenant Manley Broadstreet. He was a fine-looking young fellow, scarcely older than I was; but he had already seen a great deal of service in border warfare with the Indians, as well as in Florida and Texas.

“You are welcome here, friends,” said Uncle Jeff, who, as I have said, was no respecter of persons, and made little distinction between the lieutenant and his men.

At this Lieutenant Broadstreet demurred, and, as he glanced at Clarice, inquired whether there was any building near in which the men could be lodged.

“They are not very fit company for a young lady,” he remarked aside.

He did not, however, object to the sergeant joining him; and the other three men were accordingly ordered to take

up their quarters at the hut, with its motley inhabitants.

Their appearance, I confess, somewhat reminded me of Falstaff's "ragged regiment." The three varied wonderfully in height. The tallest was not only tall, but thin in the extreme, his ankles protruding below his trousers, and his wrists beyond the sleeves of his jacket; he had lost his military hat, and had substituted for it a high beaver, which he had obtained from some Irish emigrant on the road. He was a German; and his name, he told me, was Karl Klitz. The shortest of the party, Barnaby Gillooly, was also by far the fattest; indeed, it seemed surprising that, with his obese figure, he could undergo the fatigue he must constantly have been called upon to endure. He seemed to be a jolly, merry fellow notwithstanding, as he showed by breaking into a hearty laugh as Klitz, stumbling over a log, fell with his long neck and shoulders on the one side, and his heels kicking up in the air on the other. The last man was evidently a son of Erin, from the few words he uttered in a rich brogue, which had not deteriorated by long absence from home and country. He certainly presented a more soldierly appearance than did his two comrades, but the ruddy blue hue of his nose and lips showed that when liquor was to be obtained he was not likely to let it pass his lips untasted.

The three soldiers were welcomed by the inhabitants of the hut, who were glad to have strangers with whom they could chat, and who could bring them news from the Eastern States.

On coming back to the house, after conducting the three men to the hut, I found the lieutenant and his sergeant,

Silas Custis, seated before the fire; the young lieutenant every now and then, as was not surprising, casting a glance at Clarice. But she was too busily occupied in getting the supper-table ready to notice the admiration she was inspiring.

Rachel, with frying-pan in hand, now made her way towards the fire, and begging those who impeded her movements to draw on one side, she commenced her culinary operations. She soon had a huge dish of rashers of bacon ready; while a couple of pots were carried off to be emptied of their contents; and some cakes, which had been cooking under the ashes, were withdrawn, and placed hot and smoking on the platter.

“All ready, genl’em,” exclaimed Rachel; “you can fall to when you like.”

The party got up, and we took our seats at the table. Clarice, who until a short time before had been assisting Rachel, now returned—having been away to arrange her toilet. She took her usual seat at the head of the table; and the lieutenant, to his evident satisfaction, found himself placed near her. He spoke in a pleasant, gentlemanly tone, and treated Clarice in every respect as a young lady,—as, indeed, she was. He now and then addressed me; and the more he said, the more I felt inclined to like him.

Uncle Jeff had a good deal of conversation with Sergeant Custis, who appeared to be a superior sort of person, and had, I suspect, seen better days.

An Indian stalked into the room.

We were still seated at supper when the door opened and an Indian stalked into the room, decked with war-paint and feathers, and rifle in hand.

“Ugh!” he exclaimed, stopping and regarding us, as if unwilling to advance without permission.

“Come in, friend,” said Uncle Jeff, rising and going towards him; “sit down, and make yourself at home. You would like some food, I guess?”

The Indian again uttered a significant “Ugh!” as, taking advantage of Uncle Jeff’s offer, he seated himself by the fire.

“Why, uncle,” exclaimed Clarice, “it is Winnemak!”

But I must explain how Clarice came to know the Indian, whom, at the first moment, no one else had recognised.

Not far off, in a grove of cottonwood trees up the valley, there came forth from the side of the hill a spring of singularly bright and cool water, of which Uncle Jeff was particularly fond; as were, indeed, the rest of us. Clarice made it a practice every evening, just before we returned home from our day's work, to fetch a large pitcher of water from this spring, that we might have it as cool and fresh as possible.

It happened that one afternoon, in the spring of the previous year, she had set off with this object in view, telling Rachel where she was going; but she had just got out of the enclosure when she caught sight of one of the cows straying up the valley.

"I go after her, Missie Clarice; you no trouble you-self," cried Rachel.

So Clarice continued her way, carrying her pitcher on her head. It was somewhat earlier than usual; and having no especial work to attend to at home, she did not hurry. It was as warm a day as any in summer, and finding the heat somewhat oppressive, she sat down by the side of the pool to enjoy the refreshing coolness of the air which came down the cañon. "I ought to be going home," she said to herself; and taking her pitcher, she filled it with water.

She was just about to replace it on her head, when she was startled by the well-known Indian "Ugh!" uttered by some one who was as yet invisible. She at first felt a little alarmed, but recollecting that if the stranger had been an enemy he would not have given her warning, she stood still,

with her pitcher in her hand, looking around her. Presently an Indian appeared from among the bushes, his dress torn and travel-stained, and his haggard looks showing that he must have undergone great fatigue. He made signs, as he approached, to show that he had come over the mountains; he then pointed to his lips, to let her understand that he was parched with thirst.

“Poor man! you shall have some water, then,” said Clarice, immediately holding up the pitcher, that the stranger might drink without difficulty. His looks brightened as she did so; and after he had drunk his fill he gave her back the pitcher, drawing a long breath, and placing his hand on his heart to express his gratitude.

While the Indian was drinking, Clarice observed Rachel approaching, with a look of alarm on her countenance. It vanished, however, when she saw how Clarice and the Indian were employed.

“Me dare say de stranger would like food as well as drink,” she observed as she joined them, and making signs to the Indian to inquire if he was hungry.

He nodded his head, and uttered some words. But although neither Clarice nor Rachel could understand his language, they saw very clearly that he greatly required food.

“Come along, den,” said Rachel; “you shall hab some in de twinkle ob an eye, as soon as we get home.—Missie Clarice, me carry de pitcher, or Indian fancy you white slavey;” and Rachel laughed at her own wit.

She then told Clarice how she had caught sight of the Indian coming over the mountain, as she was driving home

the cow; and that, as he was making his way towards the spring, she had been dreadfully alarmed at the idea that he might surprise her young mistress. She thought it possible, too, that he might be accompanied by other Redskins, and that they should perhaps carry her off; or, at all events, finding the house undefended, they might pillage it, and get away with their booty before the return of the men.

“But he seems friendly and well-disposed,” said Clarice, looking at the Indian; “and even if he had not been suffering from hunger and thirst, I do not think he would have been inclined to do us any harm. The Redskins are not all bad; and many, I fear, have been driven, by the ill treatment they have received from white men, to retaliate, and have obtained a worse character than they deserve.”

“Dere are bad red men, and bad white men, and bad black men; but, me tink, not so many ob de last,” said Rachel, who always stuck up for her own race.

The red man seemed to fancy that they were talking about him; and he tried to smile, but failed in the attempt. It was with difficulty, too, he could drag on his weary limbs.

As soon as they reached the house Rachel made him sit down; and within a minute or two a basin of broth was placed before him, at which she blew away until her cheeks almost cracked, in an endeavour to cool it, that he might the more speedily set to. He assisted her, as far as his strength would allow, in the operation; and then placing the basin to his lips, he eagerly drained off its contents, without making use of the wooden spoon with which she had supplied him.

“Dat just to keep body and soul togedder, till somet’ing more ’stantial ready for you,” she said.

Clarice had in the meantime been preparing some venison steaks, which, with some cakes from the oven, were devoured by the Indian with the same avidity with which he had swallowed the broth. But although the food considerably revived him, he still showed evident signs of exhaustion; so Rachel, placing a buffalo robe in the corner of the room, invited him to lie down and rest. He staggered towards it, and in a few minutes his heavy breathing showed that he was asleep.

Uncle Jeff was somewhat astonished, when he came in, on seeing the Indian; but he approved perfectly of what Clarice and Rachel had done.

“To my mind,” he observed, “when these Redskins choose to be enemies, we must treat them as enemies, and shoot them down, or they will be having our scalps; but if they wish to be friends, we should treat them as friends, and do them all the good we can.”

Uncle Jeff forgot just then that we ought to do good to our enemies as well as to our friends; but that would be a difficult matter for a man to accomplish when a horde of savages are in arms, resolved to take his life; so I suppose it means that we must do them good when we can get them to be at peace—or to bury the war-hatchet, as they would express themselves.

The Indian slept on, although he groaned occasionally as if in pain,—nature then asserting its sway, though, had he been awake, he probably would have given no sign of what he was suffering.

“I suspect the man must be wounded,” observed Uncle Jeff. “It will be better not to disturb him.”

We had had supper, and the things were being cleared away, when, on going to look at the Indian, I saw that his eyes were open, and that he was gazing round him, astonished at seeing so many people.

“He is awake,” I observed; and Clarice, coming up, made signs to inquire whether he would have some more food.

He shook his head, and lay back again, evidently unable to sit up.

Just then Uncle Jeff, who had been out, returned.

“I suspect that he is one of the Kaskayas, whose hunting-grounds are between this and the Platte,” observed Uncle Jeff; and approaching the Indian, he stooped over him and spoke a few words in the dialect of the tribe he had mentioned.

The Indian answered him, although with difficulty.

“I thought so,” said Uncle Jeff. “He has been badly wounded by an arrow in the side, and although he managed to cut it out and bind up the hurt, he confesses that he still suffers greatly. Here, Bartle, you are the best doctor among us,” he added, turning to Won, who was at work mending some harness on the opposite side of the room; “see what you can do for the poor fellow.”

Bartle put down the straps upon which he was engaged, and joined us, while Clarice retired. Uncle Jeff and Bartle then examined the Indian’s side.

“I will get some leaves to bind over the wound to-morrow morning, which will quickly heal it; and, in the meantime, we will see if Rachel has not got some of the ointment which helped to cure Gideon when he cut himself so badly with his axe last spring.”

Rachel, who prided herself on her ointment, quickly produced a jar of it, and assisted Bartle in dressing the Indian’s wound. She then gave him a cooling mixture which she had concocted.

The Indian expressed his gratitude in a few words, and again covering himself up with a buffalo robe, was soon asleep.

The next morning he was better, but still unable to move.

He remained with us ten days, during which Clarice and Rachel watched over him with the greatest care, making him all sorts of dainty dishes which they thought he would like; and in that time he and Uncle Jeff managed to understand each other pretty well.

The Indian, according to the reticent habits of his people, was not inclined to be very communicative at first as to how he had received his wound; but as his confidence increased he owned that he had, with a party of his braves, made an excursion to the southward to attack their old enemies the Arrapahas, but that he and his followers had been overwhelmed by greatly superior numbers. His people had been cut off to a man, and himself badly wounded. He had managed, however, to make his escape to the mountains without being observed by his foes. As he knew that they were on the watch for him, he was afraid of returning to the plains, and had kept on the higher ground, where he had suffered greatly from hunger and thirst, until he had at length fallen in with Clarice at the spring.

At last he was able to move about; and his wound having completely healed, he expressed his wish to return to his people.

“Winnemak will ever be grateful for the kindness shown him by the Palefaces,” he said, as he was wishing us good-bye. “A time may come when he may be able to show what he feels; he is one who never forgets his friends, although he may be far away from them.”

“We shall be happy to see you whenever you come this way,” said Uncle Jeff; “but as for doing us any good, why, we do not exactly expect that. We took care of you, as we should take care of any one who happened to be in distress and wanted assistance, whether a Paleface or a Redskin.”

Winnemak now went round among us, shaking each person by the hand. When he came to Clarice he stopped, and spoke to her for some time,—although, of course, she could not understand a word he said.

Uncle Jeff, who was near, made out that he was telling her he had a daughter of her age, and that he should very much like to make them known to each other. “My child is called Maysotta, the ‘White Lily;’ though, when she sees you, she will say that that name ought to be yours,” he added.

Clarice asked Uncle Jeff to tell Winnemak that she should be very glad to become acquainted with Maysotta whenever he could bring her to the farm.

Uncle Jeff was so pleased with the Indian, that he made him a present of a rifle and a stock of ammunition; telling him that he was sure he would ever be ready to use it in the service of his friends.

Winnemak’s gratitude knew no bounds, and he expressed himself far more warmly than Indians are

accustomed to do. Then bidding us farewell, he took his way to the north-east.

“I know these Indians pretty well,” observed Bartle, as Winnemak disappeared in the distance. “We may see his face again when he wants powder and shot, but he will not trouble himself to come back until then.”

We had begun to fancy that Bartle was right, for many months went by and we saw nothing of our Indian friend. Our surprise, therefore, was great, when he made his appearance in the manner I have described in an earlier portion of the chapter.

Chapter Two.

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Winnemak warns us of the approach of Indians—Bartle goes out to scout—No signs of a foe—I take the lieutenant to visit “Roaring Water”—Bartle reports that the enemy have turned back—the Lieutenant delayed by the sergeant’s illness—The visit to the hut—A tipsy trooper—Klitz and Gillooly missing—The lieutenant becomes worse—Search for the missing men—I offer to act as guide to the lieutenant—Bartle undertakes to find out what has become of Klitz and Barney.

“Glad to see you, friend!” said Uncle Jeff, getting up and taking the Indian by the hand. “What brings you here?”

“To prove that Winnemak has not forgotten the kindness shown him by the Palefaces,” was the answer. “He has come to warn his friends, who sleep in security, that their enemies are on the war-path, and will ere long attempt to take their scalps.”

“They had better not try that game,” said Uncle Jeff; “if they do, they will find that they have made a mistake.”

“The Redskins fight not as do the Palefaces; they try to take their enemies by surprise,” answered Winnemak. “They will wait until they can find the white men scattered about over the farm, when they will swoop down upon them like the eagle on its prey; or when all are slumbering within, they will creep up to the house, and attack it before there is time for defence.”

“Much obliged for your warning, friend,” said Uncle Jeff; “but I should like to know more about these enemies, and where they are to be found. We might manage to turn the tables, and be down upon them when they fancy that we are all slumbering in security, and thus put them to the right-about.”

“They are approaching as stealthily as the snake in the grass,” answered Winnemak. “Unless you can get on their trail, it will be no easy matter to find them.”

“Who are these enemies you speak of; and how do you happen to know that they are coming to attack us?” asked Uncle Jeff, who generally suspected all Indian reports, and fancied that Winnemak was merely repeating what he had heard, or, for some reason of his own—perhaps to gain credit to himself—had come to warn us of a danger which had no real existence.

“I was leading forth my braves to revenge the loss we suffered last year, when our scouts brought word that they had fallen in with a large war-party of Arrapahas and Apaches, far too numerous for our small band to encounter with any chance of success. We accordingly retreated, watching for an opportunity to attack any parties of the enemy who might become separated from the larger body. They also sent out their scouts, and one of these we captured. My braves were about to put him to death, but I promised him his liberty if he would tell me the object of the expedition. Being a man who was afraid to die, he told us that the party consisted of his own tribe and the Apaches, who had been joined by some Spanish Palefaces; and that their object was not to make war on either the Kaskayas or the Pawnees, but to rob a wealthy settler living on the side of the mountains, as well as any other white men they might find located in the neighbourhood. Feeling sure that their evil designs were against my friends, I directed my people to follow me, while I hastened forward to give you due warning of what is likely to happen. As they are very numerous, and have among them firearms and ammunition, it may be a hard task, should they attack the house, to beat them off.”

Such in substance was the information Winnemak brought us.

“To my mind, the fellows will never dare to come so far north as this; or, if they do, they will think twice about it before they venture to attack our farm,” answered Uncle Jeff.

“A wise man is prepared for anything which can possibly happen,” said the Indian. “What is there to stop them? They are too numerous to be successfully opposed by any force of white men in these parts; and my braves are not willing to throw away their lives to no purpose.”

Uncle Jeff thought the matter over. “I will send out a trusty scout to ascertain who these people are, and what they are about,” he said at length. “If they are coming this way, we shall get ready to receive them; and if not, we need not further trouble ourselves.”

Lieutenant Broadstreet, who held the Indians cheap, was very much inclined to doubt the truth of the account brought by Winnemak, but he agreed that Uncle Jeff’s plan was a prudent one.

Bartle Won immediately volunteered to start off to try and find the whereabouts of the supposed marauding party. His offer was at once accepted; and before many minutes were over he had left the farm, armed with his trusty rifle, and his axe and hunting-knife in his belt.

“Take care they do not catch you,” observed the lieutenant.

“If you knew Bartle, you would not give him such advice,” said Uncle Jeff. “He is not the boy to be caught napping by Redskins; he is more likely to lay a dozen of them low than lose his own scalp.”

The Indian seeing Bartle go, took his leave, saying that he would join his own people, who were to encamp, according to his orders, near a wood in the valley below. He too intended to keep a watch on the enemy; and should he