

LITERATURE. THE BELFRY OF THE PAST.

BY WILLIAM ROSS WALLACE. who has not listened to Memory's bell in the belfry built up by the Past? How its magical numbers are wrought, weaving over the spirit fall many a spell. When rung by the breeze or the blast! New they whisper the gladness, or thunder the woe Of each heart in the far-away time; And no tremulous soul in the numbers may flow Over the maddest scene as it listens below. It must thrum to the changeable chime.

BLANCHE BERTRAND; OR, PERILS OF THE BORDER.

BY EMERSON BENNETT. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1855, by ROBERT BONNER, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Southern District of New York.

CHAPTER I. THE VOYAGE.

The angle on the right bank of the Great Kanawha, formed by its junction with the Ohio, is called Point Pleasant, and is a place of historical note. Here, on the 10th of October, 1774, during what is known as Lord Dunmore's War, was fought one of the fiercest and most desperate battles that ever took place between the Virginians and their forest foes—a battle which is believed by some to have been, rather than the action of Lexington and Concord, the opening scene of the great drama of the Revolution—for the Indians in this instance, it has since become ascertained, were urged on by the British agents to strike a death-blow against the frontiers, in order to pave the way for an easy conquest, in the event of the rebelliously-inclined colonists venturing upon an open rupture with the mother country. After the battle in question, in which the Indians were defeated with great loss, and driven back to their towns, in the month of January, 1775, the State of Ohio—and whence they would again have been routed by their indignant and chivalrous foes, but for the pusillanimous conduct of Virginia's governor, Lord Dunmore, who, as commander-in-chief of all the forces protecting the frontier, had been ordered to peace with an almost conquered and barbarous enemy, and insisted upon an inglorious retreat—after the battle of Point Pleasant and the unwilling retreat of the Virginians, we say, a fort was here erected by the latter, which was destroyed, and the site of the fort, which was afterwards occupied by the British, was the scene of the sanguinary scenes of strife which immediately followed, and which in this section of country were continued for many years after that establishment of peace which acknowledged the united colonies of America a free and independent nation.

In fact, it may be said that there was no real safety for the hardy and daring settlers of the West till after General Wayne's celebrated treaty of Greenville in 1795, and that the year 1795, during the interval, witnessed many a bloody scene, it being a prominent frontier post, magazine, and rendezvous for the different traders and emigrants of the great interior of Virginia, who found the deep and navigable waters of the Kanawha a safe and convenient channel for the transportation of their goods to and from the banks of the Ohio. The first fort erected here was a large rectangular stockade, and occupied the site of the present one; and subsequent to the battle of Point Pleasant, fell the noble and celebrated Shawnee chief, Cornstalk, together with his son, Elinipshaw, Red Hawk, and another Indian—altogether murdered by the garrison, and the revenge for the murder of Cornstalk, who was unfortunately shot near the fort by another party of Indians during the time that Cornstalk and his comrades, on a visit to the commandant, were being detained as hostages.

As if a curse, or a fatal doom, had been pronounced upon the spot, the fort, which was erected for the purpose of protecting the frontier, was soon after destroyed; and another and smaller one, composed of a circle of cabins, was erected higher up the bank of the Ohio, about two hundred yards above the site of the former one. This latter was standing at the period we have chosen for the opening of our story, and contained several families of men, women, and children, who lived by trading, hunting, and cultivating the lands in the immediate vicinity.

For some distance back of the fort, and all between the angle of the two rivers, the ground had been swept of trees and put under cultivation; and between the fort and the usual boat landing, covering the sharp point of the angle, and the large number of those who had fallen so nobly in the battle already mentioned, was a kind of lawn—the soil, greenly ploughed of the youth and junior members of the station, who not unfrequently frequented here with all their hearts, and the large number of children who had no cause for fear, though each had more than once heard the shrill war whoop of the red man, and knew not at what moment it might startle him again.

The scene which was now prepared to present to the reader was one of placid and picturesque beauty. The bright sun of a clear and beautiful morning, in the spring of 1790, was pouring down his glorious rays upon a great forest, sweet and fresh with new verdure, and the large and small streams rolling like mirrors between, and reflecting far down in their still depths every object presented above them—upon the open ground, fenced fields, browsing cattle and fortified dwellings of the settlers; and in the distance, and high up in the air, in idle, busy or romping groups, according to age, condition or inclination, as they were seen scattered over the green lawn between the landing and their stronghold, which was now deserted by all save the aged and infirm.

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acquaintance with the rude and perilous scenes of the frontiers, everything in his manner, dress and appearance would seem to testify; but as we shall have occasion in the course of our narrative to fully set forth who and what he was, we will leave him for the moment, and return to the approving group, for he seemed to be regarding with lively interest.

Of this group, composed of a middle aged man and four females, with a black female servant following some five or six paces in the rear, there was not the most casual eye would have detected one who stood out and rested upon with pleasure, and that one only we propose to give such a description as will convey in the fewest words a general idea of her appearance, with a slight inkling of her character. The lady in question, then, or she evidently was a lady, born and bred, was apparently about twenty years of age, of a slender and graceful figure, and of that peculiar cast of feature which, besides being beautiful in every lineament, rarely fails to affect the beholder with something like a charm. Her soft blue eyes looked sweetly out, from under long, drooping lashes; a kind of active, intelligent animation appeared to beam from the whole countenance; and when she spoke, disclosing two rows of pearly teeth, a soft smile played around her mouth, and her eyes were ever seen; and when she laughed, if we may be permitted the poetic idea, the music thereof seemed to come from the realm of sunlight, for her soul in such moments ever seemed to light up her face with an almost unearthly brilliancy.

But though wanting to a refined degree, that face was not effeminate in character; and he could have been no connoisseur in human nature who would have judged her to have been a delicate or joyous creature. She was human, with a man's will and pride; and there were times when those soft eyes could flash, those laughing lips curl, and those mellow tones become commanding and stern. There was a light complexion, a nose of a fine shape, a present slightly brown hue of her features would have indicated exposure to the open air, such as might result from a long journey, had not her dress, of finer materials and more fashionable than those around her, proclaimed her to have recently from the older settlements at the eastward. Her travelling costume—a fine brown habit, high in the neck, buttoned closely over the bosom and around the wrists, and coming down her small, pretty feet, with her trailing on the ground, both neat and becoming; and with her riding cap and its waving ostrich plume, set gaily above her flowing curls, her tout ensemble contrasted forcibly with the rough, unpolished appearance of those of her own sex, who were to be seen in the crowd, in scarlet flannel petticoats and bleached linen caps.

"Oh, Blanche," said one of the more venerable of her female companions, pursuing a conversation which had been maintained since quitting the open boat, "I cannot but be glad to see you, and it just seems to me as if something were going to happen to you; and when I feel that way something generally does happen."

"Well, aunt," returned Blanche, with a light laugh, "I do not doubt, in the least that something will happen—for I expect one of these days to reach my dear father and blessed mother, and give them such an embrace as is due from a dutiful daughter to parents who have waited so long for me. But I do not mean that, Blanche," returned the other, somewhat petulantly; "and when you just laugh like a gay and thoughtless girl, when you ought to be weeping, and when you have come so far, through a partially settled country, you think, I believe, your own pretty face will ward off danger in the more perilous wilderness—let me warn you that a fearful journey is before you. Let me repeat, then, my dear child, that you have come so far, and that scarcely a boat descends the Ohio—as calm and beautiful as it looks to-day, under this bright sunshine—that does not encounter more or less peril from the savages that prowler along either bank, and who will not spare a life, and who will with human life are heard of no more, and none ever return to tell the tale."

"But why repeat this to me, dear aunt," returned Blanche, with a more serious air, "when you know that I have no intention of attempting the voyage? My parents have sent for me to join them in their new home, and it is my duty to go to them, be the peril what it may."

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contained two berths, one for herself and the other for her waiting woman—a large rush mat for the feet—a rude, but cushioned settee—two or three camp stools—a kind of dressing bureau, evidently of frontier manufacture—a small mirror—and a few other articles of no great importance; and though many a proud beauty of to-day might have entered it with a smile of contempt, yet for that period and region of country it was considered quite respectable, and it was not always to be found; and that when our barn was burned, you made rather a narrow escape from the hay mow; but then perhaps you had stolen thither to get your weapons in order."

"Very well, Duke," returned Blanche, "I will take your word for the present. And now go and tell Master Eugene I wish to speak to him."

Eugene, who was below when the message of Blanche reached him, instantly turned on his heel with a slightly flushed face, and repaired to the deck, where the beautiful heiress received him with her wonted dignified courtesy.

"I have sent for you, Eugene," she said, "to know what you have done about anything being done during this voyage?—You have made the journey twice, I believe, and ought to know. It is true, you told me something of it before we crossed the mountains, but I confess I paid little heed to it; and I proceed, as I have done, to have the matter settled in your own mind, and to let you know the result."

"I believe there is little danger, Miss Blanche—I should say comparatively little—so long as we keep vigilant, and do not venture to approach either shore," returned Eugene, in a quick, excited tone, that indicated his deep interest in the matter. "Many boats and their crews have been destroyed by the savages; but two or three have in fact been seized by the savages this spring, and in several others had very narrow escapes; but in every instance, I am inclined to believe, the misfortune has resulted, either from their neglecting to keep a sharp look out, or from their giving care, as your uncle expressed it, to the most earnest appeals of humanity."

"I do not exactly comprehend the last remark, which you ascribe to my uncle," said Blanche, "but I will endeavor to do so. In other words, you must understand there are a number of white men among the Indians, either renegades or prisoners, who occasionally, either voluntarily or by compulsion, are induced to accompany the savages. Some of these men have been lost, for often a number of Indians are lying in ambush to attack the boat the moment it touches the shore; and if not unfrequently they succeed in killing the crew, and in capturing the boat, and in some instances are forced in turn to act as decoys to others, before being carried into a captivity which generally results in a death of the most agonizing kind."

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Oh, that's a clear case, Miss Blanche," replied Duke, straightening himself up with an air, "clear as daylight of day, that is. What 'ud dis child do? Golly bless! I'd just stand up and fight 'em, like Mars' Phill' fit the Brit'ners!"

"Phill' fit the Brit'ners!" rightly informed, my brave Duke," pursued Blanche, with a mischievous smile, "you were not always noted for courage; for during the time that your Master Phillip fought the British, and especially upon any report being made that the latter had been killed, it is said you were not always to be found; and that when our barn was burned, you made rather a narrow escape from the hay mow; but then perhaps you had stolen thither to get your weapons in order."

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creased feeling of security which their so far eventful progress had served to induce, it was little they dreamed of an impending fate more terrible than their darkest fancies had ever conceived.

"I think it is better to be safe than sorry," returned Blanche, "and I will take your word for the present. And now go and tell Master Eugene I wish to speak to him."

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and at the same moment the boatman on the rig called out: "Quick, here, boys! We're agin the shore, as us as death, followed a scene of hurried and anxious confusion, the voices of the three boatmen mingling together in loud, quick, excited tones.

"Push off the bow!" cried one. "Quick! altogether, now! over with her!" shouted another. "The de'il in it! she's running aground here, a muddy bottom!" almost yelled a third. Meantime the laden boat was brushing aloft against projecting bushes and overreaching limbs, and every moment getting more and more entangled, while the long poles and sweeps of the boatmen, they attempted to push her off, were often plunged without touching bottom, into what appeared to be a soft, clayey mud, from which they were only extricated by such an outlay of strength as tended to more to draw the clumsy craft upon the bank, than wished to avoid. At length, scarcely more than a minute from the first alarm, there was a kind of a thing together, as it were, and the boat immediately became disengaged from the mud.

The fact was announced by Dick Winter, in a characteristic manner, who added, with an oath that it was just what he expected. For a moment or two a dead silence followed, as if each compartment of the matter was one to be viewed in very serious light.

"Why do you pause, men?" almost shouted Eugene. "For God's sake, set to work at once, and get her off! Every moment we remain here is as much as our lives are worth." "It's powerful easy to say 'git her off, Cap'n,'" answered Dick, "but I'd just like to see ary ten m that could do it, in a night like this."

"And I'd just like to see anything," put in the one called Tom, who was ready with his joke, and surrounded circumstances be what they might. "But you will make an effort," said Eugene. "You surely do not think of sitting quietly down here, and waiting for daylight, with perhaps a savage close proximity to see afore he can get 'em?" "No, we'll not try, Cap'n; we'll do our best, if it do come to nothing!" was the response.

"And where are we, do you think?" inquired Eugene, "and what are we to do? Excitement—not much thought for fear on how you think of the danger which perhaps menaced the f. Blanche. "It seems like we are stuck in the mud," replied Tom, "and what are we to do? Excitement—not much thought for fear on how you think of the danger which perhaps menaced the f. Blanche. "Quit your jesting, Harper, and attend to your duty!" rejoined Eugene, in a stern, angry tone. "I warn't jesting then, Cap'n," replied the boatman, doggedly; "I war jesting a right smart while ago, but now I'm serious, and I'd like to see 'em speak out and lighten a feller!" "I think we're agin the north bank of the Ohio observed Tom. "That's amazing clear wisdom," yawned Harris, rejoined Harper, with an oath; "unsaiding 'ris 't that is!" "As clear as your anyhow!" retorted Tom. "And mine war clear as mud," returned the other, "for war gwine down this here river, and as clear as gin, and as clear as mud, and you think it's Ohio side. Why, whar else mought we be?" "Agin a island, for all you know," growled Tom. "In Heaven's name!" exclaimed Eugene, excitedly, "cease this jesting and wrangling, and do your duty, or I'll see you and your crew employed you for tre, earnest, faithful men, and find you neglecting your duty in the first moment of our greatest peril."