LORDS OF THE NORTH

A Story of the Trappers and Pioneers of the Great Northwest.

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SYNOPSIS OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

A story of the pioneers and trappers in the Canadian northwest in the early days of the past century. Rufus Gillespie, a trader and clerk for the Northwest company, is telling his experience and adventures. The opening scene is at Quebec. Rufus, a lad of 18, has a particular friend in Eric Hamilton, a trader with the Hudson Bay company. Hamilton's wife and child are abducted by Indians, one of whom, La Grande Diable, had a grudge against him. Louis Laplante, a former schoolmate of Gillespie, is found to be in league with the Indians. The Indians having gone north, Gillespie goes with the Nor'west voyageurs on their annual trip to the head of Lake Superior, and Hamilton goes with the Hudson Bay company. Hamilton is detained at Fort Douglas, on the Red river, but Rufus secures appointment as a trader with the buffalo hunters, which enables him to follow Laplante. Meantime, Rufus had met Frances Sutherland, daughter of a Red river settler, and the two became attached to each other. He is accompanied to Pembina by the girl and Father Holland, a jovial Irish priest. A buffalo hunt is held, and, getting away from the others in the chase, Rufus is attacked by Sioux Indians. His own Indians come to the rescue and Le Grande Diable is captured. A rush is made for the latter's camp, but the Sioux set the prairie on fire.

La Grande Diable escapes while Rufus pursues his fruitless chase of the Indians. The following winter is spent in Indian village trading for furs. Hamilton is on the verge of insanity, but Rufus keeps a careful watch over him and conducts his business transactions.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GOOD WHITE FATHER.

For a week Hamilton and I had been busy in our respective lodges getting peltries and personal belongings into shape for return to Red river. On Saturday night, at least I counted it Saturday from the notches on my doorpost, though Eric, grown morose and contradictory, maintained that it was Sunday—we sat talking before the fire of my lodge. A dreary raindrip pattered through the leaky roof and the soaked parchment tacked across the window opening flapped monotonously against the pine logs.

Unfastening the moon-shaped medallion, which my uncle had given me, I slowly spelled out the Nor'westers' motto—"Fortitude in Distress."

"For-ti-tude in Dis-tress," I repeated, idly. "By Jove, Hamilton, we need it, don't we?"

Eric's lips curled in scorn. Without answering, he impatiently kicked a fallen brand back to the live coals. I know old saws are poor comfort to people in distress, being chiefly applicable when they are not needed.

"What in the world can be keeping Father Holland?" I asked, leading off on another tack. "Here we are almost into the summer, and never a sight of him."

"Did you really expect him back alive from the Bloods?" sneered Hamilton. He had unconsciously acquired a habit of expecting the worst.

"Certainly," I returned. "He's been among them before."

"Then all I have to say is, you're a fool!"

Poor Eric! He had informed me I was a fool so often in his ravings I had grown quite used to the insult. He glared savagely at the fire, and if I had not understood this bitterness towards the missionary, the next remark was of a nature to enlighten me.

"I don't see why any man in his senses wants to save the soul of an Indian,' he broke out. "Let them go where they belong! Souls! They haven't any souls, or if they have, it's the soul of a fiend—"

"By the by, Eric," I interrupted, for this petulant ill-humor, that saw naught but evil in everything, was becoming too frequent and always ended in the same way—a night of semi-delirium, "by the by, did you see those fellows turning up soil for corn with a buffalo shoulder-blade as a hoe?"

"I wish every damn red a thousand feet under the soil, deeper than that, if the temperature increases."

It was impossible to talk to Hamilton without provoking a quarrel. Leaning back with hands clasped behind my head, I watched through half-closed eyes his sad face darkling under stormy moods.

At last the rain succeeded in soaking through the parchment across the window and the wind drove through a great split in chilling gusts that added to the cabin's discomfort. I got up and jammed an old hat into the hole. At the window I heard the shouting of Indians having a hilarious night among the lodges and was amazed at the sound of discharging firearms above the huzzas, for ammunition was scarce among the Mandanes. The hubbub seemed to be coming towards our hut. I could see nothing through the window slit, and lighting a pine fagot, shot back the latch-bolt and threw open the door. A multitude of tawny, joyous, upturned faces thronged the steps. The crowd was surging about some newcomer, and Chief Black Cat was prancing around in an ecstasy of delight, firing away all his gunpowder in joyous demonstration. I lifted my torch. The Indians fell back and forth strode Father Holland, his face shining wet and abeam with pleasure. The Indians had been welcoming "their good white father." As he dismissed his Mandane children we drew him in and placed his soaked over-garments before the fire. Then we proffered him all the delicacies of bachelors' quarters, and filled and refilled his bowl with soup, and did not stop pouring out our lye-black tea till he had drained the dregs of it.

Having satisfied his inner-man, we gave him the best stump-tree seat in the cabin and sat back to listen. There was the awkward pause of reunion, when friends have not had time to gather up the loose threads of a parted past and weave them anew into stronger bands of comradeship. Hamilton and the priest were strangers; but if the latter were as overcome by the meeting after half a year's isolation as I was, the silence was not surprising. To me it seemed the genial face was unusually grave, and I noticed a long, horizontal scar across his forehead.

"What's that, father?" I asked, indicating the mark on his brow.

"Tush, youngster! Nothing! Nothing at all! Sampled scalping knife on me; thought better of it, kept me out of the martyr's crown."

"And left you your own!" cried Hamilton, astonished at the priest's careless stocism.

"Left me my own," responded Father Holland.

"Do you mean to say the murderous—" I began.

"Tush, youngster! Be quiet!" said he. "Haven't many brethren come from the same tribe more like warped branches than men? What am I, that I should escape? Never speak of it again," and he continued his silent study of the flames' play.

"Where are your Indians?" he asked abruptly.

"In the lodges. Shall I whistle for them?"

He did not answer, but leaned forward with elbows on his knees, rubbing his chin vigorouly first with one hand, then the other, still studying the fire.

"How strong are the Mandanes?" he asked.

"Weak, weak," I answered. "Few hundred. It hasn't been worth while for traders to come here for years."

"Was it worth while this year?"

"Not for trade."

"For anything else?" and he looked at Eric's dejected face.

"Nothing else," I put in hastily, fearing one of Hamilton's outbreaks. "We've been completely off the track; might better have stayed in the north—"

"No, you mightn't, not by any means," was his sharp retort. "I've been in the Sioux lodges for three weeks."

With an inarticulate cry, Hamilton sprang to his feet. He was trembling from head to foot and caught Father Holland roughly by the shoulder.

"Speak out, sir! What of Miriam?" he demanded in dry, hard, rasping tones.

"Well, well, safe and inviolate. So's the boy, a big boy now! May ye have them both in y'r arms soon—soon—soon!" and again he fell to studying the fire with an unhurried deliberation, that was torture to Hamilton.

"Are they with you? Are they with you?" shouted Hamilton, hope bounding up elastically to the wildest heights after his long depression. "Don't keep me in suspense! I cannot bear it. Tell me where they are," he pleaded. "Are they with you?" and his eyes burned into the priest's like live coals. "Are—they—with—you?"

"No—Lord—no!" roared Father Holland, alarmed at Hamilton's violent condition. "But,' he added, seeing Eric reel dizzily, "but they're all right! Now you keep quiet and don't scare the wits out of a body! They're all right, I tell you, and I've come straight from them for the ransom price."

"Get it, Rufus, get it!" shouted Hamilton to me, throwing his hands distractedly to his head, a habit to common with him of late. "Get it! Get it!" he kept calling, utterly beside himself.

"Sit down, will you?" thundered the priest, as if Eric's sitting down would calm all agitation. "Sit down! Behave! Keep quiet, both of you, or my tongue'll forget holy orders and give ye some good Irish eloquence! What d' y' mane, scarin' the breath out of a body and blowing his ideas to limbo? Keep quiet, now, listen!"

"And did they," I cried, in spite of the injunction, "did they do that to you?" pointing to the scar on his brow.

"Yes, they did."

"Because they saw you with me?"

"No, that's a brand for the faith, you conceited whelp, you—they stopped their tortures because they saw you with me. Now, swell out, Rufus, and gloat over your importance! I tell you it was the devil, himself, snatched my martyr's crown."

"Le Grand Diable?"

"Le Grand Diable's own mission. I saw his devilish eyes leering from the back o' the crowd, when I was tied to a stake. "Bring that Indian to me,' sez I, transfixing him with my gaze; for—you understand—I couldn't point, my hands being tied. Troth! But ye should 'a' seen their looks of amazement at me boldness! There was I, roped to that tree, like a pig for the boiling pot, and sez I, 'Bring—that Indian—to me!' just as though I was managing the execution," and the priest paused to enjoy the recollection of the effects of his boldness.

"A squaw up with an old clout," he continued, "and slashed it across my face, saying, 'Take that, pale face! Take that, man with a woman's skirts on!' and 'Take that!' howled a young buck, fetching the flat of his dagger across me forehead, close-cropped hair giving no grip for scalping, not to mention a pate as bald as mine," and the priest roared at his own joke, patting his bare crown affectionately.

"Though the blood was boilin' in me enraged veins and dribblin' down my face like the rain to-night, by the help o' the Lord, I felt no pain. Never flinchin' nor takin' heed o' that bold baste of a squaw, I bawled like a bull of Bashan, 'Bring—that Indian—to me, coward-hearted Sioux—d' y' fear an Iroquois? Bring him to me and I'll make him enrich your tribe!'

"Faith! Their eyes grew big as a harvest moon and they brought Le Grand Diable to me. Knowing his covetous heart, I told him if he still had the woman and the child, I'd get him a big ransom. At that they all jangled a bit, the old squaw clouting me with her filthy rag as if she wanted to slap me to a peak. At length they let Le Grand Diable unfasten the bands. With my hands tied behind my back, I was taken to his lodge. Miriam and the boy were kept in a place behind the Sioux squaw's hut. Once when the skin tied between blew us, I caught a glimpse of her poor white face. The boy was playing round her feet. I was in a corner of the lodge but was so grimed with grease and dirt, if she saw me she thought I was some Indian captive and turned away her head. I told La Grand Diable in habitant French—which the rascal understands—that I could obtain a good ransom for his prisoners. He left me alone in the lodge for some hours, I think to spy upon me and learn if I tried to speak to Miriam; but I lay still as a log and pretended to sleep. When he came back, he began bartering for the price; but I could make him no promises as to the amount or time of payment, for I was not sure you were here, and would not have him know where you are.

"He kept me hanging on for his answer during the whole week, and many a time Miriam brushed past so close her skirts touched me; but that shemale devil of his—may the Lord give them both a warm, front seat!—was always watching and I could not speak. Miriam's face was hidden under her shawl and she looked neither to the right, nor to the left. I don't think she ever saw me. On condition you stay in your camp and don't go to meet her, but send your two Indians alone for her with your offer, he let me go. Here I am! Now, Rufus, where are your men? Off with them bearing more gifts than the Queen of Sheba carried to Colomon!"

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From the hour that La Robe Noire and Little Fellow, laden with gaudy trinkets and hunting outfits, departed for the Sioux lodges, Hamilton was positively a madman. In the first place, he had been determined to disguise himself as an Indian and go instead of La Robe Noire, whose figure he resembled. To this, we would not listen. Le Grand Diable was not the man to be tricked and there was no sense in ransoming Miriam for a captive husband. Then, he persisted in riding part of the way with our messengers, which necessitated my doing likewise. I had to snatch his horse's bridle, wheel both our horses round and head homeward at a gallop, before he would listen to reason and come back.

Round the lodges he was a ramping tiger. Twenty times a day he went from our hut to the height of land commanding the north country, keeping me on the run at his heels; and all night he beat around the cramped shack as if it had been a cage. On the fourth day from the messengers' departure, chains could not bind him. If all went well, they should be with us at night. In defiance of Le Grand Diable's conditions, which an arrow from an unseen marksman might enforce, Erie saddled his mare and rode out to meet the men.

Of course Father Holland and I peltered after him; but it was only because gathering darkness prevented travel that we prevailed on him to dismount and await the Indians' coming at the edge of the village.

At last came the clank, clank of shod hoofs in the valley. The natives used only unshod animals, so we recognized our men. Hamilton darted away like a hare racing for cover.

"The Lord have mercy upon us!" groaned Father Holland. "Listen, lad! There's only one horse!"

I threw myself to the earth and laying my ear to the turf strained for every sound. The thud, thud of a single horse, fore and hind feet striking the beaten trail in quick gallop, came distinctly up from the valley.

"It may not be our men," said I, with sickening forebodings tugging at throat and heart.

"I mistrusted them! I mistrusted the villains!" repeated the priest. If only you had enough Mandanes to ride down on them, but you're too weak. There are at least two thousand Sioux."

Hamilton and Little Fellow, talking loudly and gesticulating, rode crashing through the furze.

"I knew it! I knew it!" shouted Hamilton fiercely. "One of us should have gone."

"What's wrong?" came from Father Holland in a voice so low and unnaturally calm, I knew he feared the worst.

"Wrong!" yelled Hamilton. "They hold La Robe Noire as hostage and demand five hundred pounds of ammunition, twenty guns and ten horses. Of course, I should have gone—"

"And would it have mended matters if you'd been held hostage, too?" Idemanded, utterly out of patience and at that stage when a little strain makes a man strike his best friends. "You know very well, the men were only sent to make an offer. You'd no right to expect everything on one trip without any bargaining—"

"Shut up, boy!" exclaimed Father Holland. "Just when ye both need all y'r wits, y'r scattering them to the four winds. Now, mind yourselves! I don't like these terms! 'Tis the devil's own doing! Let's talk this over!"

With a vast dea' of the wordy eloquence that characterizes Indian diplomacy the tenor of Le Grand Diable's message was "His shot pouch was light and his pipe cold; he hung down his head and the pipe of peace had not been in the council; the Sioux were strangers and the whites were their enemies; the palefaces had been in their power and they had always conveyed them on their journey with glad hearts and something to eat." Finally, the Master of Life, likewise Earth, Air, Water and Fire were called on to witness that if the white men delivered five hundred rounds of ammunition, twenty guns and ten horses, the white woman and her child, likewise the two messengers, would be sent safely back to the Mandane lodge; none but these two messengers would be permitted in the Sioux camp; also the Sioux would not answer for the lives of the white men if they left the Mandane lodges. Let the white men, therefore, send back the full ransom by the hands of the same messenger.

CHAPTER XVI.

LE GRANDE DIABLE SENDS BACK OUR MESSENGER.

Father Holland advised caution and consideration before acting. A policy of bargaining was his counsel.

"I don't like those terms at all," he said, "too much like giving your weapons to the enemy. I don't like all this."

He would temporize and rely on Le Grand Diable's covetous disposition bringing him to our terms; but Hamilton would hear of neither caution nor delay.

The ransom price was at once collected. Next morning, Little Fellow, on a fresh mount, with a string of laden horses on each side, went post haste back to the Sioux.

In all conscience, Hamilton had been wild enough during the first parley. His excitement now exceeded all bounds. The first two days, when there was no possibility of Miriam's coming and Little Fellow could not yet have reached the Sioux, I tore after Eric so often I lost count of the races between our lodge and the north hill. The performance began again on the third day, and I broke out with a piece of my mind, which surprised him mightily.

"Look you here, Hamilton!" I exclaimed, rounding him back from the hill, "can't you stop this nonsense and sit still for only two days more, or must I tie you up? You've tried to put me crazy all winter, and, by Jove, if you don't stop this you'll finish the job——"

He gazed at me with the dumb look of a wounded animal and was too amazed for words. Leaving me in midroad, feeling myself a brute, he went straight to his own hut. After that incident, he gave us no further anxiety and kept an iron grip on his impatience. With me, anger had given place to contrition. He remained much by himself until the night, when our messengers were expected. Then he came across to my quarters, where Father Holland and I were keyed up to the highest pitch. Putting out his hand, he said:

"Is it all right with us again, Rufus, old man?"

That speech nigh snapped the strained cords.

"Of course," said I, gripping the extended hand, and I immediately coughed hard, to explain away the undue moisture welling into my eyes.

We all three sat as still and silent as a death watch, Father Holland fumbling and pretending to pore over some holy volume, Eric with fingers tightly interlaced and upper teeth biting through lower lip, and I with clenched fists dug into jacket pockets and a thousand imaginary sounds singing wild tunes in my ears.

How the seconds crawled, and the minutes barely moved, and the hours seemed to heap up in a blockade and crush us with their leaden weight! Twice I sought relief for pent emotion by piling wood on the fire, though the night was mild, and by breaking the glowing embers into a shower of sparks. The soft, moccasined tread of Mandanes past our door startled Father Holland so that his book fell to the floor, while I shook like a leaf. Strange to say, Hamilton would not allow himself the luxury of a single movement, though the lowered brows tightened and teeth cut deeper into the under lip.

Dogs set up a barking at the other end of the village—a common enough occurrence where half-starved curs roved in packs—but I could not refrain from lounging with a show of indifference to the doorway, where I peered through the moon-silvered dusk. As usual, the Indians with shrill cry flew at the dogs to silence them. The noise seemed to be annoying to my companions and was certainly unnerving me, so I shut the door and walked back to the fire.

The howl of dogs and squaws increased. I heard the angry undertone of men's voices. A hoarse roar broke from the Mandane lodges and rolled through the village like the sweep of coming hurricane. There was a fleet rush, a swift pattering of something pursued running round the rear of our lodge, with a shrieking mob of men and squaws after it. The dogs were barking furiously and snapping at the heels of the thing, whatever it was.

"A hostile!" exclaimed Hamilton, leaping up.

Hardly knowing what I did, I bounded towards the door and shot forward the bolt, with a vague fear that blood might be spilled on our threshold.

"For shame, man!" cried Father Holland, making to undo the latch.

But the words had not passed his lips when the parchment flap of the window lifted. A voice screamed through the opening and it hurtled a round, nameless, blood-soaked horror, rolling over and over in a red trail, till it stopped with upturned, dead, glaring eyes and hideous, gaping mouth, at the very feet of Hamilton.

It was the scalpless head of La Robe Noire. Our Indian had paid the price of his own blood-lust and Diable's enmity.

Before the full enormity of the treachery—messengers murdered and mutilated, ransom stolen and captives kept—had dawned on me, Father Holland had broken open the door. He was rushing through the night screaming for the Mandanes to catch the miscreant Sioux. When I turned back, not daring to look a tthat awful object, Hamilton had fallen to the hut floor in a dead faint.

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And now may I oe spared recalling what occurred on that terrible night!

Women luxuriate and men traffic in the wealth of the great west, but how many give one languid thought to the years of bloody deeds by which the west was won?

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Before restoring Hamilton, it was necessary to remove that which was unseemly; also to wash out certain stains on the hearthstones; and those things would have tried the courage of more iron-nerved men than myself.

I should not have been surprised if Eric had come out of that faint, a glibbering maniac; but I toiled over him with the courage of blank hopelessness, pumping his arms up and down, forcing liquor between the clenched teeth, splashing the cold, clammy face with water, and laving his forehead. At last he opened his eyes wearily. Like a man ill at ease with life, moaning, he turned his face to the wall.

Outside, it was as if the unleashed furies of hell fought to quench their thirst in human blood. The clamor of those red demons was in my ears and I was still working over Hamilton, loosening his packet collar, underpillowing his chest, fanning him, and doing everything else I could think of, to ease his labored breathing, when Father Holland burst into the lodge, utterly unmanned and sobbing like a child.

"For the Lord's sake, Rufus," he cried, "for the Lord's sake, come and help! They're murdering him! They're murdering him! 'Twas I who set them on him, and I can't stop them! I can't stop them!"

"Let them murder him!" I returned, unconsciously demonstrating that the civilized heart differs only in degree from the barbarian.

"Come, Rufus," he pleaded, "come, for the love of Frances, or your hands will not be clean. There'll be blood on your hands when you go back to her. Come, come!"

Out we rushed through the thronging Mandanes, now riotous with the lust of blood. A ring of young bucks had been formed round the Sioux to keep the crowd off. Naked, with arms pinioned, the victim stood motionless and without fear.

"Good white father, he no understand," said the Mandanes, jostling the weeping priest back from the circle of the young men. "Good white father, he go home!" In spite of protest by word and act they roughly shoved us to our lodge, the doomed man's death chant ringing in our ears as they pushed us inside and clashed our door. In vain we had argued they would incur the vengeance of the Sioux nation. Our voices were drowned in the shout for blood—for blood!

The sigh of the wind brought mournful strains of the victim's dirge to our lodge. I fastened the door, with robes against it to keep the sound out. Then a smell of burning drifted through the window, and I stop-gapped that, too, with more robes.

That the Sioux would wreak swift vengeance could not be doubted. As soon as the murderous work was over, guides were with difficulty engaged. Having fitted up a sort of prop in which I could tie Hamilton to the saddle, I saw both Father Holland and Eric set out for Red River before daybreak.

It was best they should go and I remain. If Miriam were still in the country, stay I would, till she were safe; but I had no time to see Eric go mad or die before the rescue could be accomplished.

As they were leaving I took a piece of birch bark. On it I wrote with a charred stick:—

"Greetings to my own dear love from her ever loyal and devoted knight."

This, Father Holland bore to Frances Sutherland from me.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRICE OF BLOOD.

How many shapeless terrors can spring from the mind of man I never knew till Eric and the priest left me alone in the Mandane village. Ever, on closing my eyes, there rolled past, endlessly, without going one pace beyond my sight, something too horrible to be contemplated. When I looked about to assure myself the thing was not there—could not possitively be there—memory flashed back the whole dreadful scene. Up started glazed eyes from the hearth, the floor, and every din nook in the lodge. Thereupon I would rush into the village road, where the shamefaced greetings of guilty Indians recalled another horror.

If I ventured into Le Grand Diable's power a fate worse than La Robe Noire's awaited me. That there would be a hostile demonstration over the Sioux messenger's death I was certain. Nothing that I offered could induce any of the Indians to act as scouts or to reconnoiter the enemy's encampment. I had, of my own will, chosen to remain, and now I found myself with tied hands, fuming and gnashing against fate, conjuring up all sorts of projects for the rescue of Miriam, and butting my head against the impossible at every turn. Thus three weary days dragged past.

Having reflected on the consequences of their outrage, the Mandanes exhibited repentance of a characteristically human form—resentment against the cause of their trouble. Unfortunately, I was the cause. From the black looks of the young men I half suspected, if the Sioux chief would accept me in lieu of material gifts, I might be presented as a peace-offering. This would certainly not forward my quest, and prudence, or cowardice—two things easily confused when one is in peril—counseled discretion, and discretion seemed to counsel flight.

"Discretion! Discretion to perdition!" I cried, springing up from a midnight reverie in my hut. Every selfish argument for my own safety had passed in review before my mind, and something so akin to judicious caution, which we trappers in plain language called "cowardice," was insidiously assailing my better self, I cast logic's sophistries to the winds, and dared death or tortue to drive me from my post. Whence comes this sublime, reasonless abandon of imperiled human beings, which casts off fear and caution and prudence and forethought and all that goes to make success in the common walks of life, and at one blind leap mounts the Sinai of duty? To me, the impulse upwards is as mysterious as the impulse downwards, and I do not wonder that pagans ascribe one to Ormuzd, the other to Ahriman. 'Tis ours to yield or resist, and I yielded with the vehemence of a passionate nature, vowing in the darkness of the hut, "Here, before God, I stay!"

Swift came test of my oath. While the words were yet on my lips, stealthy steps suddenly glided round the lodge. A shuffling stopped at the door, while a chilling fear took possession of me lest the mutilated form of my other Indian should next be hurled through the window. I had not time to shoot the door-bolt to its catch before a sharp click told of lifted latch. The hinges creaked, and there, distinct in the starlight that smote through the open, stood Little Fellow himself, haggard and almost naked.

"Little Fellow! Good boy!" I shouted, pulling him in. "Where did you come from? How did you get away? Is it you or your ghost?"

Down he squatted with a grunt on one of the robes, answering never a word. The gaunt look of the man declared his needs, so I prepared to feed him back to speech. This task kept me busy till daybreak, for the filling capacity of a famishing Indian may not be likened to any other hungry thing on earth without doing the red man grave injustice.

"Hoohoo! Hoohoo! But I be sick man tomorrow!" and he rubbed himself down with a satisfied air of distension, declining to have his plate reloaded for the tenth time. I noticed the poor wretch's skin was cut to the bone round wrists and ankles. Chafed bandage marks encircled the flesh of his neck.

"What did this, Little Fellow?" and I pointed to the scars.

A grim look of Indian gratitude for my interest came into the stolid face.

"Bad Indians," was the terse response.

"Did they torture you?"

He grunted a ferocious negative.

"You got away too quick for them?"

An affirmative grunt.

"Le Grand Diable—did you see him?"

At that name, his white teeth snapped shut, and from the depths of the Indian's throat came the vicious snarl of an enraged wolf.

"Come," I coaxed, "tell me. How long since you left the Sioux?"

"Walkee—walkee—walkee—one sleep," and rising, he enacted a hobbling gait across the cabin in unison with the rhythmic utterance of his words.

"Walkee—walkee—walkee—one."

"Traveled at night!" I interrupted. "Two nights! You couldn't do it in two nights!"

"Walkee—walkee—walkee—one sleep," he repeated.

"Three nights!"

Four times he hobbled across the floor, which meant he had come afoot the whole distance, traveling only at night.

Sitting down, he began in a low monotone relating how he had returned to La Robe Noire with the additional ransom demanded by Le Grand Diable. The "pig Sioux, more gluttonous than the wolverine, more treacherous than the mountain cat," had come out to receive them with hootings. The plunder was taken, "as a dead enemy is picked by carrion buzzards." He, himself, was dragged from his horse and bound like a slave squaw. La Robe Noire had been stripped naked, and young men began piercing his chest with lances, shouting, "Take that, man who would scalp the Iroquois! Take that, enemy to the Sioux! Take that, dog that's friend to the white man!" Then had La Robe Noire, whose hands were bound, sprung upon his torturers and as the trapped badger snaps the hand of the hunter so had he buried his teeth in the face of a boasting Sioux.

Here, Little Fellow's teeth clenched shut in savage imitation. Then was Le Grand Diable's knife unsheathed. More, my messenger could not see; for a Sioux bandaged his eyes. Another tied a rope round his neck. Thus, like a dead stag, was he pulled over the ground to a wigwam. Here he law for many "sleeps," knowing not when the great sun rose and when he sank. Once, the lodges became very still, like many waters, when the wind slumbers and only the little waves lap. Then came one with the soft, small fingers of a white woman and gently, scarcely touching him, as the spirits rustle through the forest of a dark night, had these hands cut the rope around his neck, and unbound him. A whisper in the English tongue, "Go—run—for your life! Hide by day! Run at night!"

The skin of the tent wall was lifted by the same hands. He rolled out. He tore the blind from his eyes. It was dark. The spirits had quenched their star torches. No souls of dead warriors danced on the fire plain of the northern sky! The father of winds let loose a blast to drown all sound and help good Indian against the pig Sioux! He ran like a hare. He leaped like a deer. He came as the arrods from the bow of the great hunter. Thus had he escaped from the Sioux!

Little Fellow ceased speaking, wrapped himself in robes and fell asleep.

I could not doubt whose were the liberator's hands, and I marveled that she had not come with him. Had she known of our efforts at all? It seemed unlikely. Else, with the liberty she had, to come to Little Fellow, surely she would have tried to escape. On the other hand, her immunity from tortue might depend on never attempting to regain freedom.

Now I knew what to expect if I were captured by the Sioux. Yet, given another stormy night, if Little Fellow and I were near the Sioux with fleet horses, could not Miriam be rescued in the same way he had escaped? Until Little Fellow had eaten and slept back to his normal condition of courage, it would be useless to propose such a hazardous plan. Indeed, I decided to send him to some point on the northern trail, where I could join him and go alone to the Sioux camp. This would be better than sitting still to be given as a hostage to the Sioux. If the worst happened and I were captured, had I the courage to endure Indian tortures? A man endures what he must endure, whether he will or not, and I certainly had not courage to leave the country without one blow for Miriam's freedom.

With these thoughts, I gathered my belongings in preparation for secret departure from the Mandanes that night. Then I prepared breakfast, saw Little Fellow lie back in a dead sleep, and strolled out among the lodges.

Four days had passed without the coming of the avengers. The villagers were disposed to forget their guilt and treat me less sulkily. As I sauntered towards the north hill, pleasant words greeted me from the lodges.

"Be not afraid, my son," exhorted Chief Black Cat. "Lend a deaf ear to bad talk! No harm shall befall the white man! Be not afraid!"

"Afraid?" I flouted back. "Who's afraid, Black Cat? Only white livered cowards fear the Sioux! Surely no Mandane brave fears the Sioux—ugh! The cowardly Sioux!"

My vaunting pleased the old chief mightily; for the Indian is nothing if not a boaster. At once Black Cat would have broken out in loud tirade on his friendship for me and contempt for the Sioux, but I cut him short and moved towards the hill that overlooked the enemy's territory. A great cloud of dust whirled up from the northern horizon.

"A tornado the next thing!" I exclaimed with disgust. "The fates are against me! A fig for my plans!"

I stooped. With ear to the ground I could hear a rumbling clatter as of a buffalo stampede.

"What is it, my son?" asked the voice of the chief, and I saw that Black Cat had followed me to the hill.

"Are those buffalo, Black Cat?" and I pointed to the north.

As he peered forward, distinguishing clearly what my civilized eyes could not see, his face darkened.

"The Sioux!" he muttered, with a black look at me. Turning, he would have hurried away without further protests of friendship, but I kept pace with him.

"Poh," said I, with a lofty contempt, which I was far from feeling. "Poh! Black Cat! Who's afraid of the Sioux? Let the women run from the Sioux?"

He gave me a sidelong glance to penetrate my sincerity and slackened his flight to the proud gait of a fearless Indian. All the same, alarm was spread among the lodges, and every woman and child of the Mandanes were hidden behind barricaded doors. The men mounted quickly and rode out to gain the vantage ground of the north hill before the enemy's arrival.

Another cross current to my purposes! Fool that I was, to have dilly-dallied three whole days away like a helpless old squaw wringing her hands, when I should have dared everything and ridden to Miriam's rescue! Now, if I had been near the Sioux encampment, when all the warriors were away, how easily could I have liberated Miriam and her child!

Always, it is the course we have not followed which would have led on to the success we have failed to grasp in our chosen path. So we salve wounded mistrust of self and still, in spite of manifest proof to the contrary, retain a magnificent conceit.

I cursed my blunders with a vehemence usually reserved for other men's errors, and at once decided to make the best of the present, letting past and future each take care of itself, a course which will save a man gray hairs over to-morrow and give him a well-provisioned to-day.

Arming myself, I resolved to be among the bargain makers of the Mandanes rather than be bargained by the Sioux. Waking Little Fellow, I told him my plan and ordered him to slip away north while the two tribes were parleying and await me a day's march from the Sioux camp. He told me of a wooded valley, where he could rest with his horses concealed, and after seeing him off I rode straight for the band of assembled Mandanes and surprised them beyond all measure by taking a place in the forefront of Black Cat's special guard. The Sioux warriors swept towards us in a tornado. Ascending the slope at a gallop, whooping and beating their drums, they charged past us, and down at full speed through the village, displaying a thousand dexterities of horsemanship and prowess to strike terror to the Mandanes. Then they dashed back and reined up on the hillside beneath our forces. The men were naked to the waist and their faces were blackened. Porcupine quills, beavers' claws, hooked bones, and bears' claws stained red hung round their necks in ringlets, or adorned gorgeous belts. Feathered crests and broad-shielded mats of willow switches on the left arm completed their war dress. The leaders had their buckskin leggings strung from hip to ankle with small bells, and carried firearms, as well as arrows and stone lances; but the majority had only Indian weapons. In that respect—though we were not one-third their number—we had the advantage. All the Mandanes carried firearms; but I do not believe there was enough ammunition to average five rounds a man. Luckily, this was unknown to the Sioux. I scanned every face. Diable was not there.

Scarcely were the ranks in position when both Sioux and Mandane chiefs rode forward, and there opened such a harangue as I have never heard since, and hope I never may.

"Our young man has been killed," lamented the Sioux. "He was a good warrior. His friends sorrow. Our hearts are no longer glad. Till now our hands have been white and our hearts clean. But the young man has been slain and we are grieved. Of the scalps of the enemy, he brought many. We hang our heads. The pipe of peace has not been in our council. The whites are our enemies. Now, the young man is dead. Tell us if we are to be friends or enemies. We have no fear. We are many and strong. Our bows are good. Our arrows are pointed with flint and our lances with stone. Our shot-pounches are not light. But we love peace. Tell us, what doth Mandane offer for the blood of the young man? Is it to be peace or war? Shall we be friends or enemies? Do you raise the tomahawk, or pipe of peace? Say, great chief of the Mandanes, what is thy answer?"

This and more did the Sioux chief vauntingly declaim, brandishing his war club and addressing the four points of the compass, also the sun, as he shouted out his defiance. To which Black Cat, in louder voice, made reply.

"Say, great chief of the Sioux, our dead was brought into the camp. The body was yet warm. It was thrown at our feet. Never before did it enter the heart of a Missouri to seek the blood of a Sioux! Our messengers went to your camp smoking the sacred calumet of peace. They were sons of the Mandanes. They were friends of the white men. The white man is like magic. He comes from afar. He knows much. He has given guns to our warriors. His shot bags are full and his guns many. But his men, ye slew. We are for peace, but if ye are for war, we warn you to leave camp before the warriors hidden where ye see them not, break forth. We cannot answer for the white man's magic," and I heard my power over darkness and light, life and death, magnified in a way to terrify my own dreams; but Black Cat cunningly wound up his bold declamation by asking what the Sioux chief would have of the white man for the death of the messenger.

A clamor of voices arose from the warriors, each claiming some relationship and attributing extravagant virtues to the dead Sioux.

"I am the afflicted father of the youth ye killed," called an old warrior, putting in prior claim for any forthcoming compensation and enhancing its value by adding, "and he had many feathers in his cap."

"He, who was killed, I desired for a nehew," shouted another, "and an ivory wand he carried in his hand."

"He, who was killed was my brother," cried a third, "and he had a new gun and much powder."

"He was braver than the buffalo," declared another.

"He had three wounds!" "He had scars!" "He wore many scalps!" came the voices of others.

"Many bells and beads were on his leggings!"

"He had garnished moccasins!"

"He slew a bear with his own hands!"

"His knife had a handle of ivory!"

"His arrows had barbs of beavers' claws!"

If the noisy claimants kept on, they would presently make the dead man a god. I begged Black Cat to cut the parley short and demand exactly what gift would compensate the Sioux for the loss of so great a warrior. After another half-hour's jangling, in which I took an animated part, beating down their exorbitant request for two hundred guns with beads and bells enough to outfit the whole Sioux tribe, we came to terms. Indeed, the grasping rascals well-nigh cleared out all that was left of my trading stock; but when I saw they had no intention of fighting, I held back at the last and demanded the surrender of Le Grand Diable, Miriam and the child in compensation for La Robe Noire.

Then, they swore by everything, from the sun and the moon to the cow in the meadow, that they were not responsible for the doings of Le Grand Diable, who was an Iroquois. Moreover, they vowed he had hurriedly taken his departure for the north four days before, carrying with him the Sioux wife, the strange woman and the white child. As I had no object in arousing their resentment, I heard their words without voicing my own suspicions and giving over the booty, whiffed pipes with them. But I had no intention of being tricked by the rascally Sioux, and while they and the Mandanes celebrated the peace treaty, I saddled my horse and spurred off for their encampment, glad to see the last of a region where I had suffered much and gained nothing.

(To be continued.)

A SCRAP OF LACE.

BY JOHN J. A'BECKET.

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Thorwald did not altogether like the request. But Prince Murianoffsky was a good fellow, and had been such a help to him in Paris he felt that he must comply with it. After all it was only the government that would suffer, and that was well able to put up with a slight loss.

So Thorwald found himself speeding toward the realm of the Great White Tsar with the intention of defrauding it! In one of the last stages of the journey his sole companion in the railroad carriage was a woman, quietly dressed, with an air of high breeding. He was worrying as they arproached the frontier, and would have been glad of a companion to talk to. At last opportunity was afforded him of accosting the lady. She was trying to arrange something in the network bracket for parcels. He approached and with great politeness offered his services. As he again turned his eyes toward her he saw she was removing her index finger from her bodice. Afterward she smothed out the bosom of her gown.

Could it be? She looked like a lady. So did he look like a gentleman. He seated himself and began a conversation. They exchanged a few remarks very pleasantly for some time, when suddenly he asked: "Pardon me! Is that a piece of lace?"

Her hands and eyes went at once to the buttoning of her bodice. Then she replied coldly: "You are mistaken sir!"

"Madame," he answered smilingly, "you need not fear that I would be scandalized by your smuggling a little lace into Russia. The government takes such immense precautions against evasion of the duties that one need not scruple at deceiving it, if possible. I should regard it as a bit of amusing cleverness."

"You think it is one of those things that are only wicked when found out?" she returned, eyeing him with a faint smile.

"Precisely."

"And you are possibly so gallant that you would even help a lady in such an attempt.

"If the lady was nice," he laughed back.

She turned her face to him with a captivating smile and said archly: "Do you think I am 'nice?' "

"Most assuredly, madame."

"Then I will throw myself upon your mercy," she exclaimed with a lovely air of candor. "The fact is, I am smuggling"—she made a little face—"a scrap of lace. There is not much, but it is choice, and I want it for a certain purpose. Now I have put myself in your hands."

"The hands of a gentleman," replied Thorwald. "How can I help you?"

"You might take the keys of my trunks and act as if we were together. You could tell them you had nothing to declare. I shrink from saying flatly that I have nothing to declare when I know I have. You will not have that difficulty to disturb you, and if you can give the man the idea that you have both our things in charge, they will say nothing to me."

"Madame, leave the matter entirely to me."

When they reached the frontier and the ordeal was at hand Thorwald walked up to the most prominent functionary, and ta