

SCENES IN THE SOUTH-WEST,

BY ROBERT WEST.



AR AWAY to the Southwest, where the sun shines out of a cloudless sky the long red summer through, I once met with a strange adventure. It was in the land of the Choctaws, near the Red River of the South. It is well known that all that region has long been the haunt of desperadoes, and the hiding place of desperate men.

You may ride all day, and see no more than one or two human habitations on the wide prairie. The great forests are full of wild animals, and the home of countless beasts of prey, as well as game of all kinds.

A village is an oasis to the traveler, though in them he sometimes finds the greatest dangers, as more than one poor fellow has learned at the cost of his life.

One day, just as the sun like a ball of fire was sinking into the prairie, and showing his red disk for a moment, e'er the darkness crept over the earth, I rode into one of these villages, and was directed to a rude building as the only hotel in the place. In front of it some horses were tied to a broken fence, and rough-looking men were standing around, while the usual number of ugly dogs bayed everything except a deep-mouthed welcome as I drew near.

A half-breed Indian, who had apparently come in from a distance, was hanging his blanket on the limb of a tree, out of the reach of the cattle, and it was evident that preparations were going on inside for supper, such as it was.

After that meal was over, I made some effort at getting acquainted with the mixed company that is sure to be found in such places; but, making little headway, I took a walk out on the prairie until bed-time. I retired early, out of respect to my profession, for it was known by the landlord that I was a minister, come to see about sending a missionary to that region. I was given a room to myself. To be plain about the matter, I was uneasy. More than one man had been murdered in this place, and I knew it. My own life

had been threatened by a half-breed Indian a

year before, and the same man had shot to death one with whom I was well acquainted, near the spot where I was to spend the night.

After I had gone to bed some one rapped at my door.

"What is the matter?"

"Man wants to see you."

"Who is he?"

"Don't know."

"What is he like?"

"A half-breed Indian."

"What does he want of me?"

"Don't know; says he must see you."

It was the landlord outside. I answered, "Send him up." My light was yet burning, and sitting up in my bed, I reached out and opened the door. In a moment there walked into the room a great, rough, powerfully-built man, with long hair, and an ugly scar on his cheek. As he turned full toward me, I saw that his upper lip bore the mark of a knife, and that a bullet had plowed a furrow across his forehead. He was the half-breed Indian I had seen on my arrival. He began:

"I am awful sorry to disturb a feller after he is in bed, but are you a parson?"

"Yes."

"I am a bad-looking customer to come into a parson's room at night, aint I?"

There was something in his tone and manner that assured me that he was to be trusted, rough as he was, and I replied:

"To tell the truth, you are not much of a beauty, but I guess I am about even with you. Take a seat."

He sat down on the floor and said: "I am a herder. I have cattle out on the plains, more'n two hundred miles from here, and I'm a bad feller, I spose, about some things, but I'm square. My mother was converted in Georgia by one of your parsons which the 'Merican Board sent there a great many years ago. She read me the New Testament. I can't read. I am trying to learn, but can't do it yet. Would you mind reading me something about the Sermon on the Mount? That is what my mother used to read. I come down twice a year to sell cattle and get supplies. I was never in a church but onct: that's a long time ago. The last time I came into town they got the racket on me, and did this," pointing to a scar on his cheek and lip. "Two years ago they got after me for the money after I'd sold my cattle, and did this," and he laid his finger where the bullet had gone across his forehead. "Some of them won't ever do that agin with any other fellers, I tell you. Now I've some money here in this belt. Ef you got no objection, I'd like to put it under your pillow, ef you'll let me sleep across the door after you read and sing."

The whole situation was droll, and bordered on the ludicrous, since I instinctively felt that the man was honest and meant me no harm, but his simplicity would have touched any heart. And so, there, in that little upper room, I read the whole Sermon on the Mount and sang Rock of Ages, Jesus Lover of my Soul, and many other of those old hymns which have moved and comforted the hearts of thousands.

After a little, he interrupted me, and said: "Sometimes when I come in from the ranch, and stop by the fence as I'm going home, I hear my little girl sing. She can sing too. She learned it from the Moody and Sankey Hymns, which somebody sent in a package of papers from Boston. Wonder if you ever heard the hymn she sings? I'd like to hear it, for it's the prettiest thing I ever heard in my life. It's about 'I am so glad that Jesus loves me.' I think ef you know the hymn tune, I can sing with you a



little, though I suppose you know that Indians hardly every sing. My wife can read, and she teaches all our children to read. She learnt to read down to the Mission. Now, ef you'll sing a little of it, I think I'll join in the chorus." And so we sang

"I am so glad that our Father in Heaven.

"Say."

"Well?"

"Don't you think it's queer that Jesus does love such fellers as we are? Just think how we look and how we act sometimes. I often think about it when I'm out on the plains. I don't know what it all

means, and I don't know where Jesus is. None of us can see him, but somehow I cant help believing it's true. Now, let's sing the chorus again, and that last verse."

And so we sang,

Oh, if there's only one song I can sing.

With that reserve peculiar to his race which sometimes amounts almost to stoicism, he listened until the close of each hymn, but begged for another, remembering always enough of what his mother had taught him to indicate what he wanted. And then there was a prayer for which he did not ask, but in which he seemed to join in deepest reverence, and we both lay down and slept in the manner he had suggested, he on the floor stretched across the door-sill, and I in bed. With morning light he was up, and asked for some more hymns. Then we counted the money in the belt. There was \$7,000 in that old leathern girdle. He had driven his cattle about 300 miles to the station where he had sold them, and was now on the road going back. Afterward I heard of him away out on the frontier, where the wild bee gathers its sweets, and the prairie flowers nod to each other in the breeze, and strange birds of bright plumage flit in the air. There is a little school-house, and on each Sabbath this half-breed, who has within the last year learned to read, is superintendent of a Sunday-school among his own people.

And so the seed which was sown by faith in Georgia, more than three-score years ago—before that sad exodus which took the Indians to their home in the wild Territory—is now bearing fruit in the Sun-land of the South-west.