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White Hand

A Tale of the Early Settlers of Louisiana.

BY AUSTIN C. BURDICK

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

The old chief took the youth's hand, and having gazed into his face a few moments, he said:

"White Hand, you once gave me an oath, but from all oaths you have ever given me I now absolve you. Coqualla has told me all. She has told me how true you are in heart, and how yet you long for the home of your childhood. Do not think your father has fallen in this general massacre, for his place is strong, and the red men owe him no grudge. Yet he may have fallen with the rest. If he has, you may sometime find opportunity to reach your native land. But you are under no oath now. Of what has now happened I will not speak, only to say that you cannot see nor understand all that has led us to this fearful work. The story of the white man's rule is everywhere the same. Where a tribe, or a people, have made peace and accepted the friendship of the French, they have become weak and puny. White Hand, I have a strange love for thee, but I hate thy people. And that thy father hates them too has drawn my heart towards him. But we could not see our people being gradually swept away, and our homes torn from us, without striking this blow. Yet Stung Serpent has fallen. The bullet of the white man has found his life. But he dies content. The white man has fallen, too."

The old chieftain sank back exhausted as he ceased speaking, and for some moments he remained with his eyes closed. When he opened them again, White Hand spoke.

"My father," he said, "ere the hand of death has done its work upon thee, wilt thou not tell me why I was taken from my father's house? Surely you cannot object to tell me all now?"

"No, my child, I have no objections, for I never promised not to tell. And when I sat for thee now, I meant to tell thee all. Do you remember when your father met me in the woods near his dwelling?"

"Yes," returned White Hand, bending over with eager interest.

"Well, I had then been to see Simon Lobois. By some means he learned that I was down the river, and he sent for me. He had heard that I was a savage chieftain, and a lover of gold. I met him in the woods, and he proposed to me that I should see St. Julien's son and slay him, and for this he offered to pay me a hundred pieces of gold. But I spurned the offer and left him. I came home, and told my brother what Lobois had said to me. He was angry, and he told me to kill him, but that you and your companion had killed them all—six of them. I then offered to do what he wished. But this time his wants had received an addition. He not only wanted the son killed, but he wanted the daughter captured and carried off towards New Orleans. I agreed to this; but I made him give me a written promise to pay me the money when the work should be done. He hesitated at first, but at length he wrote the pledge and signed it; and then it was arranged that Louise should be left upon the bank of Lake Pontchartrain, at the end of the middle trail, and I pledged myself to take you with me and kill you, for you know this had been my purpose in seeking you."

"But the paper—the pledge—you had of Lobois—where is it?" uttered White Hand.

"It is safe, Coqualla, go to my closet, and you will find it in the oaken casket. The princess went, and in the box she found the paper, which she handed to her father. He took it, and having opened it, he handed it to White Hand, saying, as he did so:

"Here it is yours. And now all I ask is pardon."

"For all that you have done to me," murmured the youth, "I pardon you from the bottom of my soul; for you may have been an instrument in the hands of heaven for saving my life. Had you not taken me, another would, and I should not have lived. So I shall, after all, remember Stung Serpent with more gratitude than of complaint or anger."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do."

Stung Serpent raised himself upon his elbow, and caught the youth by the hand. "Coqualla," he whispered, "where art thou?"

"Here, my father."

"I have been kind to thee. If it lays in thy power, help White Hand to his people. Is it Coqualla I see?"

"Yes. Are you faint?"

"Faint? Stung Serpent faint? No! Warriors of the Natchez, strike for your homes! Who shall fear the dead? No! My brave, remember the trophies you have won under Stung Serpent's lead. Strike—strike, now, for your honor, your homes, and for the tombs of your ancestors! Sink your blades to the hilt, and leave not a single foe to tell their king the tale! Now! On—to the death!"

One long, loud war cry followed this exhortation, and as it ended in a low, guttural sound, the chieftain sank back. Coqualla moved to his side and knelt over him, and in a moment more the loud cries of the women rent the air, for Stung Serpent was dead!

CHAPTER XX.

There was consternation for a while in the village of the White Hand when it was known that Stung Serpent was dead, for he had been an important man among the Natchez. At the end of four

days, the body was made ready for the grave, and nine persons, with ropes about their necks, remained fasting by it. "And are all these people to die?" asked White Hand, after he and Coqualla had retired to their own dwelling.

"Yes. And but for the intercessions of my father himself, many more would have died."

"It is a cruel practice," said the youth, sadly.

"Cruel?" repeated the princess, in surprise. "Why do you say so?"

"Because one death is enough. Why should so many be added?"

"Ah," answered Coqualla, indignantly, "you do not understand. Our people have not so much love for the departed as we have. It is a long, dark road which my father has now to travel, and surely it is fitting he should have company."

"And does this always happen when one of your people dies?"

"Certainly, though some have not so many companions; but all have one. When the last Great Sun died, there were one hundred who went to keep him company over the dark road."

"So many?"

"Yes, and of course they were happy, for with him they were at once admitted to the happy home where the Great Spirit is."

"But," queried White Hand, "Stung Serpent has been dead now four days, and these people will not die until night. How, then, shall they go together?"

"Ah," returned Coqualla, with a faint smile, which seemed to indicate a pity for her companion's ignorance, "my father's spirit will not start alone. It remains near the old body until the other spirits join it, and then they all go off together. Do you not understand?"

"Yes."

"And is it not right and proper?"

"It is, if you think so; but I should hardly dare give my voice in favor of it. Why, look, Coqualla, and tell me if this very thing has not already reduced your nation from a once powerful people to a mere handful."

"My father spoke of that ere he died," answered the princess, thoughtfully. "He wished only his few immediate companions to go with him beyond the grave, and even they must be old people."

"And he was right, Coqualla. I have heard that the Natchez were once a mighty race—a great nation, numbering many thousands, and now they have only a very few hundred. In a large community, under ordinary circumstances, the births will not more than overrule the deaths by nature. But see here—not only do your people die off as do others, but for every one who dies there comes from one to a hundred more must be killed to keep the company."

"I know," said Coqualla, thoughtfully. "I know. But still it was cruel to send my father's spirit away over the dark, long trail alone. Your people do not think of this. They do not think of the loved spirit wandering away in the dark alone."

"Yes they do, Coqualla."

"They do?"

"Yes."

"And yet they send them no company?"

"Ah, their company comes from the other way," spoke White Hand, softly and sweetly. "When a human soul departs, we, or I, believe that the loved ones who have been before come down to lead the new-born spirit away to heaven. I have a mother there, Coqualla, and I think she will come down to catch when my spirit departs, and welcome me to the home of the blessed ones. Surely they know the way through the dark valley better than we could, or better than any others of earth."

Gradually the Indian girl's hands were brought together over her bosom, and her head was bowed. When she looked up there was a strange light in her eyes and a soft, hopeful expression dwelt upon her dusky features.

"White Hand," she whispered, "tell me that again."

"It is the theme more pleasing than the strangling of helpless victims over the graves of the dead?" the youth asked, kindly.

"Yes—yes. But tell me more."

And White Hand went on and whispered into his companion's ear the whole of his own pure faith in God and the risen Savior; and when he had done the princess murmured:

"It is sweet, and it is better than the faith I have been taught."

She bowed her head again, and this time she remained a long while thoughtful; and when she next looked up, a change had come over her countenance.

"White Hand," she said, "I promised my father that I would help you escape from here, if you wished. What have I to remain here for? My father is dead; I have no brother or sister, and the ways of my people are not pleasant to me. May I not go with you?"

The youth threw his arms about the fair speaker's neck and drew her upon his bosom.

"Coqualla, speak but the word, and I'll die in thy service, if necessary, to lead you to my father's home. O, we will not be separated!"

The burial was over. Stung Serpent reposed in his grave, and by his side lay the bodies of those who had, in obedience to the cruel faith and custom, given up their lives that they might keep their loved chief company in his dark journey. And once more the Natchez commenced their mad orgies over their victory, for they were not yet satiated.

Late at night, while the warriors were dancing and howling in the square, Prickled Arm came to White Hand's lodge and called him out. The youth could not see her face in the gloom, but from the manner of her breathing, he could tell that she was deeply moved by something.

"White Hand," she said, "our plot has worked exceedingly well. Not a blow has been struck save here at Natchez; so the great mass of the French are saved. But thou art in danger here. The moment the Natchez find that their plan has failed they will suspect that for it has been whispered that you visited the temple, and the Great Sun, when he looked towards the west for the moon last night and saw it not, was perplexed. This night they saw the new moon for the first time, and they remembered, for the first time, that the moon ought to have been a week old. Amid their mad joy they had not thought of this before. But they think of it now, and fear has already seized upon some of them, though those few keep it to themselves. Now you can judge how much risk you run."

"And will they suspect me?" the youth uttered, tremulously.

"They will be likely to; for you are of

the hated people, and your powerful friend is dead. Dark, angry eyes have been bent upon you, because you have shown your loving of the enemies you have witnessed. And again, the French will soon be on the Natchez trail. The future is dark for us all, but you may escape. Can you not remember the trail by which you came?"

"I fear not."

"But you can follow it part way from here."

"Yes, for it is broad towards the village."

"There you can take the river. You know the southern trail. You went it once hunting with Stung Serpent."

"Yes—I remember that."

"Then all is safe. Follow that trail to the right, and it will bring you out upon the river fifteen miles below here. Among a clump of brakes there you will find a canoe. Take it, and take it and float down the river. Still retain your present garb, and let the walnut stain be upon your face. In that way you may escape the Natchez, should any of them meet you, and by your speech you could quickly convince the French. I can do no more for you. I would have saved all the French if I could, for I loved them; yet I must follow the fortunes of my own people."

White Hand thanked the old princess for her kindness, and with a thoughtful step he returned to his lodge. Coqualla asked him what Prickled Arm had wanted, and he sat down and told her all.

"And will you go?" the princess asked.

"Yes, I must. But, Coqualla, have you changed your mind?"

"Only to be more strongly bound to thee. And yet," she added, putting her arms about her husband's neck, "speak but one word—simply whisper to me—that thou wouldst rather go free from care or thought of me, and—"

"Hush, Coqualla! I will see you now. O, I should never sleep in peace again, did I think thou remainedst here when thy wish was with me. But we must live to-night."

"I am all ready, dearest."

"But we need provisions."

"I have such all prepared as we can carry."

"Then you have thought of this?"

"Yes. But O, speak the truth, my love. If within thy inmost soul there dwells a thought—"

"It is all of love for thee, Coqualla," interrupted the youth, seeing at once her drift. "Let me hear no more of it. Now let us go."

"Bless thee," murmured the fair girl, sinking upon her companion's bosom. "O, since we first spoke of this, my heart has sunk deep down in its darkest mood when the thought of staying here has dwelt with me. Those sweet words you whispered to me have been with me ever since, and they have wrought a wonderful change in my feelings. When we get to our new home we will talk more about it, and you shall teach me to read the great book wherein these precious truths are written."

"I will," promised White Hand. "But the night comes on; the morning will be speedily approaching. Come—we will talk on the way."

Just as the first gray streaks of dawn appeared in the east, the fugitives reached the great river, and without much trouble they found the brake and the canoe. They easily pulled the light craft from its nest and dragged it to the river. It was a smooth, beautifully finished boat, fashioned from a huge log of yellow pine, and seasoned without crack or check.

Into this the adventurers put their little store, and then, with hopeful hearts, they entered and pushed out into the broad stream.

(To be continued.)

PIANO OF MUSICAL STONES.

After Years of Search M. Baudre Collected the Flints.

It was a work of years, says L'Illustration, for M. Baudre to make the collection of flints which constitute his geological piano. The stones do not belong to the class of resonant rocks known as "phonoliths," such as are found in Auvergne, not far from Mont-Dore, but are flints collected by M. Baudre with infinite toil and search, each giving when struck a true musical note.

By accident, while taking a country walk one day he picked up a flint and, chancing to strike it, heard a faint note respond to the blow. The idea took hold of him to gather, if possible, enough flints to form a complete chromatic scale. Difficulties in the search for these stones only increased his ardor. For more than thirty years he pursued the quest, making it the principal aim of his life to form out of a collection of flints the instrument he called the "geological piano."

From the neighborhood of the little village of the department of L'Indre, where he lived and first met with the singing flint, he extended his search far and wide. Only once in a while would he hit on the ideal flint which uttered a true note with generous vibration. That was finding the precious stone which repaid him for his thousand and one disappointments, his toilsome wanderings, his diligent search in stony places.

After many years he had at length got together the full scale in flint notes, and numerous examples of each, with the exception of one. He had been so far unsuccessful in putting his hand on the first "do." Perhaps it did not exist in nature. He gave up hope that he could meet with it in France. He would try Canada. But the new world showed no trace of the initial note of the octave, and M. Baudre returned to his native land resigned to the notion that the elusive note had been abandoned in his old age. Fortune once again smiled, and the stone of which he despaired suddenly appeared, as he was walking in Berry.

Advanced in years, he now passes his leisure in playing, as he does with skill, on this curious piano.

Time—some Work.

May—Mr. Huggard called on you last evening, didn't he?

Yes—Yes, and he made me very tired. I—suppose he tried to kiss you.

May—Yes, and every time he kissed me I had to slap him.—Philadelphia Press.

A DELUGE OF ROCK

TOP OF MOUNTAIN IN CANADA FALLS ON TOWN AND COAL MINE.

Fifty-Six Lives are Lost by Strange Disaster in Crows Nest Coal Field—Entrance to Coal Mine Buried Under 100 Feet of Huge Rocks—Either Upheaval of Limestone or Earthquake.

Frank, N. W. T., April 30.—This place was visited yesterday morning by the worst disaster that has ever been known in any community in Western Canada, possibly in the entire Dominion. What was either a land or rock slide of such gigantic magnitude as to be utterly inconceivable to the mind of any whose eyes has not beheld it, or a slide induced by a seismic upheaval, killed 56 people, destroyed the plant of the Canadian-American coal and coke company, did a vast amount of damage to the mine and completely devastated about ten square miles of the finest and most picturesque section of the Crow's Nest pass.

The catastrophe came at 4:15 yesterday morning, when residents of the town were awakened by a deafening tumult and a shaking of buildings which it seemed would rattle them into complete demolition. Of all the town's inhabitants, numbering nearly 1,000, not one professes to have reached the outside of his domicile in time to see any part of what took place, but when day dawned it was seen that the whole side of Turtle mountain had fallen away and that the country extending from the eastern edge of the town for two miles down the pass and entirely across the pass, a distance of two miles or more from the mountain, lay buried beneath rock and debris of various kinds for a depth varying from 25 to 100 feet.

The coal mines of the Canadian-American coal and coke company, or more properly the seam being worked, extends along the side of Turtle mountain in a parallel direction. It is a vertical vein and is worked from a tunnel up. It was immediately over the workings that the mountain fell away, burying them to a depth of more than 100 feet. As there is no geological expert on the ground, it is impossible to determine the true character of the force exerted. Many hold to the belief that it was an earthquake which caused the mountain to fall away, others believe it to have been a limestone upheaval, while others think it was simply a slide caused possibly by the line rock slaking under the influence of the thawing weather of spring.

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READY FOR WAR.