Aimard Gustave

The Frontiersmen

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CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTORY

In the year 1783, Western New York – or at least what was then deemed Western New York – was an almost unbroken wilderness, scarcely known to the inhabitants of the eastern and south-eastern portions of the State; although the greater part of that large tract of territory then known as Tryon County, was especially an unexplored country. It is true that occasionally some adventurous pioneer had penetrated the wilderness, and endeavored to form for himself and family a home, where, if he could not enjoy the luxuries and comforts to be found in more populous sections, he could at least be freed from many of the evils incident to the growing settlements and cities. Some there were, who had not these inducements, but, moved by a spirit of hardy enterprise, and with a love for the excitements and dangers of a pioneer life, penetrated the wilderness alone, with no companion but the rifle – a sure and steadfast friend amidst the dangers which were certain to beset him.

Thus, an adventurous traveler, who perhaps fancied himself

the first white man who had ever toiled through the forests of this portion of the State, would be surprised as he came upon the traces of civilization, in a log hut, situated, perhaps, in the midst of a few acres of partially cleared wilderness. When such happened to be the case, it would be no occasion for wonder that the traveler and the *settler* became at once acquaintances and friends. The news from the settlements – inquiries for friends, and political information, would gladly be exchanged for the homely but welcome entertainment, which was at once provided.

At the period which we have chosen for our narrative, the County of Tryon was inhabited by roving bands of Indians, mostly belonging to the Six Nations. Some favorite localities were selected, which might be deemed peculiarly the homes of these bands; although their roving dispositions, the pursuit of game, or hostile encounters, would prevent the permanent occupation of any one locality.

That portion of Tryon County with which the reader will become somewhat acquainted in due course of this narrative, was more especially inhabited by that division of the Iroquois, known as the Oneidas. But it was not infrequent that bands belonging to other tribes of the confederacy made incursions into this territory, in pursuit of game, and occasionally on less peaceable missions.

It is well known that during the War of the Revolution, the different tribes, composing the confederacy of the Six Nations, were divided in their choice between England and the

rebellious Colonies. The Oneidas, and a part of the Tuscaroras and Mohawks, adhered to the Colonies, while the other three nations of the confederacy were leagued with England, under Col. Butler, and the notorious Johnson. It was under the former officer that the Senecas, principally, aided by Tories, perpetrated the Massacre of Wyoming. The Onondagas, at first, professed neutrality between the belligerent parties; but as it was believed that they aided in the more hostile operations of the Senecas, a detachment was sent from Fort Stanwix, which destroyed their villages. This attack was revenged by assaults upon the settlements of Schoharie and the western borders of Ulster.

During the war, Tryon County contained a large number of Tories, who were constantly inciting the Indians to acts of hostility against the Colonies. But while they were successful with a large portion of the Iroquois, they signally failed in all their attempts to abate the fidelity of the Oneidas and Tuscaroras. This division in the councils of the Six Nations, disturbed the amity which had previously existed between the confederated tribes; and the bond which had so long united them, was severed forever. More than once, were the Oneidas driven from their villages, and compelled to seek protection from the whites; and parties of the latter tribe, with a part of the Tuscaroras, actually took up arms against their ancient brethren. It is said that the notorious Col. Walter Butler was killed by an Oneida Chief, during his flight after the battle of Johnstown.

At the time embraced by our narrative, it was not infrequent

that difficulties occurred between the separated parties of the confederacy, and hostile encounters took place, which ended in bloodshed. Indeed, the successful Colonies had not concluded any treaty of peace with the Mohawks, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas, until October, 1784. By that treaty, those tribes consented to a release of prisoners, and also to a cession of all their territory west of Pennsylvania.

The Six Nations, at the time of the Revolution, were considered the most formidable of the Indian warriors to be found on the North American Continent; and overtures were made to them, as well by the Congress of the confederated Colonies, as by the English Government. The overtures of the latter were made through Col. Guy Johnson – successor to Sir William – and through the great influence he possessed over them, he was able to induce them to take up arms against the peaceable and scattered inhabitants of the frontier. The number of Indians of the Six Nations who actually took up arms in favor of Great Britain, is estimated at about 1200. The whole number of Indians, of all tribes, who were employed by the British against the Colonies, was estimated by Captain Dalton, (Superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1783.) at 12,690.

The histories of the time, relate the terrible sufferings endured by the inhabitants of Tryon County. The valleys of the Schoharie, the Mohawk and the Susquehanna, were swept, year after year, by the Indians; villages were burnt – and, without discrimination of age or sex, the whites who were supposed to be favorable to

the Colonial cause, were massacred. These events gave rise to the expedition of Gen. Sullivan into the Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca country, which was overrun and laid waste; and it was hoped that the Indians, having lost their provisions and stores, would cease their incursions upon the border settlements. But all such hopes were vain; the depredations were renewed, and continued until the end of the war. It is said by the author of the Life of Brant, that "two years before the close of the war, one-third of the population had gone over to the enemy – one-third had been driven from the country, or were slain in battle, and by private assassination. And yet among the inhabitants of the other remaining third, in June, 1783, it was stated at a public meeting held at Fort Plain, that there were three hundred widows and two thousand orphan children."

The country which is the immediate scene of the following narrative, was little known in the time of the Revolution. The maps of the period designated it as Indian country, and as an unexplored region. The Tienaderack, or Unadilla River – one of the tributaries of the Susquehanna – is given as the western boundary of the whites, beyond which are the villages and hunting-grounds of the Oneidas and Tuscaroras. It is into this unexplored region that we propose to conduct the reader. We cannot promise a strict fidelity to truth, in the precise incidents related in our narrative, but they have kindred features in narratives related by the ancient settlers of this valley. There are traditions, well authenticated, which might give rise to many

of the incidents. With this general view of the condition of Tryon County, at the time of the Revolution, we will conduct the reader to that portion of it in which we are more immediately interested.

CHAPTER II

"Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we but the penalty of Adam —
The season's difference."

AS YOU LIKE IT.

It was, then, in the early part of the month of October, 1783, that two travelers might have been seen, leisurely wending their way, on foot, southwardly, along a somewhat narrow valley, through which flowed a rapid but attractive river. That part of the valley which was now in their view, was not more than half a mile in breadth. On the west, the hills were low, and presented no peculiar attraction to the eye. On the east, however, they attained a loftier height, and, in the golden sunshine which fell from the autumn sky, excited the surprise and admiration of our travelers. From the position they occupied, they could trace the course of the valley for some six or seven miles, among the hills, which became bolder and loftier, until it was lost in a sudden turn to the westward. The river, along whose banks they had traveled for some ten or twelve miles, was here from four to six rods in width; and, as we have before observed, was attractive by the rapidity

of its current and the frequent but graceful curves in which it pursued its course. The Indian name, which this river now bears, implies "the Pleasant River."

The forest about them exhibited much variety of vegetation; and among the trees which they observed, they saw fine specimens of the pine, which towered above the surrounding forest, in the graceful superiority of foliage and beauty. The maple, hemlock, beech, birch, walnut, and chestnut, were abundant. It was at just the season of the year when the leaf of the maple wears its choicest hue of red; and the beech and chestnut assume their "sere and yellow." Blending with these varieties, the unfading richness of the evergreen, it would excite no wonder, that the younger of our travelers, at least, beheld with admiration the gorgeous drapery which, in this climate, the forest assumes, preparatory to the desolation of winter.

The younger of the two persons to whom we have called the attention of the reader, might have been twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age. Of middle stature, he exhibited a frame of much symmetry and power; and it was apparent that he had been inured to labors which had fully developed health and strength. His face was somewhat embrowned by exposure to the weather; but his active and intelligent eyes, the firm compression of his lips, and the ready play of his countenance, as he listened to or answered some remark of his companion, made it apparent that he had at least bestowed some labor upon the cultivation of his mind; for inward discipline and culture always have their

effect upon the outward bearing. Besides this, there was in his countenance an evidence of sincerity of purpose, which if it pursues but one path to attain its end, and that frequently an *uncomfortable* one, always triumphs over temporary difficulties. Ralph Weston – for that is the name of the young traveler – was ever honorable and upright, even where worldly "prudence" would have admitted of a slight departure from the rigid rules of propriety. He was not of that modern school, which makes *expediency* the touchstone of morality of conduct; but he always disclaimed the artifices to which men too frequently resort to hide the practices which are well enough in themselves, but which happen to contravene popular opinions or customs. But, with this serious turn of mind, he possessed a romantic disposition, which frequently led him into acts that excited the surprise of more sedate or less romantic acquaintances; but with no art, save a frank disposition, and a heart of sympathy and friendship, Ralph Weston always found "troops of friends" to whom he was little less than what we propose to make of him – a hero.

Ralph Weston, then, as might be readily supposed, in the dark hours when the Colonies were struggling for life, embarked his hopes and fortunes in the cause of his country. At the age of eighteen, he volunteered as a private soldier, and after serving a short time in this humble capacity, he had risen in rank, until at the close of the war, he held the commission of a captain. His maternal aunt (for he had neither father nor mother, both having died in his infancy) always insisted that he should have

been a general, at least; and perhaps, if merit were always the true test of advancement, he would have attained a much higher rank. But while he was always foremost in danger, he was ever a laggard in the ranks of those who press eagerly forward for the spoils of victory, or the honors which are more often worn than deserved. But we will suffer the reader to become more intimately acquainted with him as we proceed in our history.

His traveling companion, however, cannot be dismissed without notice; for Ichabod Jenkins (familiarly called "Ike," by his too-presuming acquaintances) had no small idea of his own importance. At the time when he appears before us, he cannot be less than forty-seven or eight years of age; when standing erect, he is full six feet two in stockings; but as he generally appears in locomotion, you would make his height at about five feet ten. His frame was not, apparently, robust, and a stranger would have been surprised at any great indication of strength on his part; yet few in the neighborhood of his residence, on any public occasion, when feats of agility or strength were undertaken, would have dared to match him in any game where these qualities were necessary. Yet this was the least of Ichabod's merits, if his own judgment could be trusted.

In his earlier days, a long struggle had taken place in his mind between the love of wealth and literary pursuits. He recognized the distinctive antipathy between these two mistresses; yet neither of them had ever acquired a complete victory over the other; so he had compromised between them by uniting a course

of such reading as could then be attained in general literature, with a strong speculative disposition, which desired to leap at once, and by one bound, from rags into purple. Now, it must be confessed, that Ichabod had succeeded about as well in one pursuit as in the other – and to which of his mistresses to attribute his ill success, he did not know. He had read Mrs. Bradstreet's poems, who, in her day, was styled "the mirror of her age and the glory of her sex" – he had much admired the poetry of George Wolcott, but he was completely intoxicated with the "Simple Cobbler of Agawam," by Nathanial Ward, although he did not adopt its fanatical sentiments; the Revolutionary poets he had by heart, and for the reputation of Freneau, he would have abandoned the fame of Shakespeare, had he possessed the power of choice. He had at one time secluded himself from all of his acquaintances for a month or two; and at last, when he emerged from his solitude, he was seen with a quantity of manuscript, which he read to his most intimate friends with exceedingly rhapsodical gestures. It was even thought that this manuscript had been offered to some publisher, but as its contents whatever they were, never appeared in print, it was well understood that it had been rejected. It is certain, that from this time he abandoned all ideas of winning a literary reputation, and set earnestly to work to win the fortune of which he had so long been dreaming. But Ichabod, with an innate love for the jingle of rhyme, could, even at this day, repeat enough of the lyrical poetry of the country to endanger the patience and temper of his warmest friend.

After attempting, at Boston, many schemes for the sudden acquisition of wealth, which had all resulted in failure, he had, some time previous to the war, shaken off the dust of the (to him) unprosperous city, and traveled westward in search of a more congenial spot, where the resources of his mind could be developed.

He had *finally located* at one of the frontier settlements in the State of New York – a small, but growing place – and unencumbered by wife or family, he fancied himself certain of success at last. He had at one time taken a trip to the shores of Long Island Sound, for the purpose of making inquiry as to the prospect of realizing anything from the buried money of Capt. Kidd; but he returned somewhat poorer than he left. One time, while wandering on the shore of a small creek, in his own neighborhood, devising means for the expenditure of his wealth when it should be obtained, he was suddenly arrested by the glitter of some fine, shining particles, in the sand. Certain that he had at length discovered a gold mine, the land was purchased by him on contract, at an extravagant price, by turning out what little money and few valuables he possessed. His mysterious appearance and conduct, attracted towards him the attention of the whole settlement; it was whispered that he was always out of his boarding-house at night, and that he invariably slept a portion of the day. He had been heard, too, to hint, in a solemn manner, of his taking up his residence at Boston or New York, and of building half a dozen blocks of brick buildings,

and living in a style of splendor that should astonish his early acquaintances, who had always enviously predicted that he would never amount to anything. The consequence was, that after much managing and prying, Ichabod's mine was discovered, and the whole settlement rushed – men, women and children – to share his good fortune. Trespass suits followed thick and fast, and at length it was discovered that the glittering particles which had been gathered so eagerly, were worth just as much as the sand in which they were imbedded, and no more. The result of this speculation was, that Ichabod lost both his gold and his land, and the little money he had previously possessed.

But nothing disheartened, other schemes filled his mind; and he was always the surest of success, just as he was the most certain to be unsuccessful. Ichabod was altogether too busy in his financial operations to volunteer as a soldier during the Revolutionary War, although he had cast around earnestly to ascertain if there was any way by which he could make his business and patriotism harmonize together. But while he had refused to sacrifice his chances of a fortune by taking up arms as a soldier, to his credit be it said, that in the frequent Indian incursions which had been made on the frontier settlements of New York, he had zealously engaged in the plans of defense, and had won an enviable notoriety as an Indian fighter. Always cool and calculating, he never suffered himself to be surprised; and he came at last to be dreaded by the Indians, as bearing a charmed life, which could not be taken. More than one Seneca, who had

escaped from his rifle, bore the marks of his bullets; and his name was never mentioned by them but with a look of hatred. This feeling was cordially reciprocated; and even a lucky chance at a fortune could scarcely have deterred him from an attack, even in a time of peace, upon an Onondaga, Cayuga, or Seneca.

But with the return of peace, all ideas of war had vanished, and he now felt that it was necessary to make a desperate effort for the fortune which had been so long delayed. But it was necessary to possess some little capital; and with the view of laying the foundation for the capital desired, he had embraced the opportunity of guiding Ralph Weston on his journey, which was now nearly completed. He also had an idea about a speculation which he wished to look after; but of that hereafter.

Armed with a rifle, which had been his constant companion in his encounters with the Indians, and with a hunting-knife which he wore in a leathern belt, it would have been difficult for a stranger to have pronounced his vocation. There was little in his figure or appearance which would have indicated the habits of a borderer of the period, yet one would scarcely have ventured to guess at any other calling or profession.

His hair, which was long and straight, and originally of a brownish color, had become grizzly, and flowed from under his cap without order or regularity. His face was embrowned by long exposure to the extremes of weather, while its expression had a rigidity that was scarcely ever discomposed. His eyes were of a grayish cast, and seemed always to be on the alert, to detect

dangers that might threaten either his person, or the mental treasures which were just ready to be coined.

The travelers journeyed in a sort of path, which had evidently been made some time before, but which had been little used. Occasionally, a tree that could not be avoided had been felled, and the stump wholly or partially removed; and often the path was obstructed by the trunk of a decayed tree, which had fallen from old age, or had been overthrown by the violence of the winds.

"Well, Ichabod," said Ralph, after the travelers had paused a while to survey the valley which now opened upon their view, "we must be near our journey's end. From the indications you gave me, we cannot be more than a mile distant, at farthest."

"I should say not, Captain," replied Ichabod; "I was never hereabouts but once before, and then I reckon we made something of a spec in the way of Injins. The varmints! but they are a long way off now, I reckon."

"I have never heard," said Ralph, "that any battles of consequence were fought in this section of the State. This region is too distant from the settlements, and too much of a wilderness, to have been the scene of any important conflict."

"I can't say, Captain, how important it may or mayn't have been to the country at large; but this I *do* calculate, that it was mighty important to them that had the fighting on't. Three Injins to one man, sartin; and they fought like devils, as they were, confound 'em! Why, Captain, if you'll believe it, one of them red

rascals and I ra'ally had a pitched battle for the ownership of this here companion of mine," pointing to his rifle; "but we taught the cussed red-skins better manners. We don't part company so easy;" and Ichabod grasped his rifle with a still firmer hand; and then half said and half sung, from the old ballad of "Lovewell's fight,"

"'For, as we are informed,
So thick and fast they fell,
Scarce twenty of their number
At night did get home well.'"

"I supposed," said Ralph, "that this country, through which we are now traveling, was in the possession of the friendly Oneidas and Tuscaroras?"

"Yes, it was in their possession," answered Ichabod, "except when it was overrun by those devils of Senecas or Onondagas and that was pretty tolerably often. They got lots of scalps, sometimes, and sometimes they lost their own. The Tryon County boys, when they had a fair chance at 'em, always paid 'em off with interest. As the poet said:

"'Come all you Tryon County men,
And never be dismayed;
But trust sincerely in the Lord,
And He will be your aid.'"

"But, as I ginerally found, they had to trust a good deal to their rifles."

"I had heard of the sufferings of the people at the settlements," said Ralph, "and knew the fact that many sharp battles, which are little known in the general history of the war, occurred; but I supposed they were confined to the immediate neighborhood of the settlements."

"Why, you see, Captain, if we got the start of 'em at the settlements, we weren't such fools as to let 'em go without a taste of our pluck; and it was on one of them occasions that I was down here. But I say, Captain," exclaimed he, as he approached a sudden bend in the river, where there was a much more than usual current, "what d'ye think of the chance of setting up a woolen factory down here, on this creek?"

Amused with the turn Ichabod had given to the conversation, Ralph suggested that it might possibly be a profitable investment, provided he could induce the Indians to become customers to his establishment, and provided the requisite staples for the manufacture could be obtained. Nothing daunted by the suggestion of obstacles, Ichabod proceeded to explain to Ralph how a rapid fortune, in that line, could be accumulated.

"Now s'pose, Captain, that we buy of these Oneidas and Tuscaroras a water-privilege. Well, that's done. Then we'll put up a building. Plenty of materials, you see, all around here; and we can get the machinery at New York, or send for a good hand, and make it ourselves. Then, as you say, we shall have to get the wool;

and after it's manufactured, we shall have to sell it. But why can't we raise sheep here? We can get a small stock at the settlement, and what with them and the increase, we shan't have any lack of wool: and for a market, haven't we got the whole country? But you'll say, Captain, that the foreign importations will ruins us? Well, that *is* a difficulty; but it can't last, Captain; it won't last. We'll conquer them foreign fellows in that business, yet, as we did in the other. But I think we can, any way, get up a good-enough home market among these Injins. I'll have a talk with 'em about it." And we shall see that he did, on a subsequent occasion, faithfully perform his promise.

But we will not follow the worthy Ichabod in his calculations upon the profits of his speculation. He had scarcely reached the middle of his figurings upon the profits to be realized from a thousand sheep, when Ralph, who was wearied, yet amused, by the earnestness of his companion, exclaimed:

"Arrived at last!"

They had now approached near the northeastern shore of a small lake or pond, which lay buried in the valley, completely surrounded by the forest. Its eastern shore was about fifty rods from the river; and so far as they could observe, it had neither inlet nor outlet. It was of an almost perfect oval form, having on the eastern and a portion of the southern shore a bluff of fifteen or twenty feet in height; but on the southwest, the land gradually receded in an upward slope, into a hill of fifty or sixty feet in height, while, towards the northwest, the land rose sharply

from the water's edge to an elevation of eighty or a hundred feet. The northern shore seemed to be flat and marshy, and had the appearance of having, at one time, been covered with the waters of the pond. As we have said, it was of nearly an oval form, and was about one hundred rods across, from east to west, while from north to south the distance was still greater. The water was calm and clear, and reflected, with the brightness and truthfulness of a mirror, the forms of the trees which stood upon its western shore. Even Ichabod awoke from his speculative dreams, and admired, with Ralph, the still and quiet beauty of the scene.

Upon the brow of the hill which we have described on the southwestern shore of the pond, in a clearing of few acres in extent, stood a cottage, not much different from the general style of cottages, as they were then built by the pioneers of the wilderness. Yet, in the distance which intervened between it and our travelers, and in the calmness and clearness of the day, which had now nearly reached its close, the cottage possessed charms, in their eyes, which its intrinsic beauties, either in situation or construction, did not perhaps merit. So far as Ralph was concerned, perhaps, there were other reasons to lend it a charm, beyond the beauty of the landscape or the golden rays thrown upon it by the setting sun.

While they were yet observing it, with very different emotions, it was apparent from an unwonted excitement among its inhabitants, that their arrival had been observed, and the figure of a stout-looking elderly man, followed by a negro, could be

seen advancing towards them. But we must leave the meeting to be recorded in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

"'Tis pleasant, through the loop-holes of retreat,
To peep at such a world; to see the stir
Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd;
To hear the roar she sends, through all her gates,
At a safe distance, where the dying sound
Falls, a soft murmur, on the uninjured ear."

WILLIAM COWPER

The individual we have mentioned, who now came rapidly, towards Ralph, was somewhat advanced in years – not less, perhaps, than sixty. Yet, in his whole bearing and appearance could be seen the iron frame and hardihood, which in these days have given place to a certain effeminacy of manners. The hardy, robust race of men who cleared our forests, and encountered cheerfully the sufferings and privations, and endured the toil incident to a pioneer life, are passing away; and however much our vanity may suffer in making the confession, their sons and successors are apt to lack in those iron qualities which succeeded against obstacles, the magnitude of which most of us do not appreciate.

The countenance of this individual exhibited tokens of the energy of this now nearly departed class of men; yet upon it, at the same time, glowed an expression of honesty and intelligence,

which at once win the heart and command confidence and respect. The frosts of time had but lightly touched his hair, and at the first glance, one would have guessed him at least ten years younger than he actually was.

Matthew Barton, for such was his name, about two years before the period we have assigned for our narrative, had left one of the settlements at the eastward, and removed with his family to this remote region. He had been unfortunate in his pecuniary affairs, and his confidence had been betrayed by a friend for whom he had incurred obligations nearly to the amount of his small fortune. With the remains of his little property he had removed to the west, advancing beyond the remotest dwelling in this section of the State. He was satisfied that he had years of labor left in him yet; and with a prudent foresight, he saw that a few years, at most, would surround him with neighbors, who would be likely to follow him to the fertile and beautiful valley he had selected. Suddenly, perhaps, for one advanced to his age, and yielding partially to the feelings of mortification he endured at the idea of struggling with poverty among those who had seen him in a more prosperous condition, he resolved upon this course, and it was at once adopted.

His wife had died a number of years before, leaving him but one child, a daughter, who at this time had arrived at about twenty years of age. He had purchased, with the remains of his property, a negro, to assist him in his farming operations, and thus provided, we behold him in the new house of his old age.

Ralph advanced rapidly forward to meet him, and hearty were the greetings between them.

"Right glad am I to see you here, Ralph," said Barton, "yours is the first friendly face I have seen from the settlements in many a day; and I can say, too, that there is no other I would more gladly see. Oneidas and Tuscaroras are well enough in their place, but it does one good to see a little of the old eastern blood, once in a while."

The first greetings over, Ralph, with a blush – very faint indeed, but still a blush – of which the old gentleman was entirely unconscious, inquired about his old playmate, Ruth.

"Well and happy, Ralph – at least, as happy as one can be, so far from friends; but she will be right glad to see you, I doubt not."

Ralph introduced Ichabod to Mr. Barton, as a worthy gentleman from the settlements, who had been induced to accompany him through the wilderness; and the party then proceeded towards the cottage, which, on a nearer approach, if it lost some of the enchantments which distance had lent it, gained on the score of adaptation to the purposes for which it had been erected. It was situated in the midst of a few acres of land which had been almost entirely cleared, and which showed abundant signs of having already repaid, for the season, the labor which had been bestowed upon it. A log barn had been erected, a short distance from the house, and about the premises were seen the usual fixtures of a pioneer habitation. The house itself was built of logs, but they had been hewn and squared with some care;

and, altogether, it had the appearance of a neat and comfortable residence. It had, also, with a foresight against contingencies which might occur, been adapted as a place of defense against any attacks which might be made upon it by Indians.

"Stir your shanks, Sambo!" said Barton to the negro, "and inform your mistress that she has visitors coming."

The negro hurried away on his errand, while the party proceeded more leisurely towards the dwelling.

Ralph was welcomed by Miss Barton with all the warmth and pleasure that might have been expected from their early friendship. Years had elapsed since they had been separated, and, in the look of mutual joy and pleased surprise at the changes which time had wrought in each other, might be traced, perhaps, in both, the existence of a tenderer feeling than belongs to mere friendship.

Ruth Barton, as we have already said, was about twenty years of age. In figure, she was of the medium female height, but with a form fully developed by healthful exercise; her countenance possessed a gentle quietness, which was peculiarly feminine; but withal it gave evidence of a confidence and self-reliance necessary to the women as well as to the men of the frontier settlements of that period. She was, as her appearance would indicate, the life of the family – always busy in the labors and duties of the household; and, under her superintendence, there were a regularity and neatness which, to the most fastidious of housekeepers, might perhaps have been a little surprising.

But these were not the only qualifications which Ruth Barton possessed. She was not satisfied with the mere routine of ordinary duties, but she had found time to adorn her mind with many of the accomplishments of education – far beyond most of those even, who were elevated above her by the means and opportunity of acquiring a thorough education. Her mind was of a somewhat imaginative cast, and she possessed a deep and quiet love for the beauties of Nature. She loved her new home in the wilderness – the beautiful valley which her father had selected, possessed charms which she admired; and she had never wished to exchange it, though solitary and neighborless, for the more populous country in which she had once resided.

There was also present in the room an ill-clad, stout-looking man, by the name of Guthrie, apparently about forty-five years of age. His countenance had a vulgar cast; and it wore, besides, an ill-natured expression, that repelled any attempt at an intimate acquaintance. This Guthrie had, during the war of the Revolution, been a Tory; and it had been suspected that he was one of the most active agents in inciting the Indians of this locality to revolt. He resided at some distance below, on the river, in a log shanty erected by him. He was a sort of squatter, and tilled a few acres which had been partially cleared by the Indians years before; but relied principally upon his gun and fish-pole for a livelihood. Occasionally he went to the settlements with such skins or other articles as he could exchange. He was merely tolerated in the family of Mr. Barton, whenever he made

his appearance; and knowing the ill favor with which he was received, it was seldom that he intruded himself upon them.

As the party entered the door, Guthrie, who had been sitting listlessly by the fireside, arose with a sort of dogged air; but as the tall figure of Ichabod met his eye, he shrank quietly back again, and endeavored, as much as possible, to withdraw himself from observation. Ichabod did not observe him, or, at least, exhibited no signs of recognition.

"We have been expecting you, Captain Weston, for some days," said Ruth; "we learned by Guthrie, who came about a week ago from the settlements, that you had returned from the army; and we have been awaiting the fulfilment of an old promise to visit us."

"I left Philadelphia but a few weeks since," replied Ralph: "I was mindful of my promise, and set out on my visit here as soon as my business arrangements would allow; but I hardly think I should have found my way here at all, had it not been for my friend, Mr. Jenkins. He picked his way through your wilderness like an old acquaintance."

Ichabod acknowledged the attention which this remark attracted towards him, by gradually elevating his form and replying:

"Well, these woods *are* something like an old acquainance to me, seeing as how I have been through here on some sharp war paths, afore now. It was down yonder in them flats, we had a terrible skrimmage with them red sarpints the Senecas and

Onondagas; but we gave 'em a touch of Independence, *con*-found 'em!"

"How long ago, Mr. Jenkins," asked Barton, "did the fight which you mention occur?"

"Well, as near as I can calculate, I should think it was in the fall of '79."

"That must have been the same affair which I have heard you mention, Guthrie," said Barton, addressing that individual, who sat in the corner of the large fireplace, with his hat drawn over his eyes.

"Yes," growled Guthrie, without moving.

"What! old veteran, was you there, too?" asked Ichabod, approaching him.

"No, I wan't there," replied Guthrie ferociously, partly turning his face towards Ichabod.

"Well, you needn't be so savage about it, friend," said Ichabod, slowly. "Them that fout there, so far as I know, hadn't nothing to be ashamed on." Then turning away, he muttered to himself, "I've seen them features afore, somewhere – down in the settlements, perhaps. But I say, Squire," turning towards Barton, "you've done a mighty smart business, clearing up here, lately."

"Yes, something of a business. We have not been idle. Sambo and I have got ten or fifteen acres pretty well cleared."

In the meantime, Ruth was busy making preparations for the family supper, and providing otherwise for the comfort of their guests. Guthrie took the opportunity quietly to leave the

room, and with his rifle on his shoulder, proceeded rapidly in a southerly direction.

The conversation then turned upon the political condition of the country, the depreciated state of the currency, and the anticipated proceedings of Congress.

"The greatest difficulty that lies in the way of a proper management and settlement of our affairs," said Ralph, in reply to some remark of Barton, "it seems to me, is in the limited powers of Congress. Impotent for any purpose, it has a herculean task before it. I think it will be found necessary to adopt a stronger government."

"No, no," replied Barton, who seemed to be tenacious of State rights, and to labor under a great fear of the evil consequences of a centralization of power. "Congress has power enough. The disorders under which the country labors, would have been no less under any form of government. Without resources, in a long and harassing war, the burden of indebtedness and the depreciated condition of the currency, were unavoidable; but all that will be necessary to restore us, will be a few years of peace. Things will come round of themselves."

"But," said Ralph, "how is our indebtedness to be paid? The country is already exhausted by taxation. The States themselves are overburdened with their own debts: when to these are added those contracted by Congress, it is very difficult, under the present order of things, to see our way clearly out of our embarrassments. No credit in Europe – no money at home – no

confidence anywhere. With a few years of peace, had Congress the power to levy impost duties, much might be done. Even the late measure of a proposed impost duty of five per cent. has been lost by the obstinacy of Rhode Island, which would not concur in the measure."

"Say, the *patriotism* of Rhode Island, rather," answered Barton, "if that term may be applied to a State. I look upon that system of impost duties as a direct robbery of the people. Give Congress that power, and you give away the whole property of the nation. Duties would be laid that would deprive the poorer classes of all the comforts – ay, of many of the necessaries of life. That won't do."

"How, then," asked Ralph, "would you pay off our indebtedness, and support the burthens of government?"

"By direct taxation!"

"But that system, you would find, I think," said Ralph, "would not answer the purpose. It would only reach a certain class, and would be very strongly resisted. But, by the other system, the trifling addition to the cost of articles of general consumption would be little felt, and after a time, would be generally acquiesced in. Besides, all classes of persons would be reached, and almost universally in proportion to their means."

"It is only a return to the principle of the stamp act," said Barton, who was a little excited; "and our seven years of warfare and suffering will have been useless, if, after all, we are to permit any authority, in its discretion, to impose burdens upon us."

"I don't know about that, Squire," interrupted Ichabod, who had listened to this discussion with much interest, and to whose mind the factory speculation proposed to Ralph, recurred. "Wouldn't such a system a little better allow us to take care of ourselves? Couldn't we a little easier build up manufactories of our own? Just add that five or ten per cent, to the profits of our own manufacturers, and pretty soon we'd hold them *furrin* manufacturers off at arm's length. You'd see factories of all sorts starting up all over the country, and there would be a pleasure in that, to a man who loved his own country – to wear cloth and drive nails made at home. Now, couldn't *you*, Squire if a duty of ten or fifteen per cent, was laid on woollen fixins', afford to go into the factory business, on your own hook, on this river of your'n, here?"

"Fiddlesticks!" ejaculated Barton, "what could *I* do in the factory business?"

"Well, perhaps *you* mightn't do anything at it, Squire," replied Ichabod; "but somebody else might. Now, suppose somebody *should* locate a business of that kind down here, I'll tell you how you could make a nice spec out of it, without laying out any capital at all – although it would be kind'er fair to lend a helping hand, jist to start, perhaps, seeing you could make so well out of it."

Barton looked at Ichabod, as if he began to doubt his sanity; but to Ralph, the earnestness of the one and the surprise of the other, was a matter of great amusement.

Ichabod continued, pleased at the surprised attention which Barton was giving to him:

"You see, Squire, s'pose that business should be started down here, jist opposite them flats, it would be necessary to bring in lots of people, and you could lay out them flats into building-lots, and realize something handsome out of it."

"Pshaw!" said Barton, "a city down here! Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Jenkins. I'll give you the land for your factory, together with your water-privilege, and we'll divide the profits on the city lots;" and the old gentleman laughed heartily at the suggestion.

"That's what I call fair," said Ichabod, slowly; "but *couldn't* you, Squire, do a little something towards furnishing the capital?"

"Furnishing the capital!" ejaculated Barton; "why, as to that, I haven't capital enough to furnish my own farm, small as it is. No: I think, Mr. Jenkins, I have made you a very fair offer."

Just at this moment, Sambo announced their supper to be ready, and Ichabod was obliged to desist from the further prosecution of his project. But, extremely well satisfied with the progress already made, he began seriously to dream of the manufacturing firm of "Barton, Weston, Jenkins & Co."

CHAPTER IV

2d Fisherman. – "Master, I marvel how the fishes live in the sea."

1st Fisherman. – "Why, as men do on land – the great ones eat up the little ones." – PERICLES.

Ralph was now fairly installed as a member of the family of Mr. Barton. He had found an opportunity, in the course of the evening of his arrival, to exchange a few words of conversation with Ruth; and he was now satisfied that the partiality with which, in former days, she had regarded him, had not given place to indifference. The consciousness of this fact amply repaid him for long years of absence, and led him to look forward to such a future as only appears to the vision of those who reason from the heart. The future, cold, impassable, dark, and filled with mysterious dread, to him who has outlived the power of youthful passion – to the young and the hopeful, is the unattained but attainable region, where exist all the charms and raptures which can be bodied forth by an ardent imagination. So different are the views of life which can be made by a few active, busy years.

On the morning of the day after their arrival, Ralph and Ichabod, accompanied by Barton, examined the farm and the improvements which had been made by the energy of the latter. Some fifteen acres of forest had already been cleared, and

Sambo, on this morning, was engaged in still farther invading the domains of the wilderness; and with his bare and muscular arms was wielding the axe like a redoubtable soldier among a multitude of enemies.

There is something pleasant to the eye in beholding the struggle of man with the wilderness; to see old, mossy trees, that had stood for ages, faithful guardians of the soil, whose long, leafy boughs and bushy crowns, seemed to belong as much to the sky in which they waved and nodded, as to the earth which sustained them, bow down their heavy heads with a crash, that to the imaginative mind, seems, with its echoes, like a mournful wail issuing from the surviving forest. As the tree falls, the golden sunlight darts into a new and unexplored region, and the melancholy forest abode recedes, as if pursued by an implacable enemy. But it is a rescue of the earth from the long slumber of past time, and an offering to the comforts and necessities of the future.

It is scarcely to be wondered at, that in earlier times, when the imaginations of men overruled their powers of reason, the sombre, melancholy forest abode was peopled with fanciful beings – children of the shadow and of the forest – Fairies, Dryads, and Satyrs, with Arcadian landscapes, and the good god Pan to preside over sylvan sports! But in these days of utility, the reed of the shepherd and the music of the sylvan gods are drowned in the clatter of saw-mills, and the hoarse song of the woodchopper.

Ichabod, who had not forgotten the conversation of the previous evening, endeavored, two or three times, to revive the project which on that occasion he had proposed to Barton; but he was unsuccessful in his attempts to renew the discussion. After a few hours thus spent, the party returned to the cottage. Barton proposed, for the afternoon, a fishing excursion upon the pond. "It is filled," said he, "with pickerel and perch – both very delicious fish, and they are taken with the utmost ease. This is just the season for them."

Ralph inquired if the streams contained any specimens of trout; and Barton answered, "that the river contained some very fine specimens, although they were not so numerous as in the smaller streams. Occasionally we take pike, but they do not come so far up the river in very large quantities. But," he continued, with a zeal that showed he was not a stranger to the gentle art, "our brooks are filled – absolutely filled – with trout. There is a stream, about a mile and a half west of us, which comes from the northwest, through a wilderness, with which I am almost wholly unacquainted, where they can be taken in great numbers. In an hour, we can catch as many as it will be convenient to carry. If you like, we will go over there to-morrow, or next day; but for to-day, I am anxious to show you sport nearer by."

It was arranged, that in the afternoon the suggestion of Barton should be followed; and hearing the latter giving some directions to Sambo, which it will be unnecessary here to repeat, Ralph and Ichabod proceeded leisurely towards the cottage.

"There is a charm, for me, about a life in the woods," said Ralph, "which I cannot explain. Mingled with the idea of a nearer approach to the Court of Nature, is that of separation from the passions and vices of men in the world. One feels to exclaim with the Bard of Avon,

> "Is not this life more sweet
> Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
> More free from peril than the envious court?"

"I don't dispute the general idea," said Ichabod, "about the sweetness of a life in the woods. I have never tried it very much, but I always have a different sort of feeling from usual when I find myself in the forest; but I reckon that it can't be considered very patriotic for a Captain in the Revolutionary Army to be quoting Shakspeare, or any other British poet. What did *he* know about *our* woods? All the woods he ever saw were but a child's play-ground compared with the eternal, never-ending forests of America. As for me, if I've got any poetry to quote, I can find enough of our own manufacture. I believe in the home manufacture of *that* article, just as much as I do in that of the other kind we were talking about last night."

Ralph smiled at Ichabod's literary bigotry. He answered:

"I do not know any reasonable objection to our admiring the men of genius of a foreign or hostile nation, or their writings. Men of genius are the property of the world. Whatever they may think or say that may delight and instruct one people, may equally

delight and instruct all others. We are yet in the infancy of the poetic art, and have produced no poets capable of winning a world-wide reputation."

"That's precisely what the British say, Captain; and if I didn't know that your heart was true as steel to the American cause, I should be a little *jealous* of you. No poets of reputation! Did you ever read Freneau, Captain? To my mind, he's got more poetry in his little finger than Shakspeare had in his whole body. Now, did Shakspeare ever write anything equal to Freneau's "Antiquity of America"?"

And Ichabod began reciting, in a loud voice —

> "'America, to every climate known,
> Spreads her broad bosom to the burning zone;
> To either pole extends her vast domain,
> Where varying suns in different summers reign.'"

"That's the way the poem begins, and it fully keeps up its pitch all the way through."

Ralph had some knowledge of the poetical compositions of Freneau, who had really produced some poems, full of a fine, poetic feeling, and who was much beyond the mass of his poetical contemporaries in this country; yet, although he entertained a feeling of respect for the ability and services of the revolutionary poet, he could not share the high degree of admiration which Ichabod entertained for him.

"I'll grant," said Ralph, scarcely knowing how to reply to the

irritated Ichabod, "that Shakespeare never *did* write precisely such a poem; and I will admit that I do not believe he ever *could* have written such an one."

"I knew you were right at heart, Captain," exclaimed Ichabod, highly elated over his equivocal victory. "Some of his verses have done as much towards bringing down the British, as whole regiments of Continentals could have done. But then, Freneau is only one of a whole circle of poets. The British boast about their old ballads; now, I'll take an even bet, that I can show 'em ballads, written here at home, that will make 'em ashamed. Why, we've had a woman that would eclipse 'em all, to my mind – Mrs. Bradstreet, of whom another poet said:

> "'Her breast was a brave palace, a broad street,
> Where all heroic, ample thoughts did meet.'"

"Mrs. Bradstreet *did* possess a sweetness of expression," said Ralph; "and, with a higher cultivation, she might have written some fine poetry."

"*Might*, Captain! Lord bless you, she did! Speaking of the Squire's fishing expedition, what other poet ever said as fine things about *fish*, for instance, as she did?

> "'Ye fish, which in this liquid region 'bide,
> That for each season have your habitation,
> Now salt, now fresh, where you think best to glide,
> To unknown coasts to give a visitation.

In lakes and ponds you leave your numerous fry:
So Nature taught, and yet you know not why,
You wat'ry folk that know not your felicity.'"

Ralph was much amused at the earnestness of Ichabod, and he did not wish to irritate him by any depreciating criticism upon verses which he considered so extraordinary; but remarked:

"An admiration of poetic productions depends very much upon the quality of our taste. I presume that I have very little taste for such things; but I do think that our ballad poetry has done us good service. Written in a popular style, and sung or recited by men who *felt* the particular sentiments usually contained in them, these ballads have frequently proved effective in inspiring a proper, natural feeling."

"Them's my sentiments, Captain," said Ichabod; "and I'm glad to see that you're right on that p'int. We've got ballads on all sorts of subjects, from the time of King Philip's war down to these days. Did you ever read the ballad of 'Lovewell's Fight,' Captain? I call it a great poem. After speaking of the valiant Captain Lovewell, it goes on to say:

"'He and his valiant soldiers
Did range the woods full wide,
And hardships they endured,
To quell the Indian's pride.

""'Twas nigh unto Pigwacket,

Upon the eighth of May,
They spied a rebel Indian
Soon after break of day.
He on a bank was walking,
Upon a neck of land
Which leads into a pond, as
We're made to understand.'

"It then goes on to describe the fight between the company and the Injins that laid in ambush, and winds up with telling who and how many were killed.

"'Our worthy Captain Lovewell
Among them there did die;
They killed Lieutenant Robbins,
And wounded good young Frye,'

while the rest of the company started for home;

'And braving many dangers
And hardship in the way,
They safe arrived at Dunstable,
The thirteenth day of May.'"

"Very good, Ichabod – very good! It is really quite American in style, as well as theme."

"But good as it is, Captain, it isn't a circumstance to some of 'em. There's 'Brave Pawling and the Spy,' and 'Bold Hawthorne,'

and 'American Taxation.' That last poem, Captain, has got the true essence of poetry in it. If I was the author of that, I'd die content. The poem goes on to say.

"'The cruel lords of Britain,
Who glory in their shame,
The project they have hit on
They joyfully proclaim;
'Tis what they're striving after,
Our rights to take away,
And rob us of our charter,
In North America.'

"Then 'two mighty speakers, who rule in Piedmont,' propose to King George a plan for taxation of the colonies, to which the king accedes, and says:

"'My subjects shall be taxed
In North America

Invested with a warrant
My publicans shall go,
The tenth of all their current
They surely shall bestow:
If they indulge rebellion,
Or from my precepts stray,
I'll send my war battalion
To North America.'

"Then the people of the colonies address King George, and implore him not to tax 'em; and finally say that if he does they'll fight about it, and that

> "'We never will knock under,
> O George, we do not fear
> The rattling of your thunder,
> Nor lightning of your spear;
>
> Though rebels you declare us,
> We're strangers to dismay;
> Therefore you cannot scare us
> In North America.'

"It's a great poem, Captain; it was written by a schoolmaster in Connecticut."

"It is patriotic in tone," replied Ralph; "it has that merit, at least. Are you much acquainted with the old poets of the country?"

"A little, Captain; I've read them all. Besides Mrs. Bradstreet, there's Roger Wolcott, Nathaniel Ward, Mather Byles, Joseph Green, Peter Foulger, old Michael Wigglesworth, and hosts of others. A splendid galaxy, Captain! There's 'The Day of Doom; or, a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment,' by Wigglesworth. It *is* rather strong on the old New England religion, but as a piece of poetical work, it's really great.

Was anything ever more terrible than the description of the final judgment? After the sentence is pronounced, before the condemned,

> "'They wring their hands, their caitiff hands,
> And gnash their teeth in terror;
> They cry, they war, for anguish sore,
> And gnaw their tongues for horror;
> But get away, without delay,
> Christ pities not your cry:
> Depart to hell – there ye may yell,
> And war eternally.'

"We can admire poetry, sometimes, when we don't precisely approve of the sentiments. Did you ever see a more terrific piece of writing than that, Captain?"

"It is full of horrors, I must confess," said Ralph, who was beginning to get weary at the extent of Ichabod's poetical recollections; "but we are near the cottage, and we must now make our preparations for the fishing expedition. Are you anything of a fisherman, Ichabod?"

"I can't say that I am, Captain. With all respect for the taste of other people, it always looked to me like rather poor sport. A man may do that, as he does anything else, for a livelihood; but, for sport, give me a rifle, a sharp eye, and a practised hand. Howsomever, I am with you."

The afternoon seemed to prepare itself expressly for the

accommodation of the fishing party. Light clouds covered the sky and a gentle south wind just stirred the face of the water. Sambo had been to the river and caught for bait a quantity of small white fish; and, equipped with hooks and line, Barton, with Ralph and Ichabod, proceeded to the pond, where they entered a boat that had been made by hollowing out two halves of a large log, some three feet in diameter and attaching them together. Barton paddled towards the north-west side, and advanced some fifteen or twenty rods from the shore.

"In this portion of the pond," said he, "the pickerel are most abundant. Perch are found in large quantities near the south-east shore."

They then fastened the bait, which had been kept alive, to the hooks, and threw them overboard. Ichabod was a stranger to this manner of fishing, and he watched the proceedings with an evident degree of interest. Ralph had been accustomed to it in his boyhood and therefore needed no instructions.

Seeing that Ichabod did not understand the course of operations, Barton said to him, "It is necessary, usually, for the purpose of securing the fish, whenever it strikes the bait, to allow it to run with the line for a short distance, when it stops and endeavors to swallow its prey. If it succeeds in doing so, or if it finds itself hooked, it then runs. Then is the time to pull; pull slowly, but steadily, and you have him."

"Hallo! ive got one!" shouted Ichabod; and, mindful of the directions he had just received, he commenced jerking and

pulling violently on his line. The fish, which was of good size, and would weigh from two to three pounds, came struggling towards the boat, as if not anxious to make a more familiar acquaintance with the party. "Ah you varmint, – you Seneca!" shouted Ichabod. "Pull will you! I'll show you a trick worth two of that!" He had just got the fish close to the side of the boat, and was eagerly bent over to grasp him, if necessary, when the pickerel, with a desperate struggle, that splashed the water in all directions, broke loose, and darted with the rapidity of light, as it seemed to the eyes of Ichabod, back into the pond. The excitement, and the sudden release of the prisoner, nearly capsized Ichabod. He fell towards the other side of the boat, and and had it not been for Ralph, would have tumbled overboard.

"Hallo, there!" said Barton, laughing, "it's no use going into the water after him; you cannot catch him that way."

Ralph also laughed heartily at the accident; and Ichabod, much disconcerted, quietly fastened another bait, determined to succeed better on the next trial.

Just then, a pickerel of large size darted at Barton's bait, and Barton eased off his line, while the fish ran with it some eight or ten feet, and then commenced its efforts to swallow the captive it had seized. It would have been amusing to one who had no experience in the excitements of that species of fishing, to have Seen the evident anxiety of Barton. To the sportsman, the excitement is of such a degree as almost to obtain the mastery of his calmness, when, with a dart like a flash of

sunlight, the pickerel seizes the bait, and flies so suddenly that one can scarcely say he saw it; then comes the violent twitching and jerking of the line, as the monster endeavors in its eagerness to devour its prey. Barton waited patiently, until by the rapid motion of his line through the water, it was apparent that the pickerel was disposed to make off, either entirely satisfied or very much dissatisfied, – when, with a steady pull, he assisted the captive in its escape, and brought it slowly, but struggling violently, back to the boat. In a moment it was lifted in, and the capture was completed. One would have supposed from the appearance of Barton, that he had triumphed in some great encounter in another and more important field of action. But it is true, although perhaps not strange, that we enjoy with as keen a relish, a triumph, when we contend only with trifles, if our success is owing to our own skill or wisdom, as we do, where we triumph over greater obstacles with less skill, but with the assistance of accident.

Barton and Ralph both had extensively "good luck," and the boat began to be loaded with the fish they had taken. Ichabod, who for some time had watched their operations with much interest, had, of late, become silent, and seemed to pay little or no attention to the sport. His first failure, and the success of the others, had disconcerted him somewhat; and his want of luck began to make him think he was engaged in rather dull business.

At an interval of cessation in their sport, which had now become a little like labor, Ralph turned to Ichabod, and said,

"How now, Ichabod – did that pickerel run away with your spirits? Wake up, man; what are you dreaming about?"

"Confound the varmints!" exclaimed Ichabod. "The pervarse cree'turs ain't worth talking about, to say nothing about skirmishing here half a day after 'em. Give me a chance at them deer yonder in the woods, or the wolves I've heered of round here, and we'd have something to talk about, I tell you."

"Well we'll give you a chance," said Barton laughing; "you shall have an opportunity to triumph in your own field. You don't like pickerel-fishing, then?"

"Pickerel-fishing," replied Ichabod gravely; "may be good sport for them as likes it, and have a cunning that way; but you see, I don't look upon it as a reg'lar large business any way. Give me the sports one can unite with business. Now you see, the man that's a good shot on a deer, may be jist as good a shot, providing he has steady nerves, on an Injin; but you can't catch Senecas or Onondagas with this kind of bait. No, I don't like it, Squire." And Ichabod drew back into his former position of listlessness.

"I say, Squire," said he, in a moment, with a twinkle of his eyes, as if he had hit upon a happy idea. "I say, Squire, there's one way you might make this pond profitable. This wasn't put here merely to grow these cussed varmints in. Things has their uses; and the uses of this body of water isn't to cover fish spawn, as any man can see with half an eye.

"Well, Ichabod, any more factory projects?" asked Barton with an attempt at composure.

"There isn't anything to laugh at in that idea," said Ichabod. "You haven't thought of it as much as I have. But I tell you, Squire, you might jist as well build up this country here, and make your own spec. out of it, as to allow some body else to come in here, and do it; for 'twill be done, I tell you. A country like this can't be kept out of all its advantages a great while, any way. Now, you see, this pond, Squire, providing – I say, *providing*– you can get a proper fall of water from it, as I reckon you can, would make a great chance for a mill privilege, or something of that sort; and you see, Squire, if that could be done, you'd have a supply of water here, that – Creation, what *have* I got hold on?" and Ichabod commenced tugging violently at his line; for he evidently had caught something that offered much more than ordinary resistance to his efforts. His struggles attracted the attention of both Barton and Ralph, who came to offer him any assistance that might be necessary.

"Slow! steady!" said Barton.

"Yes, yes," shouted Ichabod: "I'll have him now. Ah! here he comes – ugh! what in creation – " and in his astonishment he dropped his line, which began to make off rapidly from the boat.

"A turtle!" exclaimed Barton, "a mud-turtle!" seizing the line, and pulling in the turtle, which would weigh eight or ten pounds. "You have triumphed at last, Jenkins. Nobody else has caught a turtle to-day – and so large a one, too. It is a real victory – another Saratoga," and he laughed so heartily that Ichabod showed some symptoms of getting angry.

"*Con*-found the victory, Squire," said he, "I'll tell you what, Squire, I don't handle them traps any more. If you want to see slaughter among your bears and wolves, bring 'em on: but I've got through with this cussed business, any how."

"But, without jesting, Jenkins," said Barton, "that turtle is worth more for eating than all the fish we've got here – their meat is delicious; and I prize them highly."

"If that's so, Squire," said Ichabod, "you're entirely welcome to it. The varmint! I've seen 'em down in the settlements: but I never heerd of eating 'em, before; *I'd* feed 'em to Senecas."

"They would be very thankful for them," said Barton. "It isn't every day they get a turtle like this."

The lines were all taken in, and as they were now sufficiently wearied, the boat was paddled towards the shore, where Sambo was waiting to receive the fish.

"Golly!" said the negro, grinning "who caught dis ere fellar? he! he! he!" pointing towards the turtle.

"*I* caught that varmint!" replied Ichabod, gravely.

"Guess massa Jenkins let he bait die," said Sambo. "Dose fellars don't bite like pickerel, no how. How massa Jenkins manage?"

"Manage! you black devil," said Ichabod, angrily, "I'll feed you to him, if you ask any more questions."

Ralph and Barton were very much amused at Ichabod's discomfiture, which did not at all pacify him; but the party proceeded towards the cottage, Sambo being careful to keep out

of Ichabod's way; but many were the grins which he made at his expense, behind his back. Ichabod gave up the idea of ever being a fisherman; but, as he seemed to be extremely sensitive on that subject, neither Ralph nor Barton saw fit to make any particular allusion to it.

CHAPTER V

"We rustled through the leaves like wind,
Left shrubs, and trees, and wolves behind;
By night I heard them on the track,
Their whoop came hard upon our back,
With their long gallop, which can tire
The hound's deep hate and hunter's fire."

MAZEPPA

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, when they returned to the cottage; and as the sun had again made its appearance, and there were no indications of unpleasant weather. Ralph proposed to Miss Barton that they should put in execution a project which she had mentioned, of taking a ride on horseback down the valley.

The horses were at once brought out, by the negro. They were kept for working horses by Barton; but they had sufficient life and activity to make an excursion in that mode pleasant and agreeable.

Sambo, who was very much attached to his mistress, took the liberty of cautioning her to be home again by nightfall, and muttered something about "strange Injins" and wolves. Barton smiled at the fears of the negro; but at the same time intimated that any possible danger might be avoided by an early return.

"As for Indians," said he, "I haven't known many around here lately, and they are all of the friendly sort. The King's Indians, as they are called, have not been here, as I have known, since I have resided here. As for wolves, they are sometimes dangerous, in winter; I have heard of them pursuing people, at that season of the year, when they are particularly voracious; but I never heard of such an instance so early in the season – although it is possible that it might occur. But Ruth knows the country," continued he, "and will know how to avoid any dangers that are incident to it."

"I shall place myself wholly under the control of Miss Barton," said Ralph; "she shall be both guide and guard."

"I can answer for the guide," replied Ruth, "if not for the guard. But I have often taken the short excursion I proposed for to-day; and I will promise to bring home Captain Weston safe and sound."

They mounted their horses, and proceeded slowly down the valley, along a narrow path or road, but of sufficient width to allow two horses to travel abreast. They had proceeded in this manner about a mile, in a southerly direction, with little conversation, except such as was suggested by their ride, when after rounding a hill which ran down nearly to the river, they came in full view of the valley, which here widened out into broad flats, and certainly offered to their observation a high degree of beauty and attraction.

"Beyond the hill which you see yonder," said Ruth, "the valley attains a much greater width. The river, on one side, flows at

the base of the eastern hills; and a pleasant stream, which, to translate the Indian appellation, means a "swiftly running creek," flows at the base of the hills on the west. At about a mile and a half below, they unite, and finally empty into the Susquehanna. The excursion I proposed for to-day was only to the spot where the junction of the two streams is formed. I have been there a few times, and I have always been charmed with the beauty of the place."

"The whole valley is beautiful," said Ralph, "beyond any ideas I entertained before visiting it. Such a place will soon be populated. I do not blame Ichabod for his schemes at speculation here; for with the impulse which the country must now receive in population and wealth, so beautiful and advantageous a region as this, will not long be neglected."

They passed around the hill which Ruth had mentioned, where the valley, as she had observed, became of a much greater width, wider than Ralph had yet seen it. It was almost entirely covered with forest; although here and there were places which had been partially cleared by the savages, in former days. The forest in which they were encompassed shut out any very extensive observation of the valley itself, except when they were upon some of the high ground; but enough could be seen to give one a good general idea of its shape and condition. The path had become somewhat more narrow, and they were surrounded by a wilderness of vegetation, which was peculiarly attractive to the eyes of Ralph and his companion.

After about half an hour's further progress, they arrived at the place which had been mentioned by Ruth. The river, just before it reaches the spot where it receives the waters of the creek, makes a sudden turn to the east, for about thirty rods, and then returns to nearly the same point, in a north and south line, at a distance of only fifteen or twenty rods, where the junction is formed. A portion of the waters of the river, however escape from the main channel and flow directly towards the south, making an island two or three acres in extent.

Having arrived at this spot, Ralph and his companion dismounted from their horses, and fastening them to some small trees nearby, they gave themselves up to the contemplation of the fine scenery around them. The sun was then about an hour high, and the golden sunlight flashing upon the variegated foliage of the forest – the calmness which reigned undisturbed around them, the solitude of the wilderness in which they were encompassed, all conspired to give a hue to feelings which both possessed, but which they scarcely dared to breathe to each other.

"I have often dreamed," said Ralph, "of just such a spot as this. I am something of a recluse by nature; but after all, I have some choice as to the place of my isolation."

"I shall expect, then," answered Ruth, smiling, "to hear of Ralph Weston, the hermit, occasionally, from those who may pass by here. Where do you propose to establish your hermitage?"

"In truth, I cannot say," replied Ralph; "but I suppose it will

be when I, like the hermits of old, have become sufficiently disgusted with the world, to make me fly from it with hatred; I will not fix the precise time, just now – I will leave it to circumstances. But familiarity with Nature – converse with the solitude of the forest, is the best antidote to the disgust which many persons conceive of society. The man cannot be all bad, who has any relish left in him for the beauties which Nature can unfold to him."

"You are becoming very much of a philosopher, Captain Weston. You shall have another title added to that of hermit. You shall be a philosophical hermit."

"Ruth! you laugh at me! But you must pardon my caprice at the idea of a forest life; for I am not much of a woodsman, you know. But I'll venture to say, after all, that you agree with me."

"Yes," answered Ruth, earnestly, "I do like our new mode of life. We are nearly shut out from the world, – but we have still a thousand pleasures, perhaps the sweeter from our solitary position. We do not merely *find* a home, we *create* one. We see broad meadows starting out from the forest, and know that they are ours by the best of titles – a reclamation from the waste of Nature. I have often asked myself whether I would be willing to abandon our present home for the old home in the settlements, and I never yet could answer that I would."

"To a light, vain head," answered Ralph, "such a life would be tiresome; but it seems to me, although how long the feeling would endure, I cannot say – yet it seems to me, that the constant idea of

dependence upon a Power beyond and over men, which must be ever present to the minds of those who dwell in the wilderness, would give life a higher and truer aim, than can be attained in society. But familiarity with scenes like these, blunts the mind, perhaps, and the idea is soon lost."

"I believe the remark is true," replied Ruth. "We cannot entirely forego society, without injury to ourselves."

"Yes, perhaps it is so," said Ralph; "we can attain no such marvellous degree of sentiment or independence as wholly to destroy our taste for crowds and social intercourse. I think, after all, that if I were to become a hermit, I should like a few familiar friends to share my hermitage."

Ruth smiled as she replied, "your hermitage, then, Captain Weston, would be a very different affair from the 'cave, rock and desert' of an old-fashioned recluse, who

> "'Had nought to do but feed on roots,
> And gaze upon the stars!'"

"Were I ever to choose the 'rock, cave and desert,'" said Ralph, "I believe I should wish my solitary life, after all, to be terminated, as was the Solitude of Edwin, in the ballad of Goldsmith; that is, if I could ever hope that any Angelina would seek the solitude I sought. But I suppose that "Angelinas" are the creatures of poetry."

"And why not Edwins, too?" inquired Ruth, with an arch

smile.

"And why, since we are asking questions," asked Ralph, with a look that brought a blush to the cheek of his companion, "may I not ask Miss Barton – "

But the question, however important to the happiness of either, or both of them, was interrupted by a sudden rustling of dry underbrush in their immediate vicinity, as if trodden upon by a hasty foot. Ralph turned suddenly round, and beheld the ill-natured countenance of Guthrie before him. The squatter stopped short, leaning upon his rifle, and said, with an attempt at civility, but in a gruff tone:

"You're a *stranger* in these parts, friend, and don't know that you may find it a little *dangerous* traveling through this forest by night."

"Dangerous, Guthrie! how so?" inquired Ruth.

"You, who live up at the cottage, Miss Ruth, mayn't know it, but the wolves have been prowling around here in reg'lar troops, for a few days past; and it will be dark now, afore you can get back to the cottage. I had a set-to with a rascally troop of them, last night."

Ralph thanked Guthrie for his caution, although he was half angry at the interruption, at that particular moment of time, and intimated to Ruth that perhaps they had better return. Ruth assented, the horses were unfastened, and they proceeded at a leisurely pace towards home, although more rapidly than they had come.

The labor and perplexity of making their way along the rough path and among the underbrush were such as to prevent any continued conversation. By the time they had traveled half a mile, the sun, with a broad, ruddy glow, had sunk behind the western hills. The twilight in the midst of the forest soon gave way to a deep shade, which rendered their path still more difficult.

Ralph, who had at first inwardly cursed the interruption made by Guthrie, in a conversation which had reached a point most deeply interesting to him, now almost wished that it had occurred a little earlier. Ruth evidently entertained the same thought, for her countenance exhibited much anxiety.

"Guthrie's advice was reasonable, most certainly," she said, "although it was not given in the most civil manner."

"It was somewhat later than I thought," answered Ralph, "but we shall reach home in an hour more, at least. But who is this Guthrie? I believe I saw him at your father's on the night of my arrival."

"Nothing is known of him, with certainty," replied Ruth. "He has a shanty somewhere below here, where he lives alone, subsisting upon such game as he finds, and upon the trade he drives at the settlements. He is supposed to have been a Tory, and to have been leagued with the Indians of this region; although we merely suspect it – we do not know it."

"He has an ill-favored countenance. He wears one of those peculiar faces, that we always distrust. Is he often at your father's?"

"Not very frequently; we entertained the same distrust of him you have expressed, on first seeing him, and that feeling has rather increased than diminished, with only a very short acquaintance."

"He has certainly rendered us a favor on this occasion," said Ralph, who found their progress was momently becoming more difficult, as the darkness increased.

It was just at this instant, that a long howl was heard at some distance behind them, but apparently from the westward. In the stillness and darkness which encompassed them, it had a melancholy and threatening sound, which was far from agreeable. Scarcely a moment had elapsed ere the howl which they had heard was answered from the opposite direction; and almost simultaneously it seemed to be echoed by a hundred discordant throats.

"The wolves!" exclaimed Ralph and Ruth, together. "But," said Ralph, "perhaps they have not scented us, and we may have nothing to fear from them."

"Heaven grant that it may be so," earnestly replied Ruth; but as if at once to end their hopes, the cries were again heard, sharper and wilder. Just at this moment the moon arose, and began to throw a misty and uncertain light through the forest. Ralph seized the horse upon which Ruth was mounted by the bits, and the animals were at once urged to the greatest speed which the difficulties of their path would allow. The horses themselves felt the alarm, and readily yielded to the impulse of their riders.

The cries seemed now to be nearly half a mile behind them; and Ralph hoped, at the least, to be able to arrive so near the house of Mr. Barton, that assistance could be immediately afforded. But in spite of all their exertions, the path was so intricate, owing to the thick underbrush and the overhanging branches of trees, together with the rough and uneven surface of the ground, that the utmost care was necessary to prevent the falling of the horses, on the one hand, and to guard against being thrown from them by the branches which were constantly projecting before them, on the other.

On they rode, with as much rapidity as the utmost limit of safety would allow. They well knew that their only hope of safety depended upon their being able to keep mounted and in flight; for were any accident to happen to their horses, they would be left, in the midst of the wilderness, at the mercy of the ferocious beasts that were on their track. But their pursuers gained upon them; the howls which but a few moments since seemed fully half a mile behind, were now evidently within a much less distance. The woods appeared to be alive with their enemies. The discordant cries filled every avenue of sound. Faster, faster ran the horses – but still nearer approached the sound of the cowardly pack – cowardly when few in numbers, but savage in multitude.

The moonlight lay in scattered patches in the forest, but every shadow seemed occupied by an enemy. The pursuers had now approached so near, that Ralph could hear the crackling of the dry underbrush and branches, over and through which they ran,

amidst the noise of their cries. Looking behind him, he saw the leaders of the pack leaping upon their track, and in the moonlight saw, with terrible distinctness, their glaring eyes and protruded tongues. The horses strained every muscle, quivering with affright, but the wolves were approaching – were almost upon them! Snatching, with a hurried hand, a shawl from the shoulders of Ruth, he threw it behind them. For a moment the chase ceased; and with wild, ferocious cries, the pack gathered around the object which had been so opportunely offered to them. At that instant, when the last hope had nearly vanished, the eyes of the travelers encountered in the path before them the form of an Indian, who, with outstretched arms, requested them to stop. In a moment they approached him, when with a rapid utterance, he exclaimed:

"Me friend; me Tuscarora – come!" and suddenly seizing the horses by the bits, he led them three or four rods from the path, where they saw before them, in the midst of the forest, a small log hut; although in an extremely ruinous condition, it afforded the protection which, but a few minutes before, seemed utterly withheld from them.

Again were heard the cries of the wolves, and the noise of their approach! Ralph leaped from his horse, and at once lifted Ruth from the saddle, who, until that moment, had preserved her courage and fortitude, but now fell fainting into his arms. He bore her instantly into the hut, where the Tuscarora rapidly brought in the horses after them; and the door was closed, just as the

ferocious pack came rushing into the open space before the hut.

CHAPTER VI

"And then to mark the lord of all,
The forest hero, trained to wars,
Quivered and plumed, and lithe and tall,
And seamed with glorious scars."

BRYANT.

Ralph, as we have said, bore his fainting burden into the hut and the Tuscarora, having secured the frightened horses, at once hastened to his assistance. Ruth, in a few moments, became partially restored; and a blush lit up the pallor of her countenance, as she found herself sustained in the arms of Ralph. Partially withdrawing from his support, she said:

"You must be astonished, Captain Weston, that a woodman's daughter had so little fortitude as to be unable to withstand the ordinary perils of her condition. I almost feel that I owe you an apology."

"You have no reason to be ashamed of your want of fortitude, Miss Barton," answered Ralph. "The courage with which you endured that terrible ride was amazing. You have more, much more, than sustained your reputation as a woodman's daughter."

Ralph now, for the first time, observed the Tuscarora, who was standing silently before him leaning upon his rifle. The

Indian was of little more than medium height, and straight as an arrow. His form was rather slight than otherwise, but was fully developed, and gave evidence of great agility and strength. His countenance was open and frank; and in his present attitude of repose, one would not have thought that he possessed those peculiar qualities of the Indian, which we are apt to associate with our recollections of that rapidly wasting race. He looked like a true lord of the forest, – cold and impassive in demeanor, – but concealing beneath that grave exterior a fountain of terrible passions. He had not yet passed the age of "youth," for not more than thirty times, to him, had the leaves of autumn fallen; yet his youth seemed extinguished in the gravity of the warrior.

Ralph could not resist a feeling of admiration at the well-built frame and noble countenance of the Tuscarora; and advancing towards him, he grasped him by the hand.

"Tuscarora," said he, "you have this night rendered this young lady and myself a service, for which we shall ever be grateful; you have preserved our lives."

The Indian, with a modest gesture, seemed to disclaim the gratitude which Ralph so freely expressed – then quietly said:

"Tuscarora friend to the colony pale-face – me no Kings Injin – me do my duty to friend. Young people careless – all heart – no eyes – no mind wolves; – me know – me waited for 'em."

"I did not know," said Ralph, "that the wolves of this section ever attacked men."

"No often; but get hungry sometimes – then ugly – then must

look out. Hear that?"

Since our travelers had entered their place of safety, the forest seemed to be alive with the unearthly howls of the beasts, whose din increased at the loss of their prey. They had rushed up to the sides of the hut; and, as the Tuscarora answered Ralph, a number of them had evidently leaped against the door and the sides of the building with a savage ferocity.

"Me have fun, now," said the Tuscarora, advancing towards one of the numerous loop-holes of the hut, which had been made by its builder for its defence. "Me shoot – give 'em something to howl for."

His rifle was discharged, and for a moment, the din outside completely ceased; but as the pack saw one of their number fall, their cries increased in ferocity, until they became almost deafening. Ralph advanced to one of the loop-holes, and looked out upon the savage crowd of beasts, which seemed determined to besiege them into a surrender. As well as he could observe in the moonlight, there appeared to be forty or fifty of them, standing before and prowling about the hut, with their faces upturned – and their eyes gleaming like balls of fire.

The North American wolf is naturally a cowardly animal; and never, when alone, dares to attack a man. The animal has become, in the section of country of which we are now writing, entirely extinct. Mean, thievish, cowardly in disposition, they always fled from an encounter with a human creature, except when frenzied with hunger, and gathered in large packs. At such

times, they become extremely dangerous; yet, even then, any resistance which seemed able to withstand their attack, at once disconcerted them.

The Indian again loaded his rifle, and again it was discharged. Another wolf was killed; and although they still kept up their clamor, they began to retreat to a distance from an enemy who had so much advantage of them.

"Wolf run," said the Tuscarora; "wolf no like rifle – they got no heart – cowards!" and, as if he disdained the firing upon so mean a foe, after reloading his rifle, he came towards Ralph, and quietly sat down on a rough bench by the side of the hut.

"Wolf run away," said he – "they gone soon – then you go home."

"We have our lives to thank you for, Tuscarora," said Ruth, with a look of gratitude, "and my father will always be glad to welcome you to the cottage. Will you not return with us?"

"Not now – may be by-'m-by."

"Is your nation in this territory now?" asked Ralph.

"Me got no nation," said the Indian, sorrowfully. "Tuscaroras once great – away south. Then had great many warriors – then they great nation – but most all gone, now."

"Are not your people and the Oneidas brethren?"

"Oneidas are brothers – love Oneidas."

"Why are you here in this section alone, Tuscarora, with none of your brethren near you?" abruptly asked Ralph.

The Indian looked at him steadily for a moment, and then

replied:

"My young friend is wise. The white men all ask questions – no good for Injin to answer questions;" and he fell into a gloomy and listless posture, and refused, for the time, to hold any further conversation.

The silence of the Tuscarora was somewhat embarrassing to Ralph; and he again went towards the loop-holes to reconnoitre the present position of the enemy. The howls had almost entirely ceased; and what few were heard, seemed to be twenty-five or thirty rods distant. Just as he reached the loop-hole, he heard a rifle discharged on the outside, and a voice which he recognized as that of Ichabod, which made the woods ring again with a loud halloo.

The Indian started abruptly from his seat, and both he and Ralph advanced towards the door. On opening it, they discovered at the distance of ten rods three men who were rapidly approaching the hut. As they came from among the shadows of the trees into the bright moonlight, which lay in the small opening in front of the hut, Ralph recognized Barton and Ichabod accompanied by the negro.

The moment they were discovered by the party, Barton ran towards Ralph, exclaiming, "Is she safe, Ralph – is she safe?"

Scarcely was the question asked, before Ruth was in her father's arms. "God bless thee, girl," said he; "I hardly dared hope ever to see thee again," and the tears rolled down his manly face.

"For this joy, my father, we have to thank this good Indian

here. He it was who saved us."

The Indian, during this scene, had silently withdrawn into a deep shadow which fell by the side of the hut. There he stood, leaning upon his rifle, seemingly as passionless and unconcerned as the shadow within which he stood.

Barton went up to him, and grasped him by the hand. "You have this day," said he, "in rescuing my daughter, saved both her life and my own. How can I thank you?"

The Tuscarora remained unmoved. "No thanks," said he. "The Great Spirit smiles when his children do their duty. Tuscarora likes colony pale-face. The Great Spirit sent me here – thank him, not poor Tuscarora."

"You say right, Tuscarora. God hath preserved my child this day. To Him be thanks, who taketh and giveth."

Scarcely had the first sound issued from the mouth of the Tuscarora, when Ichabod rapidly approached him. The Indian gave him a glance of recognition, and silently took his hand.

"Eagle's Wing, as I live!" exclaimed he. "Glad to see you again, old friend. I haven't seen you since we were down here on that last war-path."

Canendesha, as the Tuscarora was named by his own people, bore also the name of Eagle's Wing, which had been bestowed upon him not only for his boldness in fight, but for the keenness and rapidity with which he followed the trail of an enemy. When he heard himself thus called by his name of honor, he drew himself up with pride as he replied:

"Three summers and winters have destroyed the marks of the war-path. I have dwelt in the wigwams of my people, and near by the fires of the Oneidas."

In the meantime Barton had approached Ralph, and testified scarcely less joy at his deliverance than he had at that of Ruth. Ichabod and Eagle's Wing had withdrawn still further from observation into the shadow.

"Eagle's Wing," said Ichabod, imitating the language of the Tuscarora, "is wise. He dwells in peace in the wigwams of his people. But why is he here – two days' march from his friends?"

The Indian remained silent for a few moments. At length he replied:

"I am in the hunting grounds of my people. The heart of Eagle's Wing is filled with peace."

"Yes, yes, old friend," said Ichabod, resuming his usual manner of expression. "You and I have been on a good many warpaths together. I know a Tuscarora and Oneida just as well as I know a Seneca or Mohawk. I know your people are gentlemen born, and I know them others are reptiles. You can't deceive *me*, Eagle's Wing – you are on a trail?"

"The eyes of my brother are keen – he has followed the war-path. Has he crossed the trail of an enemy?"

The Indian uttered this with a countenance so unmoved, and with such an expression of sincerity, that Ichabod began to think the Tuscarora had nothing to conceal from him. He said, however, in reply:

"I know your heart is true, Eagle's Wing; but I rather thought, at first, you might be following up some devil of a Seneca. But them varmints have left these parts, I s'pose."

"My brother is wise," softly replied the Tuscarora, but at the same time with a quiet expression of victory in the glance which he cast towards Ichabod. The glance was not unnoticed, and the latter at once saw that his original suspicions were correct. But he knew it would be useless to press the Tuscarora with questions. He said to him, however, in a tone that convinced the Indian that Ichabod was not deceived:

"Well, old friend, you and I have been brothers in harder times than these; and if you need the help of this rifle here, which is an old acquaintance of your'n, I shall take it in dudgeon if you don't call on me."

The Indian still remained unmoved; but Ichabod could see that the offer was kindly received.

At this moment, Barton approached, and invited the Tuscarora to accompany him to his dwelling. "You will always be welcome there, and I hope I may have many opportunities to testify to you my gratitude."

The Tuscarora courteously declined the invitation for the present, and the party prepared to depart. The horses were led out, and the party proceeded towards the cottage, while Eagle's Wing, remained as long as he could be observed, still leaning upon his rifle in front of the hut.

The party journeyed for some distance without conversation,

until Ralph at length asked Ichabod, who seemed to be much less talkative than usual, how they who were at the cottage had so soon learned the danger which Ruth and he were in, from the pursuit of the wolves.

"Learn!" answered Ichabod. "Why, you see the old Squire, 'long towards dusk, began to get considerable uneasy, from some cause or other – either because he had heard more about them infarnal varmints, lately, than he chose to tell, or else because Sambo teazed him until he ra'ally thought you was in some danger; and so he proposed to me to walk with him along down the road, until we met you. We'd got in just about a mile of that shanty, when we heard the yells of them pestiferous cre'turs. I tell you, Captain, them would have been tough customers to have come to a close fight with."

"I was entirely unarmed," said Ralph, "but I had no reason to expect meeting an enemy of any kind; and least of all did I suppose we should run any danger from such an enemy."

"Them varmints," replied Ichabod, "when they've once had a taste of human blood, are as hungry for it as Senecas are for scalps —*con*-found 'em."

"I know the prevalent opinion in some portions of Europe – in Germany, for instance, of the ferocity of wolves. There is an old superstition of Weird-wolves, of which I have heard."

Ralph explained, by giving an account of this peculiar superstition. In Germany, and in the Netherlands, and in some other portions of Europe, the opinion had been prevalent among

the people, that there were certain sorcerers, who, having anointed their bodies with ointment, the preparation of which, they had learned from the devil, and having put on an enchanted girdle, so long as they wore it, appeared, to the eyes of others, like wolves; and who possessed the same ferocity and appetite for human blood, as the animals they were believed to resemble. A large number of persons in these countries had been executed, who were supposed to be guilty of that offence. They were generally known as Weird-wolves.

This popular superstition, indeed, has survived in some portions of Europe, until this day. In the "Arabian Night's Entertainments," the unhappy subjects of this superstition were denominated "ghouls," but in the west they were known by the name we have already mentioned. A circumstance occurred in Paris, in 1849, which seemed to throw more light upon the nature of this superstition, and to prove indeed, that there was a pretty good foundation for the popular belief. Like the delusion under which many of those unhappy persons labored in the days of the "Salem witchcraft," who really believed themselves to be what their judges pronounced them, so these Weird-wolves were undoubtedly insane persons, who fancied themselves possessed of the wolfish form and nature.

"I have heard," said Barton, who now joined in the conversation, "of many instances in our northern settlements, where people have been attacked by these animals; but, although it is a frequent occurrence for them to disturb the whole country

about here with their howls by night, I had never apprehended any such danger from them. But we ought to be thankful that there is no worse enemy about here."

Ichabod, whose mind, ever since his conversation with the Tuscarora, had been occupied with thoughts that did not seem very agreeable to him, started at this remark, and said, slowly —

"Well, squire, I hope you mayn't be able to change that last remark of your'n by to-morrow this time."

Ralph, who knew Ichabod well enough to know that however unsafe his opinion might be upon subjects relating to moneymaking, yet that, upon all the perils and dangers incident to a forest life, he possessed an excellent judgment, with some anxiety asked him for an explanation.

The whole party had caught the alarm; and Ichabod, with a mixture of pride at finding himself in such an important position, and of sorrow at the information he felt bound to communicate, answered —

"You see, Eagle's-Wing and I are old friends. We've *fout* many a battle agin them cussed Senecas and Onondagas; and I reckon I know an Injin, and can read him through pretty tolerably easy. Now Eagle's-Wing isn't down here for nothing; and though his Injin blood wouldn't let him tell me what kind of speculation he *is* on, yet I know he's on a trail of some sort. You can always tell an Injin when he's after an enemy."

"But *what* enemy," asked Barton, "can he be pursuing in this direction? There can be no large body of hostile Indians in

these forests; for Guthrie, who is a woodsman, and who would at once have discovered the fact, would have communicated the intelligence to us. I think there can be no ground for apprehension."

"I don't know about that, Squire," replied Ichabod, "but I'm sure something's in the wind; and if you take my advice, you'll prepare for defence. As for Guthrie, as you call him, *you* know best about *him*; he's got a miserable, hang-dog face, any way."

Although there was much plausibility in the opinion of Barton and Ichabod's apprehensions did not seem to be well-grounded, yet Ralph, who knew that Ichabod had not given this advice without reflection, also advised Barton at once to take means of defense against any attack which might be made upon the cottage.

Barton yielded to the solicitations of Ralph and Ichabod; and the party having arrived at the cottage, Sambo was at once despatched to drive in the cattle into an enclosure which had been constructed upon the west side of the house. This yard was guarded upon all sides by an enclosure of logs some ten or twelve feet in height, and had been prepared expressly for the purpose for which it was now used. Its construction had been deemed necessary by Barton for the purpose of protecting his cattle in case of an attack by Indians, as well as to protect them from wolves or bears, which were occasionally seen prowling around the premises.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.