

The Storyteller

AN EVENING IN CHAMBLY.

SOME years ago, upon the occasion of a visit to the Rev. F. Mignault, at Chamby, we were most agreeably surprised to meet an old and valued friend whom we had not seen or even heard from for many years. We had known him as a Protestant physician in Upper Canada, and our surprise was none the less to see him now in the habit of a Catholic priest.

After the first salutations, tea was served, when we all withdrew to the cosy parlor of our reverend host—which none can ever forget who has once participated in its genial warmth, and inhaled the kindly atmosphere of its old-time hospitality—and settled ourselves for a long winter evening of social delight.

Our chat was opened by eager inquiries of the friend, whom we had known as Dr. Morris, touching the change of his religion and profession. After some hesitation, and smiling at the urgency of our request for his narrative, he complied, saying:—

'Should the tale tire you, let this challenge stand
For my excuse.'

My medical course was completed in a Scotch university at an earlier age than was usual with students of the profession.

Immediately after receiving my diploma, I joined a colony of my countrymen who were leaving for the wild regions of Upper Canada. After our arrival, not relishing the rough life in 'the bush,' I decided to settle in the little village of Brockville, instead of remaining with the colony.

During the progress of the last war between Great Britain and the United States, I had a professional call to go up to St. Lawrence, a two days' journey.

It was a glorious morning in June when, having accomplished the object of my visit, I set out on my return trip. I was then a stranger to that region, and, attracted by the peculiar beauty of the scenery on the river, I determined to leave the dusty highway and enjoy a stroll along its banks for a few miles. Accordingly, dismissing my man with the carriage, and directing him to await my arrival at a little inn some miles below, I turned my steps towards the majestic stream, whose flowing waters and wide expanse formed a leading feature of the charming landscape before me, and an appropriate finish or boundary upon which the eye rested with ever increasing satisfaction and delight.

I had loitered on, absorbed in contemplation of the shifting scene, pausing occasionally to watch the changes wrought by the wing of the passing zephyr as it touched the polished mirror here and there, leaving a ripple more like a magic shadow upon the surface than any ruffling of its peaceful bosom, and peering into its abysses, with the eye of an eager enthusiast, to see—

'Within the depths of its capacious breast
Inverted trees, and rocks, and azure skies.'

lulled, the while, by the blissful consciousness of present beauty, to forget that—

'Garry's hills were far remote,
The streams far distant of my native glens'—

over the thoughts of which my home-sick spirit was but too prone to brood.

I had reached a close thicket of low bushes that skirted the water's edge, when my steps were suddenly arrested by a rustling sound a little in advance of me. Peeping cautiously through the leafy screen

on my secure hiding-place, I saw what seemed to my excited fancy more like an apparition from another world than aught that belonged to this. Upon the gentle slope of a hill which descended to the water, and close upon the bank, stood a gigantic tree that threw its shadows far into the stream, and at the foot of it sat a youthful maiden with a book in her hand, the rustling leaves of which had first attracted my attention. She seemed at times to pore intently over its pages, and at others to be lost in reverie, while her eyes roamed anxiously up and down the river.

As she reclined on the bank, her slight form enveloped in the cloud-like folds of a white morning-dress, it was easy to imagine her the Undine of those wild solitudes, conning the mystic page that was unfolding to her the mysterious lore, hidden from mental ken, through which the power of her enchantments should be gained and exercised. While I gazed with admiring wonder upon the serene intelligence and varying light which played about her fair features, and rested like a glory upon her uplifted brow, I was surprised by the soft tones of a voice proceeding from the tangled underwood that clothed the upward sweep of the hill. 'Sits the paleface alone on this bright summer morning?'

'O Magawiska! how you startled me, breaking so suddenly upon my dreams! I was indeed sitting alone under the shade of this old tree, pondering over a page in history; counting the white sails far up and down among the Thousand Islands; watching the boiling whirlpools in the waters in our dear old St. Lawrence; and thinking of more things than I should care to enumerate, when your voice broke the spell, and disenchanted me. How is it, Magawiska, that my sisters of the wilderness always approach so softly, taking us, as it were, unawares?'

'In that, we do but follow the example given by all things which the Great Spirit has created to enchant the forest. But come away with me, my white love, to the wigwam. That page in history is turned, and strong hands are even now writing the next one in letters of blood. Many a white sail has glanced through the mazes of the Thousand Islands that will never thread that fairy dance again, and the waters, so pure below, are already tinged further toward their source with the heart's blood of many a brave soldier! Let my fair one come away, for old Honey Bee, the medicine woman, has just returned from Chippewa, and may bring some news of the gallant young captain who commands the Water-witch. Floated not the thoughts of my pale sister to him from the folds of the white sails she was so busy counting'

'Nonsense, Magawiska! But your words alarm me. Surely the Honey Bee has no bad tidings for me from him you name! What can she know of him?'

'I know not: only I heard her whispering to my mother in the Indian tongue, and was sure she uttered the name of the Lightfoot more than once.'

'Well, I will go with you, and hear whatever news she has for me.'

'Will my sister venture through the Vale of the Spirit-flowers, by crossing which the distance of the wigwam is so greatly shortened?'

'Yes, if you are sure you know the way perfectly: for I have never traversed its dreary depths myself.'

'Never fear! The dove shall be as safe in the home of the wild bird as in the nest of its mother.' Say-

ing which, the young daughter of the woods glided away over the hill, followed by her fair companion.

As they vanished, I quietly emerged from my hiding place and followed them at a distance, creeping cautiously along to avoid awakening any sounds in the echoing forests, into which we soon entered, that would reach the quick ear of the young native, and at the same time making a passing note of her appearance. She was quite young and beautiful for one of her race. Her form was very slight and graceful in every motion, while her light, elastic step seemed scarcely to press the tender herbage and moss under her feet in her noiseless course. As she passed along, she ever and anon cast a shy glance over her shoulder, mischievously to see the difficulty with which her companion kept pace with her rapid movements through the tangled recesses of the forest. After descending the opposite side of the hill, they entered the dingle at its base to which the young squaw had alluded. I was startled when I found myself enshrouded in its dim shadows. So faint was the light therein on this cloudless June morning as to make it difficult to realise that the hour was not midnight. I could discern something white upon the ground that I conjectured was mould which had gathered in those damp shades. Upon examining more closely, I found it to be a vegetable growth, embracing in form every variety of wild flowers that abounded in the neighboring woods, but entirely colorless, owing to the total absence of light. I gathered a quantity of these singular 'spirit-flowers,' which presented the appearance of transparent crystallisations, hoping to inspect them by the full light of day; but the moment they were exposed to the sun, to my great surprise, they melted like snow-flakes, leaving only fine fibres, like wet strings, in my hands.

When they reached the wigwam, I secreted myself in a thicket near by, where I could hear the conversation between the old squaw and the beautiful stranger; for having then less knowledge of the Indian character than I afterwards acquired, I could not feel quite safe to leave her so entirely in their power. 'Magawiska tells me,' she said, with the blushing hesitation of maidenly reserve, 'that you have just returned from a distant voyage, and may know something of events which are taking place far up the wilderness of waters.'

'And if the Honey Bee knows, and should fill your ear with tales of bitterness, would not the paleface say she was more ready to sting the child she loves than to nourish her with sweetness? No, my White Dove! return to the nest of thy mother, and seek not to hear of ills for which there is no cure.'

'I must know, and I will not go until you have told me!' she vehemently cried. 'For the love of heaven! my mother, if you know aught of the Lightfoot, tell me, for I can bear any ills I know better than the dread of those I know not.'

'Even so. If the Bee must wound the heart she would rather die than grieve, even so; the will of the Great Spirit must be done, and may He heal what He has broken! There has been a mighty battle; the foes of thy fathers are the victors. The Waterwitch went down in the midst of the fight. The Lightfoot was known to be on deck and wounded when it sank. Thy father is maddened at the triumph of his foes, but rejoices over the fall of him whom he hated for his bravery in their cause, for his religion, and for the love the young brave had won from the only daughter of the old man's heart and home.'

How my bosom throbbed in painful sympathy with the moans and stifled sobs that burst from the young heart, crushed under the weight of this series of dire calamities, knowing that no human aid or

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