



LITERATURE.

DROOP NOT UPON YOUR WAY.

BY JOHN BARNES.

No! ye who start a noble scheme,
For general good designed;
Ye workers in a cause that tends
To benefit your kind!
Mark out the path you fain would tread,
The game ye mean to play;
And if it be an honest one,
Keep steadfast on your way.

Altho' ye may not gain at once,
The points ye most desire;
Be patient—time can wonders work—
Plod on, and do not tire;
Obstructions, too, may crowd your path,
In threatening, stern array,
Yet flinch not, fear not, they may prove
More shadows in your way.

Then, while there's work for you to do,
Stand not despairing by;
Let "forward" be the move you make,
Let "onward" be your cry;
And when success has crowned your plans,
T'will all your pains repay;
To see the good your labor's done—
Then droop not on your way!

THE SCALP-HUNTER.

A SEMI-HISTORICAL SKETCH.

Far be it from me to detract from the fair fame of our ancestors. Least of all, would I cast any reflection on those frontier heroes, the memory of whose exploits lives in the homely chronicles of Drake, or in the "collections" of some Historical Society; or faintly survives in the mouldering pages of some obscure MS. Yet, if truth be told, their valiant deeds were not always achieved, under the inspiration of pure patriotism. The backwoodsmen of a century since sometimes hunted Indians from the same motive that urges those of our time to hunt wolves; viz., the bounty on scalps. In the year of which I propose to treat, 1724, the bounty in New Hampshire was, if my recollections do not fail me, ten pounds; not an eighth part of the sum which peaceful and scrupulous Pennsylvania long afterward offered in the day of her distress, when the savages of the West broke in upon her frontier. How far such measures are consistent with religion and morality, is a question which I gladly leave to pious philanthropists, who can form no conception of the circumstances that made them necessary; for I propose merely to relate plain facts, and leave reflections and inferences to my betters. Should I be called upon to produce authority for what I say, I am permitted to refer to an ancient manuscript diary, kept by the Rev. Phineas W. Stone, of Portsmouth. This, however, relates merely to the earlier part of my narrative. The remainder must be regarded as of a character somewhat less authentic, as it rests solely on the authority of a tradition preserved by a few old squaws of the St. Francis tribe; one of whom, rendered good-humoured and loquacious by the benign influences of a bottle of rum, told the story at a hunting-camp near Lake Megantic.

A party of the tribe just mentioned came, in July, 1724, to work their usual butcheries upon the back settlers of New-Hampshire. Eight white men undertook to chastise them, and secure the bounty. The savages were now retiring, which they did with remarkable celerity, and in an unusual direction. The whites plunged into the forests after them. For nearly a fortnight they hung on their rear, unable to find a good opportunity to attack. They traced them past Lake Winnipisogee; and from the top of Red Mountain saw them cross the beautiful lake beyond, in two canoes, made hastily of bark for the purpose. Again striking their trail, they followed it some twenty miles farther, into the recesses of those wild mountains that stretch from the present town of Conway toward the great father of New-England hills. Meanwhile the savages lost all suspicion of pursuit, as was evident from their careless manner of encamping, and the great profusion of game which the frontiers-men found around their smouldering fires.

One hot afternoon, the party came to the brow of a precipitous hill, looking northward, which commanded a wide prospect of forests and lonely mountains. In all probability there was no human being within the range of a dozen leagues save themselves and their destined prey. In its terrible solitude it was a scene of more than Alpine sublimity; but what chiefly interested the hunters was a smoke that rose most dense and distinct through the thick carpet of boughs at the bottom of a deep valley just below them. The afternoon

sun beat powerfully on the cliff where they sat, and filling the sultry air with the resinous odors of the spruce and pine that grew around. They watched till it had sunk behind the bristling firs on the ridge of the western mountain; and then, as the usual crimson hue of an American sunset, which had suffused the whole landscape, turned to a gray obscurity, and the half-starved wolves began to call and reply from opposite hills, they descended and groped their way towards their victims. With great difficulty and danger they managed to surround the fires of the savages. Their motives were none of the most magnanimous, it is true; but one cannot help admiring the hardihood of thus assailing a very superior force in a wilderness whose savage features were themselves sufficient to fill with awe and terror any but the manliest heart.

It is useless to dwell on the incidents of the ignoble and desperate conflict that followed. The white men had to lie flat on the ground for hours, before the last savage had wrapped himself in his blanket, and lain down. They counted eleven Indians around the two fires. It was now near midnight; the damp air of the forest was very chill, and the fires had sunk to glowing piles of coals, that shed a dim ruddy light on the sleepers, the mossy trunks of the trees, and the thick undergrowth around the spot. The leader of the whites was about to give the signal, when an Indian turned in his place, murmured, and finally arose; awakened apparently by the cold. Dropping his blanket, he approached the fire, and stirred the embers with a stick; when a stream of crackling sparks flew upward, illuminating for a moment the distorted boughs and shadowy leaves. This sudden light was answered by a scream so piercing and unearthly, that the ferocious frontiers-men started at their posts; and with a loud flapping of wings in the branches overhead, a huge dark bird sailed off into the depths of the forest. The Indian immediately took a handful of tobacco from a pouch by his side, and scattered it on the coals, as an offering to the Great Horned Owl, whose supposed connexion with the divinities of his national mythology, procured it this remarkable honour. This was the poor fellow's last act of piety. At that instant, the white men poured upon the sleeper's a deadly fire, and bursting in with a fierce shout, beat down those who rose with axes and rifle-butts. Of the eleven, all but two were killed at the camp, or at a short distance from it. One of these two bounded into the dark woods and escaped; the other was soon traced to a neighbouring "windfall," where no man could follow him, among the decayed trunks and roots and tangled branches. The dogs of the white men, however, soon penetrated into its depths, killed the wounded wretch, and drew him out.

This was a deed achieved, of which the reverend gentleman before mentioned speaks in his diary with high praise, as an act of eminent service to God and man. The actors themselves felt well satisfied. Having peeled the trophy from each head, they tossed the carcasses into the bed of a cold and sluggish rivulet, that, flowing from the clear springs in the heart of some granite mountain, glided lazily, hard by, half hid by fallen trees, decaying logs and mosses, and the abundant vegetation that sprang from the rich forest soil. There they left them to be nibbled by the minute trout that darted in the pure icy waters; while seated around the re-kindled fires, they ate the moose meat which the Indians had left, and refreshed themselves with drafts from their rum canteens. They ate and drank with the spirits of a party of successful wolf-hunters; and when they laid down, they slept the sound sleep of health and toil.

But the morning brought reflection and regrets. They grumbled over their bad luck. One savage had escaped. The most prominent figure in their group was an old man, who sat on a log, leaning lazily forward, with his elbows on his knees, while he extracted the rich marrow from a thigh-bone of moose with his jack-knife. A little torn straw hat was stuck jauntily on one side of his gray bristly head, his leathery countenance expressed a kind of reckless good-humour, which his present discontent did not wholly banish; though you might see that his features could readily assume the expression of anger and even ferocity. He was venting his wrath and uneasiness through his toothless jaws, in a succession of oaths and injurious expressions, uttered by no means in a sly manner, but in a reckless, boastful spirit, that had survived his youth. This old reprobate was eager for gain; had a keen relish for the chase; and was desirous, moreover, to exhibit his superiority to his fellow-sportsmen. These motives combined to produce the resolution he presently expressed, to set out alone, and not rest till he had taken the scalp from the head of the remaining Indian. So, calling his dogs and shouldering his gun, he calmly marched away, without a word of leave-taking on either side; after that cold manner which his countrymen seem to have caught from their expropriated enemies, the aborigines, and which often hides as warm a heart as ever beat in the breast of man. His companions returned with great glory to the settlements, whither we will not follow; but turn to pursue the old man on his adventurous quest.

For four days the staunch huntsman tracked his game northward, through forests and over mountains. Whatever were his faults, fear was not one of them. Neither the howlings of beasts, nor the deep solitude of his situation, nor any sense of his ferocious purpose, ever disturbed his rest. With his dogs for sentinels, he slept as quietly on a bed of spruce boughs, to the music of some savage stream, as on the straw of his own frontier cabin. His hardened muscles were never fatigued, though he struggled from sunrise to sunset through tangled brushwood and obscure ravines; over decaying logs, and the thousand pit-falls and impediments that annoy the forest traveller. His course lay always through the obscurity and dampness of the dense wood; except at times, when he would hear the noise of a stream below him, and emerge from the forest darkness into a beautiful sun-lit vista of trees and glancing waters. At such times, he could see that, as he proceeded, the mountains grew wilder and higher, and closed gradually around him.

Late one afternoon, when he had all day toiled stub-

bornly on in twilight, and was looking upward to catch glimpses of the bright sky through the leaves, he heard again the sound of water, and by the transparency in the screen of maple saplings before him, he knew the opening was near at hand. In a moment he put aside the slender boughs, and stepped out in the broad stony bed of the Saco, just where it emerges from the Notch of the White Mountains. It was a wild and beautiful scene.—The tumbling waters, the long lines of birch trees, maples and beeches that reached their branches over it; the stiff pines that shot up into the air above them; the great pile of granite crags that rose from the woods, bristling with firs, three thousand feet sheer upward; all were tinged with the crimson of approaching evening; all lay in the quiet of the wilderness, which the ripple and murmur of the stream only made more impressive.

The old man did not trouble himself with the scenery. His feelings were those of bitter vexation; for he knew himself close upon his game, and here the savage had taken to the water and thrown his dogs off the scent. He dashed into the wide and shallow stream, and wading up the middle, sent a dog on each bank to search for the lost track. The very first angle he turned showed him his prey, wading naked and unarmed, for he had fled from the massacre without his gun. The old hunter did not repress a cry of fierce exultation, which the sleeping mountains prolonged; then, as the unhappy savage leaped splashing to the bank, he followed close, and set his dogs again on the track. They made the woods resound with their fearful baying; the old man held his gun poised for a shot; and the trio dashed on at a pace at which that tangled wood was never traversed before or since. He often tripped and fell; the thorns and branches tore away fragments of his clothing, and bared his gray head. Twilight soon came on. The old hunter's bloodhound cared for none of those things. At length, suddenly and unexpectedly, he broke out from the woods, upon a broad surface of rocks, stones and gravel, interspersed with stunted bushes; while at a little distance on the right stood a forest of dead trees, bare and white, seeming in the dim light like a host of skeletons. All around towered high mountains, half clothed with shaggy firs; and their precipitous crags, old weather stains, and scars of avalanches, gave them the aspect of savage desolation. The old hunter scarcely saw them. All that met his eyes was the slender figure of the Indian, leaping like a frightened deer toward the base of the mountain on the left. He dashed after him at full speed, over piles of rock and stone, strewn by an ancient avalanche over the narrow valley, where none but a sleep-walker, or such a frantic sportsman, could have passed in safety. It was in the Notch, close to the place where the unfortunate Willets afterward met their fate.

The game soon began to ascend the mountain, choosing the place where the avalanche had come down, and cut for itself a pathway, resembling in all but its depth, the bed of a torrent. These mountains are everywhere channelled with such ravines, which often extend from top to bottom, and seem at a little distance, like deep gashes cut in their sides. Most of them expand and grow shallow as they approach the base, where the torrent of earth and stone spread itself over the valley. Such was the case in the present instance. The Indian bounded up; the hunter and the dogs followed. The sides of the ravine rapidly approached each other, and grew more abrupt and high; the ascent became steeper and more perilous. A little stream that trickled down the narrow and steep passage-way, and spread itself over the smooth rocks, made the foothold very precarious. The dogs were soon brought up. They stopped at the foot of a deep pitch of the rock, against which they pawed in vain efforts to ascend, and made the rocks echo with their cries.—The eager old man climbed on. The sides of the ravine now towered over his head, leaving only a strip of the darkening sky visible between their opposite edges. His efforts soon brought him to a height, whence the baying of the dogs sounded up the passage faint and distant.—He caught frequent glimpses of the Indian, scrambling on before him; and once, getting a fair sight, he fired.—The mountains followed back the report; but the Indian climbed on upward. Still the old man gained rapidly on him, clenching his jaws together with eagerness and longing.

At length, however, a long reach of the ravine stretched upward in the obscurity before him. He looked, and saw nothing of his prey. Furious with anger and disappointment at the renewed activity of the savage, he pressed on faster than before. A smooth rock, nearly perpendicular, soon arrested his progress. He did not dream of pausing, but began to work his way up the dangerous precipice, with his mind occupied by the sole thought of overtaking and slaying the Indian. With every faculty at its utmost tension, availing himself of every little point and crevice, he did what no man else could have done; he climbed half way up the steep wet face of the rock; but here he was obliged to pause; and for the first time, his blood cooled, and he was conscious of the peril of his situation. He moved his hand to the right and to the left, over the rock, clammy with the spreading water of the little streamlet, and found scarcely a crevice large enough to thrust a finger into, or a projection that a foot could rest against. He looked up; the edge of the precipice was twenty feet above his head. He looked down; there were the sharp projecting angles of the rocky side of the ravine; and below, all lay in deep blackness, like a bottomless gulf. He tried to descend; but his foot moved vainly from side to side, searching for the place where it had last rested when he was climbing up. To ascend was perilous enough; to descend, impossible. His hair began to bristle. He listened, and heard from below the faint bayings of the hounds. Hitherto he had clung to his gun by a sort of instinct, but now he let it drop.—The oaken stock struck at the bottom of the cliff with a dull shock, and splintered into pieces; there was a pause for an instant, and then came the changing rattle of the barrel, as it bounded from side to side of the ravine, down the mountain.

The old man thought he must soon follow it; and the