

## LITERATURE.

## THE MOTHER'S HEROIC DEFENCE OF HER HOME.

## A Fearful Story of the Frontier Wars.

[There is no exaggeration in the following sketch, the events narrated having actually occurred during the border wars of Kentucky, as the reader may convince himself by referring to "Collins' History of Kentucky." The seemingly incredible feat (for a woman especially,) of biting in two a musket bullet is there vouched for.]

A more beautiful and quiet scene than the clearing on the Elkhorn, which smiled and sparkled in the light of a cloudless sunrise, on the 27th of April, 1792, could not have been found between the Kentucky river and the mountains. A rude but stongly built log-cabin—half-dwelling, half-fortalice—was the most conspicuous object in the foreground. A stream—the Elkhorn—too large to be called a creek, yet scarcely broad and deep enough (except during a freshet,) to be considered a river, its sloping banks clothed in the tender green of early spring, swept with rapid current within half rifle shot of the front of the cabin. The entire clearing consisted of about forty acres, girded on every side by the dense forest, except on the east, where a broad opening appeared, and the "blazed" outline of a road was visible for a rod or two, leading apparently to some adjacent settlement. The location was only three or four miles from Frankfort, then a small village, and about two miles from the nearest point in the Kentucky river, of which the Elkhorn is a tributary. Within the cleared area labor had done much. The axe, which had let the sunlight into the heart of the wilderness, had been promptly followed by the plough. The barns and corn-cribs were filled to overflowing, and the green blades, glistening with dew, that covered the southern slopes, gave promise of another abundant harvest.

The cabin was double the usual size, for it contained two families. Its occupants were two brothers, Hosea and Jesse Cook, their wives and children, and a youth of seventeen named John McAndre, who assisted the Cooks in their farm work. The two brothers were originally from Connecticut, but had emigrated to Kentucky some years before the time at which our narrative opens. Nearly four years had elapsed since they first settled on the Elkhorn, and during the whole of that time they had seen but one Indian.

Hosea's household consisted of his wife Miriam, like himself a native of New England—a man of commanding stature and great personal strength—and their daughter Alice, a fair den-haired beauty, with a face that smiled over, then in her sixteenth year. Hope, the son of Jesse Cook, was a rosy, comely daughter of Virginia, much younger than her sister-in-law, with two boys, of six and three years at her apron string. Young McAndre was a brave, hardy young huntsman, whose father had been killed in a rencontre with a party of Wyandots, near the Blue Licks, in the memorable era of the frontier wars of the west, in the year 1782.

Just as the sun's red disc became visible above the upper line of the forest to the east, the cabin door opened and the brothers passed out. The ground spread before them was one of perfect beauty. The morning mist had already lifted from the stream and was sailing slowly upward, and a breath stirred to shake the pendant dew-drops from the forest leaves, or ripple the surface of the swiftly gliding water. But the brothers were not the men to look upon the landscape with a poet's or painter's eye, and with simple observation that it was a fine growth of morning, the elder, Hosea, shouldered his rifle, followed by his brother, walked to a pile of chestnut timber a few rods west of the cabin, where they had been engaged the preceding day splitting fence rails.

They were both unarmed, and would have been at the idea of carrying arms to protect themselves against the Indians, so confident had they long exemption from attack or molestation afforded them. But their dream of security was destined to be suddenly and awfully broken.

They had not struck twenty blows with their axes, when a dozen rifles,

"Too nearly, deadly aimed, to err," cracked from a clump of maples about forty yards in advance of the nearest point of woods, and Hosea Cook, who was in the act of chopping, sprang like a ball into the air, and, straightening as he descended, fell with his face upward, quite dead.

Jesse, although struck with three bullets and mortally wounded, started on a staggering run for the cabin, and fell a few feet from the door, at the very moment that thirteen Wyandots, painted and plumed for war, leaped from the cover with a whoop of demoniac exultation.—For one moment the inmates of the cabin were panic stricken; but in the next, the youth, McAndre, had rushed out for the purpose of bringing in the wounded man. He seized him by the shoulders, and was in the act of dragging him toward the threshold, when an old Indian, who had reserved his charge when the volley was fired, took deliberate aim at the young man, and shot him through the brain.—He fell dead across the body of Jesse Cook.

Had the savages rushed upon the cabin at that moment, they would have encountered no resistance. The door was open, and the women completely unnerved by the horror of the scene. The savages stopped when they reached the body of Hosea Cook, to scalp their victim.—They knew that all the males of the household had fallen, and that it was utterly impossible for the women and children to escape. As to any attempt at a defence, they did not dream of that.

The three females, who with arms outstretched, and their eyes protruding towards the bleeding bodies of their fallen protectors and even dilated with horror, stood huddled together on the threshold, felt rather than saw that their only chance of avoiding immediate massacre was in availing themselves of the brief respite which the blood-thirsty malignity of the savages allowed them. Rushing from the cabin, Miriam Cook grasped the corpse of her brother-in-law in her powerful arms, while at the same instant Hope and Alice seized each an arm of the unfortunate youth, McAndre, and in the next moment they had darted back with their burdens, and closed and barred the door. The cabin was a solid structure, built of immense logs of chestnut and oak, completely impervious to rifle or musket shot, except at three or four points, where narrow loop-holes had been left for the purpose of reconnoitering or firing upon an enemy.—These holes were about three feet from the ground, and barely large enough to admit the play of a rifle barrel, so as to command the whole front of the building. The door was formed of two thicknesses of heavy white oak plank, equally impenetrable by bullets, and, when secured by the solid bar inside, was almost as impregnable as the walls of the cabin itself.

Having deposited their dead upon the cabin floor, Miriam, Hope, and Alice began to prepare for vigorous defence. Their faces no longer wore an expression of terror. The brows of the two matrons were knitted with fierce determination, and their eyes sparkled with the instinct of revenge. Alice was no longer the timid and gentle maiden of yesterday. Her lover (for she had given her whole heart to young McAndre,) and her beloved father lay dead before her, side by side: the red demons were in the very act of scalping and mutilating the body of the uncle outside; and something of the tigress flashed even in her eyes, half blinded as they were by tears. The two children alone exhibited signs of fear; but it was only perceptible in their blanched faces and quivering limbs. They neither shrieked nor wept, but sat in a corner of the cabin, with their arms locked together, watching the movements of the females, as they piled chests, and benches, and firewood against the door, in order to strengthen the weakest point of defence.

Miriam Cook was the first to speak. After assisting to secure the door, she knelt down at one of the loop-holes to reconnoitre. At the very instant when she applied her eye to the aperture, the group of savages, who had been engaged in stripping the body of her husband, and hacking it with their knives and tomahawks, opened on the right and left, and a brawny fellow, in the war trappings of a chief, advanced

two or three steps, and shook the bloody scalp of the victim derisively above his head, while the whole party joined in an infernal yell of scorn and exultation.

"My husband's rifle!" she shouted, springing to her feet; and, rushing across the cabin, she tore the weapon and accoutrements from the wall. But on trying the piece with the ramrod, it proved to be unloaded. She thrust her hand into the pouch, but it contained nothing but musket bullets, which her husband had purchased at Frankfort a few days before, intending to run them into bullets suitable for his rifle. The powder-horn was full, but of what use was powder without ball? Dropping the weapon she wrung her hands in despair.—Suddenly a thought struck her: she seized one of the bullets, placed it between her teeth, and, by a tremendous exertion, bit it clean in two! Dashing a charge of powder into the barrel, she rammed down one of the fragments, primed and cocked the piece, and the next moment its muzzle, protruding through the aperture, covered the body of the chief, now advancing at the head of his party, toward the house. The quick eye of the savage caught the glimmer of the rifle sight as the sunshine fell upon it, and he stopped; but before he had time to rush for cover, Miriam's finger pressed the trigger.—When the puff of smoke from the discharge had cleared away, she saw him reeling backward, and clutching at the air, in a vain effort to recover himself. Before the other Indians, who seemed paralyzed by the unexpected catastrophe, could afford him any assistance, he threw his hands wildly above his head, and, whirling quickly round, fell upon his face. A shout of triumph burst from the lips of Miriam, as she saw the effects of the avenging shot, and then withdrawing from the loop hole, she commenced re-charging the rifle.

The savages remained motionless for a few seconds, transfixed with astonishment, and then lifting the body of the chief, withdrew hastily to a more respectful distance from the cabin, and the inmates half believed that the peril was over. They were soon undeceived.

After getting out of gunshot, the savages clustered together, and appeared for several minutes to be in close conversation. At the expiration of their pow-wow, having apparently agreed upon their plan of action, the whole gang took open order, and dashed with wild yells, at full speed, toward the dwelling. As the foremost came up, Miriam Cook, who was stationed at another loop-hole, again discharged her rifle, and the unlucky Wyandot, shot through both legs, dropped in his tracks with an involuntary shriek of agony. The other eleven kept on, and on reaching the cabin six of them clambered on the roof, while the other five commenced firing at the doors and openings in the logs. Those on the roof quickly kindled a fire on the shingles, which were soon in a bright blaze. The destruction of the cabin and its inmates now seemed inevitable. But the brave garrison did not despair. There was a hogshead half filled with water in the house, and Miriam, bucket in hand, mounted to the loft. Hope and Alice supplied her with water from below, and as long as it lasted, she contrived to extinguish the flames as fast as they broke out, while she herself, enveloped and almost suffocated by steam and smoke, was invisible to the assailants. At length, the water was exhausted, and a savage, finding the besieged slackening, ventured to poke his head through one of the holes that had burned in the roof to see how the land lay. The undaunted Miriam was standing at the moment within a few feet of the opening, and the instant she saw the face of the Indian she whirled the empty bucket round her head, and hurling it with the full swing of her powerful arm, struck him directly on the forehead with the sharp edge of the staves. She heard the bones crash and the victim groan. A moment afterwards he was drawn away by his companions, three of whom descended from the roof, bearing him in their arms.

Miriam now thought she heard the two who remained upon the roof tearing down the upper logs of the chimney, and presuming that they intended to attempt an entrance that way, she ran down stairs to prepare for them.

"The feather bed! the feather bed!" she

shouted, as she reached the lower room; and this much prized article in the frontier man's inventory of household chattels, was quickly dragged forth and thrust *sans ceremonie* into the huge fire-place. By this time one of the Indians was fairly in the chimney, and the other about to follow.

"Thrust the lighted brands into it, quick!" said Alice, and the next moment clouds of stifling smoke from the burning feathers were ascending the chimney. The savage made an effort to scramble up again, but the pungent effluvia of the feathers overcame him, and he fell heavily upon the hearth-stone. In the meantime Miriam had again grasped the rifle and held it clubbed for his reception. Scarcely had he touched the floor when the iron-bound point of the breach crashed through his skull. The other Indian, who had caught a whiff of the vapor in time to avoid a like fate, precipitately descended from the roof.

Four of the thirteen Indians were now killed or disabled, but these casualties only added to the fury of the remainder. They were all well aware that the cabin was occupied by women only, and nothing could be more degrading in the eyes of these swarthy warriors than to be baffled by a parcel of squaws. They now furiously assailed the door with their tomahawks. To this proceeding the inmates could offer no resistance. In striking the savage who had fallen down the chimney, Miriam Cook had broken the lock of her husband's rifle—the only one they had; and now, handing the rifle to her sister-in-law, she armed herself with the axe of young McAndre, which stood in the corner of the cabin, and prepared for the last extremity. Alice betook herself to a very formidable weapon—the slaughtering knife of the establishment; and thus armed, the three women ranged themselves on the other side of the door, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

In about an hour the Indians had nearly cut out two planks of the door beneath the bar—a space just sufficient for a man to force his body through in a stooping posture. They now brought a heavy piece of timber from the adjacent pile, and using it as a battering ram, soon bent in the weakened portion of the door, at the same time driving the articles which had been piled against it into the middle of the cabin.—Taught caution by the losses which they had already sustained, they did not immediately attempt to enter through the breach, but thrusting in and crossing the muzzles of their rifles, discharged them into the house. In this they had a double design—that of killing or maiming some of the occupants, and getting in under cover of the smoke.

Before the sound of the deafening broadside had died away, the feather-crested head of a Wyandot warrior parted the smoke cloud which obscured the interior; but as he rose from a stooping posture in entering, Miriam's axe descended with tremendous force, cutting through shoulder and collar bone sheer into his chest. He dropped with a wild cry, half of defiance and half of agony. Another savage followed, and another, and another, each to sink in turn under the axe of the courageous matron. The fifth she missed, but instantly grappling with him, she held him powerless in her arms while Alice plunged the knife into his body. Of the next two who entered, one was disabled by a blow on the head from the butt of Hope's rifle, and the other very nearly decapitated by a sweep of Miriam's axe.

Of the thirteen warriors who had left their tribe for the war-path a few days before, only two were unwounded and capable of service, and they, seized with a panic at the havoc made among their companions by the "long-knife squaws," abandoned the siege, and fled back to the village. To the wounded they left behind them, no quarter was given. To have spared their lives would have been treason to the dead. Miriam's axe and the knife of Alice made short work of them, and this duty fulfilled, the family lost no time in proceeding to Frankfort. The next day a hundred mounted frontiersmen assembled, and after bringing in the bodies of the Cooks and McAndre, started for the nearest Wyandot village to take a wholesale revenge.

Fair dealing is the bond and cement of society

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