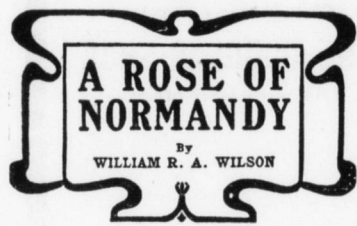




MODERATE AMBITION.

I'm jes a-keepin' even; which is doin' purty good. Haven't made the fortune that I used to hope I would. Haven't caused the trump of fame o'er distant hills to sound. But kin allus face the music when the landlord comes around. I've had my share of sunshine an' I seen the flowers smile; Have the rheumatiz, but only fur a little while. An' when I come to quit this scene of hope an' likewise doubt, I'll hardly leave enough fur lawyer folks to fight about. I have had my disappointments an' I've had my silent fears, But I reckon that the laughs will easy balance all the tears; It ain't a brilliant record, but I want it understood That I'm still a-keepin' even, which is doin' purty good. -Washington Star.



CHAPTER XXI. WHEREIN A BATTLE IS FOUGHT AND AKIESKO COMES OFF VICTORIOUS.

The prisoners slept little that night. Both Renee and Tonti had undergone a nervous excitement during the day sufficient to keep every fiber tingling, he at the discovery of her love for him, she upon learning the truth from the lips of Madame Bizard. Now that the heat of his encounter with Miron had subsided, Tonti fell into a slough of despair. Escape seemed impossible. Renee's fate became more hideous now that he knew her secret. Even the satisfaction of dying together was denied them. Renee was happy, rejoicing in the restoration to his proper place of the lover she had vainly sought to forget; unmindful of the terrible ordeals the future might have for her; believing vaguely that the discovery of her lover's faithfulness was not for naught; that a means of escape would be accorded to them.

Akiesko alone of the three prisoners had neither hope nor fear. He faced the dawn of the day of suffering with the stoicism of his race. He knew that he would be sacrificed first, in order to whet the appetite of the people for blood so that the torture of Tonti would be a lesson of greater enjoyment to this captors. Help, unless it came within a very few hours, could not rescue him, even if it were to arrive before Tonti's turn came. A feeling akin to sorrow invaded his savage heart at the thought of the disappointment and injury that would come to La Salle from the loss of Tonti. A feeling of pity for the white girl, whose days thenceforward would be a death in life, then followed. Last of all, the hatred of his tribe against his enemies surged across his mind, obliterating all other feelings, and his thoughts were filled with plans how to endure his pains bravely and give defiance to them until the very last.

Thus passed the weary hours of darkness to the three captives. The camp was astir at dawn, and the sound of voices and din of preparation for the day's festivities smote ominously upon their ears. Food was served to each at breakfast time. After noon they were summoned to the beginning of the saturnalia of bestial cruelty.

In an open place in the center of the town were gathered the Indians, who ranged themselves in an elongated circle, down the center of which were piled at intervals seven brush heaps ready for lighting. Equidistant from each end a small scaffold some six feet from the ground had been built. On one of them Miron had reserved a seat, one on each side of himself for Renee and Tonti, so situated that they would be witnesses of the ensuing scene. He greeted them with a sardonic smile, and wished them all manner of pleasure during the coming hours. Tonti's hands were securely bound, but his feet were free.

They were scarcely settled when an opening in the throng on the opposite side was made and through it Akiesko was led, with every mark of respect and attention from those attending him. His escort consisted of some 30 or 40 of the young men of the tribe, who advanced singing and dancing. The prisoner strode along haughtily in their midst, clad in a magnificent beaver robe, with a string of polished multicolored shells about his neck and a smaller one placed like a wreath or crown about his head. He was greeted by a friendly shout from the waiting crowd. The procession marched about the edges of the throng, so that all could catch a glimpse of the condemned. Finally they conducted him to a log placed in the center of the open space and he was seated. Food was set before him, saganite, squashes, venison and fruit. As his wrists were bound, one of the chief men was deputed to feed him.

"Here, my nephew," he said gravely and in the kindest tones, "eat of this food your friends have prepared for you. It will give you strength. Eat and have no fear, for no one is doing you any harm. Behold thyself now among thy kindred and thy friends."

When this portion of the repast was finished, a dog which had been placed in a kettle near by and boiled, was produced, and being cut into pieces of convenient size, was presented to

the prisoner to taste. Upon his having done so the remains of his feast were removed. His hands were loosed and he was invited to sing. A hush fell upon the multitude as he arose to give utterance to his death-song. Straight and firm he stood with outstretched arms, from which the folds of beaver skin fell in graceful lines. His head was proudly raised, his eyes looking above the crowd eastward toward the land of his birth. His voice, now quivering in a strange, weird minor cadence, rising and falling, lingering on the words with a pathetic tenderness, now full and strong in sonorous monotone, rapidly delivered, penetrated to the farthest ranks of his foes.

"I see afar the wigwams of my people. The smoke rises from a thousand camp-fires and the woods are filled with the countless moccasins prints of the hunters. They creep here and there through the forests. The deer and bear fall in multitudes before them. 'Where are the waters dark with fish but yesterday? The streams are there, but the fish have gone, for the Mohegans have passed by and taken them all. There are no hunters like them anywhere. All other nations are but as children whom they have taught to use the bow and spear. Were they to leave their own country, all the rest of the world would starve, for there would be no game left. The sun here is dim, but there it is always bright, for my people do no evil and the sunlight never falls them. The wind blows fresh and bends the tops of the waving maize fields, for there the harvests are ever full. The Iroquois plants his seed and but one appears. The Mohegan drops his into the ground and lo! a thousand sprout from one. I see the council fires ablaze, and around them sit the wisest of all men. To their feet come the chiefs of other nations and crouch, waiting to hear the wisdom that falls from their lips. There is the source of all knowledge and cunning; that of all other people is but foolishness. Above their heads hang the scalp-locks of their enemies, thick as the leaves of the forest in summer, for there are none so brave as they, the sound of whose name makes their enemies to tremble and be afraid."

Thus sang the helpless prisoner, boasting in the presence of his foes of the prowess of his tribe. As his song progressed, his body swayed to the rhythm of his voice. Soon he moved in stately measure to and fro, as he described the delights of his own country, the pleasures of his own people. Then the theme was changed, the steps were quickened, and the words flowed faster as the deeds of the mighty warriors were rehearsed and his own achievements were boastfully proclaimed.

"But among them one place is empty. It is that of Akiesko, the greatest sachem of them all. 'Where is Akiesko, our brother?' they ask of one another. 'There is none so brave or wise as he.' 'He is gone,' says one, 'to the wilderness where live the ignorant Iroquois. He has taken pity on their blindness and will teach them many things. They cannot hunt; they cannot fish; they are but squaws fit only to sit and pound the maize between two stones. He will show them how to live. They have no courage. At the barking of a wolf they run; the sound of an owl at night causes them to tremble.'"

The movements of the singer became more rapid and he passed gradually around the open space. One by one the fires were lighted, and each of the surrounding crowd armed himself with a piece of bark; lighting one end of this, they waited. The motion of his glance gradually loosened the robe around the prisoner, which he allowed to slip off and he continued his steps naked. As he passed along, the waiting blazing bits of bark in the hands of his tormentors were applied to his back, his arms, and his legs, inflicting painful burns. The victim did not wince, but went on faster and faster, never stopping his song for an instant.

"Akiesko will show the poor Iroquois how to live. He will also show them how to die. They will drink of his blood; and their own, which is only water, will become thick and red. They will eat his heart and it will make them men; they will be squaws and children no longer, but will become warriors. My brothers, Akiesko is going to die. Amuse yourselves boldly around him; he fears neither tortures nor death."

The dance became faster and more furious. A growing excitement moved the throng, a shout of delight went up as one buck ran behind the prisoner, and pressed against his back the red-hot head of an ax; the sight of the smoke arising from the burning flesh and the odor that was wafted to their nostrils served further to stimulate the minds of the onlookers. Renee shuddered and closed her eyes. Miron noticed it, and, turning to Tonti, said loud enough for her to hear, "Is your seat comfortable, M. Tonti? If not, I have provided another for your use to-morrow. It is a pointed stake. I fear it would be tiresome standing out there on your feet the whole time, as your Mohegan friend is doing." Tonti disdained to reply, but strove to convey by a look to Akiesko his feelings of sympathy for his sufferings and commendation for his bravery.

Gradually the lust for cruelty in the savage breasts broke beyond restraint. Now one rushes towards the dancing figure and, seizing his hand, tears loose a finger-nail; another coming from behind cuts his flesh; still another thrusts a pine splinter into his shoulder and lights it. Cries of exultation are heard on all sides. Above it all, clear, but with waning strength, comes the taunting voice:

"The Iroquois are squaws who shudder at the sight of blood. They are but children at the torture. They cannot cause a Mohegan pain."

yet more loud rise the hoarse triumphing cries of the fiendish persecutors. At length the prisoner's vigor shows signs of exhaustion. He stumbles and falls, but is up again with a louder tone to his voice and a more agile movement than before. His face is now no longer recognizable. Long thorns have been thrust through his cheeks and forehead, and masses of clotted blood hang from his eyebrows. The flesh of his body drops in torn shreds. The surface is covered with an oozing stream of blood. At length he staggers and falls fainting. His tormentors seize him and lay him upon the hot ashes of one of the fires; the pain revives him and he jumps up and passes on. Again he falls. This time they pour fresh water over his burns and wounds and give it to him to drink. The refreshing coolness recalls him once more to life and misery. He is dragged up the steps of the scaffold and made to stand erect, his arms stretched over and fastened to a cross-piece, thus suspending him so as to throw his weight upon his wrists.

Pandemonium is let loose. The crowd of yelping, screeching demons surrounds the scaffolding. He gazes at them and a smile breaks on his lips, as with eyes glaring with hatred he reviles and mocks them.

"Dogs of Iroquois, why do you not make me cry out with pain, like one of you would do if a bee stung him? It is because I am a Mohegan chief, brave and without fear."

Heated stones are now placed beneath the soles of his feet; one stands above and slowly pours boiling water over his head; another now approaches and empties a gourd full of the scalding stuff down his throat. A red-hot iron is passed into each eye, burning the socket empty. A young buck climbs upon the cross-beam and deftly scalps him, holding up the gory trophy to the shrieking throng below. Suddenly a silence. The end is near. Every human voice is stopped, and only the repressed breathing of the infuriated mob is heard. Sightless, quivering in awful agony, the prisoner's undaunted will summons his remaining strength for one last defiance. "Cowards! Dogs!" he gasps, and in the tone issuing from scorched and lacerated lips, one perceives the intensity of scorn and hatred felt. His head droops; a shiver runs through his frame. At this signal a chief leaps forward with flashing knife and with quick stroke lays bare the still feebly palpitating heart, removes it, and tosses it to the waiting braves, who quickly cut it into tiny pieces and devour it raw, believing that thereby they each may acquire some of the bravery of the dead prisoner. Another cuts down the body and half a dozen quickly sever arms and feet and legs, throwing these members into the waiting boiling kettles, to be devoured later by the whole tribe. The head is cut off and brought, a shapeless, blood-stained mass, and laid at the feet of Miron.

Tonti, sickened at the fearful sight, turned his head away and looked towards Renee. Her woman's nature had mercifully asserted itself. She had fainted.

CHAPTER XXII. SHOWING HOW MIRON HELD A GOOD HAND, BUT POMPON PLAYED THE ACE OF TRUMPS.

The captives were led back to their respective prisons after this sickening scene of barbarity, and soon a silence fell upon the camp as though the inhabitants were fatigued by the excitement of the day and had sought repose. Renee had nerved herself to witness the horrible spectacle and had borne herself bravely throughout until the last, but when she found herself once more alone and conscious, a reaction set in and she became but a weak and trembling woman after all. Tonti, used as he was to the scenes of carnage of civilized warfare, could not repress a shudder as he recalled the recent ordeal. His chief anxiety was now for Renee; for himself he had faced danger and death too many times to experience any fear at their proximity; he would sell his own life as dearly as possible, and promised himself that more than one recruit for the happy hunting-grounds would be started on the long journey thither before they would have him lashed to the stake. He realized that neither of them could hope anything from the mercy of the comte. Their only chance would be through the opportune arrival in the camp of some party sent out from Fort Niagara in search of them. This was, however, hardly possible, as any such expedition would naturally follow along the shore of the lake even as far as Fort Frontenac, before they would turn back or think of visiting any of the Indian tribes. To be sure, Pompon had signalled to him before they arrived at the camp that he would effect a rescue, but he would not have had the time to procure assistance and there was but little reliance to be placed on his ability to achieve anything alone. The comte would not allow his people to be deprived by any tricks that he would play, as had happened at the time of their Huron captivity, and, aside from some such measure, Tonti feared that for once the little fellow's wit would be lacking.

It was while absorbed in these disconsolate thoughts that his quick ear caught the sound of some small object striking against the bark covering of his lodge. He listened. Again it came and yet again; then it ceased, but soon recommenced. Three times there did he count, and then he understood it was a signal from his trusty friend, probably produced by lightly tapping with some hard substance against the exterior. He repaired to the back wall from whence the sound came, and placing his lips close to it he gave a slight cough. He then heard a low whisper:

"It is I, Pompon. Go to your door and see if the guard is awake, and make no noise." Tonti did as he was bid, and peeping out saw the sentinel seated before his prison as usual, but in such a position that it would be impossible for any one to either enter or leave the place without arousing him. Tonti reported the fact to Pompon, who replied: "It is well. I will cut a hole in the saplings wide enough to pass you a knife. You can then work from the inside to enlarge the opening while I am employed out here. Madame Bizard is assisting mademoiselle at this moment. Make haste." Soon Tonti heard a strip of bark cautiously give way, and ere long an opening large enough to admit a hand was made. Through this Pompon passed a knife. "Work diligently, but noiselessly, mon capitaine," he urged, "and we will soon have you freed." Tonti turned to with a will, and between them they soon had, by dint of cutting and pulling at the interlacing branches, an aperture formed, through which Tonti squeezed himself. He seized Pompon's hand in silent pressure, and the two stood with straining ears, fearful lest the noise they had been compelled to make had been heard. There was no evidence of this, and they both tiptoed to the back of the lodge in which Renee was confined and assisted Madame Bizard in her similar endeavors. Pompon in some unaccountable way had placed himself in communication with this poor creature, who, true to her resolve to aid, had entered heartily into his plan. She had seen to it that the guard at Renee's door received a sleeping potion that Pompon had prepared out of the contents of his indispensable pouch, and was thus able to enter without detection, stepping lightly over the sentinel's recumbent figure. Their work was finally accomplished, and Renee was assisted through the opening and was followed by Madame Bizard.

As has been said, the village was built upon a plateau overlooking the lake. The houses in which the prisoners had been confined were erected within a few feet of the edge of this plateau, which ended in a sheer precipice some 50 feet above the surface of the water. As assistance and escape were deemed impossible from this direction, no attempt had been made to guard the rear of the lodges. As the little party stood together, Tonti was puzzled as to their next step. Before he could say anything, Pompon explained the situation to them.

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[To Be Continued.]

Suggested a Hymn.

The Sunday school officers in a large uptown church were conducting a special song service one Sunday afternoon. So interested had they become that the regular time of dismissal slipped past and a number of the more youthful scholars began to grow restless. "Now," said the superintendent, "we will sing another hymn—let some little boy or girl give the number of one he or she wishes to sing." There was a pause for several moments and then a little boy, who had been shuffling his feet in tired impatience for the last half hour, spoke up quite cheerfully: "Please, sir, I would like to sing No. 51." The superintendent smiled and turned to the hymn, then gave a gasp and almost strangled to keep from laughing. The title read: "In a little while we are going home."—Philadelphia Press.

The Smaller the Greater.

Until the Spanish-American war came surgeons in this country knew but little of the effect of gunshot wounds made by a small calibre bullet fired at a high velocity. The almost pinlike puncture made by a Mauser or a Krag-Jorgensen bullet was somewhat baffling to them. During the Cuban campaign a surgeon was taking Gen. Leonard Wood on a tour of inspection through his hospital ward.

"You see," he said, when they came to a soldier whom a Mauser bullet had caught, "this man's wound is serious because it is so small."

"Then," replied the general, "I suppose that if he had no wound at all he would be in a very dangerous condition and would probably die."—N. Y. Herald.

Faith and Works.

A pretty anecdote is related of a child who was greatly perturbed by the discovery that her brothers had set traps to catch birds. Questioned as to what she had done in the matter, she replied: "I prayed that the traps might not catch the birds." "Anything else?" "Yes," she said, "I then prayed that God would prevent the birds getting into the traps, and," as if to illustrate the doctrine of faith and works, "I went and kicked the traps to pieces."—Household Words.

An Awful Error.

"Mrs. Readum was not as popular as usual at the reception given for the great author last night."

"Why, she usually shines at such events."

"But last night she did not. She had made a mistake and studied up on the books of another author of the same name, but different initials."—Terre Haute Star.

No Interferences.

"Bess—I really think May is in love money?"

"Tess—No, her husband is rich, but that isn't what caught her."

"What was it?"

"He hasn't a relative in the world."—Detroit Free Press.

Her Fault.

"My wife," growled Chumpley, "is the most forgetful woman."

"Indeed?" politely queried his friend.

"Yes. She can never remember in the morning where I left my pipe the night before."—Philadelphia Press.

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