

Select Tale.

From Household Words.  
THE CHILD SEER.

A Story of Pioneer Life in western N. Y.

The little story I am going to tell is a true story of pioneer life in America. It is known to many descendants of the early settlers among whom it happened, and I write it in that country.

One of the darkest pages in American history is that relating to the sufferings of the inhabitants of Tyron county, New York, during the war of the Revolution from the attacks of the Indians and Royalists under the Mohawk chief, Brant, and the more savage Captain Walter Butler. Early in the war, Cherry Valley was selected as a place of refuge and defence for the inhabitants of the smaller and more exposed settlements. Block-houses were built, fortifications were thrown up, and finally a fort was erected, under the direction of General Lafayette. The inhabitants of the surrounding settlements came in and lived for several months as in garrison, submitting to strict military regulations.

Among the families which took temporary refuge in this fort, was that of Captain Robert Lindsay formerly a British officer, brave and adventurous who, only at the entreaty of his wife, had left his farm which stood in a lonely unprotected situation, several miles from any settlement. This Captain Lindsay was a reserved, melancholy man, about whom the simple and honest pioneers wondered and speculated not a little. His language and manner bespoke at once the man of education and breeding. His wife, though a quiet, heroic woman, was evidently a lady by nature and association.

Capt. Lindsay had a native love of solitude and adventure—the first requisites for a pioneer; and for several years no other reason was known for seeking the wilds, and exposing his tender family to all the perils and privations of a frontier life. But at length an emigrant coming from his native place, in the Highlands of Scotland, brought the story of his exile, which was briefly this: Capt. Lindsay, when a somewhat dissipated young man, proud and passionate had quarrelled with a brother officer, an old friend, at a mess dinner. Both officers had drunk freely, and their difference was aggravated by hot brained, half-drunken partisans. Insulting words were exchanged and a duel on the spot was the consequence. Lindsay escaped with a slight wound, but his sword pierced the heart of his friend. He was hurried away to a secure hiding place, but not before he had learned that in the first matter of the dispute he had been in the wrong.

Lindsay made all the reparation in his power by transferring his paternal estate, for the term of his own lifetime, to the homeless widow and young daughter of his friend. Then, with his wife's small property, and the price of his commission, he secretly emigrated to America. He left his family in New York while he went up the Hudson, purchased a small farm, and built a house for their reception. He was accompanied in this expedition by an old family servant, who, with true Highland fidelity, clung to his unfortunate master with exemplary devotion.

Mrs. Lindsay's heart sunk within her when she found that her new home was so far from any settlement—literally in the wilderness; but she understood her husband's misanthropic gloom, almost amounting to melancholy madness, and did not murmur. Yet her forest home was very beautiful—a small valley farm surrounded by densely wooded hills, dark gorges and mossy dells. The house was a rough, primitive-looking structure, containing but three small apartments and a low chamber or rather loft. But it was comfortable and securely built and overhung by noble trees and overrun by wild vines, was not unpicturesque. Under the tasteful care of Mrs. Lindsay, a little garden soon sprung up around it, where among many strange plants, bloomed a few familiar flowers, whose fragrance seemed to breathe of home like the sighs of an exile's heart.

The family at the period of their taking refuge in the fort at Cherry Valley, consisted of three sons, an infant daughter (the last born in America), the man Davie and a maid servant. Douglas, the elder son, a lad of twelve or thirteen, was a brave highspirited, somewhat self-willed boy, tall and handsome and the especial pride of his mother—not alone because he was her first-born, but because he most vividly recalled to her heart her husband in his happy days. Angus, the second son, was a slight, delicate, fair-haired boy, possessing a highly sensitive and poetic nature. Unconsciously displaying at times singular and startling intuitions—dreaming uncomprehended dreams, which were sometimes strangely verified, and uttering involuntary prophecies, which time often fulfilled—he was always spoken of as a strange child, and, for all his tender years and sweet pensive face, was regarded with a secret, shrinking

awe, even by those nearest him. In truth, the child seemed gifted with that weird, mysterious faculty known as second-sight.

Archie, the youngest son, his father's own darling, was a sturdy, rosy-cheeked, curly headed boy of five. Effie was at the mother's breast, a little rosy bud of beauty—a fair promise of infinite joy and comfort to her mother's saddened heart.

As I have stated, this family took refuge in the fort, in the spring of seventeen hundred and seventy eight, somewhat against the will of Capt. Lindsay—who, as he remained neutral, had little fear of the Indians—and also of his eldest son, who fancied there was something cowardly in flying from their forest home before it had been attacked. The latter however, was soon reconciled by the opportunity afforded him, for the first time for several years, of associating with lads of his own age, of whom there were a goodly number at the fort and settlement. The sports and exercises of the men and youth were entirely of a military character; and Douglas, who had inherited martial tastes from a long line of warlike ancestors, and who had been instructed by his father in military rules and evolutions, soon became the captain of a company of boys armed with formidable wooden guns, and fully equipped as mimic soldiers. Angus was made his lieutenant; but this was a piece of favoritism, the child having little taste or talent for the profession of arms.

One bright May morning, as these young amateur fighters were parading on the green before the fort, they had spectators whom they little suspected. Up on a hill, about a mile away, Joseph Brant had posted a large party of his braves, where, concealed by the thick wood, they were looking down on the settlement. It had been his intention to attack the fort that night; but this grand parade of light infantry deceived him. At the distance he mistook the boys for men, and decided to defer the attack till they could ascertain by their scouts the exact strength of the place. In the meantime, he moved his party northward a few miles, to a point on the road leading from Cherry Valley to the Mohawk river, where he concealed them behind rocks and trees. At this spot the road passed through a thick growth of evergreens, forming a perpetual twilight, and wound along a precipice a hundred and fifty feet high, over which plunged a small stream in a cascade, called by the Indians Tekaharawa.

Brant had doubtless received information that an American officer had ridden down from Fort Plain, on the Mohawk river, in the morning, to visit the fort, and might be expected to return before night. This officer had come to inform the garrison that a regiment of militia would arrive the next day, and take up their quarters at Cherry Valley. His name was Lieutenant Woodville; he was a young man of fortune—gay, gallant, handsome and daring. He was dressed in a rich suit of velvet, wore a plumed hat and a jewel lilted sword, and let his dark waving hair grow to cavalrish length. He rode a full-blooded English horse, which he managed with ease. This Lieutenant Woodville lingered so long at the settlement that his friends tried to persuade him to remain all night; but he laughed, and, as he mounted, flung down his portmanteau to one of them, saying 'I will call for that tomorrow.' When it was nearly sunset the little garrison came into the court yard to watch his departure. Among the spectators were the boy soldiers whose parade of the morning had daunted even the terrible Brant. Foremost stood the doughty Douglas, and by his side the timid Angus, gazing with childish curiosity on the dashing young officer, marking with wondering delight his smiling mastery over his steed.

Suddenly the boy passed his hand over his eyes, grew marble white and rigid for an instant, then shuddered and burst into tears. Before he could be questioned, he had quitted his brother, rushed forward and clinging to the Lieutenant's knee, cried in a tone of the most passionate entreaty.

'Oh, sir, ye man stay here to-night—here, where a' is safe! Dinna gang; they'll kill ye! Oh dinna gang!'

'Who my little lad, who'll kill me?' gently asked the officer, looking down in the delicate face of the boy, struck by his agonized expression.

'The Indians, They're waitin' for you in yon dark, awful place by the falls,' replied Angus in a tone of solemnity.

And how do you know all this my little man, asked the officer smiling.

'I hae seen them,' said Angus, in a low, hoarse tone, casting down his eyes and trembling visibly.

'Seen them! When?'

'Just noo. I saw them a'as voel as I see you and the lave. Its the guid God, may be, that sends the vision to save you frae death. So, ye man heed the warning, and not put your life in peril by riding up there, where they're waitin' for ye in the gloaming.'

'What is the matter with this child?' exclaimed Lieutenant Woodville, turning to a friend in the little crowd. The man for answer merely touched his forehead significantly. 'Indeed! So young!' replied the officer.

Then, laying his hand gently on the head of the boy, and smiling pityingly into his wild beseeching eyes, he said, 'But indeed I must go prophet of evil. Indians or no Indians a soldier must obey orders, you know. Come dry your tears, and I will bring you a pretty plume for your soldier cap when I return. Adieu friends, until tomorrow.'

Saying this, he bent to loosen Angus's hands from the stirrup; but the child clung convulsively, shrieking out his warnings and entreaties, until his father broke through the crowd, and bore him forcibly away.

Lieut. Woodville galloped off with gay words of farewell; but as some noticed, with an unusual shadow on his handsome face.

Mrs. Lindsay took Angus in her arms, and strove to soothe him in her quiet loving way. Yet the child would not be comforted. He hid his face in her bosom, sobbing and shuddering, but saying nothing for several minutes. Then he shrieked out, 'There! There! Oh, mither they hae killed him? I hae seen him fa' fra his horse. I see him noo, lying among the briars, wi the red blood runnin frae his head, down on his brow soldier coat! Oh, mither I could na help it; he would na believe the vision!'

After this the repose of a sad certainty seemed to come upon the child, and, sobbing more and more softly he fell asleep; but not until the return of Lieut. Woodville's horse, with an empty saddle stained with blood, had brought terrible confirmation of the vision. Next morning the body of the unfortunate young officer was found in the dark pass, near the falls of Tekaharawa. He had been shot and scalped by Brant himself.

As may be supposed, this tragic verification of Angus Lindsay's prophecy excited surprise and speculation, and caused the child to be regarded with a strange interest, which though not unfriendly, had in it too much of superstitious dread, to be altogether kindly.

The boy instinctively shrank from it, and grew more and more reserved day by day. Some regarded the prediction as naturally resulting from the omnipresent fear of savages—common to settlers' children—taking more vivid form in the imagination of a nervous and sickly boy, and the fate of Lieutenant Woodville as merely a remarkable coincidence. But more shook their heads with solemn meaning, declaring that had a young wizard, and went so far as to intimate that the real wizard was the lad's father, whose haughty and melancholy reserve was little understood by the honest settlers, and that poor little Angus was his victim: the one possessor.

The expression of this feeling—not in words, but in a sort of distrustful avoidance—made Mrs. Lindsay consent to the proposition of her husband to return home for harvest. Several families were venturing on this hazardous step, encouraged by the temporary tranquility of the country, and thinking that their savage enemies had quenched their blood thirst at Wyoming—thus rather taking courage than warning at that fearful massacre.

The Lindsays found their home as they had left it three months before; nothing had been molested; they all speedily fell into their old in-door and out door amusements. And so passed a few weeks of quiet happiness,—Captain Lindsay and his man always took their arms with them to the harvest fields, which were in sight of the house. The two elder sons usually worked with their father. On the last day of harvest when little remained to be done, the boys asked permission to go to a stream, about two miles away to angle for trout.

In his moody abstraction of fearlessness, Captain Lindsay consented, and the boys set out in high glee. Little Archie, who was also with his father for that day, begged to be taken with them; but the lads did not wish to be encumbered, and hurried away. Just as they were passing from the clearing into the little cow-path leading through the woods to the creek, Angus looked back and saw the child standing by his father, in tears, gazing wistfully after his elder brother.

'Ah, Douglass,' exclaimed he, 'let us tak' Archie wi' us. See how the pair bairn is greeting.'

'No, no; he'll only fright the trout, and we canna wait. Come awa.'

The lads reached the creek in safety, crept stealthily along its shaded bank selected their places in silence, and flung their bait upon the water. Douglass seemed to enjoy the sport keenly, but Angus was remorseful for having said nay to his little brother's entreaty.

'Oh, Douglass!' he exclaimed, at last, 'I canna forget Archie's tearfu' face. I'm soe sorry we left him!'

'Dinna fash your head about Archie but mind yer fish!' replied Douglass impatiently. Angus was silent for another half hour.—Then he suddenly gave a short, quick cry, made a start forward, and peered anxiously down into the water.

'What noo?' said Douglass, potulantly, for the cry and movement had scared a fine trout that seemed just about to take his hook.

'Oh, brother,' answered Angus trembling, 'I hae seen Archie's bonie face in the burn, and it had sic a pale, frightened look. I doubt

something awful' has happened. Let us gang hame.'

Douglas laughed as he replied, 'It's yer own face ye saw in the burn, and no Archie's.—how could it be his, when he's maist two miles awa?'

'I dinna ken, Douglass,' replied Angus, humbly, 'but I maun believe it was Archie's face. There it comes again! And father's and Davie's? Oh, brother, the Indians!'

Shrieking out these words, the boy staggered backward and fainted. Douglass, though a good deal alarmed, had sufficient presence of mind to apply nature's remedy, fortunately near at hand; and under a copious sprinkling of cold water, Angus speedily revived. Douglass no longer resisted his entreaties, but silently gathering up their fishing tackle, and taking up their string of trout, set out for home, walking slowly, and supporting the trembling steps of his brother. As they neared the borders of the clearing where they were to come in sight of the harvest fields—and their home, Angus absolutely shook, and even the cheek of the bold Douglass grew white.

The first sight which met their eyes, on their emerging from the wood, was their house in flames, with a party of fiendish savages dancing and howling around it. The boys shrank back into the wood; and, crouching down together beneath a thick growth of under-bush, lay sobbing and shuddering in their grief and terror.

At length Angus gave a start and whispered joyfully, 'Oh, I've seen mither, wee Effie and Jenny—a' they're a' safe—hide away in the bushes, like us.'

'But do you see father, and Archie, and Davie?' asked Douglass, believing, at last, in the second sight of his younger brother.

'No, no,' replied Angus, mournfully, 'I canna see them only mair. They maun be a' dead, Douglass.'

'I'll no believe that,' said the elder brother, proudly, 'father and Davie both had their arms wi' them. Davie is no' a bad fighter, and ye ken a braver soldier could na be found in a' the world than father.'

They lay thus talking in fearful whispers, and weeping silently, until the shouts of the savages died away and silence fell with the twilight over the little valley. Then, slowly and cautiously, they crept from their hiding place, and stole through the harvest fields to the spot where they had left their father and little brother, and Davie.

And they were all there dead. They appeared to have fallen together—frightful old Davie lay across his master's knees, which he seemed embracing in death. Little Archie had evidently lingered longest alive; his flesh was yet soft and warm, and he had crept to his father's arms, and lay partly across his breast.

All, even to the sinless baby, had been tomahawked. Yet, bathed in blood as they were, the poor boys could not believe them dead, but clasped their stiffened hands, and kissed their lips, felt for their heart-beats, and called them by their names in every accent of love and sorrow. At last, finding all their frenzied efforts vain, they abandoned themselves utterly to grief.

The moon rose upon them thus—weeping wildly over their murdered father and brother—stained with their blood, and shuddering with their death chill. Never did the moon look on a more desolate group. Captain Lindsay's brow seemed more awfully stern in its light, and his unclosed eyes shone with an icy gleam. Archie's still tearful face showed most piteously sad; while the agonized face of the two young mourners, now bent over their dead, now lifted despairingly towards heaven, seemed to have grown strangely old in that time of terror and horror, and bitter grieving. Thus the hours wore on; and, at last, from utter exhaustion, they slept—the living and the dead.

They were awakened by the warm sunlight and the birds who sang—how strange it seemed!—as gaily as ever, in the neighboring wood. The boys raised their heads and looked each into the other's sad face, and then on the dead, in the blank, speechless anguish of renewed grief. Douglass was the first to speak—'Come brother,' he said, in a calm tone, 'we maun be men, noo—let us gang back to the fort; may be we shall find mither there, wi' Jenny and the bairns, 'gin you're sure ye saw them a' in your vision.'

'But we canna leave these here to their lane,' said Angus.

'We maun leave them; we are no' big enough to bury them; but we'll cover them over wi' leaves and branches o' the pines, and when we get to the fort we'll ask the soldiers to come and make graves for them. Come wi' me.—Angus, dear.'

Angus took Douglass's hand, and rose; but soon staggered and fell, murmuring, 'Oh, brother, I'm sair faint and ill. I think I am dying. Stay wi' me a little while, and then ye may cover us a' up together and gang awa.'

'Dinna say sic sorrowfu' things, Angus; yer no dying, pair laddie; yer but fainting wi' hunger, and I the same,' said Douglass, in a

tone of hopeless despondency. Just at the moment, his eyes fell on a small hand-basket, in which the laborers were accustomed to take their luncheon to the harvest field. It was now lying where the dead had left it, against a pile of wheat sheaves, and was found to contain some fragments of bread and meat, of which they partook.

Somewhat refreshed, the boys set about their melancholy duty. They did not attempt to move the bodies from the positions in which they had found them; they left little Archie on his father's breast, and faithful old Davie with his face hid against his master's knees.

Douglas took out his pocket-knife to sever a lock of hair from his father's and his little brother's heads for mementoes. 'Oh! Dinna tak' that lock, Douglass,' said Angus, with a shudder, 'did ye na see bluid on it?'

Alas! it was difficult to find a lock on the head of either father or child not darkened and stiffened with gore.

When they had taken the last look, the last kiss, and had completed their mound of boughs and leaves, the two children knelt beside it and prayed. Surely the God of the fatherless was near them. Better in His sight, their pious care of the dead, than the most pompous funeral obsequies; sweeter to Him the simple prayer they sobbed into His ear, than the grandest requiem.

It was nearly noon when the boys left the little valley, and took their way towards the fort. They had first visited the ruins of their house, and searched around them and the garden diligently, but vainly, for any trace of their mother, and nurse, and sister. From a tree in the little orchard they filled their baskets with apples, and set forth.

They had advanced but a mile or two on the dark, winding, forest path, when they heard before them the sound of footsteps and voices. In their sudden terror, thinking only of savages, they fled into the thickest recesses of the wood. When their alarm had passed, and they sought to regain the path, they found to their grief and dismay that they had lost it.—Still they kept on—apparently at random—but angels guided, it seemed in the direction of the fort. Yet night came upon them in the dense, gloomy wood, and, at last, very weary and sorrowful, they sank down; murmured their broken prayers, and clasped in each others arms, fell into a chill and troubled sleep.

Douglas was awakened in the early morning, by a touch on the shoulder. He sprang to his feet, and confronted—Brant! Behind the chief stood a small band of savage attendants, eagerly eyeing the young 'pale faces,' as though their fingers itched to be among their curls.

'Who are ye?' asked the warrior sternly. 'I am Douglas Lindsay; and this is my brother, Angus Lindsay.'

'Is Captain Lindsay your father?'

'He was our father,' replied Douglas with a passionate burst of tears; 'but ye ken wee enough we hae no father noo, sin' ye've murdered him. Ay, and pair old Davie, and wee bairn Archie, ye devils!'

'No, boy,' replied Brant, in not an ungentle tone, 'we did not murder your father. I am sorry he has been killed. He was a brave man, never took part with the rebels. I am sorry he has been killed. He was a brave man, and never took part with the rebels. I promised him my protection. It must have been some of Captain Butler's men; they are about now. I would have risked my life to have saved his. I will protect his children. Where are you going?'

'To the fort,' put in little Angus eagerly.—'May be we shall find mither, and Effie, and Jenny a' there. 'Oh! Mither Thaycendenge, tak' us to the fort, if it's no' too far, for we hae lost our way.'

Brant—who was an educated man, and had little of the Indian in his appearance or speech—smiled to hear himself addressed by his pompous Indian name, (a stroke of policy on the lad's part,) and replied: 'that is easy to do. Cherry Valley is just over the hill; only a little way off. Let us go.'

Saying this, and briefly commanding his warriors to remain where they were, until he should return—an order received in sullen silence by the savages, who glared ferociously upon their lost prey—the chief strode forward through the forest, followed by the two boys. When they reached the brow of the hill overlooking the settlement, he paused and said, 'I had better no' go any further. I will wait here till I see you safe. Good bye! Tell your mother that Brant did not kill her brave husband. Say he's sorry about it—go.'

The children sought to express their thanks, but he waved them away, and stood with folded arms under the shade of a gigantic oak watching them as they descended the hill.

Mrs. Lindsay's part in the story is soon told. On the day of the massacre she heard the firing in the harvest field, and, from the windows of the house, witnessed the brief struggle of her husband and Davie with their foes. The fearful sight at first benumbed every faculty—but one cry from her baby roused her from her stupor of grief and terror. She snatched the infant from the cradle, and rushed with it into the woods, followed by