

CHAPTER VI

CRUEL DEATH OF UL-WE THE STAGHOUND

WHEN Coacoochee left the Indian village on the night of his betrothal and set forth on his journey to St. Augustine, he fully realized that the act marked a crisis in his life, and that from this hour his irresponsible boyhood was a thing of the past. For a moment he was staggered by the thought of what he was undertaking, together with an overpowering sense of his own weakness and lack of worldly knowledge. How could he, a mere lad, educated in nothing save forest craft, hope to compete with the strength, wisdom, and subtlety of the all-powerful white man? His heart sank at the prospect, there came a faltering in his springy stride, he feared to advance, and dreaded to retreat.

As he wavered he became conscious of a presence beside him, and to his ear came the voice of Allala. In tender but reproachful accents it said:

“My brother, to thee are the eyes of our people turning. Philip Emathla is chief of a band; through long strife, bitter trial, and deepest sorrow, Coacoochee shall become leader of a nation. Remember,

my brother, that to strive and succeed is glorious; to strive and yield is still honorable; but to yield without striving is contemptible."

The voice ceased, and the young Indian felt that he was again alone, but he was no longer undecided. His veins thrilled with a new life, and his heart was filled with a courage ready to dare anything. In an instant his determination was taken. He would strive for victories, he would learn to bear defeat, but it should never be said of Coacoochee that he was contemptible. Filled with such thoughts, the youth sprang forward and again urged his way along the dim forest trail.

He had gone but a short distance when he came to a group of dark figures evidently awaiting him. They were the six warriors chosen by his father to accompany him on his dangerous mission. As he joined them, a few words of greeting were exchanged, and one of them handed him his rifle, powder-horn, and bullet-pouch. Here he took the lead, with Ul-we close at his heels. The others followed in single file and with long, gliding strides that maintained with slight apparent effort yet bore them over the ground with surprising rapidity.

The night was lighted by a young moon, and such of its rays as were sifted down through the leafy canopy served to guide their steps as truly as though it had been day. When the moon set, the little band halted on the edge of an open glade, and each man

cut a few great leaves of the cabbage palmetto, which he thrust stem first into the ground to serve as protection against the drenching night dew. Then, flinging themselves down in the long grass, they almost instantly fell asleep, leaving only Ul-we to stand guard.

A brace of wild turkey, shot at daylight a short distance from where they slept, furnished a breakfast, and at sunrise they were once more on their way. That morning they crossed the St. John's River in a canoe that had been skilfully concealed beneath a bank from all but them, and soon after sunset they made their second camp within a few miles of St. Augustine.

Up to this time they had seen no white man, but now they might expect to see many; for they were near a travelled road recently opened for the government westward into the far interior, by a man named Bellamy; thus it was called the "Bellamy Road," — a name that it bears to this day.

Over it Coacoochee, accompanied only by Ul-we, walked boldly the next morning until he came to the city. He did not carry his rifle with him, as he knew that Indians off their reservation were apt to have all firearms seized and taken from them. Moreover, he anticipated no danger. These were times of peace, in which Indians as well as whites were protected by treaty. So, cautioning his warriors to remain concealed until his return, the young leader went in

search of the information he had been detailed to obtain.

During his journey he had carefully considered the steps to be taken when he should reach its end. He might easily have slipped into the town under cover of darkness, and, with little chance of being observed, communicated with certain negroes of the place, who would have told him what he desired to know. He might have remained concealed in the outskirts until some of them passed that way. Several other plans suggested themselves, but all were rejected in favor of the one now adopted. Honest and straightforward himself, Coacoochee was disinclined to use methods that might lie open to suspicion. He knew of no reason why he, a free man, should not visit any portion of the land that his people still claimed as their own, and consequently he entered the town boldly and in broad daylight.

The sight of an Indian in the streets of St. Augustine was at that time too common to attract unusual attention. Still, the bearing of the young chief was so noble, and his appearance so striking, that more than one person turned to gaze after him as he passed.

The great dog that followed close at his heels also excited universal admiration, and several men offered to buy him from the youth as he passed them. To these he deigned no reply, for it was part of the Indian policy at that time, as it is now, to feign an ignorance of any language but their own.

Within a few hours Coacoochee had learned all that was to be known concerning the recent expedition of Jeffers and Ruffin. If they were successful in their undertaking, they were to proceed directly to Charleston, South Carolina, and there dispose of their captives. As they had now been absent from St. Augustine for more than a week, this is what they were supposed to have done.

Once during his hurried interviews with those who were able to give him information, but were fearful of being discovered in his company, the young Indian was vaguely warned that some new laws relating to his people had just been passed, and that if he were not careful, he might get into trouble through them.

Several times during the morning one or more of the street dogs of the town ran snarling after Ul-we; but, in each case, one of his deep growls and a display of his formidable teeth caused them to slink away and leave him unmolested.

Having finished his business, Coacoochee set out on a return to the camp where his warriors awaited him. His heart was heavy with the news that he had just received, and as he walked, he thought bitterly of the fate of the friend who had been dragged into slavery far beyond his reach or power of rescue.

Thus thinking, and paying but slight attention to his surroundings, he reached the edge of the town. He was passing its last building, a low groggery, on

the porch of which were collected a group of men, most of them more or less under the influence of liquor.

One of the group was a swarthy-faced fellow named Salano, who had for some unknown reason conceived a bitter hatred against all Indians, and often boasted that he would no more hesitate to shoot one than he would a wolf or a rattlesnake. Beside this man lay his dog, a mongrel cur with a sneaking expression, that had gained some notoriety as a fighter.

As Coacoochee passed this group, though without paying any attention to them, Salano called out to him in an insulting tone :

“Hello, Injun! whar did you steal that dog?”

If the young chief heard this question, he did not indicate by any sign that he had done so; but continued calmly on his way.

Again Salano shouted after him. “I say whar did you steal that dog, Injun?” then, with an oath, he added: “Bring him here; I want to look at him.”

Still there was no reply.

In the meantime the cur at Salano's feet was growling and showing his teeth as he gazed after the retreating form of Ul-we.

At this juncture his master stopped, and pointing in the direction of the staghound, said, “Go, bite him, sir!”

The cur darted forward, and made a vicious snap at Ul-we's hind legs, inflicting a painful wound.

The temper of the big dog was tried beyond endurance. He turned, and with a couple of leaps overtook the cur, already in yelping retreat. Ul-we seized him by the back in his powerful jaws. There was a wild yell, a momentary struggle, a crunching of bones, and the cur lay lifeless in the dust. At the same moment the report of a rifle rang out, and the superb staghound sank slowly across the body of his late enemy, shot through the heart.

All this happened in so short a space of time that the double tragedy was complete almost before Coacoochee realized what was taking place.

The moment he did so, he sprang to his faithful companion, and kneeling in the dust beside him, raised the creature's head in his arms. The great, loving eyes opened slowly and gazed pleadingly into the face of the young Indian; with a last effort the dog feebly licked his hand, and then all was over. Ul-we, the tall one, the noblest dog ever owned and loved by a Seminole, was dead.

Over this pathetic scene the group about the grogery made merry with shouts of laughter and taunting remarks. As Coacoochee, satisfied that his dog was really dead, slowly rose to his feet, Salano jeeringly called out, "What'll you take for your pup now, Injun?"

The next moment the man staggered back with

an exclamation of terror as the young Indian sprang to where he stood, and with a face distorted by rage hissed between his teeth :

“From thy body shall thy heart be torn for this act! Coacoochee has sworn it.”

Even as he spoke, a pistol held in Salano's hand was levelled at his head, and his face was burned by the explosion that instantly followed, though the bullet intended for him whistled harmlessly over his head. A young man who had but that moment appeared on the scene had struck up the murderer's arm at the instant of pulling the trigger, exclaiming as he did so :

“Are you mad, Salano!”

Then to Coacoochee he said: “Go now before further mischief is done. The man is crazy with drink, and not responsible for his actions. I will see that no further harm comes to you.” Without a word, but with one penetrating look at the face of the speaker, as though to fix it indelibly on his memory, the young Indian turned and walked rapidly away.

He had not gone more than a mile from town, and was walking slowly with downcast head and filled with bitter thoughts, when he was roused from his unhappy reverie by the sound of galloping hoofs behind him. Turning, he saw two horsemen rapidly approaching the place where he stood. At the same time he became aware that two others, who had made

a wide circuit under cover of the dense palmetto scrub on either side of the road, and thus obtained a position in front of him, were closing in so as to prevent his escape in that direction. He could have darted into the scrub, and thus have eluded his pursuers for a few minutes; and had he been possessed of his trusty rifle, he would certainly have done so. But unarmed as he was, and as his enemies knew him to be, they could easily hunt him out and shoot him down without taking any risk themselves, if they were so inclined.

So Coacoochee walked steadily forward as though unconscious of being the object toward which the four horsemen were directing their course. He wished he were near enough to the hiding-place of his warriors to call them to him, but they were still a couple of miles away, and even his voice could not be heard at that distance. So, apparently unaware of, or indifferent to, the danger closing in on him, the young Indian resolutely pursued his way until he was almost run down by the horsemen who were approaching him from behind. As they reined sharply up, one of them ordered him to halt.

Coacoochee did as commanded, and turning, found himself again face to face with Fontaine Salano, the man who but a short time before had attempted to take his life.