

## CHAPTER VIII

### RALPH BOYD THE ENGLISHMAN

THE man who had thus so opportunely come to the rescue of Coacoochee twice in one day was a remarkable character even in that land of adventurers. Descended from a wealthy English family, well educated and accomplished, he had sought a life of adventure, and after spending some years in out-of-the-way corners of the world, had finally settled down on a large plantation in Florida left to him by an uncle whom he had never seen. Here he now lived with his only sister Anstice, who had recently come out to join him.

Filled with a love for freedom and always ready to quarrel with injustice in any form, he had, before even seeing his property, freed his slaves and ordered his attorneys to discharge an oppressive overseer who had mismanaged the plantation for some years. This man, whom Ralph Boyd did not even know by sight, was no other than our slave-catching acquaintance Mr. Troup Jeffers.

In that slave-holding community a man who chose to work his plantation with free labor became immediately unpopular, and some of his neighbors sought

quarrels with him, in the hope of driving him from the country. But they had reckoned without their host. Ralph Boyd was not to be driven, as the result of several duels into which they forced him plainly proved. He was a good shot, an expert swordsman, a capital horseman, and was apparently without fear. Therefore it was quickly discovered that to meddle with the young Englishman was to meddle with danger, and that his friendship was infinitely preferable to his enmity. He was of such a sunny disposition that it was difficult to rouse him to anger on his own behalf, but he never permitted a wrong to be perpetrated on the weak or helpless that lay within his powers of redress. Thus a case of cowardly brutality like the present, and one of which the possible consequences were so terrible to contemplate, filled him with a righteous and well-nigh uncontrollable rage.

The Boyd plantation lay some forty miles from St. Augustine, and Boyd had ridden into town that day on a matter of business. He had reached it just in time to witness Salano's shooting of Ul-we. Filled with indignation at the deed, and admiring the manner with which Coacoochee confronted his tormentors, Boyd at once took the young Indian's part and probably saved his life. Then he went about his own business. Some time afterwards he learned by the merest accident of the departure of Salano and his evil associates on the track of the young chief. Fear-

ing that they meditated mischief toward one to whom he had given the promise of his protection, he procured a fresh horse and started in hot pursuit.

Finding the four horses hitched by the roadside, and noting that each man had left his rifle hanging to the saddle, Boyd took the precaution of putting these safely out of the way, by the simple expedient of cutting the horses loose and starting them on the back track before entering the grove. Then, following the sound of voices, he made his way noiselessly among the trees to the disgraceful scene of the whipping. He had not anticipated anything so bad as this, and the sight filled him with an instant fury.

Springing forward, rifle in hand, he stretched Salano on the ground with a single blow, and then confronted the others. They all knew him, and would rather have encountered any other two men. His very presence, in moments of wrath, inspired terror, and when he gave them permission to go, they slunk from him like whipped curs.

If Coacoochee was startled at sight of his deliverer, Boyd was no less so at the frightful change in the face of the young Indian. It was no longer that into which he had gazed an hour before. That was the mobile face of a youth reflecting each passing emotion, and though it was even then clouded by sorrow and anger, a little time would have restored its sunshine. Now its features were rigid, and stamped with a look that expressed at once

intolerable shame and undying hate. The eyes were those of a wild beast brought to bay and prepared for a death struggle.

The once fearless gaze now fell before that of the white man. Coacoochee, proudest of Seminoles, hung his head. This man had witnessed his shame and had at the same time placed him under an obligation. The young Indian could not face him, and could not kill him, so he stood motionless and silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

Ralph Boyd appreciated the situation, and understood the other's feelings as though they were his own, as in a way they were. They would be the feelings of any free-born, high-spirited youth under similar circumstances.

"My poor fellow," said Boyd, holding out his hand as he spoke, "I think I know how you feel, and I sympathize with you from the bottom of my heart. You will surely allow me to be your friend, though, seeing that I have just made four enemies on your account. Won't you shake hands with me in token of friendship?"

"I cannot," answered Coacoochee, in a choked voice. "You are a white man. I have been whipped by a white man. Not until the mark of his blow has been washed away with his blood can I take the hand of any white man in friendship."

"Well, I don't know but what I should feel just as you do," replied Boyd, musingly. "I have never

before met any of your people, but have been told that you were a treacherous race, without any notions of honor or true bravery. Now it seems to me that your feelings in this matter are very much what mine would be if I were in your place. Still, I hope you are not going to lay up any bitterness against me on account of what was done by another, even though we are, unfortunately, both of the same color. I am curious to know something of you Indians, and would much rather have you for a friend than an enemy."

"Coacoochee will always be your friend," answered the other, earnestly. "Some day he will shake hands with you. Not now. With his life will he serve you. A Seminole never forgives an injury, and he never forgets a kindness. Now I must go."

"Hold on, Coacoochee; you must not go half naked and with that mark on your back," exclaimed Boyd. "Here, I have on two shirts, and I insist that you take one of them. With your permission I will take in exchange this buckskin affair of yours that those villains cut so recklessly, and will keep it as a souvenir of this occasion."

As he spoke, the young Englishman divested himself of his outer garment, a tastefully made hunting-tunic of dark green cloth, and handed it to Coacoochee. Without hesitation the Indian accepted this gift, and put on the garment, which fitted him perfectly.

Then the two young men left the little grove in which events of such grave import to both had just taken place, and walked to where Boyd had left his horse.

Upon Coacoochee saying that he should go but a little further on the road, the other declared an intention to accompany him, and so, leading his horse, walked on beside the shame-faced Indian.

The more Boyd talked with Coacoochee, the more he was pleased with him. He found him to be intelligent and modest, but high-spirited and imbued to an exaggerated degree with savage notions of right and wrong, honor and dishonor. To avenge a wrong and repay a kindness, to deal honorably with the honorable and treacherously with the treacherous, to serve a friend and injure an enemy, was his creed, and by it was his life moulded.

At length they came to the place where the young Indian said he must leave the road. As they paused to exchange farewells, the querulous note of a hawk sounded from the palmetto scrub close beside them. Coacoochee raised his hand, and as though by magic six stalwart warriors leaped into the road and surrounded them.

Boyd made an instinctive movement toward his rifle, but it was checked by the sight of a faint smile on his companion's face. At the same time the latter said quietly:

“Fear nothing; they are my friends, and my friends are thy friends.”

To the Indians he said in their own tongue, “Note well this man. He is my friend and that of all Seminoles. From them no harm must ever come to him.”

Then he waved his hand, and the six warriors disappeared so instantly and so utterly that the white man rubbed his eyes and looked about him in amazement.

Turning, to express his surprise to Coacoochee, he discovered that the young chief had also disappeared, and that he alone occupied the road.