

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE YOUNG CHIEF MAKES A TIMELY DISCOVERY

WITHOUT ammunition the warriors of Coacoochee could not be persuaded to remain on the field of battle, and the frightened soldiers had hardly reached the river bank before the Indians were also in full retreat toward their strongholds in the great swamp.

Of this the soldiers knew nothing, nor did they stop to inquire why they were not pursued. They were thankful enough to be allowed to re-embark, a dozen at a time, in their one canoe and recross the river without molestation. They imagined the forest behind them to be swarming with Indians, and they trembled beneath the supposed gaze of hundreds of gleaming eyes with which their fancy filled every thicket.

Late that afternoon General Clinch and his terrified army were in full retreat toward Fort Drane, with their eyes widely opened to the danger and difficulty of invading an enemy's country, even though that enemy was but a band of despised Indians. They carried with them fifty wounded men and left four dead behind them, besides several others reported as missing. They had killed three of the

enemy and wounded five. When they reached the safe shelter of the fort, they reported that they had gained an important victory.

Upon the retreat of the Seminoles, Coacoochee and Louis, who had rejoined him that day, remained behind to watch the troops and discover what they might of their plans for the future. They supposed, of course, that with the cessation of the Indian fire, the soldiers would again advance, and finding no further opposition offered, would proceed with their invasion of the country. They could hardly believe their own eyes, therefore, when they saw that the troops were actually recrossing the river, as evidently in full retreat as were the Seminole warriors in the opposite direction at that very moment.

Upon beholding this marvellous sight, Louis was in favor of hastening after their friends and bringing them back to follow and harass General Clinch's retreating army; but Coacoochee said that without ammunition they could do nothing, and that it was better, under the circumstances, to let affairs remain as they were. At the same time, he desired Louis to hasten up to the ford, cross the river at that point, and, coming cautiously down on the other side, discover if the soldiers were really in retreat, or if they still had their position near the ferryman's house. While the mulatto was thus engaged, he himself would remain where they were, to follow the

troops, should they recover from their panic, and decide, after all, to continue their invasion of the Indian country.

After Louis had been despatched on this mission, Coacoochee, satisfied that the soldiers were too intent upon recrossing the river and gaining a place of safety to disturb him, ventured to revisit the battle-field, in the hope of finding a stray powder-flask or pouch of bullets.

So successful was his search, that he not only found a number of these, but several rifles that had been flung away by the soldiers in their hurried flight.

While busy collecting these prizes, the young chief was startled by hearing a faint groan. He looked about him. There was nobody in sight; but again he heard a groan. This time he located it as proceeding from a clump of palmettoes a few paces distant.

Approaching these, and cautiously parting their broad leaves, he discovered the body of a white man lying face downward. The man was evidently severely wounded, for he lay motionless in a pool of blood, but that he was also alive was shown by his occasional feeble groans.

Coacoochee's first impulse was to leave him where he lay. He would soon die there. At any rate, the wolves would make short work of him that night. It was contrary to the policy of the Indians to take

prisoners, and he certainly could not be burdened with one,—a wounded one, at that.

His second impulse, which was urged by pity, of which even an Indian's breast is not wholly void, was to put the wretch out of his misery by means of a mercifully aimed bullet. He knew that his savage companions would ridicule such an act. They would either leave the man to his fate, after making sure that he could not possibly recover, or they would revive him sufficiently to comprehend their purpose and then kill him. They would never be so weak as to kill an unconscious man merely to save him from suffering. Still this was what Coacoochee was about to do, and he felt a kindly warming of the heart, as one does who is about to perform a generous deed.

Slowly he raised his rifle and took a careful aim at the head of the motionless figure before him. His finger was on the trigger. An instant more and the deed would have been accomplished.

But there is no report. The brown rifle is slowly lowered, and the young Indian's gaze rests as though fascinated upon something that caught his eye as it sighted along the deadly tube.

It is only a peculiar seam in the white man's buckskin hunting-tunic, but it runs down the middle of the back from collar to the bottom of the shirt. There are other noticeable features about that hunting-shirt. The little bunches of fringe at the shoul-

ders are of a peculiar cut, and all of its stitching is in yellow silk.

With a low cry of mingled horror and anticipation, Coacoochee dropped his rifle, and springing forward, turned the unconscious man over so that his face was exposed. It was that of Ralph Boyd, the man who had twice saved his life; the man to whose noble scorn of one of the cruellest enemies of an oppressed race he had listened with such pleasure only two days before.

Indian and stern warrior though he was, Coacoochee turned faint at the thought of how nearly he had taken this precious life, for the saving of which he would willingly risk his own. The hunting-shirt worn by Boyd was the very one in which Coacoochee had paid his last memorable visit to St. Augustine. It was the one that had been slit from top to bottom by Fontaine Salano's knife, and stripped from him, in preparation for the whipping the brute proposed to administer. The thought of that shameful moment caused Coacoochee's blood to boil again with rage. At the same time the sight of this noble-hearted stranger who had saved him from that bitter indignity moved him to greatest pity.

Kneeling beside the unconscious man, the young Indian sought to discover the nature of his wound. To his amazement, it was caused by a bullet that had been fired from *behind*. How could such a thing be? None but white men were behind Boyd during

the battle. Suddenly the muttered words of Troup Jeffers flashed into his mind. Now all was clear. To gratify his own petty revenge the slave-catcher had committed this cowardly act.

The young chief was busily engaged in stanching the flow of blood, and binding a poultice of healing leaves, mixed with the glutinous juice of a cabbage palm, on the wound, when Louis returned and stood beside him.

The whites were in full retreat from the scene of their recent discomfiture, and Louis had returned in the very canoe they had used and abandoned. Now he and Coacoochee bore the wounded man tenderly to it, crossed the river, and carried him to the ferryman's cabin, where both he and the young chief had passed the previous night, unconscious of each other's presence. Here they made him as comfortable as possible, and here for awhile we must leave them.