

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE VICTIMS.

“HURRY back to the captain, Walt,” urged his chum as soon as the Indian boy was laid on another couch. “He may need you any minute. Those demons will be here as soon as they finish off the Seminoles. Thank the Lord, the firing is still going on. I will do what I can for these poor chaps and be with you as soon as possible.” His eye flashed and his face darkened as he added, “Tell the captain everyone must shoot at anything that shows itself—and shoot to kill.”

As soon as his chum had gone, Charley turned his attention to the Seminole chief. From the clotted mass of blood, he guessed the location of the main wound, and with his hunting-knife he rapidly cut away the shirt, exposing the warrior's chest and back. As he drew back the blood-soaked cloth, he gave a sigh of relief. The bullet had passed clear through the body close to the lungs,—a serious wound, but one which perhaps with proper care need not prove fatal.

The amateur surgeon had no antiseptic except common salt, but with that and water he quickly cleansed and sterilized the wounds and tearing up one of his own clean shirts, he first scraped a strip with an old case knife until he had a quantity of soft lint with which he stopped both the ugly holes made by the bullet, and then with other strips of the same, he neatly bandaged the wounds. Next he drew on one of the captain's shirts in the place of the one he had cut away. Lastly, he broke open a pack and took out a quart bottle of brandy. Pouring out a large drink he let it trickle slowly down between the Indian's set teeth.

The effect was noticeable at once. Slowly the warm blood flowed back into the dusky cheeks, the limbs began to twitch, the breathing grew audible, and the wounded man began to show signs of returning consciousness.

Before turning to his other patient, whom he reckoned as good as dead, Charley stepped outside the wigwam and cast a quick look around. A smile of satisfaction parted his lips as he noted the distant figures of his companions behind the tree barricade, each at his post, gun in hand, nervously alert. From them, his glance went on to the point, where the battle was still going on. To even an unobserving person, it was clear that the firing from the canoes was slack-

ening rapidly, and with a sigh of regret and anxiety, the lad turned back into the lean-to.

When he bent over the Indian lad, he uttered an exclamation of joy; from the matted hair and abundance of blood he had believed him shot through the head. A closer examination showed, however, that the bullet had only ploughed a neat little furrow down to the skull. Charley washed the wound clean, forced some of the brandy down the boy's throat, and dashed a cup of cold water in his face. The effect was startling. In a few minutes the little Indian was sitting up, swaying drunkenly and in a half dazed way staring about the little shelter.

"You are coming around all right, old chap," said Charley, cheerily.

His voice and face brought back to the Indian lad with a rush the memory of the recent ordeal he had been through. He gave one glance at the unconscious form on the other couch and his hand darted to the hunting-knife at his hip as he staggered, dizzily, to his feet.

"Stop, you are among friends," cried Charley, holding up both empty hands palm upward as a token of peace. "You were grazed on the head by a rifle bullet and it knocked you out for a few minutes, so I went out in my canoe and towed you in. Your father is hurt pretty bad, but I have fixed him up

good as I can and I think he will pull through with care."

The little Indian lad's keen, beady eyes searched the white lad's open, smiling face, his hand dropped from his knife, and he sunk back weakly on the couch.

"My father over there, heap big chief," he declared proudly, in guttural English. "Name Big Tiger. Me, they call Little Tiger." A shade of suspicion crept over his face. "You white you say you friend. More whites hid behind trees and shoot and kill many of Big Tiger's braves," he said with an ironical smile.

Charley saw that now, if ever, was the time to clear his little party from the natural suspicion of the Seminole. He sat down on the couch opposite and his honest blue eyes met the other's keen, black ones unwaveringly. "The Seminoles, once a mighty people, have grown as few in number as the deer in the forest," he began, falling naturally into the speech of the Indians. "Yet, few though they became, there walked among them, at least, one of their race whose heart and mind was like the night when the moon shines not and clouds have hid the stars. One day this evil one rose up and slew a harmless white settler. The wise men of the tribe took counsel together, saying, 'times are changing, we will turn him

over to the law of the white men.' The ears of the Little Tiger may have heard whispered the name of the white settler's slayer."

The Indian's eyes were gleaming with scorn and hatred. "Injun Charley," he hissed.

"The white men judged the slayer of the settler according to their laws. They sent him to be shackled with chain and iron ball and do heavy, squaw-work in misery the balance of his years. They did not say because this Indian was bad that all Seminoles were slayers of white men."

The young Indian started up and began to speak, but Charley silenced him with a gesture and gravely continued.

"No, these judges were not fools to believe that a whole people should be judged by the crimes of one, or a few of its race. Among the paleface race were brother, squaw, and father murderers, in great numbers, not because the white race is worse than the red, but because they exceed the red men in number as the leaves exceed the trunks of the tree."

"With the bad Indian, serving out a lifetime of work and exile, were eleven white men just as bad. When those that watched them had their eyes turned away, the twelve plotted. One night they rose up and murdered the guards, took their guns and ponies, and, under the lead of the bad Indian, came as the

crow flies for here, where were camped myself and three companions, seeking only the bird that bears plumes upon its back. The balance you know," he concluded, gravely. "As brother to brother, should the Seminoles be judged by the slayer of whites, or the white hunters by lawless murderers whose color is the same as theirs?"

During Charley's short argument, the suspicion had fled from the young chieftain's face. At the conclusion, he drew himself up proudly erect and extending his hand spoke the one English word he knew that stood with him for friendship and confidence,—“How.”

“How,” said Charley cheerfully, giving the offered hand a hearty shake. “Now let's get outside and take a look. As soon as they have finished with your followers, I expect the bad men to come down upon us.”

Short as had been the time they had spent in the lean-to, a great change had taken place at the scene of the battle. The firing had ceased from all the canoes but one, and even as they looked, a rifle cracked, the canoe's occupant half rose, then crashed down over its side, and the last Seminole rifle was silenced.

The pall of smoke had drifted away from the point, revealing a terrible sight, twenty-nine canoes or dug-

outs drifted on the quiet water at the mercy of wind or current, some floated bottom upward, others' sides were punctured and splintered with innumerable bullets. Here and there was one splotted and spotted with the crimson life-blood of its heroic defender. Not a sign of life was visible amongst the little squadron. As Charley looked, one of the convicts ventured out from his place of concealment and with a long branch, drew the nearest canoe in to shore. With a coil of rope in one hand, he jumped in and shoved out amongst the drifting craft. His errand was easy to be guessed, to make fast to the drifting canoes and tow them all in to shore.

At the sight of the wiping out of the last of his comrades, the young Indian had sunk to a seat on a log and buried his face in his hands. Now, Charley tapped him gently on the shoulder. "It is not a time for the son of a chief to be grieving like a squaw," he said, "his followers are gone, but they died like brave men. Paleface history tells of no braver stand than they made to-day. It's not meet for the son of a chief to sit repining. His thought should be of punishment for the doers of the evil."

The young Indian sprang to his feet, his eyes gleaming fiercely. "How?" he demanded. "They have slain the pack. Will they not soon come for the

leaders? Has the young white chieftain magic to work against their many guns and canoes?"

"When the blood runs hot is not the time to reason coolly," said Charley, calmly. "I go now to help my comrades. Go you into the wigwam and watch by your father; when he awakens tell him all. As soon as we may, we will all meet here in council, and the counsel of a chief will shed a light in the dark around us."

Without a word the young Seminole whirled on his heels and disappeared in the lean-to, while Charley hurried in to the barricade, where his presence was now sorely needed.