The Flamingo Feather

Kirk Munroe

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CHAPTER I. RÉNÉ DE VEAUX

ON a dreary winter's day, early in the year 1564, young Réné de Veaux, who had just passed his sixteenth birthday, left the dear old chateau where he had spent his happy and careless boyhood, and started for Paris. Less than a month before both his noble father and his gentle mother had been taken from him by a terrible fever that had swept over the country, and Réné their only child, was left without a relative in the world except his uncle the Chevalier Réné de Laudonniere, after whom he was named. In those days of tedious travel it seemed a weary time to the lonely lad before the messenger who had gone to Paris with a letter telling his uncle of his sad position could return. When at length he came again, bringing a kind message that bade him come immediately to Paris and be a son to his equally lonely uncle, Réné lost no time in obeying.

He travelled like a young prince, riding a spirited steed, and followed by a party of servants, mounted and armed to protect him against robbers and other perils of the way. Behind him rode old Francois, who had been his father's valet and was now his sole friend and protector. The big tears rolled down the boy's cheeks as he turned for a last look at his home; but as it was shut from view by the trees of the park surrounding it, he brushed them away resolutely, and turning to his companion, said,

"Thou hast seen the last of my tears, Francois, and with them goes my boyhood; for hereafter I am to be a man, and men know not how to weep."

"Well spoken, my young master," replied the old servant, greatly pleased at the brave words of the lad. "Thou art already a man in feeling, and thine Uncle Laudonniere will presently make thee one in fact, if the tales that come to us of his valorous deeds be true, and there is naught to disprove them."

"Tell me of him, Francois; for though he is my only uncle, I have but little knowledge of him or his deeds. Of what nature are they?"

"Well, then, he is a mighty navigator, and 'tis but little more than a year since he returned from the New World, whither he sailed in company with his Excellency Admiral Jean Ribault. He brings strange tales of those wonderful lands beyond the sea, and rumor has it that he is shortly to set forth again for them with a noble company, who will establish there a sanctuary for our blessed Protestant faith."

The boy's interest was thoroughly aroused by this, and he plied the old servant with questions concerning his uncle and the New World. Francois answered these to the best of his ability, and even drew largely upon his imagination to aid his glowing descriptions of those distant lands of which the men of that day held such vague knowledge.

With such talk they beguiled much of the tedious journey, that occupied a week ere it was ended and they entered Paris. Here they were finally set down before a modest dwelling near the King's palace, in which Laudonniere was lodged.

Upon meeting his nephew, the chevalier embraced him warmly, and then holding him forth at arm's−length to gain a better view of him, exclaimed, "In good sooth, Réné, thou'rt a likely lad; and if thy heart be as true and bold as thy face promises, we'll soon make a man of thee such as even thy noble father would approve."

That evening uncle and nephew talked long and earnestly together concerning the latter's future; and ere they slept it was fully decided that, in spite of his youth, he should make one of the expedition that, even as Francois had reported, Laudonniere was fitting out for the New World.

The next three months were occupied in busy preparation for the long voyage, not unmixed with vexatious delays and grievous disappointments, in all of which young Réné de Veaux bore manfully his share. He became each day more useful to his uncle, who intrusted him with many important commissions, and who, stern old soldier as he was, learned in this time to love the boy as though he had been his own son.

At length all was in readiness. The stores and munitions of war had been placed on board the three ships that formed the little fleet, the last colonist had embarked, and Laudonniere had taken leave of his King and Admiral Jean Ribault, who was to follow him in a few months with a still larger company. On a bright May morning uncle and nephew reached the little seaport town before which lay their ships, and hastened to embark and take advantage of the favorable wind that promised them a fair start on their long and perilous voyage.

As Laudonniere stepped on board his flagship his broad pennant was flung to the breeze from the mainmast−head, the fleur−de−lis of France floated proudly from the mizzen, and amid the booming of cannon and the loud acclamations of the throngs assembled on the quay to bid them Godspeed, the ships moved slowly down the harbor towards the broad ocean and the New World that lay beyond.

For many weeks they sailed ever westward, seeing no ship save their own, and becoming every day more weary of the vast, endless expanse of sea and sky. It is no wonder, then, that when on the morning of the 22d of June the welcome cry of "Land, ho!" rang through the flag−ship every soul on board rushed on deck with joyous exclamations to catch once more a glimpse of the blessed land. The cry that had brought them such pleasure had come from the mast−head, and it was some time before those on deck could detect the dim blue cloud, low−lying in the west, that was said to be land. Even then one man, who was known as Simon the

Armorer, was heard to mutter that it might be land and then again it might not; for his part, he believed the whole world had been drowned in a flood, as in the days of Noah, and that the only land they should ever see would be at the bottom of the ocean.

As the day wore on, and before a light breeze the ships were wafted towards the blue cloud, it was proved beyond a doubt to be land, for some palm−trees and tall pines became distinguishable, and above all other sounds came, faint but distinct, the heavy, regular boom of surf.

By noon the ships had approached as near to the coast as was deemed prudent, and for the first time since leaving France their anchors were dropped and their sails were furled.

They had come to anchor off the mouth of an inlet, before which extended a bar upon which the great seas were breaking and roaring so frightfully that no passage for the ships among them seemed to offer itself. Laudonniere thought he recognized the inlet as one leading into a broad river, on the opposite side of which was located an Indian village called Seloy. This place he had visited two years before in company with Admiral Ribault, and he determined to reassure himself as to the locality; therefore, bidding Réné accompany him, he entered a small boat, and ordering another, full of soldiers, to follow them, he gave the word to pull straight for the breakers.

Just as Réné thought the boat was to be swallowed by the raging seas, his uncle guided her, with great skill, into a narrow passage that opened in their very midst. After a few minutes of suspense, during which Réné dared hardly to breathe, they shot into smooth waters, rounded a point of land, and saw before them the village of which they were in search. On the beach in front of it a crowd of savage figures, nearly naked, were dancing wildly, and brandishing bows and spears.

Meanwhile, the village that the boats were now approaching had been thrown into a state of the greatest excitement by the appearance of the ships, which had been discovered while yet so distant that their sails resembled the wings of the white sea−gull. Upon the first alarm all the warriors had been collected on the beach, and the women had left their work in the fields of maize and hurried with the children to the security of the forest depths. When, however, the fleet came to anchor and the Indians could distinguish the meaning of their banners, their alarm was changed to joy; for they had learned to love the French−− who, upon their previous visit, had treated them with kindness−− as much as they hated the cruel Spaniards, whose ships had also visited that coast. Then the women and children were recalled from the forest, the warriors washed the war−paint from their faces, and preparations for feasting were begun.

As the small boats approached, the men ran down to the beach to meet them, dancing and waving their weapons in their joy, and when they recognized Laudonniere standing in the stern of the leading boat, they raised a great cry of welcome that caused the forest to ring with its echoes. As the pious leader of the expedition stepped on shore, he took Réné by the hand, and both kneeling on the sands, gave thanks to Him who guided them thus far in safety in their perilous wanderings. Though the simpleminded Indians could not understand what Laudonniere said or was doing, they were so anxious to show their respect and love for him that all knelt when he did and maintained a deep silence while he prayed.

When Laudonniere arose to his feet the Indians crowded about him with shouts and gestures of welcome; but they readily made way for him when, still holding Réné's hand, he began to walk towards the lodge of their chief. He was as anxious as his followers to welcome the white men, but his dignity had not permitted him to rush with them down to the beach.

As they walked, Rénatives; for, although they had become familiar with the appearance of bearded white men, they had never before seen a white boy, Réné being the first to set foot in this land. The Indians had thought that all white men were born with beards, and that their closely cropped hair never grew any longer; so that this

smooth−faced boy, whose golden hair hung in ringlets over his shoulders, was a much greater curiosity to them than they were to him. The old chief took an immediate fancy to him, and as he had given to Laudonniere the Indian name of Ta−lah (a palm) upon the occasion of his previous visit to Seloy, he now called Réné Ta−lah−lo−ko (the palmetto, or little palm), a name ever afterwards used by all the Indians in their intercourse with him.

The chief entreated Laudonniere to tarry many days in Seloy; but the latter answered that the orders of his own great chief were for him to proceed without delay to the river known as the River of May, and there erect a fort and found his colony. So, after an exchange of presents, they parted, and taking to their boats, the white men regained their ship. As they left, Réné gave many a backward glance at the pleasant little village of Seloy, and would have loved to linger there among its simple and kindly people.

As they crossed the bar, in going again to the ships, their boats were surrounded by a number of what they called dolphins, but what are today called porpoises, sporting in the great billows; and on their account Laudonniere named the river they had just left the River of Dolphins.

Spreading their white wings, the ships sailed northward forty miles during the night, and daylight found them standing off and on at the mouth of the great River of May. By the aid of a chart, made by Admiral Ribault two years before, they crossed its dangerous bar, and sailed up its broad channel.

Short as was the time since they had been discovered off Seloy, swift runners had already conveyed the great tidings of their coming to Micco, the chief of this part of the country, and he and his people were thus prepared to greet them upon their arrival. When Réné and his uncle, followed by a company from the ships, landed, they were received with shouts and extravagant gestures of joy by the friendly Indians, and conducted by them to the top of a hill upon which Admiral Ribault had set a pillar of stone engraved with the French coat of arms. They found it twined with wreaths of flowers, and surrounded by baskets of maize, quivers of arrows, and many other things that the kindly Indians took this means of offering to their white friends.

Not far from this point Laudonniere selected the site of his fort, and work upon it was immediately begun. He named it Fort Caroline, in honor of King Charles IX of France, and about it he hoped to see in time a flourishing colony of French Huguenots.

After all the stores and munitions had been landed from the ships, they sailed for France, leaving the little company of white men the only ones of their race in all that vast unknown wilderness. As Laudonniere remained in command of Fort Caroline, Réné de Veaux of course remained with him, and thus became the hero of the surprising adventures that will be related in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER II. A WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE

THE building of Fort Caroline occupied about three months; and during this time the friendly Indians willingly aided in the work of preparing the tree−trunks which, set on end, were let deep into the earth close beside one another, and in digging the wide moat that surrounded the whole. A heavy embankment of earth was thrown up on the inner side of the palisade of tree−trunks, and upon this were mounted a number of great guns.

During the time thus occupied, Réné de Veaux became acquainted with Micco's son, a young Indian of about his own age, named Has−se, which means a sunbeam, and a strong friendship was speedily cemented between them. They saw each other daily, and each learned the language of the other.

After the ships had sailed away Réné's uncle found time, even in the midst of his pressing duties, to attend to the lad's education; and every morning was devoted to lessons in fencing, shooting the cross−bow, and in

military engineering. The evenings were passed with the good Jacques Le Moyne the artist, who was a very learned man, and who taught Réné Latin, and how to draw.

Although his mornings and evenings were thus occupied, Réné had his afternoons to himself, and these he spent in company with his friend Has−se, who instructed him in the mysteries of Indian woodcraft. Now it happened that while Has−se was a merry, lovable lad, he had one bitter enemy in the village. This was a young man somewhat older than himself, named Chitta, which means the snake. Their quarrel was one of long standing, and nobody seemed to know how it had begun; but everybody said that Chitta was such a cross, ugly fellow that he must needs quarrel with somebody, and had chosen Has−se for an enemy because everybody else loved him.

One afternoon Has−se asked Réné to go out on the river with him in his canoe, as he had that to tell him which he did not wish to run any risk of being overheard by others. Réné willingly agreed to go with him, and taking his cross−bow and a couple of steel−tipped bolts, he seated himself in the bow of the light craft, which Has−se paddled from the stern. Going for some distance down the river, they turned into a small stream from the banks of which huge, moss−hung oaks and rustling palm−trees cast a pleasant shade over the dark waters. Here the canoe was allowed to drift while Has−se unburdened his mind to his friend.

It seemed that the day of the Ripe Corn Dance, the great feast day of his tribe, was set for that of the next full moon. On this day there was to be a series of contests among the lads of the village to decide which of them was most worthy to become Bow−bearer to Micco, their chief and his father. This was considered a most honorable position to occupy, and he who succeeded in winning it and filling it satisfactorily for a year was, at the expiration of that time, granted all the privileges of a warrior. The contests were to be in shooting with bows and arrows, hurling the javelin, running, and wrestling. Has−se had set his heart upon obtaining this position, and had long been in training for the contests. His most dreaded rival was Chitta; and, while Has−se felt ready to meet the snake in the games of running, shooting, and hurling the javelin, he feared that with his greater weight the latter would prove more than a match for him in wrestling. Could Ta−lah−lo−ko advise and help him in this matter?

"Ay, that can I, Has−se, my lad," cried Réné; "thou couldst not have hit upon a happier expedient than that of asking advice of me. 'Tis but a week since I removed a cinder from the eye of Simon the Armorer, and in return for the favor he taught me a trick of wrestling that surpasses aught of the kind that ever I saw. I have practised it daily since, and would now confidently take issue with any who know it not without regard to their superior size or weight. I will show it thee if thou wilt promise to keep it secret. Ha!"

As they talked the canoe had drifted close in to the shore, until it lay directly beneath the gigantic limb of a tree that extended far out over the water, and from which hung a mesh of stout vines. As he uttered the exclamation that finished his last sentence, Réné seized hold of a stout vine, and with a quick jerk drew the light craft in which they were seated a few feet forward. At the same instant a tawny body was launched like a shot from the overhanging limb and dashed into the water exactly at the spot over which, but an instant before, Has−se had sat.

The animal that made this fierce plunge was a panther of the largest size; and if Réné had not chanced to catch sight of its nervously twitching tail as it drew itself together for the spring, it would have alighted squarely upon the naked shoulders of the unsuspecting Indian lad. Réné's prompt action had, however, caused the animal to plunge into the water, though it only missed the canoe by a few feet; and when it rose to the surface it was close beside them.

Has−se seized his paddle, and with a powerful stroke forced the canoe ahead, but directly into the mesh of trailing vines, in which it became so entangled that they could not extricate it before the beast had recovered from his surprise, and had begun to swim towards them.

A bolt was hurriedly fitted to Réné's crossbow and hastily fired at the approaching animal. It struck him near the fore−shoulder, and served to check his progress for a moment, as with a snarl of rage he bit savagely at the wound, from which the blood flowed freely, crimsoning the water around him. Then he again turned towards the canoe, and seemed to leap rather than swim, in his eagerness to reach it. A second bolt, fired with even greater haste than the first, missed the panther entirely, and the boys were about to plunge from the opposite side of the canoe into the water, in their despair, when an almost unheard−of thing occurred to effect their deliverance.

Just as one more leap would have brought the panther within reach of the canoe, a huge, dark form rose from the red waters behind him, and a pair of horrid jaws opened, and then closed like a vice upon one of his hind−quarters. The panther uttered a wild yell, made a convulsive spring forward, his claws rattled against the side of the canoe, and then the waters closed above his head, and he was dragged down into the dark depths of the stream, to the slimy home of the great alligator, who had thus delivered the boys from their peril. A few bubbles coming up through the crimson waters told of the terrible struggle going on beneath them, and then all was still, and the stream flowed on as undisturbed as before. For a few moments the boys sat gazing in silent amazement at the place of the sudden disappearance of their enemy, hardly believing that he would not again return to the attack.

When they had regained the fort, Laudonniere heard with horrors Réné's story of their adventure with the tiger and the crocodile, as he named panthers and alligators, and bade him be very careful in the future how he wandered in the wilderness. He did not forbid his nephew to associate with Has−se, for he was most anxious to preserve a friendship with the Indians, upon whom his little colony was largely dependent for provisions, and he considered Réné's influence with the Indian lad who was the son of the chief very important.

On the afternoon following that of their adventure, Has−se came into the fort in search of Réné, and anxious to acquire the promised trick of wrestling. After securing his promise never to impart the trick to another, Réné led him into a room where they would not be observed, and taught it to him. It was a very simple trick, being merely a feint of giving way, followed quickly by a peculiar inside twist of the leg; but it was irresistible, and the opponent who knew it not was certain to be overcome by it. Has−se quickly acquired it, and though he found few words to express his feelings, there was a look in his face when he left Réné that showed plainly his gratitude.

When next the silver sickle of the new moon shone in the western sky, active preparations were begun among the Indians for their great Dance of Ripe Corn. The race−course was laid out, and carefully cleared; clay was mixed with its sand, and it was trampled hard and smooth by many moccasined feet. A large booth, or shelter from the hot sun, under which the chiefs and distinguished visitors might sit and witness the games, was constructed of boughs and palm−leaves. Bows were carefully tested and fitted with new strings of twisted deer−sinew. Those who had been fortunate enough to obtain from the white men bits of steel and iron, ground them to sharp points, and with them replaced their arrow−heads of flint. Has−se, with great pride, displayed to Réné his javelin or light spear, the tough bamboo shaft of which was tipped with a keen−edged splinter of milk−white quartz, obtained from some far northern tribe. Guests began to arrive, coming from Seloy and other coast villages from the north, and from the broad savannas of the fertile Alachua land, until many hundred of them were encamped within a few miles of Fort Caroline.

At length the day of feasting broke bright and beautiful, and soon after breakfast Laudonniere, accompanied by Réné de Veaux and half the garrison of Fort Caroline, marched out to the scene of the games. Here they were warmly welcomed by Micco and his people, and invited to occupy seats of honor in the great booth. Upon their arrival the signal was given for the games to begin.

First of all came the races for wives, for at this feast only of all the year could the young men of the tribe get married. Even now they were obliged to run after their sweethearts, who were allowed so great a start in the

race that if they chose they could reach the goal first and thus escape all further attentions from their pursuers. They generally allowed themselves to be caught, however, and thus became blushing brides. Thus, on this occasion, and in this manner, Yah−chi−la−ne (the Eagle), a young Alachua chief, gained the hand of Has−se's beautiful sister Nethla, which means the Day−star.

The contests among the boys to decide who of them should be Bow−bearer to their chief for the ensuing year followed, and as the great drum, Kas−a−lal−ki, rolled forth its hollow, booming notes, twenty slender youths stepped forward, of whom the handsomest was Has−se the Sunbeam, and the tallest was dark−faced Chitta the Snake. All were stripped to the skin, and wore only girdles about their loins and moccasins on their feet; but Has−se, as the son of the chief, had the scarlet feather of a flamingo braided into his dark hair.

From the very first Has−se and Chitta easily excelled all their competitors in the contests; but they two were most evenly matched. Has−se scored the most points in hurling the javelin, and Chitta won in the foot−race. In shooting with the bow both were so perfect that the judges could not decide between them, and the final result of the trial became dependent upon their skill at wrestling. When they stood up together for this contest, Has−se's slight form seemed no match for that of the taller and heavier Chitta; and when in the first bout the former was thrown heavily to the ground, a murmur of disapprobation arose from the white spectators, though the Indians made no sign to express their feelings.

In the second bout, after a sharp struggle, Has−se seemed suddenly to give way, and almost immediately afterwards Chitta was hurled to earth, but how, no one could tell, except Réné, who with the keenest interest watched the effect of his lesson. As Chitta rose to his feet he seemed dazed, and regarded his opponent with a bewildered air, as though there were something about him he could not understand.

Again they clinched and strained and tugged, until the perspiration rolled in great beads from their shining bodies, and their breath came in short gasps, It seemed as though Réné's friend must give in, when, presto! down went Chitta again; while Has−se stood erect, a proud smile on his face, winner of the games, and Bow−bearer to his father for a year.

Has−se had still to undergo one more test of endurance before he could call himself a warrior, which he must be able to do ere he could assume the duties of Bow−bearer. He must pass through the ordeal of the Cassine, or black drink. This was a concoction prepared by the medicine−men, of roots and leaves, from a recipe the secret of which was most jealously guarded by them; and to drink of it was to subject one's self to the most agonizing pains, which, however, were but of short duration. In spite of his sufferings, the youth who drank from the horrid bowl was expected to preserve a smiling face, nor admit by word or sign that he was undergoing aught but the most pleasing sensations. If he failed in this one thing, no matter what record he had previously gained for courage or daring, he was ever afterwards condemned to share the work of women, nor might he ever again bear arms or take part in the chase or in war.

Immediately after his overthrow of Chitta, and while the shouts of joy over his victory were still ringing in his ears, Has−se was led to an elevated seat, where he could be seen of all the people, and a bowl of the awful mixture was handed him. Without hesitation, and with a proud glance around him, the brave youth swallowed the nauseous draught, and then folding his arms, gazed with a smiling face upon the assembled multitude. For fifteen minutes he sat there amid a death−like silence, calm and unmoved, though the great beads of perspiration rolling from his forehead showed what he was enduring. At the end of that time a great shout from the people told him that his ordeal was over; and, weak and faint, he was led away to a place where he might recover in quiet from the effects of his terrible sufferings, and enjoy in peace the first glorious thoughts that now he was indeed a Bow−bearer and a warrior.

Réné sprang forward from his seat to seize and shake his friend's hand, while from all, Indians as well as whites, arose shouts of joy at the victory of the brave and much−loved lad who wore the Flamingo Feather.

As the angry Chitta turned away from the scene of his defeat, his heart was filled with rage at these shouts, and he muttered a deep threat of vengeance upon all who uttered them, those of his own race as well as the pale−faces.

CHAPTER III. CHITTA'S REVENGE

SO Has−se the Sunbeam became Bow−bearer to his father, the great chief Micco, and Chitta the Snake was disappointed of his ambition. By some means he became convinced that Réné de Veaux had instructed Has−se in his newly acquired trick of wrestling; and though he had no proof of this, he conceived a bitter hatred against the white lad. He had especially included him in his muttered threat of vengeance against all those who greeted his final overthrow with shouts of joy; but, like the wily reptile whose name he bore, he was content to bide his time and await his opportunity to strike a deadly blow. After the games were ended he disappeared, and was seen no more that day.

His absence was hardly noted, for immediately after Has−se's victory the entire assembly repaired to the great mound which had gradually been raised by the accumulation of shells, bones, broken pottery, and charred wood that many generations of Indian feasters had left behind them, and here was spread the feast of the day. Then followed dancing and singing, which were continued far into the night.

At length the dancers became exhausted; the men who beat the drums and rattled the terrapin shells filled with dried palmetto berries grew so drowsy that their music sounded fainter and fainter, until it finally ceased altogether, and by two hours after midnight the whole encampment was buried in profound slumber. Even those whose duty it was to stand guard dozed at their posts, and the silence of the night was only broken by the occasional hootings of Hup−pe (the great owl).

Had the guards been awake instead of dreaming, it is possible that they might have noticed the dark figure of a man who noiselessly and stealthily crept amid the heavy shadows on the edge of the forest towards the great granary, or storehouse, in which was kept all the ripe maize of the tribe, together with much starch−root (koonti katki) and a large quantity of yams. The granary was built of pitch−pine posts and poles, heavily thatched with palm−leaves, that the summer suns had dried to a tinder.

Occasionally the dark figure skulking among the shadows came to little patches of bright moonlight, and to cross these he lay flat on the ground and writhed his way through the grass like a snake. A close observer would have noticed a dull, steady glow which came from a round object that the skulker carried with great care. If he had been near enough he would have seen that this was a large gourd, in which, on a bed of sand, were a quantity of live coals taken from one of the fires that still smouldered about the epola, or place of dancing. In his other hand the man carried a few fat−pine splinters that would burn almost like gun−powder.

At length, without having attracted attention from any one of the encamped Indians, or the drowsy guards upon whom they depended for safety, the figure reached the granary, and disappeared amid the dark shadows of its walls. Crouching to the ground, and screening his gourd of coals with his robe, he thrust into it one end of the bundle of fat−pine splinters and blew gently upon them. They smoked for a minute, and then burst into a quick blaze.

Beginning at one end of the granary, this torch was applied to the dry thatch that covered it, and it instantly sprang into flame. As the figure ran along the end of the structure, around the corner, and down the entire length of its side, always keeping in the shadow, he applied the torch in a dozen places, and then flinging it on top of the low roof, where it speedily ignited the covering, he bounded away into the darkness, uttering, as he did so, a long−drawn, ear−piercing yell of triumph.

By the time the nodding guards had discovered the flames and given the alarm, the whole granary was in a blaze, and the startled Indians, who rushed out from the lodges and palmetto booths, could do nothing but stand helpless and gaze at the destruction of their property. All asked how it had happened, and who had done this thing, but not even the guards could offer the slightest explanation.

Meantime the author of all this mischief stopped when he had gained what he considered a safe distance from the fire, and, concealed by the friendly shadows of the forest, stood with folded arms and scowling features gazing at the result of his efforts. At length the light from the burning building grew so bright that even the shadow in which he stood began to be illuminated, and he turned to go away. As he did so he shook his clenched hand towards the burning granary, and muttered, "The white man and the red man shall both learn to dread the fangs of the Snake, for thus do I declare war against them both."

As he spoke, a voice beside him, that he instantly recognized as that of Has−se, exclaimed, "What! is this thy work, Chitta?"

For answer Has−se received a terrible blow, full in the face, that stretched him, stunned and bleeding, on the ground; and Chitta, saying, "Lie there, miserable Bow−bearer, I will meet thee again," sprang out into the forest and disappeared.

When Has−se, aroused by the shouts of the guards and the glare of light, had rushed from the lodge in which he slept, he had seen a figure standing between him and the light, and had approached it to learn the cause of all the excitement. He was just about to speak, when he recognized Chitta, and heard him utter the words that at once declared him to be the author of the conflagration and the enemy of his people and their friends.

Not being able to appreciate the petty spirit of revenge that influenced the Snake, Has−se gave utterance to his exclamation of surprise, and in return received the cruel blow for which he was so little prepared.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself in his father's lodge, lying on a bed of deer−skins, while his sister, the beautiful Nethla, was bathing his temples with cold water.

It was now broad daylight, and the great granary, with all its contents, had been reduced to a heap of smouldering ruins. About the lodge in which Has−se lay were gathered a great crowd of Indians, awaiting his return to consciousness, to learn what he knew of the occurrences of the past few hours, and in what way he had been connected with them. By the earliest light of day a band of experienced warriors had tracked his assailant from the spot in which the young Bow−bearer had been discovered, through the tall grass and underbrush from which the fugitive had brushed the dew in his flight to the river's edge. Here one of the canoes that had been drawn up on the beach was found to be missing, and search parties had been sent both up and down the river, but as yet they had not returned,

As Has−se slowly recovered consciousness, and opened his eyes, his sister bent over him and whispered, "Who dealt thee the cruel blow, oh, my brother?"

Receiving his faint answer, she sprang to her feet, and turning to her father, who stood near, exclaimed, " 'Tis Chitta the Snake who has done this thing in revenge for our Has−se's success in the games of yesterday."

From the entrance of the lodge the old chief proclaimed the news, and all through the great assembly were heard cries of anger against Chitta the Snake.

The destruction of this winter's supply of food was not only a serious blow to the Indians, but to the little garrison of Fort Caroline as well, for Laudonniere had just completed arrangements with Micco for the purchase of the greater part of it. Only a small quantity of provisions remained in the fort, and though the forest

contained an abundance of game, and the river teemed with fish, the French soldiers were not skilled in either hunting or fishing, and had become dependent upon their Indian neighbors for what they needed of such food. It was therefore with feelings of surprised alarm that, on the second day after the burning of the granary, they noticed the absence of all Indians from the vicinity of the fort. Scouts were sent to the Indian encampment to discover the cause of this unusual state of affairs, and they soon returned with the report that the place was wholly deserted, and that not an Indian was to be found.

Not only had all the visiting Indians disappeared, but also every soul of Micco's tribe; and, what was more significant, they had taken with them their lodges and all portable property.

Laudonniere at once realized the full force of the situation. His soldiers were worn out with the labor of building the fort, and many of them were prostrated by a peculiar fever that racked their joints with severe pains and unfitted them for duty. The store of provisions upon which he had depended to feed his men through the approaching winter had been destroyed. The Indians who might have provided him with game had abandoned him and gone he knew not whither. His men knew nothing of the art of winning for themselves a livelihood from the wilderness that surrounded them. Although the soldiers had been allowed to think differently, he knew that some months must still elapse before the arrival of reinforcements and supplies from France. He himself, worn out by anxiety and overwork, was beginning to feel symptoms of the approach of the dreaded fever, and he feared that ere long he would be unfitted to perform the duties of his important position.

In this emergency, he decided to hold a council with the officers of the garrison, and ask their aid in deciding what was to be done. He therefore sent word to Soisson, his lieutenant, old Hillaire, the captain of artillery, Martinez, the quartermaster, Chastelleux, the chief of engineers, Le Moyne, the artist, and to Réné, his nephew, bidding them meet him in council. He added Réné to the number, for his uncle wished him to fully comprehend the difficulties of their position.

The council met in the commandant's private room, and Laudonniere, stating the situation clearly to them, asked what was to be done, Some suggested one thing and some another, and the discussion was long and earnest. Le Moyne, the artist, added to the perplexities of the commandant by stating that he had heard rumors of dissatisfaction among the garrison, and threats that unless provisions were speedily obtained they would build a vessel, abandon the fort and country, and attempt to make their way back to France.

While the discussion was at its height, two soldiers appeared at the door, leading between them a slender young Indian, whom Réné, with a joyful cry, at once recognized as his friend Has−se the Sunbeam.

CHAPTER IV. HAS−SE IS HELD PRISONER

SALUTING his commandant, the sergeant of the guard, who held the prisoner on the right, reported that this young savage had been seen skulking in the forest near the fort, and that, deeming his presence and movements very suspicious, he had sent a party of men to capture him. They had gone out by a rear gate, and, making a long detour, had surprised him just as he was making off through the underbrush, and after a sharp tussle had secured and brought him into the fort.

At the first appearance of his friend, Réné had started up with an exclamation of joy to go to him, but his uncle sternly bade him keep his seat. He obeyed, but scowled angrily at the soldiers, who still retained their hold of Has−se, as though fearful that if they let go he might in some mysterious way vanish from their sight.

Laudonniere commanded them to release their hold of the prisoner and to retire from the room, but to remain within call. They did so, and the young Indian, left to face the council, drew himself up proudly, and folding his arms, stood motionless. Réné tried in vain to catch his eye, that he might, by a sympathetic glance, assure him

of his friendship; but the other betrayed no recognition of his presence, nor once looked in his direction. He was dressed in the full costume of a young warrior who occupied the honorable position of Bow−bearer to a great chief, and in his hair gleamed the Flamingo Feather that proclaimed the station in life to which he was born. His handsome figure, proud face, and fearless bearing caused the members of the council to regard him with approving glances, and it was with less of sternness in his tone than usual that, after the door was closed, Laudonniere said,

"Now, sir, explain to us the meaning of this sudden departure of thy people, and the reason of thine own action in thus acting the part of a spy upon us."

With flashing eyes the young Indian answered in the French that he had learned of Réné: "My name is Has−se. I am the son of a chief. My father and my people have been friendly to you and your people. This country is ours, and in it we go where we please when we are ready to go, and stay where we please when we are ready to rest from going. I have done nothing that I should be brought here against my will, and until I am set free I will answer no questions. Has−se has spoken."

Réné's face flushed with pleasure at this brave speech of his friend, and even Laudonniere admired the young Indian's coolness and courage, but he nevertheless felt it his duty to maintain his dignity, and questioned him sternly. To all his questions however, Has−se remained dumb, absolutely refusing to open his lips. The expression, "Has−se has spoken," with which he had ended his defiant speech, signified that he had said all that he had to say, and nothing should induce him to speak further unless his condition of being set at liberty were complied with.

At last Laudonniere called in the soldiers and ordered them to take the prisoner to the guard−house, and there treat him kindly, but to watch him closely and on no account allow him to escape. When Has−se had thus been removed, Laudonniere turned to the members of the council, and asked what, in their opinion, should be done with him.

Le Moyne, the artist, declared that the young Indian should be set free at once, and treated with such kindness that he might thereby be induced to give them the information they sought to gain. Then Réné de Veaux, blushing at his own boldness, jumped to his feet and made a vehement little speech, in which he said that Has−se was his dear friend, and that, as he himself had said, they had no right to make a prisoner of him, besides much more to the same effect. He became so excited in his defence of the Indian lad that finally his uncle interrupted him, saying,

"Softly, softly, Réné! Thou art right to defend thy friend if indeed he be not our enemy, but thou hast no authority for finding fault with those who are much older and wiser than thyself."

Blushing furiously at this rebuke, Réné sat down, while his uncle continued: "I am also of the opinion that this young savage should be courteously entreated and set at liberty. Thus shall we win favor with his tribe, with whom it behooves us to remain on friendly terms."

The others of the council did not, however, agree with this, but thought the better plan would be to retain the Indian lad as a hostage, and demand of his tribe a great quantity of provisions as his ransom.

As they were in the majority, Laudonniere hesitated to act contrary to their counsel, and finally said that they would hold him for at least one day, and that in the mean time Réné should visit him, and endeavor to extract from him the desired information regarding the movements of his people.

When Réné, armed with his uncle's authority for so doing, passed the sentinel and entered the guard−house, he found the Indian lad seated on a rude bench in one corner, with his face buried in his hands. He sprang to his

feet at Réné's approach, and stood silently regarding him, not knowing but what he too had become an enemy. Carefully closing the door behind him, the impulsive French boy stepped quickly over to where the other stood, and embraced him, saying, as he did so, "Surely, Has−se, my brother, thou canst not think that I am aught but thy friend?"

Thus reassured, Has−se returned the embrace, and said, "I know thou art my friend, Ta−lah−lo−ko, and I did wrong to doubt thee for a moment; but it maddens me to be thus caged, and I am become like Nutcha the hawk when restrained of his liberty, suspicious of all men."

Then both boys sat down on the bench, and Réné questioned Has−se regarding the sudden departure of the Indians, and why he was there alone.

Has−se replied that while he had no secrets that all men might not know, he would have died rather than answer the questions of those who held him a prisoner, and as such commanded him to speak. To his friend Ta−lah−lo−ko he would, however, talk freely and with a straight tongue. He said that after the destruction of the storehouse containing their supply of provisions for many months, Micco, their chief, had decided that it would be best for his people to remove to the land of the Alachua, their friends, who had provisions in plenty, and remain there until the next season of corn planting. He caused their departure to be made secretly, for fear that the white men would seek to detain them as hunters for the fort, if they learned of the intended movement, and he wished to avoid any shadow of trouble between his people and their white brothers.

"He had undoubtedly the right to act as seemed to him best," said Réné; "but why didst not thou accompany thy people, and what brings thee here to the fort?"

"To see thee, Ta−lah−lo−ko, and thee only, did I come," answered Has−se. "I learned, after we had been some hours on the journey, that which affects thee so nearly that I could not leave thee in ignorance of it and without a warning. What I learned is, that Chitta the Snake regards thee with a deadly hatred, and has sworn to have thy life."

"Mine!" exclaimed Réné, in great surprise. "Why does the Snake bear malice towards me? I have no quarrel with him."

"That I know not, unless he suspects that it was thou who taught me the trick of wrestling that overthrew him, and thus lost him the position of Bow−bearer that he so greatly desired to obtain."

"It may be so," said Réné, musingly, "though how he could learn it I cannot think, nor why, even if he had knowledge of it, it should be cause for his wishing my death."

"Ah, Ta−lah−lo−ko, thou dost not know Chitta. His nature is that of the serpent whose name he bears, and for real or fancied wrongs to himself his revenge is cruel. Having once conceived a bitter hate against thee he will have thy life, or risk his own in attempting to take it."

"In that case," said Réné, "I am deeply grateful for thy warning, and will take care that master Chitta does not find me unprepared for him, in case he seeks me out."

"Now," said Has−se, "I would speak of another matter. I know that you white men have but little food within the fort, and must soon suffer for want of it if more is not obtained. There is none left in this country, but the Alachuas, to whom my people have gone, have an abundance. If one of thy people would go with me to them, and offer them things such as thou hast and they have not, in exchange for food, he could thus obtain a supply for the fort. If many went, the red men would be afraid; but with one they would talk, and if he were my friend then would his safety be assured. Wilt thou go with me to this distant land, Ta−lah−lo−ko?"

"Why," answered Réné, hardly knowing what to say to this sudden and unexpected proposal, "thou art a prisoner, Has−se, and dost not even know if my uncle will release thee. How then dost thou speak with such confidence of journeying to the land of these Alachuas?"

With a meaning smile Has−se answered: "Walls and bars may answer to cage men, but they cannot confine a sunbeam. If thou wilt go with me, then meet me when the light of the second moon from now touches the waters where Allapatta the great alligator delivered us from Catsha the tiger. With my life will I answer for thy safety, and at the next full moon, or soon after it, thou shalt return to thy people."

Réné would have talked more of this plan, but just then the door of the guard−house was opened and the sergeant appeared, saluting, and saying, " 'Tis the hour of sunset, Master De Veaux; the guard is about to be relieved, and I must request you to retire and leave the prisoner for the night. Surely you must be tired of talking with such a pig−headed young savage."

Not caring to exhibit his real feelings towards Has−se before the sergeant, Réné bade him goodnight very formally, and added, "Mayhap I will see thee on the morrow; but count not on my coming, for I may not deem it worth my while to visit thee."

"I should think not," said the sergeant, as he closed the door behind them and barred it. "A young gentleman such as Master De Veaux can find but little pleasure in intercourse with such ignorant creatures. For my part, were I commandant of this fort, I would make slaves of them all, and kindly persuade them to my will with a lash. They−−−−"

"Hold there!" cried Réné, as he turned towards the sergeant with flashing eyes. "An thou speakest another word in such strain of those who have favored us with naught save kindness, I will report thee to that same lash of which thou pratest so glibly."

The astonished sergeant muttered something by way of apology, but Réné, not waiting to hear it, hurried away to report to his uncle the result of his mission to the prisoner, and then to his own quarters to think over the startling proposal made to him by his friend.

The next morning Has−se had disappeared, and was nowhere to be found. With a troubled countenance the sergeant of the guard reported to Laudonniere that he had looked in on the prisoner at midnight, and found him quietly sleeping. He had visited the room again at sunrise, and it was empty. The sentinels at the gates, and those who paced the walls, had been closely questioned, but declared they had seen nobody, nor had they heard any unusual sound. For his part he believed there was magic in it, and that some of the old Indian witches had spirited the prisoner up the chimney, and flown away with him on a broomstick.

Although troubled to find that his prisoners could thus easily escape from the fort, Laudonniere was relieved that the disposal of Has−se's fate had thus been taken from his hands. He said to Réné, "I am glad that thy friend has escaped, though I like not the manner of his going, and I trust he may come to no harm, I would, however, that we had been able to send a company, or even one man, with him to this land of the Alachuas of which he told thee, for mayhap we might thus have obtained provision; but without a guide, I know not how it could be discovered."

"Could I have gone, uncle?" inquired Réné, eagerly.

"Thou, lad? No, thou art too young and tender to be sent on such a perilous mission. It should be one of double thy years and experience. Let no such foolish thoughts fill thy head yet a while."

CHAPTER V. THE ESCAPE OF HAS−SE AND RÉNÉ

THIS speech from his uncle both pleased and troubled Réné. He was glad to learn that it was deemed advisable for some one from the fort to visit the land of the Alachuas, and troubled to find that if he went with Has−se, he must do so without permission from his uncle. Nevertheless he felt certain that he, being Has−se's friend, and also regarded by the Indians as the son of the great chief of the white men, could undertake the mission with a greater chance of safety and success than any one else. He would have urged this view of the case upon his uncle's attention, but feared that speaking of the subject a second time would only result in his being absolutely forbidden to leave the fort on any pretence. The lad felt himself to be truly a man, now that he was nearly seventeen years old, and like all manly, high−spirited boys of his age, he was most anxious to enter upon any adventure that promised novelty and excitement.

Réné's appearance at this time was very different from that of the boy who, less than a year before, had left the old chateau of his fathers with tear−stained cheeks. His long curls had fallen under the shears, and his closely cropped hair showed to advantage his well−formed head. He was tall for his age, his muscles had hardened with constant exercise, and his face, neck, and hands were tanned to a ruddy brown by the hot suns beneath which he had spent so many months. His brown eyes held a merry twinkle, but at the same time there was an expression of pride and fixed purpose in his face that well became it.

At this time he wore a small plumed cap, a leathern jacket, knee−breeches, stockings of stout yarn, and short boots, the legs of which fitted closely to his ankles. Simon, the armorer, had made for him a light steel corselet, that he wore over his leathern jacket whenever he went beyond the walls of the fort. Upon all such excursions he was armed with his well−tried crossbow (for which he carried a score of steel−tipped bolts) and a small, but keen−edged dagger that hung at his belt.

After considering Has−se's proposal all the morning, Réné finally decided to accept it, and, without notifying any person in the fort of his intention, to accompany the young Indian to the land of the Alachuas.

In accordance with this plan he gathered together a number of trinkets, such as he knew would be acceptable to the Indians, and during the afternoon he conveyed these to the forest beyond the fort, where he bound them into a compact package and carefully hid them.

Réné could not account, any more than the others, for Has−se's disappearance, nor imagine how his escape had been effected; but he felt certain that the young Indian would be true to his word, and await his coming at the appointed place of meeting when the moon rose above the pine−tree tops.

As it would not rise until nearly ten o'clock that evening, and as his uncle retired early on account of his indisposition, Réné was able to bid him an affectionate good−night and receive his customary blessing without arousing any suspicion of his intended departure in the breast of the old soldier.

Leaving his own quarters about nine o'clock, with his cross−bow over his shoulder, Réné walked with an unconcerned air, but with a beating heart, directly to the main gate of the fort, at which he was challenged by the sentinel on duty there. Réné gave the countersign, and was recognized by the soldier, who, however, firmly refused to allow him to pass.

He said, "I am sorry to be obliged to interrupt thy walk, Master De Veaux; but since the escape of the Indian prisoner last night, we have received strictest orders not to allow a living soul to pass the gates between sunset and sunrise."

Thus turned back at the very outset of his adventure, Réné knew not what to do. Should he attempt to scale the

walls, he might be shot while so doing, and at any rate there was the moat beyond, which he could not possibly cross without detection. Seeking the deep shadow of an angle, the boy seated himself on a gun−carriage and pondered over the situation. The more he thought of it the more impossible did it seem for him to escape beyond the grim walls and meet Has−se at the appointed time.

While he was thus overcome by the difficulties of his position, and as he had about concluded that he had undertaken an impossibility, he was startled, by the deep tones of the great bell that hung in the archway of the gate, striking the hour of ten o'clock. Directly afterwards came the measured tramp of the guard and the clank of their weapons as they made their round for the purpose of relieving the sentinels on duty, and replacing them with fresh men. Réné sat so near the gate−way that he could overhear what was said when that post was relieved, and distinguishing above the rest the voice of his old friend Simon, the armorer, he became convinced that he had been placed on duty at this most important point.

After relieving this post the guard resumed their march, and passed so close to where Réné sat in the shadow of the great gun that, had the night been a shade lighter, they must have seen him. As it was, he escaped detection, and once more breathed freely as their footsteps sounded fainter and fainter in the distance. After a while he heard them return along the opposite side of the fort, and finally halt in front of the guard−house, when silence again reigned throughout the entire enclosure.

As Réné still sat on the gun−carriage, thinking how he might turn to account the fact of his friend Simon being on duty at the main gateway, the sound of a groan came from that direction. As it was repeated, the lad sprang to his feet and walked quietly but rapidly towards the place whence it came. When near the gateway he laid down his cross−bow and advanced without it, until brought to a halt by a sharp challenge in the gruff voice of old Simon.

Réné gave the countersign, and added, "It is I, Réné de Veaux, good Simon. Hearing thy groans, I came to learn their cause. What distresses thee so grievously?"

"Ah! Master De Veaux," answered the old soldier, "I fear me greatly that the fever of the bones with which so many of our men are suffering has at length laid hold on me. I have been warned for some days of its approach, and only a few hours since obtained from good Master Le Moyne physic which, if taken at the outset, prevents much pain. I left it in the smithy near the forge, not deeming the attack so near; but the chill of the night air hath hastened it, and already am I suffering the torments of the rack. Tell me, lad, wilt thou fetch me the phial from the smithy, that I may test the virtue of its contents?"

"Not so, good Simon," answered Réné, whose thoughts had been busy while the old soldier told of his troubles. "I will gladly aid thee, but am convinced that it can better be done in another way. Go thou for the physic, for thou canst more readily place hands upon it than I, and at the same time apparel thyself in garments thicker and more suited to the chill of the night than those thou wearest. I will stand watch until thy return, and pledge thee my word that none shall pass, or be the wiser for thy absence."

All his soldier's training forbade Simon to accept this offer. To desert his post, even though he left it guarded by another, would, he knew, be considered one of the gravest military crimes. Therefore the struggle in his mind between duty on the one side and his sufferings on the other was long and pitiful.

Finally pain conquered. "Well, well, Master Réné," he said, gruffly, "I must e'en take thy advice, and obtain speedy release from this pain, or else be found here dead ere the post be relieved. Keep thou open keen eyes and ears, and I pray that no harm may come of this my first neglect of duty in all the years that I have served the King."

With these words the old soldier thrust his pike into Réné's hands, and hurried away as quickly as his pain would permit towards his own quarters in the smithy.

As soon as Simon was out of hearing, Réné went and recovered his cross−bow. Then he carefully and noiselessly undid the fastenings of the great gate, and swung it open a few inches. This accomplished, he shouldered Simon's heavy pike, and patiently paced, like a sentry, up and down beneath the dark archway, until he heard approaching footsteps.

He called softly, "Is that thou, Simon?"

"Ay, lad," came the answer.

Then laying down the pike, and seizing his own cross−bow, Réné slipped quickly through the gate (which swung to behind him), and with noiseless footsteps fled swiftly across the bridge that spanned the moat, and disappeared in the black shadows of the forest beyond.

Although the moon had risen, and was now well up in the eastern sky, so that the bridge was brightly illumined by it, Réné crossed unnoticed. As the gate was still firmly fastened when he returned, Simon failed to detect that it had been opened, but the old man spent some minutes looking for the lad in the archway before he became convinced that he was gone. Even then he considered that Réné was only endeavoring to tease him by thus slipping away, and muttering something about a boy being as full of mischief as a monkey, the soldier shouldered his pike and once more resumed his measured pacings up and down the archway.

At the edge of the forest Réné stopped, drew from his bosom a note that he had written before leaving his room, and thrust it into the end of a cleft branch that he stuck into the ground near the end of the bridge. It was addressed to his Excellency the Chevalier Laudonniere, Commandant of Fort Caroline, and its contents were as follows:

"MY DEARLY BELOVED UNCLE,−− Doubtless I am doing very wrong in thus leaving the fort and undertaking an important mission without thy sanction. It would seem, however, that circumstances are peculiarly favorable to my success in this matter, and I feared lest thou wouldst forbid the undertaking, out of a tender regard for my youth and inexperience. I go with the Indian lad Has−se, my friend, to the land of the Alachuas, on a quest for provisions for the fort. In case of my success I will return again at the end of a month, or shortly thereafter. If I fail, and return no more, I still crave thy blessing, and to be remembered without abatement of the love thou hast ever extended to me. No person within the fort has aided me in this matter, nor has any one of thy garrison knowledge of my departure.

"I remain, dear uncle, with sincerest respect and deepest love, thy nephew,

RÉNÉ DE VEAUX."

Having thus taken measures to inform his uncle of his departure and the mission on which he had set forth, Réné tightened his belt, shouldered his cross−bow, and turned into the dark pine forest. He made his way swiftly down the river−bank towards the appointed place of meeting, where he hoped to find Has−se still waiting for him, though it was already past the hour that the latter had mentioned. On the way he stopped and recovered the package of trinkets that he had hidden in the forest that afternoon.

As he neared the little stream on the bank of which the Indian lad had promised to await his coming, he uttered the cry of Hup−pe the great owl, which was the signal Has−se had taught him. To his joy it was immediately answered from a short distance in advance. In another moment he stood beside his friend, who without a word led him to where a canoe was hidden beneath some overhanging branches. They stepped in, a few strong

strokes of the paddles shot them clear of the creek, the bow of their craft was turned down−stream, and ere a word had been spoken between them, they were gliding swiftly down the glassy moonlit surface of the greet river towards its mouth.

CHAPTER VI. THE JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF FOOD

AS the paddles flashed brightly in the moonshine, and the light craft in which Réné and Has−se were seated moved swiftly and silently down the broad river, the former related to his companion all the particulars of his leaving the fort, and the delays that had detained him past their appointed time of meeting. As he concluded his story, Has−se, who until then had remained silent, said,

"Thou hast done well, Ta−lah−lo−ko, and thy success at the outset is proof to me that the Great Spirit favors our undertaking."

Réné was not so convinced of this as his companion, for he was not at all certain that he was acting rightly; but he did not seek to disturb the other's confidence, and only said,

"Now tell me of thy escape, Has−se; for I must confess that I would have deemed it impossible, and am not a little concerned to find Fort Caroline such a sieve as thy easy leave−taking would seem to prove it."

Has−se was silent for some minutes, and then he said,

"I would have no secrets from thee, my brother, and would gladly tell thee that thou askest; but I may not now, though at another time my tongue may be loosed. For the present I am bound not to reveal that which must needs be known were the manner of my escape described to thee."

Réné felt somewhat hurt at this answer, which seemed to imply a want of confidence in him; but he knew his friend's character too well to press the subject further, and so, smothering his curiosity, he turned the conversation to other things.

After they had travelled for several miles down the river, Has−se turned the bow of the canoe into a sluggish bayou, that wound, with innumerable turnings, amid vast limitless expanses of salt−marsh. This stream led into others that formed such a maze that it seemed to Réné impossible that they should ever discover a way out of it.

As Has−se kept the canoe to its course, never for an instant hesitating as to which way he should turn, they startled from their resting−places myriads of water−fowl and strange birds, that flew away with harsh notes of alarm. These were answered from the distant forest by the melancholy howlings of wolves and the cries of other night−prowling wild beasts, that sounded very fearful to Réné's unaccustomed ears.

At length their craft was run ashore at the foot of a small shell mound that formed quite an elevation amid the wide levels of the marshes, and Has−se said they would rest there until sunrise. After hauling the canoe well up out of the water, he led the way to a small hut, thatched with palmetto−leaves, that stood half−way up the side of the mound. In it was piled a quantity of long gray moss, that formed a most acceptable bed to the tired boys; and throwing themselves down on it, they were in a few minutes fast asleep.

It seemed to Réné that he had but just fallen asleep when he was awakened by a light touch upon his forehead. Springing to his feet, he found Has−se standing smiling beside him, and saw that the sun had already risen. Running down to the beach, he bathed his face in the cool salt−water, used a handful of moss as a towel, and turned to the breakfast that Has−se had spent an hour in preparing.

When Réné saw what a luxurious repast the ingenuity of the young Indian had provided, he opened his eyes wide in astonishment. He knew that a bag of parched corn and several gourds of fresh water had been brought along, and upon this simple fare he had expected to break his fast. Now, in addition to the parched corn, he saw fish, oysters, eggs, and a vegetable, all smoking hot, cooked to a nicety, and temptingly spread on some freshly cut palm−leaves.

The fish were mullet, that Has−se had speared from the canoe as they swam in the clear water. He had cleaned them, wrapped them in fresh, damp leaves, raked aside a portion of the fire that he had kindled when he first arose, buried them in the hot sand beneath it, and covered the spot with live coals.

The oysters had also come from the water, in a great bunch that Has−se had just been able to lift and carry to the fire. To cook them he had simply placed the entire bunch on the coals, where they had roasted in their shells, which now gaped wide open, offering their contents to be eaten.

The eggs were plover's eggs, of which Has−se had discovered several nests among the tall marsh grass. They also had been roasted in the hot sand, from which the fire had been raked one side.

The vegetable puzzled Réné considerably, for he had never seen its like, and knew not what to make of it. When he asked Has−se what it was, the latter laughed, with the soft, musical laugh, peculiar to his people, and answered,

"Dost thou not know thy namesake, Ta−lah−lo−ko? It is the leaf bud of a young palm−tree, and with us Indians it takes the place of bread when we have neither a−chee" (the maize) "nor koonti−katki" (the starch−root).

It was indeed the tender leaf bud of the cabbage−palm, roasted in its own husk, and to Réné it tasted much like roasted chestnuts.

From the shells on the beach he obtained a small quantity of salt, that had been left in them by the evaporated water of some former high tide. This he wanted for both his fish and his eggs. Then the two boys sat down to their feast, and ate and laughed and chatted, and enjoyed it so thoroughly that one of them at least thought nothing had ever tasted so good to him before.

After breakfast, as there were no dishes to be washed, and nothing to be packed to carry with them, they were able to resume their journey at once. Until nearly noon they were hemmed in by the monotonous salt−marshes; then they crossed a wide sheet of open water, and entered the mouth of a wild, dark river that flowed into it from the west. The rest of that day and most of the next was occupied in the ascent of this river, which ever grew darker and narrower as they neared its source. They worked incessantly at the paddles, and made such speed that Has−se said they must certainly overtake his people before they reached the land of the Alachuas.

Several times during these two days he ran the canoe ashore at places that his keen vision noted as having been the landing−places of other canoes. At each of these places he found the ashes and charred sticks that denoted recent camp−fires, and each time after making such a discovery he returned to Réné with a puzzled and thoughtful expression on his face. His companion noticed this, and finally inquired the cause.

"What troubles thee, my Has−se?" he asked. "Thy looks betoken a worriment of some kind. May I not share it with thee?"

For a few minutes Has−se plied his paddle vigorously and in silence; then he said, more as if thinking aloud than in answer to Réné's question, "Others besides ourselves are in pursuit of my people, and I fear they are enemies."

"What is thy reason for thus thinking?"

"Because I find that each halting−place of Micco's band has been carefully examined after their departure. I have also found the remains of several small but recent camp−fires on opposite sides of the river from theirs, and around them I find the traces of but two men. One of these men is very large, and he wears moccasins that were never made by my people. I fear they are enemies."

"But why should they be enemies?" asked Réné. "May they not be some of thy band left behind like thyself. Or may not one of them be of thy tribe, and the other be one of the guests who attended the Feast of Ripe Corn?"

"That is easily answered," replied the young Indian. "If they were friends who for some reason had been left behind, and were now anxious to rejoin those whom they follow, they could have done so long since. Their fires burned at the same time with those of my people, and they have visited Micco's camps before the ashes of his fires grew cold. Besides, in each case their own fires were carefully hidden, so that they could not by any chance be seen by those who were in advance of them."

"Who, then, can be following so large a band, and for what purpose? Surely two cannot harm so many."

"That I know not, but I fear them to be of the outlawed Seminoles.[*] If so, they are following my people for the purpose of picking up plunder, or of snatching the prize of a scalp−− a thing they could only gain by a cowardly attack upon one defenceless, for they dare not seek it in open fight. Or it may be that one of them is he who has conceived a bitter enmity against those who never treated him with aught save kindness, and that he has joined with him another equally base."

[* Before the Seminoles became the powerful tribe into which they finally grew they were a band of outlaws composed of those who, for some good reason, had fled or been driven from the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and other tribes of the South.−− K. M.]

At this thought Has−se's bright face became clouded, and for some time he remained silent. Finally the silence was again broken by Réné, who asked,

"Who are these Seminoles of whom thou dost speak thus contemptuously?"

"Seminole, in my language, signifies a runaway. They are a band of thieves, murderers, and other bad Indians, who have been driven out of my tribe and other tribes on the north. They have gradually increased in numbers, until now they call themselves a tribe. They are always at war with all men, and against them my people have declared a fight forever."

"And who is he of whom thou speakest so vaguely as having conceived an enmity unjustly against those who have harmed him not?"

"One who should be well known to thee, Ta−lah−lo−ko. I speak of Chitta the Snake, whom I hope we may not encounter."

"It will be the worse for him if we do encounter him, and he ventures to interfere with us," replied Réné, hotly.

"Nay, Ta−lah−lo−ko. I have a feeling within me which warns me that a meeting with the Snake will be a sad one for us," answered Has−se, who, though as brave as a young lion, was inclined to be superstitious, as were all of his race.

During this conversation the course of the canoe had been through a mere thread of a stream, and Réné now noticed that they were traversing the mazes of a dark swamp. The little stream connected a series of stagnant pools or bayous, and just as they came into the open water of one of these they caught a glimpse of another canoe leaving it on the opposite side. Even as they sighted it, it shot in among the trunks of a dense cypress forest, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII. CHITTA BECOMES A SEMINOLE

IN order to account for the presence of the canoe of which Réné and Has−se had caught a glimpse, as it darted in among the black shadows of the cypress forest in the great swamp, we must go back to the night that followed the Feast of Ripe Corn.

After Chitta struck Has−se the blow that stretched him stunned and bleeding on the ground, he sprang into the forest, and gliding swiftly among the stately trunks of the solemn pines, made his way to the river. On its bank were drawn up many canoes, over which Chitta glanced hastily, but with a practised eye. In a moment he selected one that promised to combine lightness with speed, noiselessly launched it, and stepped into it. Grasping a paddle, he headed the stolen craft down the river, and was quickly buried in the mist that rose from its surface.

As the unhappy lad pursued his solitary way down the river, neither knowing nor caring where he was going, so long as he placed distance between himself and those whom he knew would shortly search for him, his mind was filled with bitter reflections. He felt as though he hated all men, but especially Has−se and the white lad, who, he felt certain, had taught the former the trick of wrestling, by means of which the games had been won.

In destroying the great storehouse, with its winter's supply of provisions of his tribe, his desire had not been so much to injure his own people as the white men, whom he knew were also dependent upon it for food, and of whom Has−se's friend was one who would thus suffer. He had thought to escape detection after committing this wicked act, and that the fire would be supposed to be the result of an accident. This hope had been dashed by the unexpected appearance of Has−se, who had overheard his muttered threats; and now he knew that he must be an outlaw from his tribe forever, and that he would meet with a terrible punishment if he ever fell into their hands.

Of all his bitter thoughts the one uppermost in his mind was the desire for revenge upon the gentle but high−spirited Has−se, who had not only won from him his coveted position, but against whom he had just struck such a cruel and cowardly blow.

This is the way of the world, with white as well as with red men, and with boys and girls as well as with grown people. The more we injure a person, the more bitter do we feel against him; and the more we help and do good to him, the more kindly do we feel towards him.

The deep scowl of hate had not left Chitta's face when he ran his canoe ashore at the foot of the high bluff upon which Admiral Ribault had erected the stone pillar engraved with the French coat of arms. Securing his canoe, and carefully concealing it from those who might pass on the river, Chitta made his way, by means of a narrow path through the tangled underbrush, to the summit. From here, by daylight, he would command a view of the river for miles in either direction, and would be able to detect the approach of any who should come in search of him while yet they were a long way off.

As it was still night, and nothing was now to be seen except what was disclosed by the moon, the young Indian gathered together a small heap of moss and leaves, and drawing his robe over his head, flung himself down for a few hours' sleep.

Tired as he was, Chitta fell asleep almost instantly; but it was fully an hour after he had done so that a tall Indian rose, without a sound, from the clump of bushes, concealed by which he had all this time been watching the motionless figure, and cautiously approached it. In his hands the tall Indian held a slender cord of twisted deer−hide, in one end of which was a noose.

Without a movement that could arouse the lightest sleeper, he knelt by Chitta's side, and with great dexterity managed to pass the noose over both his moccasined feet without disturbing his slumber. Drawing it as tightly as he dared, the tall Indian made the other end fast to a sapling, and sat down beside the sleeper to patiently await his awakening.

At length, just as the sun was appearing in the far east, Chitta stirred uneasily, yawned, threw the blanket off from his head, and sat up. As his gaze fell upon the motionless figure beside him he uttered a sort of a gasping cry and sprang to his feet. He had hardly gained them before the noose did its work, and, tripped by it, he fell heavily to the ground. The tall Indian had also sprung to his feet, and now stood over the prostrate form of his victim, with a cruel smile lighting his dark features.

Although wicked, Chitta was no coward, and finding himself thus trapped by an unknown enemy, he coolly asked, as he lay there,

"Who art thou, and what have I done to thee that thou shouldst thus snare me like Pet−che?" (the pigeon).

For answer the tall Indian said, "I will first tell thee who thou art. Thy name is Chitta. Thou wast overthrown but yesterday at the Feast of Ripe Corn by the lad who wears in his hair the To−fa chat−te" (red feather). "Thou art he who set fire to the storehouse of corn. Above all, thou art now, like myself, an outlaw forever from thy people; for know that I am that Seminole called Cat−sha" (the tiger).

At this name Chitta gave a start of surprise, for though he had never before seen this Indian, the name of Cat−sha had been familiar to him from his childhood. It was one used by Indian mothers to frighten their unruly children, and quiet them into obedience, for it belonged to the cruelest, boldest, and most dreaded of all the outlawed Seminoles.

When still a youth, Cat−sha had, in a fit of ungovernable anger, struck one of his young companions a blow, from the effects of which he died. For this he was driven from his tribe, and from that day he had been an outcast, whose hand was raised against all men, and who had become famed and dreaded for his deeds of savage cruelty. He had gathered together and become chief of that band of Seminoles of whom Has−se had told Réné, and under his leadership it was rapidly becoming a scourge to all the more peaceful inhabitants of that country. Knowing all this, it is no wonder that Chitta gave a start of surprise not unmixed with alarm when he learned into whose hands he had fallen.

Evidently gratified at the impression the mere mention of his name produced upon his prisoner, Cat−sha continued:

"For many days have I watched the place of the pale−faces from beyond the great waters. I hate them, and would gladly drive them back into the sea whence they came. It was to learn their strength and discover in what manner they might be most successfully attacked that I came to this place. Thy people, at their feasting and dancing, have I also seen, and I had thought to do with my own hand the deed accomplished by thee last night. Since thou hast relieved me of that labor, I am inclined favorably towards thee, and will spare thy life upon condition that thou renounce forever thy own people and become one of my band."

"Become a Seminole!" exclaimed Chitta, in a tone expressive of dislike and contempt. He had never thought, even amid his wildest schemes for obtaining revenge upon those whom he considered his enemies, to make one

of this band of outcasts.

"Un−cah" (yes), answered Cat−sha, fiercely, angered by the tone of the other; "and why not? Art thou not already an outlaw and a runaway from thy people? Having thus left them forever, to whom else canst thou turn save to the brave and warlike Seminoles? Besides, if thou dost not join us, I will kill thee where thou liest, and none shall ever know thy fate. We Seminoles know but two kinds of men, those who are of us and those who are against us."

Thus Chitta had no choice left him between making one of the band of outlaws whose name was a term of reproach among all good Indians, and meeting with a cruel death, from which he shrank. After a moment's silence he made up his mind, and said, "So be it then, Cat−sha. From this hour call me Chitta the Seminole. From this hour the wisdom of the serpent shall be for them with whom he thus joins his fortunes, and henceforth his fangs shall be held ready for all who are their enemies."

Cat−sha's dark face was again lighted by a cruel smile of triumph as he listened to these words, for he knew that one of Chitta's nature would be a valuable addition to his band. He released his new recruit, helped him to his feet, embraced him, and said,

"Chitta the Seminole, I welcome thee gladly to our number. The time will come when we shall have increased to a great and powerful tribe, and when the name given us by our enemies shall be honored of all men. Let us go."

CHAPTER VIII. ON THE TRAIL

CAT−SHA, the Seminole chief, rejoiced greatly at having gained to his band so promising a young warrior as Chitta, who had so incurred the enmity of both the white men and his own people as to be obliged to fly from them for his life.

After eating together a meal of dried venison that the elder produced from his wallet, the two Seminoles sat, concealed behind a thick cluster of cactus, watching the river for any signs of pursuit, and forming plans for future action. Cat−sha told Chitta that he had left his band in their most inaccessible stronghold among the bayous and deep morasses of the great Okeefenokee Swamp. He also said that, were it not for the presence of so large a number of friendly Indians in the immediate vicinity of Fort Caroline, he should bring his warriors to attack it; for he had decided that the chances were in favor of his success in so doing.

"Ha!" exclaimed Chitta, interrupting his chief at this point, "I may, in that case, be of service to thee, though I am as yet untried in battle." Then he told Cat−sha a secret that was known to but few of his people, and which he himself had only discovered by accident. It was the same that Has−se had declined to confide to Réné when the latter questioned him as to the manner of his escape from the fort, and it was indeed a secret of the utmost value to enemies of the white men.

Cat−sha listened attentively, and when Chitta had finished he exclaimed, "Well done, my young brave! Thy serpent's wisdom is already proving of value to us. What thou hast just told me makes clear our plan of attack upon this nest of pale−faces, and removes one of the chief difficulties in our way. Having this information, I regard the fort and all that it contains as already in our power. We have only to bide our time. Well may the white man tremble; for ere many days the tiger, guided by the serpent, will spring at his throat."

As they talked, their attention was directed to a dark moving mass floating down the river, close under its bank. Cat−sha soon pronounced it to be a fleet of canoes filled with people, and they watched them with eager curiosity.

It was, indeed, the tribe from which Chitta had fled, moving, under the leadership of their chief, Micco, towards the land of the Alachuas, where food in abundance awaited them. At the outset of their journey they kept as close as possible under the river−bank, to avoid observation from the white men in Fort Caroline, who, they feared, might oppose their departure if they learned of it. It was not until they reached the bold bluff from the summit of which the two Seminoles watched their progress that they felt they were safe from the eyes of the fort, and might strike boldly out into the river. Here, aided by the full strength of the ebbing tide, they proceeded rapidly on their way towards its mouth.

Seeing that the canoes which were thus passing beneath them contained, besides the warriors of the tribe, its women and children, and all of its movable property, Cat−sha concluded that it was a general movement of Micco's people towards some distant place; and from the direction they were taking, he guessed that their destination was the fertile land of the Alachuas.

"This is thy doing," he said to Chitta, who was regarding in bitter silence this departure of his people, towards whom he still felt drawn by old association in spite of what he had so recently done and become. "This is thy doing, my young Seminole. Thou hast destroyed their store of food, and thus compelled them to go in search of more. Now let us follow them, and when we have seen them at a safe distance, we will bring my brave warriors to the attack of the white men shut up in yonder gopher hole."

When the departing tribe was nearly out of sight down the river, the two Seminoles, drawing Chitta's stolen canoe from its hiding−place, started in pursuit. They so arranged their own movements that they ran no chance of discovery from those in advance of them, though they were never far behind. They carefully examined each camping−place of the moving tribe, to assure themselves that no person was left behind who might discover them, and they always placed their own little camp so that it should be entirely concealed from those whom they followed.

Cat−sha was much pleased to find that in thus following Micco's tribe he was also journeying in the direction of his own band, who awaited him in the depths of the great swamp. He even meditated an attack upon his Indian foes as they travelled, with their women, children, and baggage, before leading his warriors back to Fort Caroline.

It was these two, then, whose traces had so puzzled Has−se as he and Réné de Veaux in turn followed them, and it was their canoe of which the two boys caught a fleeting glimpse in the great swamp.

"Look!" exclaimed Has−se, whose keen eye was the first to detect the vanishing canoe. "These are either my own people, whom we have thus overtaken, or those whom we know to be in close pursuit of them. Here is work for us, Ta−lah−lo−ko, or rather for me, for it is my duty to discover the meaning of this pursuit, and warn my people if danger is near them, while I am also bound to keep thee as far as possible from all harm."

"Nonsense, Has−se! It is well for thee to keep me out of danger so long as thou keepest from it thyself; but since I have thrown my fortunes with thine, thy friends are my friends, thy enemies are my enemies, and thy safety or danger is mine to share with thee. So say no more of my safety, save as it concerns thine as well, but lead on as thou thinkest best, and I will follow thee as truly as though I were enlisted beneath thy banner. Not that I suppose you Indians have such things as banners, or understand their significance; but thou might well have them, and be none the worse for the having."

Although Has−se made no reply to this brave speech, he accepted it as an evidence of true friendship, and gave Réné a grateful smile, which the latter understood to mean "Very well, Ta−lah−lo−ko, I accept thy offer of service as heartily as thou dost tender it."

Under ordinary circumstances, Has−se's Indian instinct would not have permitted him to cross the open water of the bayou in broad daylight when he suspected that an enemy might be lying in wait for him on its farther side. On this occasion, however, it seemed so impossible that the occupants of the canoe, of which he had caught but the merest glimpse, should have looked back and detected them at the same instant, that he decided to push on, and if possible discover more of it. So he and Réné crossed the open water as quickly and with as little noise as possible, and as they approached its opposite side, Has−se gazed keenly into the dark lanes between the moss−hung cypresses. He neither saw nor heard anything to cause him alarm, and congratulating themselves that they had not been discovered, the boys pushed on over the waters of another extremely narrow stream.

This, to Réné's surprise, flowed, though with an almost imperceptible current, in the direction they were taking, or exactly opposite to that of the river they had ascended from the salt−marshes of the east. As Has−se had requested him to keep absolute silence, and on no account to speak, he restrained his curiosity for the present, but determined to seek an explanation of this phenomenon when an opportunity should offer.

He afterwards discovered that the river they had ascended, and that they were now descending, both rose in the great swamp, and that their headwaters were connected by navigable streams, but that while one flowed east into the Atlantic, the other flowed west into the Gulf of Mexico.

In thus deeming themselves undiscovered by those in advance of them, the boys made an almost fatal mistake. The wily Cat−sha, accustomed to look for danger behind every tree, and almost expecting to hear the war−cry of his enemies in every breath of wind, knew better than to leave open waters without looking behind as he did so. On this occasion the quick glance thrown backward at the instant his canoe entered the shadows of the cypresses detected the gleam of a paddle, and he knew at once that he and Chitta were being followed, even as they were following Micco and his people.

He said nothing until they were safely within the shadows, when he told Chitta of his discovery. The latter advised going into hiding at once, and awaiting the approach of their unknown pursuers; but the more experienced Cat−sha said no, for if they had also been discovered, that was exactly what they would be expected to do, and their pursuers would exercise more than a usual amount of caution in approaching that point. Once safely past it they would advance more boldly, thinking that their own presence had been undetected. He he coming of their unknown pursuers.

Towards this well−planned trap, that seemed to insure their destruction, Réné and Has−se advanced, cautiously, to be sure, but without a warning of what awaited them. At length they had approached within a quarter of a mile of the ambush, and one would have said that nothing could prevent their falling into it.

At this point Has−se whispered, "Keep wide open thy ears as well as thy eyes, Ta−lah−lo−ko"; and Réné answered also in a whisper,

"They are already so wide open that not the faintest hum of a gnat escapes them. What's that?"

The sudden snapping of a twig by some bird or small animal caused them to start, and listen for a moment with uplifted paddles. The canoe thus left to itself, unguided, drifted aside, and hung for an instant upon the upraised end of a sunken log, Réné reached his hand down into the water to push it clear of the obstruction, but suddenly withdrew it with a suppressed cry of pain and fright. At the same moment a large water−snake, of the kind known as a moccasin, glided away, and disappeared beneath the slimy bank.

CHAPTER IX. A TRAP AVOIDED AND FRIENDS DISCOVERED

AT Réné's cry, suppressed though it was Has−se turned quickly, and in time to see the moccasin glide away through the water. He also noted the spot of blood on his companion's finger, at which the latter was gazing with a look of horror.

Without a word the young Indian sprang to Réné's side, drew the little sharp−pointed dagger from its sheath, and firmly but deliberately enlarged with it the minute wound made by the fangs of the snake, until the blood flowed freely from it; then raising the hand to his own mouth, he sucked all that was possible of the poisoned blood from the wound, stopping several times during the operation to rinse his mouth with water.

When this was done he took a handful of slimy river mud and placed it over the wounded place, bidding his friend hold it there. Then, seizing his paddle, he turned the bow of the canoe up−stream in the direction from which they had come. He paddled back to a small lagoon that emptied into the stream, and in which he had noticed a peculiar species of water−lily growing as they passed it on their way down. Pulling a handful of these up by the roots, he selected one of the bulbs attached to them, pounded it until it was a mass of fibre, and washing the river mud from the wounded hand, he replaced it with this.

The hand had already swollen and become very painful, but the application of the bruised lily−root acted so like a charm that Réné's face showed an instant sense of relief, and he expressed his gratitude to Has−se.

"It is nothing to do," replied the other. "It is but the remedy of my people for such things." Then he added, with a sort of pride,

"The pale−faces are wise in many matters that we poor red men know nothing of; but we have at least learned that for every evil there is a remedy close at hand, and that wherever poisonous serpents are found there also grows a plant that will render their poison harmless. In a short time thy hand will be as sound as before it laid hold of Chitta−wewa, the great water−snake."

"'Tis marvellous!" exclaimed Réné; "and if thou wouldst return with me to France, bringing with thee a few of these samples and thy knowledge of their application, thou wouldst become a great medicine−man and obtain much honor of my people."

Has−se only shook his head and smiled at this suggestion; then he said,

"For a time thou must lie perfectly quiet, and keep that upon thy hand wet with cool water. Meantime I will carry out a plan of which I have just conceived the idea. Near by, from the head of this lagoon, there runs a narrow trail by which a great bend in the stream is cut off, and a point much lower down upon it is reached. If thou wilt remain here and nurse thy hand, I will cross to the lower stream by this trail, and it may be that I will thus gain more speedy information concerning those whom we follow."

Réné at once agreed to this plan, and was soon left alone to nurse his hand and meditate upon his present strange position. From his savage surroundings his thoughts ran back to the uncle whom he had left in Fort Caroline to battle with sickness, and possibly with starvation and the upbraidings of his own men. The boy's heart was full of tenderness for the brave old soldier who had so promptly assumed the part of a father towards him; and had he not been restrained by the consciousness of the vital importance of the mission he had undertaken, he would have been inclined to return at once and share whatever trials were besetting the chevalier. From him the boy's thoughts sped to France and the old chateau in which he was born. He almost laughed aloud as he imagined the look of consternation with which old Francois would regard him if he could now see him, lying alone in a fragile craft, such as the old servant had never imagined, in the midst of a terrible

wilderness of great moss−hung trees, queer−looking plants, black waters, and blacker mud.

From these reveries he was suddenly startled by the sound of a slight splash in the water and a subdued human voice. Raising his head very cautiously above the side of the canoe, Réné caught a glimpse, at the mouth of the little lagoon in which his own craft was concealed, of another canoe, in which were seated two Indians. It was headed up−stream, but its occupants had paused in their paddling, and from their gestures were evidently considering the exploration of the very place in which he lay hidden from them. In one of them Réné recognized the unwelcome face of Chitta the Snake, but the other he had never before seen.

With a loudly beating heart and almost without breathing he watched them, thankful enough for the shelter of broad lily−leaves that raised their green barrier in front of him. He was fully conscious that upon the result of the conversation the two were holding, in such low tones that he could not distinguish a word, depended his own fate. He knew, from what Has−se had told him, that Chitta regarded him as an enemy, and he knew also that for his enemies an Indian reserves but one fate, and will kill them if he can.

Thus it was with the feeling that he had escaped a mortal peril, and with a long−drawn sigh of relief, that he saw the discussion come to an end, and the strange canoe continue on its course up−stream. It disappeared in the direction from which he and Has−se had come before encountering the moccasin. Then he became feverishly impatient to leave a place that seemed so full of danger, and he longed eagerly for Has−se's return.

Although Réné watched anxiously for Has−se, he also cast frequent glances towards the stream, fearful lest Chitta and his companion should again appear. Thus he was not looking when his friend emerged from the forest, and did not hear the light tread of his moccasined feet. Nor was he aware of any presence near him, until a low laugh, which so startled him that he almost upset the canoe, gave the first hint of his friend's return.

"Oh, Has−se!" he exclaimed, in a whisper rendered hoarse by his excitement, "glad am I to see thee once more. Chitta is in pursuit of us, and with him is as evil−looking an Indian as ever I saw, but large and powerful withal."

Then he related the whole incident of the appearance of the strange canoe, to which Has−se listened with grave attention.

When Réné had finished he said, "Has−se also has something to tell. Far down the river, on the side opposite the end of the trail, he heard the sound of many voices, and he knows his people are there. Let us go to them."

"But if we venture out into the stream, will not Chitta and the one with him see us ?"

"If they do not until we float on the river, they must prove themselves swifter than Hu−la−lah" (the wind) "to catch us before we reach friends. How is thy hand? Is the sting of Chitta−wewa still painful?"

"Oh! my hand? Why, no; I had no thought of it until now. Thanks to thy application, the pain and the swelling seem alike to have been removed."

"Then let us go, and if it comes to meeting Chitta, we will see if we cannot render his sting as harmless as that of his namesake Chitta−wewa."

Very cautiously the two boys paddled their canoe out from the lagoon, and headed it down the narrow river towards the place where they hoped to find friends.

Having reached the stream in safety, they were about to congratulate each other on their good−fortune, when suddenly a wild scream, such as is made by an enraged panther came ringing down through the dark forest

glade behind them.

"It is the yell of Cat−sha the Tiger, chief of the Seminoles!" cried Has−se. "For the Snake, with the Tiger to aid him, we are no match. If those white arms of thine have strength in them, now is the time to prove it, Ta−lah−lo−ko."

With this the two boys bent over their paddles, and plied them with such energy that their light craft fairly hissed through the water, and flew past the gray, motionless columns of the cypresses. Not far behind came their pursuers, also straining every muscle, and already exulting over the prize that was so nearly within their grasp.

Cat−sha and Chitta had become impatient of waiting in their ambush for those who failed to come, but who they knew had been following them, and they finally decided to cautiously retrace their course in order to learn what had become of them. At the mouth of the lagoon in which Réné had awaited Has−se's return they paused, undecided, for a moment. From the very trail taken by Has−se there branched another, which led to the distant Seminole fastness in the heart of the great swamp. Cat−sha at first thought they would do well to examine this trail; for if it should prove to be some of his own band of whose canoe he had caught a glimpse, he would surely discover traces of them here. Chitta, however, said that those who had followed them might chance to pass on unnoticed while they were in the lagoon. It would be time enough to examine the trail after they had been back as far as the bayou, and made certain that nobody was between them and it. Happily for Réné de Veaux, this counsel had prevailed, and they had gone on up the stream.

It was while on their return from the bayou that they had caught sight of the two boys just leaving the lagoon, and that Cat−sha had uttered his war−cry with such startling effect.

Even at the distance they were, both he and Chitta had seen the Flamingo Feather braided in Has−se's hair, and had also recognized the peculiar costume worn by him whom they knew as the son of the great white chief.

Faster and faster flew the two canoes in their race of life or death down the narrow stream. That of the two boys was the lighter, but the other, impelled by the powerful strokes of the gigantic Cat−sha, kept pace with it from the outset, and at length began slowly to gain upon it. Foot by foot, closer and closer, it came, and as the labored breath of the panting boys came shorter and quicker, while the perspiration rolled in great beads from their faces, it seemed as though they were moving at a snail's pace, and they knew that the unequal struggle could not last much longer.

Suddenly Has−se paused from his labor for an instant, and placing a hand to his mouth, uttered a long, tremulous cry, so wild and shrill that it roused the forest echoes for miles around.

He had hardly resumed his paddle, after a quick backward glance that showed the other canoe to be fearfully near them, when his cry was answered by one precisely similar, uttered only a short distance ahead of them.

In another minute an arrow from behind whizzed so close to Has−se's head that it cut the red feather from his hair, and passing on, it buried itself in Réné's shoulder. At the same instant a canoe filled with Micco's warriors appeared around a point ahead of them, and the two hunted and exhausted boys, seeing it, knew they were saved.

CHAPTER X. MUTINY AT FORT CAROLINE

DURING the progress of the exciting events related in the preceding chapters, troublous times had come to Fort Caroline, on the banks of the Great River of May. Above it hung the three black clouds of starvation,

mutiny, and war.

Before the sudden departure of Réné de Veaux on his journey in search of food, a party of ten men had been sent out by Laudonniere to explore the country to the south of the fort, and discover, if possible, the mountains of gold that were supposed to exist there. For more than a month they had traversed broad sand barrens, crossed deep rivers, and been lost in the mazes of dark swamps. They had discovered rare birds of gorgeous plumage, strange and beautiful flowers, and many wild animals whose nature was unknown to them, but no trace of the gold of which they were in search.

Keenly disappointed, ragged, sick, and hungry, they at length came to a village of Indians who had never seen nor heard of white men, and who fled at their approach. The famished soldiers rushed into the lodges, took whatever they could find to eat, and, building a fire, proceeded to cook for themselves a feast. While they were thus busy, their carelessly tended fire crept to one of the tinder−like palmetto lodges, and in a few minutes more the whole village was in flames.

From their hiding−places in the surrounding forest, the savages, witnessing what they supposed to be a wanton destruction of their property, discharged a cloud of arrows at the white men, by which one was killed and several were wounded. Flying from the place, the wretched soldiers started for Fort Caroline, followed by their unseen foes, from whom they did not escape until four more had paid with their lives for their carelessness. When, some days later, the five miserable survivors of this unfortunate expedition dragged themselves into Fort Caroline, it was only to bring the news of their failure to find gold, of the death of their comrades, and of the fact that they had stirred up all the Southern Indians to war upon the whites.

Laudonniere, who had taken Réné's departure keenly to heart, and who had grieved over the lad as though he were lost to him, had also suffered great anxiety on account of the scarcity of provisions within the fort. Now, added to these troubles, came these latest tidings of ill, and, as a result, the fever against which he was struggling overcame him, and he was confined to his bed.

To many within Fort Caroline the serious illness of their chief brought great sorrow; but others, seeing in it an opportunity for the carrying out of their own plans, rejoiced accordingly. These others were those who were dissatisfied with the present aspect of affairs, and despairing of a change for the better while remaining at Fort Carolina, were secretly planning a mutiny. Its object was to compel Laudonniere to abandon the fort and the New World, and to lead them back to France in a ship which they proposed to build from such materials as they had at hand.

The mutineers were headed by no less a person than Réné's old friend Simon, the armorer. He had always been inclined to grumble and growl, and his feelings had been deeply wounded by being arrested, confined in the guard−house for one day, and finally discharged (because of the necessity for his services), with a sharp reprimand from Laudonniere for having, though unconsciously, aided Réné's departure. The old growler had always secretly sided with the mutineers, and after this he openly took part with them, and soon became their leader.

It thus happened that as the good Le Moyne, who, during the illness of Laudonniere and most of the other officers, was acting as lieutenant in command of the fort, sat writing one morning, there came to him Simon, the armorer, followed by most of the garrison. The old soldier gave a military salute, which Le Moyne returned, and then he said,

"We have come, Master Le Moyne, these good men here and I, to make certain propositions that we desire should be laid before his Excellency the commandant."

"Well," said Le Moyne, in a tone of mild surprise, "have to them without further delay, and return quickly to thy duties."

"It may be," replied Simon, "that we will return not to them at all; at least not in the wise meant by thy use of the word. We are starving."

"Ye have not overmuch to eat, 'tis true," said Le Moyne; "but we hope for better things."

"We are dying of the fever."

"To a certain extent this is also true."

"We are threatened by an enemy."

"And have stout walls behind which to defend ourselves."

"We are abandoned and forgotten, and our bodies will rot in this place ere succor is sent us."

"Admiral Jean Ribault is never the man to abandon or forget those to whom he has promised succor," replied the artist, with a flush of color in his pale cheeks.

"This country yields no gold, and is unfitted for human residence."

"Yet Micco's people live and thrive here, and have a plenty of the best raised from its soil. As for gold, the mere fact that it has not yet been discovered proves nothing against its existence."

Without replying to this, Simon continued: "These be our grievances, and to remedy them we pray his Excellency to allow us to construct here as speedily as may be a vessel such as will suffice to carry us back whence we came. We also pray that he will in person lead us from this evil place back to our own country, always supposing that his health permits."

The goo highly indignant; and but for the extreme weakness which the fever had laid upon him, he would have arisen and gone out to the mutineers. As this was impossible, he sent answer to them that he could not for a moment consider their proposal. He and they had been sent to take and hold possession of that country by their King, and here he should remain until he received other instructions from the same source. As for them, his orders were that they instantly resume their duties, and use all diligence in strengthening the fort, and preparing for an attack which might at any moment be made upon it by the savages from the south.

When Le Moyne returned to the soldiers with this answer, Simon, still acting as spokesman for the rest, said,

"Thy message from the commandant is much as we expected it would be, Master Le Moyne, and in return thou wilt kindly take to him word again that for the preservation of our lives we shall certainly exert ourselves to repel any attack that may be made against the fort. At the same time we shall as certainly take active measures to insure our own and his speedy departure from this unhappy country, in which we have thus far gained naught but ill."

With this speech, and once more giving Le Moyne a stiff military salute, the old soldier turned and marched away, followed by the rest of the mutineers.

As soon as he was once more alone, Le Moyne made his report to Laudonniere, and so excited did the sick man become on hearing it that his fever took a sudden turn for the worse, and he was soon raving deliriously, and

calling upon Réné de Veaux not to desert him for his enemies the Indians.

Meantime matters proceeded so rapidly outside that the keel of a small vessel in which the mutineers hoped to cross the ocean to their own country was laid that very day, and the labor of collecting suitable material for ship−building was entered upon with the fierce energy of men who believed they were working to save their lives.

So actively did this work proceed that in less than a month the hull of the little vessel was completed, and she stood ready for launching.

At this time parties were out in several directions from the fort, some securing pitch from the pine forests for use upon the vessel, others searching the cypress swamps for suitable spars, and still others making unskilled efforts to secure a supply of game and fish for present use, and for salting down to provision their ship during her proposed voyage. These last were the most unsuccessful of all who were out, owing to their limited knowledge of wood−craft. They were at the same time the most anxious to succeed in their quest; for the supply of corn in the fort was now wholly exhausted, and the garrison was subsisting almost entirely upon fish and the leaf buds of the cabbage palm, which they had discovered how to prepare.

On the day that marked a month from the date of Réné de Veaux's departure, the working parties whose duties took them into the forest were suddenly attacked by great numbers of savages, and driven in the greatest confusion back to the fort, after sustaining severe losses in killed and wounded. The advance of the savages, who followed them closely, even up to the very gates, was only checked by a heavy fire of artillery, which so alarmed them that they fled in a panic to the shelter of the forest, nor stopped until they had retreated to a most respectful distance.

Towards evening a body of the enemy were seen gathered in plain view on and about the great shell mound upon which the Feast of Ripe Corn had been held some weeks before. The sight of them so enraged Simon, the armorer, who was now generally recognized as commandant, that he determined to sally forth at the head of a strong party and bring about a decisive battle, which he had no doubt would result in a victory for the whites.

Although he could muster but about fifty able−bodied men, so sadly had fever and lack of proper food ravaged the garrison, the old soldier, who held the fighting qualities of the savages in great contempt, deemed this number amply sufficient for his purpose, and marched forth confidently at their head. They met with no enemy until they had nearly reached the shell mound, and were preparing to charge upon the savages, who still remained gathered about it.

Suddenly the whites found themselves completely surrounded by a great number of Indians, who seemed to spring, as though by magic, from every bush and from behind every tree. So secretly had their approach been made that the first notice Simon and those with him had of the ambush into which they had fallen, was a vast discharge of arrows and spears into their ranks. These were accompanied by such bloodcurdling yells that they affected the white men almost as fearfully as the roar of their own artillery had terrified the savages in the morning.

Rallying from their first panic, they made a desperate attempt to force their way back to the fort, and struggled like men who knew their lives were at stake. In spite, however, of their bravery and the terrible execution of their swords, they were being overpowered by numbers, and it seemed impossible that a single one of them should escape with his life.

As, completely exhausted by the terrible and unequal struggle, they were about giving way to despair, a most welcome and unexpected diversion was made in their favor. A great cry arose beyond the line of savages, and they were so suddenly and fiercely attacked in the rear by an unseen foe that they fled in the utmost terror in all

directions.

Not even waiting to learn who had lent them this most timely aid, the soldiers hastened to regain the fort and seek shelter behind its ponderous gates.

As they did so, they heard, or thought they heard, from the depths of the forest, a clear voice crying, "France to the Rescue! France to the Rescue!" and they marvelled greatly thereat.

CHAPTER XI. RÉNÉ'S RETURN

WHEN Réné de Veaux sank down in the bottom of the canoe, completely exhausted by his labors at the paddle, and by the pain of Chitta's arrow that quivered in his shoulder, he became almost unconscious, and only dimly realized that they had escaped from their cruel pursuers. Then he had a vague knowledge of being lifted from the canoe and borne away, very gently, he knew nor cared not whither, and then he seemed to fall asleep. When he again awoke to an interest in his surroundings, he felt that a soft hand was smoothing his brow, and the air was cooled by a delicious sweet−scented breeze. Opening his eyes, he saw bending over him, and fanning him with a fan woven of fragrant grasses, Has−se's beautiful sister Nethla.

As he attempted to rise she gently restrained him, and bidding him lie still for a moment, she left the lodge. Directly afterwards she returned, accompanied by Has−se, whose face was radiant with joy at seeing his friend once more, and finding him so much better than he had dared hope.

The Indian lad told Réné that those who came so promptly to their rescue upon hearing his call had stopped for a minute upon reaching them to learn who their pursuers were, and how many there were of them. Cat−sha and Chitta had taken instant advantage of this delay to paddle swiftly up−stream and disappear in the depths of the great swamp, where it was impossible to track them, and so had escaped.

The fortunate meeting between the boys and their friends was owing to a scarcity of provisions among Micco's followers, which had obliged them to remain in camp for two days, while the hunters went in pursuit of game to replenish the larder.

The next evening, thanks to the wonderful healing properties of the herbs applied by Nethla to his wound, Réné was able to recline on a soft couch of furs in front of the chief's lodge, near a great fire, and enjoy with the rest the feast of venison, wild turkey, and bear's meat that had been prepared to celebrate the successful return of the hunters.

As he lay there, thoroughly enjoying the feast and the novelty of the scene, Has−se came to him and placed in his hand the Flamingo Feather that had been cut from his hair on the day before by Chitta's arrow. As he did so he said, "This I give to thee, Ta−lah−lo−ko, as a token of friendship forever between us, and for thee to keep in memory of this day. It is a token such as may only be exchanged between chiefs or the sons of chiefs; and if at any time it shall be sent to me or any of my people in thy name, whatever request comes with it from thee must be granted even at the cost of life. Keep the emblem hidden, and wear it not, for that may only be done by the chiefs of my tribe, or those who are sons of chiefs."

As he took the precious feather, and thanked Has−se warmly for the gift and its assurance of friendship, Réné noted with surprise that attached to it was a slender gold chain fastening a golden pin of strange and exquisite make. It was by these that the feather had been confined in Has−se's hair, and it was the cutting of this chain by Chitta's arrow that had loosened it.

In answer to Réné's inquiries Has−se explained that these ornaments came from a distant country in the

direction of the setting sun, where gold was like the sands on the shores of the great salt waters, and whence they had reached his tribe through the hands of many traders.[*]

[* Has−se doubtless referred to Mexico, which was known by the Indians as "The Land of Gold."−− K. M.]

At sunrise on the following morning the journey towards the land of the Alachuas was resumed, and Réné occupied with Nethla a canoe that was paddled by Has−se and Yah−chi−la−ne (the Eagle), Nethla's young warrior husband. The stream down which they floated soon left the great swamp and widened into a broad river, the high banks of which were covered with the most luxuriant vegetation and beautiful flowers. The Indians called it Withlacoochee, but the Spaniards afterwards changed its name to San Juanita (pronounced San Wawneeta), or Little St. John, from which in these days it has come to be known as the Suwanee.

The river contained great numbers of alligators, of which, when they went into camp, the Indians killed many, for the sake of the valuable oil that was to be extracted from the fat embedded in the joints of their tails.

On the second day after Réné and Has−se joined them the tribe reached the land of the Alachuas, a people speaking the same language with themselves, and bound to them by closest ties of friendship. It was a land of broad savannas, studded with groves of magnolia and oak trees, and abounding in springs of the purest water. The clear streams running from these great springs teemed with the finest fish, and the country watered by them was overrun with game of every variety. It was indeed a land of plenty, and from its peace−loving and hospitable dwellers the visitors from the far East received a warm welcome.

On the very day of their arrival they selected the site for the camp, which they expected to occupy for some months. It was in the midst of a grand oak grove, surrounding a crystal spring; and before sunset the slightly built lodges had sprung up as though by magic among its trees, the sparks from the camp−fires gleamed like myriads of fire−flies among the moss−hung branches, and the tribe was at home.

Réné de Veaux, as became his rank, was invited to occupy the lodge of Micco the chief, in which he shared the bear−skin couch of his friend the chief's son and Bow−bearer. Here, during the week that his wound took to heal completely, he rested as happily as though the world contained no cares or anxieties. He spent most of this time in adding to his knowledge of the Indian language, with which, with Has−se and the beautiful Nethla as teachers, he quickly became familiar. Thanks to the glowing descriptions of the power and glory of the white men given by his friends, Réné found himself treated with distinguished consideration by the Alachuas, who regarded him with the greatest interest and curiosity. He was always spoken of by them as the young white chief, and his slightest wishes were gratified as soon as he made them known.

At the end of a week Réné felt sufficiently strong and well to set about accomplishing the mission that had brought him to this pleasant country. Accordingly he sought an interview with the Alachua chief, and displayed before him the trinkets contained in the package that he had so carefully brought with him from Fort Caroline. As the chief gazed with delight and amazement at what he regarded as a most wonderful treasure, but what in reality was only a lot of knives, hatchets, mirrors, and fish−hooks, Réné explained to him the distress of the white men in Fort Caroline, caused by the destruction of their winter's supply of provisions. He then said that if the chief would, out of the abundance of the Alachuas, give him twelve canoe−loads of corn, and send warriors enough to conduct them in safety to the white man's fort on the great river of the East, he would give him the package of trinkets there displayed, and would promise, in the name of his uncle the great white chief, a package of equal size and value for each canoe−load of provisions delivered at the fort. He also pledged his word that the Alachua warriors who should escort the provisions should be kindly treated by the white men in Fort Caroline, and should be allowed to return at once to their own country.

After taking a day to consider this proposal, and to consult with his wise men concerning it, the Alachua chief agreed to accept it, and greatly to Réné's delight the gathering together of the twelve canoe−loads of corn was

at once begun. No difficulty was experienced in procuring an escort for them, for all the young Alachua warriors who had not attended the Feast of Ripe Corn were anxious to visit Fort Caroline, and see for themselves the white men, and the great "thunder−bows," as the Indians named the cannon that stood in its embrasures.

Thus, within two weeks of the time of his arrival in the land of the Alachuas, Réné was ready to set forth on his return to Fort Caroline. With him were to go his friend Has−se, who had obtained a reluctant consent from Micco his father to take the journey, and fifty young Alachua warriors, under command of Yah−chi−la−ne, Has−se's brother−in−law.

The white lad had made many pleasant friendships among these simple people, and it was with feelings of sadness that he bade farewell to the beautiful Nethla, the grave and stately Micco, the good chief of the Alachuas, and many others who had been kind to him, and whom he feared he might never see again.

The little fleet of twenty canoes, twelve of which were heavily laden with corn, started on their long journey at daybreak of a still, cool morning, in the presence of the entire population of Micco's camp, and a great number of the Alachuas who had collected to see them off. In the leading canoe were Réné, Has−se, Yah−chi−la−ne, and a young warrior named Oli−catara (the Bear's Paw). As it shot from the bank, the entire assembly of Indians on shore shouted,

"Farewell, Ta−lah−lo−ko!"

"Farewell to the young white chief!"

"Do not forget us, Ta−lah−lo−ko."

These shouts sounded very pleasantly to Réné, for they showed that he had succeeded in gaining not only the respect but the affection of these kindly people, and he stood up and waved his cap to them until they were hidden from his sight by a bend in the river.

On this journey nothing worthy of note happened until the party had nearly passed through the great swamp, when some of the warriors detected signs that led them to suspect that another party, eastward bound, had passed that way shortly before. The greatest vigilance was now exercised, and every effort made to discover the nature of this party. For some time no further trace of them was found; but among the vast salt−marshes of the coast these efforts were crowned with success. Here two warriors who had been sent to the main−land to examine the vicinity of a fine spring of fresh water returned, and reported that they had found a recently abandoned camp. From unmistakable signs they knew that it had been occupied by a war−party of those Indian outlaws whom they called Seminoles.

This gave Réné great uneasiness, for he feared that since they had received Chitta into their ranks, he had told them of the distress of the garrison of Fort Caroline, and induced them to attempt an attack upon it.

Even as Réné had supposed, and only a day before he and the Alachuas reached that point, Chitta, together with the gigantic Cat−sha, and the band of outlaws whom they had joined in the great swamp, had passed that way. Their object was to surround Fort Caroline, and harass its weakened garrison by cutting off any stragglers who might venture beyond its walls, until they should have so reduced the number of its defenders that it would fall an easy prey into their hands.

Upon arriving in the vicinity of the fort, the Seminoles found there a strong war−party of angry savages from the South, who were also watching for an opportunity to make a successful attack upon it, and thus obtain satisfaction for the destruction of one of their villages by the white gold−hunters. With these savages the

Seminoles joined forces, and Cat−sha, whose fame as a bold warrior had spread over the entire land, was given command of the little army thus formed.

When they made their attack and were driven back from t possible haste in the hope of overtaking them. The Alachuas were as anxious as he to come into contact with their Seminole enemies, and so rapidly did they travel that they finally entered the River of May in time to hear the thunder of guns from the fort when the first attack of the savages was repulsed.

Landing some distance below the fort, and leaving only a few warriors in charge of the canoes, the rest of the little band proceeded with the utmost caution up the river bank until they came in sight of the tall shell mound. Here they remained concealed, while scouts were sent out to discover the exact condition of affairs. Gliding with wonderful ease and silence amid the dense underbrush, these went, and at the end of two hours returned. They had discovered Cat−sha's plan of an ambush, and reported that the white men were even then leaving the fort to attack the shell mound.

Then Yah−chi−la−ne ordered an advance, and dashed forward, with Réné and Has−se close beside him, and followed by his eager warriors. They reached the scene of the conflict just as the white soldiers were about to be overwhelmed by the swarming savages, and in time to pounce upon the rear of the astonished Seminoles, and scatter them like the forest leaves before a whirlwind.

It was while charging by Has−se's side in this, his first battle, that Réné de Veaux gave utterance to the cry of "France to the Rescue!" that had so amazed Simon, the armorer, and those with him who heard it.

CHAPTER XII. ABANDONING THE FORT

ALTHOUGH the Seminoles and their newly made allies, the savages from the South, were thus put to flight by the timely arrival of the party that accompanied Réné de Veaux, it was only because of the surprise of the attack, and because they had no knowledge of the strength of these new enemies, which they believed to be much greater than it really was. It was certain that when they discovered how few those were who had thus surprised them, they would return with the chance of overwhelming the little party by mere numbers. Therefore Yah−chi−la−ne was anxious to deliver the twelve canoe−loads of corn to the fort, receive the promised reward, and depart for his own country that night if possible.

To accomplish this, he and his followers returned as speedily as they could to the place where their canoes had been left, and under cover of the darkness which came on about that time, moved silently as shadows up the river towards the fort. When they reached its vicinity a new difficulty presented itself. They feared to hail the sentries and demand admission lest they should be fired upon, and at the same time draw upon themselves an attack from the savages, who would thus discover their whereabouts.

While they remained undecided as to what plan they should adopt to gain an entrance to the fort, Has−se drew Réné to one side, and in a whisper said,

"Ta−lah−lo−ko, the time has come when I may share with thee the secret of my people. Since thy blood has flowed for my sake, and thou hast received the sacred Flamingo Feather, I am free to do so. First pledge thy word never to deliver this secret, even to those of thy own blood, and it shall be made known to thee."

Réné having satisfied Has−se that the secret should be kept, the latter continued:

"Know, then, oh my brother, that when my people aided thy people to build this fort of thine, they constructed secretly, and by Micco's own orders, a passage beneath one of its walls, by which they might at any time obtain

access to the fort or escape from it, as they might desire. It was by this means that the Sunbeam left the fort when thy people would have held him prisoner within it. It was easy to force a form as slight as mine between the bars of the guard−house window, and once past them I was as free as at this moment."

Réné was greatly surprised at this disclosure of the weakness of the fort, and not a little troubled to learn of it. He asked Has−se if the existence of the passage were known to all of his people.

"No," said Has−se; "to not more than a score of them is the secret known, and they are bound to preserve it as they would their lives. Thou art the first besides them to whom it has been disclosed."

"Well," said Réné, "so long as the passage thou namest exists, we may as well make a use of it. Do thou show it to me, and I will enter the fort by means of it. Then will I seek my uncle and inform him of what has taken place. Thou and the rest shall wait at the water gate, and there deliver the provisions and receive the reward. After that thou and they are free to return to the land of the Alachuas; but, oh, Has−se!" he added, with a burst of sincere affection, "it grieves me sorely to part from thee, for thou art become to me dearer than a brother!"

Then the two returned to Yah−chi−la−ne, who had been somewhat troubled and aggrieved by their long whisperings, which he was not invited to join. He was much relieved when Has−se told him that Réné had discovered a safe way of communicating with his people, and readily gave his permission for the two to depart together in a canoe, promising at the same time to await patiently Has−se's return.

With the utmost caution the two boys approached the fort at a point where its walls extended close to the river's edge. Here, beneath a tangle of wild−grape vines, Has−se removed a great piece of bark that closely resembled the surrounding soil, and disclosing an opening so narrow that but one man at a time might pass it. Leading the way into the passage, that extended underground directly back from the river, he was closely followed by Réné, and the two groped their way slowly through the intense blackness. It seemed to the white lad that they must have gone a mile before they came to the end, though in reality it was but about a hundred yards.

At length Has−se stopped, raised a second slab of bark that rested above his head, and whispered that they were now directly beneath the house of the commandant, which was built on stone piers that lifted it nearly two feet above the ground.

Has−se then lay down in the narrow passage, while Réné crawled over his body, until he was directly beneath the opening. Then giving Has−se's hand a warm squeeze with his own, he raised himself to the surface, leaving the Indian lad to make his way back to those who awaited him outside.

Upon gaining the fresh air once more, Réné found himself, even as Has−se had said he would, beneath a house, and in fact struck his head smartly against one of its timbers before he realized how shallow was the space between it and the ground. Unmindful of the pain of the blow in his excitement, he replaced the slab of bark over the mouth of the tunnel, and crawled on his hands and knees from beneath the building, which, as soon as he passed beyond it, he recognized as that occupied by his uncle Laudonniere.

A profound silence reigned throughout the great enclosure, nor was any light to be seen save a faint gleam that found its way through a crevice in one of the lower window−shutters of the building in front of which Réné stood. He was surprised not to meet the sentry who used formerly to pace always before the dwelling of the commandant; for he knew nothing of the mutiny, nor that all save the sentinels at the gates had been withdrawn. After listening for a moment, and hearing nothing, he made his way to the window from which came the ray of light, and tapped gently upon its shutter. He was compelled to repeat the noise several times before it attracted attention from within. At last he heard the well−known voice of his old tutor, Le Moyne, the artist, who called out,

"What ho, without! Who goes there?"

Making no answer, Réné tapped again. This caused the light to be extinguished and one leaf of the shutter to be cautiously opened, while Le Moyne asked, in a nervous voice,

"Who is here, and what is thy business with me at this hour?"

"Sh!" replied Réné, in a whisper. "It is I, Réné de Veaux. Ask me nothing, but admit me, that I may instantly communicate with my uncle the commandant. I have tidings of the utmost importance for him alone."

Le Moyne had at once recognized the voice of his beloved and long−lost pupil, and with hands trembling with eager excitement, he hastened to throw wide open the shutter and assist him to enter by the window. When he had got him safely inside he embraced the lad fervently, and kissed him on both cheeks. Then he said, "Thy uncle has been ill and is still weak; but if thy business is indeed as urgent as thou representest, I will instantly acquaint him with thy presence, I must, however, break the glad tidings gently and gradually to him, for fear of the effect of an overdose of joy."

So the good man shuffled away in his loose slippers towards the room in which Laudonniere lay, and without his knowledge, Réné followed him closely.

In the commandant's room Le Moyne began with,

"Monsieur, I have a message from the dead."

"Ay, thou wert always a dreamer," replied the sick man, testily.

"Nay, but this time it is no dream, but a living reality."

"Then the dead have come to life, and thou hast had dealings not with them, but with the living."

"It is even so, and he is one very dear to thee, whom thou hast deemed lost."

"What sayest thou?" cried the old chevalier, sitting up in bed in his excitement. "One dear to me, whom I deemed lost, and is now restored? It can be none other than Réné, my son. Where is he? Why tarries he from me?"

"He tarries not, uncle!" exclaimed a glad voice at the door, and in another moment uncle and nephew were locked in a close embrace, while sympathetic tears of joy stood in the eyes of the good Le Moyne.

As briefly as possible, and reserving the details for another occasion, Réné told his uncle that he had visited the land of the Alachuas, and had returned with twelve canoe−loads of corn, for which he had promised in his name twelve packages of trinkets such as he described, and the safe dismissal of their escort from the fort. He added that those who had come with him wished to depart that very night, and even now awaited him at the water gate.

"Alas!" exclaimed Laudonniere, when this had been told him, "I have no longer the power, to make good thy word. While I have lain here as helpless as one struck with a palsy, another has assumed command; for know thou, my dear lad, that Fort Caroline and all it contains has passed into the hands of a body of mutineers, headed by none other than thy old friend Simon, the armorer. Go thou to him, and I doubt not he will treat with these friends of thine even as thou hast promised; for provisions such as thou sayest await even now an entrance to the fort are too rare a commodity within its walls to be scorned, even by mutineers. But, lad, return

to me as speedily as may be, for the sight of thy brave face is as balm to the wounded, and thine absence has distressed me beyond that I can express."

So Réné departed in search of Simon, the armorer, and by his sudden appearance so frightened the old soldier that for some moments he could do nothing but stare, speechless, with a mixture of terror and amazement.

At length Réné succeeded in convincing the leader of the mutineers that he was no ghost, but a real flesh and blood Réné de Veaux. He gave an evasive answer to Simon's question as to how he obtained entrance to the fort, and hurried on to tell him, even more briefly than he had the commandant, of the successful journey he had made, and of the provisions that must be brought into the fort immediately.

"In good sooth, Master Réné," said Simon, when he fully comprehended that which the other told him, "I am heartily disgusted with this mutineering, and if thy uncle would but hold our views as to leaving this country, I would gladly resign all authority to him. Even as it is I am most willing to be guided in all such matters as this of thine by his judgment. As he says receive the provisions, of which indeed we are sorely in need, and deliver the trinkets thou hast promised to the savages who bring them, why so it shall be done. Thou canst vouch for them, though, and art certain that when the gate is once open they will not rush in with the intent of capturing the fort and murdering us in cold blood?"

"Of a surety I am," answered Réné, indignantly. "Would those who wished thee harm have fought for thee so valiantly as did these same friends of mine but a few hours since? It was their brave onset delivered thee from the savages near yonder mound of shells, and enabled thee to gain the fort in safety."

"What! How sayest thou! Was it indeed thy company who came so gallantly to our aid when we were so sorely beset by the savage ambush? Heaven bless thee, lad! These friends of thine shall be friends of mine as well for this day's work. Let us hasten to them. It was no fancy, then, but thine own brave cry of 'France to the Rescue!' that rang so cheerily through the forest, though I did misdoubt mine own ears at the time, and wondered greatly who our unknown friends could be. Thou art a noble lad and an honor to thy name."

Thus saying, Simon led the way towards the water gate, turning out the guard and bidding them accompany him as he went. At the gate they found Has−se, Yah−chi−la−ne, and the others awaiting them, according to agreement, and Simon and his soldiers rejoiced greatly when they saw the twelve canoe−loads of corn; for it had arrived just in time to avert a veritable famine within the walls of Fort Caroline.

While under Simon's direction the provisions were transferred to the storehouse with all possible despatch, Réné and Le Moyne made up the twelve packages of trinkets which were to pay for them. On his own account Réné also made up a package for Has−se, and another of such things as women prize for his sister, the beautiful Nethla. Nor was the brave Yah−chi−la−ne forgotten, but received in the shape of knives and hatchets what seemed to him presents of inestimable value.

Réné also gratified the young Alachua warriors by taking them inside the fort, and showing them, as well as he was able by the light of lanterns, the great "thunder−bows" whose voices they had heard that morning when still many miles away.

It was past midnight before the visitors were ready to depart, and then Réné and Has−se bade each other farewell with swelling hearts", for they had learned to love each other more dearly than brothers, and they feared they might never meet again.

One by one the canoes of the Alachuas glided away from the water gate noiselessly as so many thistle−downs, and were instantly lost to view in the night mist that hung like a soft gray curtain over the whole river. Réné watched the last one depart, and then going to his own room, he flung himself on a couch and was almost

instantly buried in a profound slumber, so thoroughly exhausted was he by the exciting labors of the previous day.

The morning was well advanced when he awoke. For some moments he stared about him in bewilderment, unable to account for the absence of the open−air surroundings of his late life. As soon as he realized where he was, he sprang up, dressed, ate a hurried breakfast, and went to his uncle's room.

He found the commandant feeling so much stronger and better that he was sitting up for the first time in weeks, and, in a large easy−chair by the window, was impatiently awaiting his nephew, A look of great joy lighted up the old soldier's face as Réné entered the room, and he blessed Him who had once more restored to him this son of his old age. Then they talked, and several hours had slipped away before Réné had related all the details of his remarkable journey through the unknown wilderness of the interior, and Laudonniere had in turn given all the particulars of the mutiny, and made clear the present state of affairs in Fort Caroline.

At the conclusion of Réné's story his uncle said, "Thou hast carried thyself like a man, my lad, and like a true son of our noble house. The successful issue of thy undertaking also insures thee a pardon for the manner in which thou didst set about it. I must warn thee, however, that unless thou choose to be considered a mutineer or a rebel, never again take upon thyself the ordering of such a matter when under command of a superior officer."

Réné hung his head at this mild rebuke, and promised his uncle that his future actions should be entirely guided by him, so long as they sustained each other the relations they now bore.

He was amazed and troubled to learn of the plans of the mutineers in regard to abandoning the fort, and begged his uncle's permission to remonstrate against such a proceeding with Simon, the armorer. It being granted, he held a long and serious conversation with the old soldier, but to no avail.

"It is of no use, Master Réné," the armorer said, in his gruffest tones, but not unkindly, for he felt a strong affection for the lad, as all did who knew him−− "it is of no use arguing at this late day. We have fully determined to leave this country of starvation and misery, and at least to make an effort to lay our bones in fair France. Our ship is ready for launching, and the provisions thou hast so bravely fetched will serve to victual her. We no longer dare to show our faces outside the walls of the fort, for the forest is full of red savages who thirst for our blood; and if we remain here much longer we shall die like rats in a trap. So put you the best possible face on the matter, young master, and lend us thine aid in preparing for departure."

Although Réné could not do this and still remain loyal to his uncle, he could and did prepare the chevalier for the abandonment of the fort that was so fully determined upon, and he rendered the latter valuable service in gathering together and packing his important papers for immediate removal.

The newly built vessel, which was at best a poor affair in which to undertake so tremendous a journey, was launched, and so speedily equipped, that within two weeks from the time of Réné's return she was pronounced ready for sea, and the business of getting her stores on board was begun. It proceeded so rapidly that in one week more Fort Caroline was dismantled of everything except its heavy guns and other ponderous articles that must be left, and the day for departure was set.

Soon after daylight, one fine morning early in the new year, the garrison marched on board the vessel. Laudonniere, protesting to the last, and accompanied by his nephew and by the faithful Le Moyne, was carried on board. Then the sails were spread to a gentle breeze, and the little company, who had only a few months before built the fort with such brave hearts and high hopes, sailed away from it, leaving it to its fate, though with the broad banner of France still floating above its walls. They expected, and even hoped, never to see it again, and even the terrible voyage they were about to undertake in a small and crazy craft seemed to them less fearful than a continuance of the life from which they were escaping.

The only farewells sent after them came in the shape of a few arrows shot at the ship by the angry savages who lined the river−bank, and sullenly watched the departure of their intended victims.

That day they sailed to the mouth of the river, but found so great a sea rolling in over its bar that they dared not attempt a passage through it, and were therefore forced to drop anchor while still within shelter of the land, and await its abatement.

CHAPTER XIII. ARRIVAL OF JEAN RIBAULT

AS the fugitives from Fort Caroline lay inside the mouth of the River of May, awaiting the calming of the great seas that broke in columns and hills of foam on its bar, and for a favorable wind with which to put out to sea, they attempted to strengthen their crazy vessel and render her more seaworthy. Already her seams, calked with moss and pitch, had opened in so many places that she leaked badly, and only constant labor at the pumps kept her afloat.

Laudonniere had no hope of a successful termination of their voyage, and as he shared his fears with Le Moyne and Réné de Veaux, these three found little consolation in the thought of leaving the river and embarking upon the turbulent sea that promised them only a grave. They had no choice, however, but to go on with the rest; for to remain behind would be to fall into the hands of the savages, and thus meet with a more terrible death than that offered by the sea.

For several days they awaited the opportunity to depart, and at length it came. The great waves subsided, the wind blew from the right quarter, and spreading all their sorry showing of canvas, the little band of white men carried their vessel over the bar, and putting boldly out to sea, bade farewell, as they thought forever, to the shores on which they had suffered so greatly.

But other things were in store for them, and their voyage was soon brought to an end; for, as they were fast losing sight of the land, and it showed only as a low−lying cloud in the west, the ship suddenly rang with the thrilling cry of "Sail, ho!" All eyes were eagerly turned to the white speck seen far away to the southward, and its probable character and nationality were anxiously discussed. Many felt confident that it was one of the ships of Admiral Ribault, bringing the long−expected reinforcements, but as many more felt certain that it was a Spanish ship. If it should prove to be the latter they could expect only death or cruel captivity, for, being Huguenots, they knew that no mercy would be shown them by the Spanish Catholics.

As they watched the sail with straining eyes it was joined by another and another, until they beheld a goodly fleet bearing down upon them. Only constant labor at the pumps kept their own wretched craft from sinking, as she crept on at a snail's pace compared with the rapid advance of the on−coming fleet, and those on board of her knew that in any case flight was impossible. Nor were they in a condition to defend themselves against an attack from even the smallest of the approaching ships. Therefore there was nothing left for them to do but pray that those who came might prove friends and not enemies.

At length Laudonniere, whose cot had been brought on deck, pronounced that by their rig and general appearance the ships they watched were not French. Upon this a feeling of dull despair seized upon all who heard him, for they thought, if not French, they must certainly be Spanish ships.

In a moment, however, this despair was changed into the wildest joy, for from the main−mast−head of the foremost ship there flew out upon the freshening breeze, not the cruel yellow banner of Spain, but the brave blood−red ensign of England.

Shouts of welcome burst from the throats of Laudonniere and his men. They danced about the deck as though

crazed by the thoughts of their great deliverance, and most speedily they ran to their own mast−head the lily banner of France. Its appearance was the signal for a roar of kindly greeting from the cannon of the leading English ship, which was soon afterwards hove−to at a distance of less than half a mile from them.

The English fleet proved to be that of the brave Sir John Hawkins, the bluff old sea−king whose very name was a terror to all Spaniards. He was on his way back to his own country from one of the famous cruises to the Spanish Main and the West Indies that were even then making him world−renowned. He had captured many Spanish ships laden with treasure in gold and silver from the mines of Mexico and Peru, and when he learned of the sad plight of the Chevalier Laudonniere and his people, he promptly offered to give them a ship in which they might safely undertake a voyage to their own country. Moreover, when he was told how slender was their store of provisions, he furnished the ship which he was about to give them with a supply of food that would last them for several months.

In the name of King Charles IX of France, Laudonniere, who had again assumed command of his little company unquestioned by the mutineers, thanked the brave Englishman for his great kindness to them, and accepted his generous gifts. Then the English fleet, with a parting salute from its loud−mouthed cannon, bore away and resumed its homeward voyage. At the same time the Frenchmen started back for the River of May, where, under shelter of the land, they proposed making the transfer of their property from their own crazy craft to the stout ship which they had received from the English admiral. Thus it happened that the sunset of that eventful day found them in the very same place from which they had so willingly departed that morning, and had never expected to see again.

At this time Laudonniere made another earnest effort to induce his men to return to Fort Caroline, and there await patiently the arrival of Jean Ribault, now that they had a supply of provisions and a good ship, but to no avail.

Simon, the armorer, expressing the sentiments of all the rest, save only Le Moyne and Réné de Veaux, said,

"What with fightings and fevers, we are in no condition to drive out the savages who have doubtless ere this entered into full possession of Fort Caroline. If we did regain the fort, what could we do save remain there until this heaven−sent store of provisions should be exhausted? and then would we not be in as sad a plight as before? No, your Excellency, let us return to our own land while we may, and not linger here longer in the hope of succor which seems likely never to be sent."

So Laudonniere, having numbers against him, was forced to accept the situation as he had done before, and the work of transfer from one vessel to the other proceeded rapidly.

When it was accomplished, and they were ready to start on their second venture, the elements were again against them, and for a week they were confronted by an impassable wall of foam−crested billows, breaking and roaring upon the bar in the most tumultuous confusion.

Late one afternoon, when their patience had become well−nigh exhausted by this tedious delay, all hearts were thrilled by the report of a fleet of ships seen far out at sea, but approaching the land. An anxious night followed, for again were the members of the little band torn with conflicting fears and hopes. Were the ships French, English, or Spanish? Daylight only could bring an answer to the question.

At length it came, and as the sun rose, its earliest beams fell upon seven tall ships riding easily at anchor outside the bar. From each was displayed in the golden light the fair lily banner of France.

At this glorious sight there was indeed joy on board the ship of Laudonniere. At last the long−looked−for reinforcements had come. There was no more talk of mutiny, nor of abandoning the country. Now the cry was,

"Ho for Fort Caroline, and destruction to the savages!"

Crowding all sail upon their newly acquired ship, and with its guns firing salutes of welcome, and banners flung to the breeze from every point, they sailed out over the still tumultuous bar to greet the new−comers from their own land. It was indeed Admiral Jean Ribault and his fleet of succor for the little colony. On board his flag−ship Trinity, a joyful meeting took place between him and his trusted lieutenant, the brave Laudonniere, who, supported by Réné de Veaux and Le Moyne, found strength to carry himself thither.

The admiral was highly indignant when he heard of the mutiny, and would have punished the mutineers severely had not Laudonniere pleaded for them, giving their sufferings and their despair of the arrival of reinforcements as their excuse.

The closest attention was paid to the tale of the brave deeds of Réné de Veaux. At its conclusion the admiral sent for him, and caused him to blush as ruddily as his sun−tanned cheeks would permit, by highly commending the courage and wisdom he had displayed on his journey to the land of the Alachuas. In conclusion the admiral said, "Did thy years warrant it, thou shouldst receive thy knighthood, for never did squire more worthily earn it. For the future thy welfare and speedy promotion shall be the especial charge of Jean Ribault."

For such words as these from such a man, Réné felt that he would gladly face, singlehanded, the whole Seminole band; and for the rest of that day he conceived himself to be the happiest boy in the world.

Only one of Admiral Ribault's ships was of such light draught as enabled her to cross the bar, and so this one, with that of Laudonniere, was obliged to transfer all the newly arrived colonists and supplies to Fort Caroline. This labor occupied many days, for the three hundred new colonists had brought with them a vast amount of provisions, munitions of war, tools, and articles of every description necessary for the building and equipping of other forts in the New World, and all this had to be brought in over the bar and carried up the river.

When the newcomers first caught sight of the fort they were grievously disappointed to see it dismantled and deserted. As they approached it more closely they obtained a glimpse of a few savages who were still searching for plunder within its walls, and from these they gained their first impressions of the inhabitants of the New World.

Réné was made very happy by the return to the fort, for he said to himself, "It will soon be time for Micco's people to come again to their own hunting−grounds. Then I shall again see Has−se, and mayhap I shall be able to persuade him to go with me some day to France."

His thoughts were soon to be of other things, for even at this time a terrible storm which had long been gathering was about to burst upon this little band of Huguenots. Even as they busied themselves so happily in restoring their fort and planning a settlement that should flourish forever as a refuge for the persecuted of their religion, a powerful enemy, and one who was even more cruel than powerful, was on the way to destroy it and them. Don Pedro Menendez, with a fleet of thirty−four ships and three thousand troops, had been sent out to the New World by the King of Spain. He was ordered to take and hold possession of all the country then known as Florida, which extended as far north as the English settlement in Virginia, and had no western limit. He was to build a fort and found a city; but first of all he was to discover and destroy the colony of heretics who were reported to have established themselves within this territory.

Soon after Ribault's coming the Spanish fleet arrived on the coast, and sailing northward they discovered the French ships, late one afternoon, lying at anchor off the mouth of the River of May. At midnight they too came to anchor within hailing distance of the French fleet, and a trumpet was sounded from the deck of the San Palayo, the Spanish flag−ship. It was immediately answered from the Trinity, and from the deck of his own

ship Menendez inquired, with great courtesy,

"Gentlemen, whence comes this fleet?"

"From France," was the reply.

"What is its object here?"

"To bring men and supplies to a fort that the King of France has caused to be built in this country, and to establish many more in his name."

"Be ye Catholics or heretics?"

"We be Huguenots, and who be ye who askest these many questions?"

Then came the bitter answer, "I am Don Pedro Menendez, admiral of this fleet. It belongs to the King of Spain, his Majesty Don Philip II, and I am come to this country to destroy all heretics found within its limits, whether upon sea or land. I may not spare one alive, and at break of day it is my purpose to capture your ships and kill all heretics they may contain."

Upon this Ribault and his men interrupted the proud Spaniard with taunts and jeers, begging him not to wait until morning before putting his threat into execution, but to come at once and kill them.

So greatly did this provoke the Spanish admiral that he ordered his captains to cut the cables of their ships, and make an instant attack upon the French fleet, though the night was intensely dark. He was so enraged that he rushed about the deck of his own ship like a madman, and assisted with his own hands in forwarding the preparations for battle. In a few minutes the entire Spanish fleet bore down upon the six French ships; but the crews of these had not been idle, and before their enemies could reach them they too had cut their cables, hoisted sail, and stood out to sea. For the rest of the night the Spaniards chased them, but Ribault's superior seamanship soon placed him at a safe distance from the pursuers, who at daylight gave over the chase and turned back towards the River of May, intending to make an attack upon Fort Caroline.

In the meantime word had been sent to the fort by Admiral Ribault of the coming of the Spanish fleet, when it was first sighted, and Laudonniere had collected his entire force at the mouth of the river, and planted there a number of heavy guns. Here he proposed to dispute the landing of the enemy, and if possible to prevent his crossing the bar, just inside of which he had anchored his two small vessels, so that their guns commanded the narrow channel.

When Menendez returned from his unsuccessful pursuit of Ribault's ships, and saw these warlike preparations, he felt that it would be unwise to attempt to land his troops through the surf, or to force the passage of the bar, and so he ordered his captains to proceed southward to the River of Dolphins. When it was reached, the smaller vessels crossed the bar at its mouth, and came to anchor opposite the Indian village of Seloy, where Réné de Veaux had first set foot upon the soil of the New World, and where he had received the name of Ta−lah−lo−ko.

Here Menendez determined to build his fort, and found a city which he hoped to make the capital of a great and glorious kingdom, and from which he proposed to conduct operations against the Huguenots of Fort Caroline. On the day after his arrival he landed with the greatest pomp and ceremony, and claimed possession of the country in the name of the King of Spain. As he did so all the cannon of the ships lying in the river were discharged at once with a mighty roar, which was answered by a distant booming from those anchored far out at sea. At the same time all the trumpets were sounded, and the air was filled with the exulting shouts of the soldiers, and with hymns of praise chanted by a great company of priests. At the same moment the great stag

that stood in front of the council−house of the Indians was torn down from the tall pole on which it was uplifted, and the cross was raised in its place.

So terrified were the simple−minded Indian inhabitants of the village by this sacrilege, and the great noise of the rejoicings, that they knew not which way to turn or flee, until they were seized by the brutal soldiers, and either killed or set to work with the negro slaves brought from the West Indies in throwing up fortifications. After thus taking possession of the country, Menendez proclaimed that the new city, founded upon the smoking blood−stained ruins of the pleasant little Indian village of Seloy should be called "San Augustin," which name it bears to this day, and that the River of Dolphins should be thereafter known as the "San Augustin River."

When the bewildered chief of the Seloy Indians found that these strange white men were about to destroy his village, he made a bitter protest against their cruelties; but he was no more regarded than if he had been a barking dog. They would have killed him, but he gathered together a few of his chosen warriors, and with them fled for protection to his white friend Laudonniere, at Fort Caroline, which place he reached the next day.

He had some difficulty in gaining admittance to the fort, for since its attack by the Seminoles its garrison were suspicious of all Indians, and had it not been for Réné de Veaux he would have been driven away. Réné happened to be near the gate when the sentinel challenged the newcomers, and recognizing the good old chief who had been so kind to him, and whom he knew to be a friend of his uncle, ordered the sentry to admit these Indians, at the same time pledging his own word for their good faith.

When Réné learned the importance of the tidings brought by these fugitives, he at once conducted the chief to Laudonniere, on whom the fever still retained such a hold as to confine him to his room.

The poor old chief told his pitiful tale to Laudonniere, and begged his powerful aid in driving away these wicked white men, who had treated him so differently from all others who had landed at his village. Promising to do what he could, Laudonniere at once despatched a messenger down the river to Admiral Ribault, who had returned with his ships and again lay at anchor beyond the bar.

In answer came an order for all the fighting men of Fort Caroline to join the fleet immediately, as the admiral proposed to sail southward and attack these impudent Spaniards ere they had time to erect fortifications, or so strengthen their position that to attack it would be useless.

Then came a time of tremendous bustle and excitement within the fort. There were men hurrying hither and thither gathering their weapons, women and children screaming and crying−− for many of these had been brought out with the new colonists−− and dogs barking.

Réné de Veaux begged his uncle to permit him to accompany the fighting men, but Laudonniere said "No," that the order did not include boys, and he could be of greatest service by remaining within the fort.

So the fighting men marched away to join the fleet, leaving Fort Caroline to be defended only by the old, the sick, the women, and the children. Besides the commandant and Réné de Veaux, among those who remained behind were Le Moyne, the artist, and old Simon, the armorer, to whom was given the command of the guard.

CHAPTER XIV. A NIGHT OF TERROR

IMMEDIATELY after landing Menendez and his soldiers, with their supplies, at San Augustin, the ships of the fleet, which on account of their size had been unable to enter the river, sailed away for Spain, leaving only a few small vessels at anchor inside the bar. Thus apparently all was favorable to the bold enterprise of Admiral Ribault, who, with his six ships, and all the troops from Fort Caroline, had determined to attack, and if possible

to destroy, the newly founded city before it could be fortified.

When he arrived off the mouth of the river the tide was so low on the bar that his ships could not pass it. So they stood off and on, waiting for it to rise, and the Spaniards on shore, seeing them, were filled with great consternation. Of a sudden, almost without warning, there came a terrible blast of wind out of the north−east. It was followed by another and another, until such a gale was raging as had never been seen by white men on that coast. In vain did the French ships struggle against it, and against the huge billows that towered as high as their tallest masts. They could do nothing against its fury, and soon the Spaniards were filled with joy at seeing them drift helplessly down the coast towards certain wreck and destruction.

Then Menendez made up his mind, in spite of the terrible gale, to march overland to the attack of Fort Caroline, thus deprived of its defenders. Followed by five hundred picked men, he set forth, and for three days, beaten and drenched by the pitiless storm, he wandered through over−flowed swamps and tangled forests. He had compelled several of the Seloy Indians to go with him and act as guides; but finally, believing that they were purposely leading him astray, he put them to death with great cruelty, and trusted to his own knowledge to lead him to the great river. At length he reached it, and following its course, came during the night to a high bluff, from which he looked down upon the few twinkling lights of Fort Caroline beneath him.

Meantime the raging of the elements had caused the greatest anxiety to those who remained within the fort, for they were fearful of its effect upon the ships of Admiral Ribault; and though they of course knew nothing of their fate, they were already beginning to regard them as lost.

Under Simon, the armorer, as captain of the guard, Réné de Veaux had done duty with the few old men and invalids who were pressed into service as sentinels, and he had manfully shouldered his cross−bow, and paced the walls through many long hours of storm, rain, and darkness. Although, in his pride at thus performing the duties of a real soldier, the boy allowed no word of complaint to escape him, he felt what the others expressed openly−− that this guard duty, now that the Spaniards and savages had departed, and in the midst of a storm so terrible that it did not seem possible for mortals to face it, was an unnecessary hardship. So when, towards morning of the fourth night, after two hours of wearily pacing the walls in the cold, drenching rain, he was relieved, and flung himself, all wet as he was, upon a couch in his own quarters, he determined to remonstrate with Simon upon the subject.

In spite of his feelings, Réné had been absolutely faithful to his duty, which, alas! the soldier who relieved him was not. After a few turns upon the parapet, during which he neither saw nor heard anything to disquiet him, this sentinel sought shelter from the beatings of the storm in an angle of the walls, where he soon fell into a doze.

Even then the Spaniards were at the gates, awaiting the signal to make an attack. It was given, and Réné had hardly dropped into a troubled sleep when he was rudely awakened by a crash, a rending of wood, the wild scream of agony with which the unfaithful sentinel yielded up his life, and the triumphant yells of the enemy, who had forced an entrance through the little unguarded postern−gate.

Réné sprang to the door, and for an instant stood motionless, petrified by terror at the awful sights that greeted his gaze. Already flames were bursting from many of the tents and barracks, and by the light thus given he saw men, women, and children, almost naked as they had sprung from their beds, flying in every direction before the pitiless Spaniards. Wherever they turned the fugitives were met by long pikes, gleaming swords, and keen daggers, and above the howlings of the storm rose their shrill screams of terror and quickly stifled cries of mortal agony.

For an instant only did Réné gaze upon these awful scenes, and then, remembering his uncle, he rushed to the commandant's dwelling which the Spaniards had not yet reached. He found, Laudonniere, pale and trembling,

but as calm and collected as becomes the brave soldier even in the presence of death, standing beside his bed, while the faithful Le Moyne endeavored to assist him into his armor.

Breathlessly Réné explained that there was no time to lose, and no hope of saving the fort. "All is lost!" he cried, "and if ye would save your own lives, follow me without an instant's delay. I, and I alone, know of a way of escape."

It was only then that Réné had bethought himself of the underground passage of which Has−se had taught him the secret.

Reassured by his confident words, the two men followed him out of the house, and to their great surprise were led beneath it among the stone piers of its foundations. They were not a moment too soon, for as they disappeared, some Spanish soldiers, who had learned that this was the dwelling of the commandant, burst into it with savage cries, and proceeded to search its every corner in the hope of capturing the greatest prize of all in the person of the Huguenot leader.

Their hour of triumph was imbittered by not finding him, for even as they searched his chamber he, preceded by Réné de Veaux and followed by Le Moyne, the artist, was making his way through the narrow tunnel beneath them towards the river−bank beyond the walls of the fort.

So surprised was Laudonniere at this underground passage leading into the very heart of his fort, of the existence of which he had never until that moment even dreamed, that when they emerged on the river−bank he forgot all else in his curiosity concerning it.

"Whence comes this passage that has proved of such wonderful service to us, and how came thou by a knowledge of it?" he asked of his nephew.

Even then Réné would not betray the solemn promise of secrecy given to Has−se, but answered,

"Let us not now stop to talk of these matters, I pray thee, oh mine uncle. Thy precious life is still in great danger. Let us first perfect thy escape, and another time I will answer thee concerning this secret passage. For the present I beg of thee to make thy way, accompanied by the good Master Le Moyne, as speedily and secretly as may be, down the river to its mouth, where do still lie the two small ships left behind by Admiral Ribault. Let me, who am young, strong, and active, tarry here for a short time, that perchance I may aid others of our people to effect an escape by means of this same tunnel. I will delay but shortly, and will overtake and rejoin thee long ere thy feebleness shall have permitted thee to reach the river's mouth."

Although Laudonniere was most reluctant to part with his nephew at such a time, he deemed that it would be an exhibition of selfishness on his part to compel his attendance upon himself when it was possible that by remaining he might save the lives of some of the unfortunates within the fort. Therefore he reluctantly gave his consent that Réné should remain behind for a short time, but charged him not to unnecessarily expose himself to danger. Then both men embraced the lad fervently, gave him their blessing, and departed, full of the hope of speedily meeting with him again−− a hope that was destined to be sadly deferred.

After their departure Réné again entered the tunnel and made his way back to its inner terminus. There he cautiously drew himself up from its mouth, crept to the edge of the building beneath which it lay, and watched and listened for what he might discover.

He had not been there a minute when he was startled by hearing a smothered groan close at hand. Listening attentively, he heard it again; and feeling confident that he who uttered it must be one of his own countrymen, he began to creep carefully, and without betraying his presence by the slightest sound, in the direction from

which it proceeded. At length he heard a third groan, so close to him that he instinctively drew, back for fear of coming into contact with the person who uttered it. Then, in the lightest of whispers, he inquired,

"Who is there? I am Réné de Veaux."

For answer came the whisper, "Heaven help thee, Master Réné, if thou art in like plight with myself! I am thy old friend Simon, sorely wounded, and with no hope save that of falling into the hands of these fiends of Spaniards when daylight shall enable them to make a thorough search of the premises."

"Cheer up, good Simon, and speak not thus dolefully," whispered Réné. "If thou canst walk, or even crawl, I can save thee. Where lies thy wound?"

"Not so that it interferes with my crawling or even walking; for though it seems to lie in several portions of my body at once, it affects not my legs. If thou hast knowledge of a chance of escape, however slender, lead on, and I will gladly follow thee, for hopes I have none in remaining here."

So Réné guided Simon very slowly and cautiously to the mouth of the tunnel. Through it the old man forced his way, and with much difficulty and many groans, until he too reached the river−bank in safety, and was sent on to join Laudonniere and Le Moyne, and with them to make an effort to reach the ships.

Then once more did the brave lad make his way back through the narrow tunnel and to the outer edge of the house above its inner entrance. Here, as before, he listened and awaited in the hope of discovering other unfortunates whom he might aid to escape.

As he lay there watching, he listened with a swelling heart to the triumphant songs and shouts of the Spaniards, and the cries of the victims, whose hiding−places were still occasionally discovered, and who were instantly put to death. Suddenly the smouldering embers of a fire near by were fanned into a momentary blaze that caused him to withdraw hastily beneath the building lest he should be discovered. As he did so his eye lighted on a pile of books and papers that had been tossed from the windows of the building beneath which he was concealed. Even in that glance he recognized them as belonging to his uncle, and being the same that he had helped to pack when the fort was abandoned.

Realizing their importance, and despairing of being able to afford further aid to any of the recent occupants of the fort, Réné determined to attempt to save these papers. It was a bold undertaking, for to reach them he was obliged to leave the shelter of the building and advance some distance into the open, where at any moment he might be revealed to his enemies by flashes of firelight from the smouldering timbers near by. Fully realizing the risk he ran, but undismayed by it, the brave boy made several trips to and from the pile of books and papers. He had removed nearly all of them to the tunnel, which he felt to be the only safe place for them, when he suddenly became aware that morning was near at hand, and that the rapidly increasing light of day had made his task doubly dangerous.

Knowing, however, that all that were left could be carried on one more trip, he determined to make it. Just as he gathered into his arms the last of the papers to save which he was risking his life, a yell of delight announced that he was discovered. A quick glance revealed two Spanish soldiers rushing towards him with levelled pikes, and gleaming eyes that were red and bloodshot as those of the tiger who has tasted blood.

With a rare presence of mind, and without dropping his precious bundle, Réné darted, not under the house, but into it through the main entrance. Running through the long hall, which was still shrouded in complete darkness, he sprang out of an open window at its rear end. As he did so he heard his pursuers enter the house and begin an eager search of its rooms, at the same time calling others of their comrades to their assistance.

Breathlessly creeping beneath the building, Réné reached the underground passage in safety, and deposited within it the papers for which he had dared so much. After drawing the slab of bark carefully over the entrance above his head, he removed all the books and papers to the very middle of the tunnel, where they nearly blocked the narrow way and rendered it impassable. With the other things, he had brought away a small iron box, banded and locked, and this he took especial pains to effectually conceal.

While he was thus working like a mole beneath the ground, the baffled Spaniards above his head were becoming more and more enraged and perplexed. Their thorough search of the building into which they had seen their would−be victim enter, but which no one had seen him leave, failed to discover not only him, but any traces of the great pile of books and papers which they had collected for the purpose of burning.

Finally they became convinced that the building contained some secret chamber that they were unable to detect, and by order of Menendez himself it was set on fire and burned to the ground. Thus the Spaniards felt sure that they had destroyed not only the books and papers, but the unknown enemy who had so daringly risked his life to recover and save them. At the same time they were greatly astonished that he should have quietly permitted the fire to destroy him without making an effort to escape, or allowing a single cry of pain or anguish to betray his presence. After much consideration of the matter they finally concluded that so many of the Huguenots had suffered martyrdom at the stake that they had all learned to endure the torture of burning in silence.

When Réné had finished storing the books and papers as carefully as the circumstances would permit, he at last found time to consider his own safety. Going to the end of the tunnel, and peering cautiously out to make sure that he was not observed, he replaced the bark door beneath its curtain of vines, and began to work his way very slowly and with many a backward glance down the river. It was now broad daylight, and for fear of being seen from the fort, he crept close under shelter of the bank, sometimes crawling on his hands and knees, and often wading in water up to his waist.

At length, by several hours' hard labor, which, coming after his exertions of the preceding night, completely exhausted him, he reached the high bluff which has already been described as commanding a view of several miles both up and down the river. Wearily the tired boy climbed to its summit, from which, as he gazed up the river, he saw with a heavy heart the yellow banner of Spain flaunting itself above the walls of Fort Caroline. As its folds glistened in the bright sunshine, for the storm of the past four days had passed away with the night, they seemed to him like those of some huge and venomous serpent, and he turned from the sight with a shudder.

On the other hand, in the far distance, he saw, still lying at anchor, the two small ships which he believed to be, as they were, the only representatives of the power of France now left in the New World. On these he placed all his hopes of escape, of future happiness, and of life itself.

Anxious as he was to reach the ships and to rejoin his uncle, the poor lad's exhausted frame could withstand the terrible strain upon it no longer. It pleaded for a rest so effectually that Réné flung himself upon a pile of wet moss, determined to snatch an hour's sleep before attempting to proceed farther.

As the boy slept he was visited by troublous dreams that caused him to toss his arms and moan pitifully; and no wonder, after the horrid scenes of which he had so recently been a spectator; no wonder, too, when new and terrible dangers threatened him closely even as he slept. Had he been awake he would have noticed the approach of a small band of Indians, who, appearing on the edge of the forest, made their way directly towards the bluff. It was a party of Seminole warriors, led by their chief the gigantic Cat−sha. With him was Chitta the Snake, and behind them walked three bound prisoners. Two of these were Frenchmen, and the third was an Indian lad who had escaped with his chief from the doomed village of Seloy, only to share the fate of the equally doomed fort in which he had sought shelter. These had thrown themselves from the walls of the fort upon its capture by the Spaniards, and had reached the forest unharmed.

There they had fallen into the hands of these Seminoles who had not fled from this part of the country upon the return of the French, as the latter had supposed, but had lingered in the hope of capturing any white men who might incautiously stray beyond the protecting walls. They desired to capture these that their tortures might form part of the festivities with which they proposed to celebrate their return to their stronghold in the great swamp, and to which the rest of the band, bearing the plunder taken from Fort Caroline after it was abandoned, had already gone. The Seminoles, rejoicing greatly over the fortune that had thrown three victims thus easily into their hands, were now on their way to their canoes, which they had hidden near the foot of this high bluff.

Directing the others to proceed to where the canoes lay, Cat−sha, accompanied by Chitta, ascended the eminence for the purpose of taking a sweeping view of the river and the surrounding country. As they gained the summit Réné's moanings warned them of his presence. Stealing to the spot where he lay with the noiseless footfalls of wild beasts, the two Indians stood for a moment gloating over the unconscious lad. They fully realized the value of this unexpected and welcome prize, for both of them recognized the young white chief the moment their eyes lighted upon him. In another minute the poor lad had awakened with a wild cry of terror, to find himself bound hand and foot, and lying at the mercy of those whom he knew to be his bitterest and most unrelenting enemies.

CHAPTER XV. RÉNÉ IN THE HANDS OF HIS ENEMIES

WELL might Réné de Veaux feel that he had fallen into evil hands, as, upon awakening from his troubled slumber, he found himself bound hand and foot, and gazed into the cruel face of Chitta, lighted by a triumphant but sneering smile. Nor did he gain any comfort by turning his eyes to the sullen countenance of the huge Cat−sha. Neither pity nor mercy was expressed in the slightest degree by either of the Seminoles. Chitta thought of the revenge he was to enjoy for his humiliating overthrow during the games at the Feast of Ripe Corn, which he fully believed he owed to the white lad. Cat−sha knew that Réné had led the attack upon his band at the shell mound, and regarded him as a brave enemy whom he should take an exquisite delight in torturing.

Loosening the bonds that encircled the boy's ankles, his captors forced him to walk to the foot of the bluff, where the rest of their band were gathered. These received the new prisoner with extravagant manifestations of delight, and after all had examined him, and his weapons had been taken from him, he was again tightly bound and thrown into the bottom of one of the canoes. Although he had caught a glimpse of the other white prisoners, he was not allowed to communicate with them.

As his captors desired to keep him well and strong, they gave him food and water, both of which he at first thought of refusing, and thus bringing his sufferings to an end as quickly as possible. On second thought, however, he decided that this course would be cowardly, and unworthy of his white blood. So he ate heartily all that was offered to him, determined to keep up his strength, and to make a desperate effort to escape should the slightest opportunity present itself.

Having reached this decision, Réné felt much calmer and more hopeful, and as he was sadly in need of sleep, he determined to obtain as much of that blessing as was possible. Shortly afterwards the Indians were greatly astonished to find their new prisoner slumbering as quietly as though no danger threatened him, and he had not an anxiety in the world.

While daylight lasted the Seminoles remained in that spot, but at nightfall they launched their canoes, and set forth on their journey to the great swamp of the Okeefenokee.

An hour later a few shadows flitted through the darkness over the placid waters, past the two French ships that still lay at anchor near the mouth of the river. Making no sound, they were unnoticed and unchallenged, and in

a few minutes they had turned and vanished amid the vast salt−marshes that bounded the river on the north. Thus Réné de Veaux passed within a few rods of the uncle who was so anxiously awaiting his coming, and neither of them had the slightest suspicion of the other's presence.

Lying in the bottom of a canoe, from which he was only taken when the Indians went into camp, Réné knew not whither he was being taken, nor had he any idea that he was making the very same journey that he and Has−se had taken together some months before. He was not allowed to communicate with, nor did he even see, the other white prisoners, for they were carried in separate canoes, and at night all three were bound to trees situated at considerable distances from each other.

Day after day the boy studied the faces of his captors attentively, but among them all he found only one that betrayed the faintest evidence of pity for his forlorn condition. Even his expression was only one of somewhat less ferocity than that of the others, and poor Réné imagined that it was owing to his youth, for this Indian was but a mere lad of even less years than himself. In fact he was the young Indian from Seloy who had been captured by the Seminoles on the same day with Réné. Having unexpectedly obtained three instead of two white prisoners, and being in need of recruits, Cat−sha had offered to spare this lad's life and set him at liberty if he would become a Seminole and a member of their band. This the young Indian, whose name was E−chee (the Deer), had professed himself as willing to do, though he secretly determined to make his escape at the very first opportunity.

He had at once recognized Réné, though he was careful not to betray the fact, and was very glad that the white lad showed no sign of ever having seen him. Only by an occasional pitying glance, when he could give it undetected by the others, did he attempt to convey his friendly feelings to the young prisoner. When it came his turn to stand guard over the captives, he treated them with greater harshness than any of the Seminoles, in order to allay any suspicion that might be entertained of his faithfulness. But always he watched for an opportunity to communicate with Réné, and make known to him that he was a friend.

At length such an opportunity offered itself. They had entered the great swamp, and even Réné, from the bottom of the canoe, seeing the tall cypresses meet overhead, began to suspect where they were. During a portion of an intensely dark night E−chee kept watch over the prisoners. While the guard whom he relieved was there to note the action, he gave each of the three captives a kick with his moccasined foot. This, while it did not hurt them, expressed to the Seminole a degree of contempt that satisfied him that the new recruit hated the white men as cordially as he himself.

When he had departed and all was quiet, E−chee approached the place where Réné lay bound to a tree, and lying down close beside him, he whispered, "Ta−lah−lo−ko."

Réné had fallen asleep, but he was instantly awakened by the sound of this familiar name, even though it was only whispered. Without moving, he waited to hear if the sound would be repeated, or, whether he had only dreamed some one had called him.

In a moment the whisper came again, "Ta−lah−lo−ko."

"Who art thou?" asked Réné, in the Indian language.

"I am E−chee from Seloy, where I saw thee when thou first set foot on the land of my people. Dost thou not remember?"

"Art thou not E−chee the Seminole?"

"To all appearance I am become one of these runaways, but my heart is that of a true man, and I seek only an opportunity to escape from them and to rejoin my own people. If indeed any of my people be left alive," he added, bitterly.

"Dost thou think an escape may be effected?" asked Réné, eagerly, a new hope dawning in his breast.

"I know not, but I can try, and should I fail, death itself were better than life with these Seminole dogs."

Then Réné asked where they were and what E−chee knew of Cat−sha's plans.

He was told that they were in the great Okeefenokee swamp, even as he had suspected. On the morrow they were to leave the canoes and find a trail that led to the Seminole village, hidden in its most impenetrable depths. When they reached it E−chee believed, from fragments of conversation he had overheard, that there was to be a great feast, and that the prisoners were to be tortured.

Then Réné told E−chee of the land of the Alachuas, and described to him how he might reach it. This done, he asked the young Indian to reach a hand into the breast of his doublet, where, within its lining, he would find a feather with a slender chain and pin attached to it. This, on account of his bonds, he could not get at with his own hands.

When E−chee had secured the feather, which was the very Flamingo Feather given to Réné by Has−se, Réné told him to guard it with his life; and, if he succeeded in escaping from the Seminoles, to convey it with all speed to the land of the Alachuas. There he was to present it to any of Micco's tribe, but in particular to one named Has−se the Bow−bearer, if he could discover him. He was to tell them of the sad plight of the prisoners, and beg of them to send a party to their rescue.

Hardly had he finished these instructions when the snapping of a twig near by caused E−chee to spring to his feet and pour out a torrent of abuse upon Réné, at the same time giving him a kick that drew from the prostrate lad an exclamation of pain. It was quite as much a groan of despair; for he could not understand the action of the young Indian, and imagined him to be a vile traitor who had only gained his confidence in order to betray it.

Directly, however, he heard the voice of Cat−sha demanding of E−chee why he thus abused the prisoners. To this the young Indian made answer that he had discovered that this one, who was the most troublesome of the three, had nearly succeeded in loosening his bonds. This he would doubtless have accomplished had not he, E−chee, been possessed of the forethought to examine them as he made his rounds.

Commending his vigilance, Cat−sha, who was in the habit of personally assuring himself of the safety of the prisoners several times during each night, passed on. Then E−chee, after stooping to whisper to Réné to be of good cheer, also moved away.

Before noon of the following day the canoes were run ashore, and Réné was allowed to rise and step from the one in the bottom of which he had travelled. As he did so, he at once knew the place as the head of the little lagoon, where he had been left to nurse his snake−bite, while Has−se explored the trail that led away into the swamp. It was with a swelling heart that the lad contrasted his present position with the one he had occupied at that time, and it was with difficulty that he forced back the hot tears that his thoughts caused to stand ready to flow.

The brave lad did not permit these signs of weakness to be seen, and he received some comfort by catching a kindly look from E−chee, and exchanging sympathetic glances with his fellow−prisoners, with whom, however, he was not allowed to speak. They were of the new arrivals, and on account of illness had been left in the fort when the fighting men marched away to join Admiral Ribault.

As soon as the canoes had been drawn from the water and carefully concealed, the Seminoles and their captives turned into the gloom of the shadowy cypresses, and made their way in single file along the narrow trail that led away from the lagoon. It was often covered with water, and a misstep on either side of its entire length would have plunged the unfortunate who should make it into a bottomless morass. From it, without assistance, he would never be able to extricate himself, but would only sink deeper and deeper, until he had disappeared forever. It happened that one of the French prisoners did step from the trail on this occasion. The brutal savages watched with pleasure his frantic struggles to regain a footing, but without offering to aid him. He had very nearly drowned in the horrible mixture of black water and blacker mud before they hauled him out. He was in a pitiable plight, but they only greeted him with blows and jeers at his appearance, and forced him to resume the march, without allowing him to remove from his clothing any of the filth that clung to it.

Réné was able to distinguish the point at which the trail they were following branched off from that formerly taken by Has−se. He hoped that E−chee would also note it, but had no chance of assuring himself that the young Indian had done so.

It was nearly nightfall before they reached the Seminole village that marked their journey's end, Here they were received by its inhabitants with the wildest demonstrations of savage joy. Réné was an especial object of interest, for, as the "young white chief," his name was already well known to them, and his capture was regarded as the most noteworthy one ever made by the band.

The squaws and children, and even the youths of his own age, crowded closely about him, taunting him with shrill voices, spitting on him, pulling his hair, and pushing him this way and that. For some time Réné bore all this patiently, feeling that to express annoyance would perhaps only subject him to greater abuses. He knew also that it would afford his tormentors the greatest delight and satisfaction, and this pleasure he was not inclined to give them.

At length, however, his patience came to an end. Among the crowd surrounding him was a lad somewhat taller than himself, and possessed of hideous features. When he began pricking Réné with the point of a sharp knife, at the same time approaching his face close to that of his victim, and mocking him with frightful grimaces, the boy could stand it no longer. Regardless of what the consequences might be, he drew back a step, and raising his clinched and still bound hands, struck his tormentor full in the face such a blow as felled him to the ground.

A loud outcry arose at this unexpected exhibition of the prisoner's spirit, and the young savage, regaining his feet, was so enraged that he attempted to plunge his knife into Réné's heart. This was prevented by several warriors who had witnessed the scene, and who stepped quickly forward to his rescue. Pushing Réné's assailant aside, they led him away to a palmetto−thatched hut that stood at a distance from the rest. Here, after so tightening the bonds of his ankles that he could not stand, but could only sit or lie down, they closed the entrance and left him to his own sorrowful reflections.

The Seminole village occupied an island the surface of which was raised considerably above that of the surrounding swamp. It was of such extent as to afford space for several large fields of maize, pumpkins, and starch root, besides the collection of huts, which numbered in all about a hundred. These represented a population of about five hundred souls, of whom about two hundred were warriors.

On all sides of the island stretched to unknown distances the vast impenetrable swamp, and only by the one narrow trail over which Réné had been brought could it be gained from the outside world. At the point where this trail joined the island a Seminole warrior kept watch night and day, so that the place would seem to be absolutely safe against surprise, and proof against any attack that might be made upon it. Escape from it would also appear to be impossible.

On the very night of the arrival of Cat−sha and his prisoners, the warrior who kept guard at the end of the trail was startled by hearing a few wild notes of a death−song rise from a small thicket but a short distance from him.

Then came a loud cry, and the words,

"Thus does E−chee of Seloy defy the Seminole dogs and rejoin his people!"

Directly afterwards, and before the astonished warrior could reach the spot, he heard a loud splash in the black waters that surrounded the island, and then all was still.

As the warrior gained the little thicket, he saw nothing save some ripples on the surface of the water, and some bubbles rising from its unknown depths. He was joined by others from the village, and all searched the thicket for some trace of him who had uttered the remarkable cry. Finally they discovered in it the head−dress of feathers that the young Indian of Seloy had worn as a Seminole warrior, and were forced to conclude that he had drowned himself rather than to live as one of them. Sneering at the want of taste he had thus displayed, and regretting that he had not been kept a prisoner, and as such been tortured for their amusement, instead of being allowed to become a Seminole, they returned to the village. The sentinel resumed his watch on the trail, and the incident of E−chee's disappearance was thought of no more.

When Réné overheard some Indians talking outside the hut in which he lay, and laughingly telling each other of the method E−chee had taken to rejoin his own people, his heart sank within him, and he felt that he no longer had aught to hope for, now that his only friend amid all these enemies was dead.

On the following day preparations for the great feast of rejoicing were actively begun. In the middle of a small mound just outside the village a stout post of green wood was set deep into the ground, and near it was gathered a great pile of dry wood and fat pine splinters. This was the stake at which the prisoners were to suffer torture, and around which the chief interest of the festivities was to centre. The feast was to continue for three days, according to the number of prisoners on hand. One of them was, by his behavior under the ingenious tortures devised especially for the occasion, to furnish the principal amusement for each day. At its close, if he were not already dead, he was to be sacrificed.

It was generally understood that the most important of the prisoners, the young white chief, was to be reserved for the last and crowning day of the feast, and for him an especial committee were inventing a series of new and peculiarly painful tortures.

At all hours of the day crowds of women and children gathered about the hut in which Réné was confined, in the hope of catching a glimpse of him. Their delight knew no bounds when, occasionally, one of the more good−natured of his guards would lift the mat of braided palmetto fibre that hung before the entrance, and allow them to peep in at him, and taunt him with hints of what he was to undergo.

Wearily did the long hours pass with the unhappy boy as he lay thus friendless among cruel enemies, helplessly awaiting the fate from which he shrank so fearfully, and yet from which he could conceive no manner of escape.

CHAPTER XVI. HAS−SE RECEIVES THE TOKEN

FAR away from the scenes of sorrow, suffering, savage cruelty, and savage rejoicing of which the shadowy depths of the great swamp were witness, in the pleasant land of the Alachuas, the close of the second day after the one on which Réné de Veaux had been held a prisoner into the Seminole village presented a picture of

peace and happy contentment. A light breeze sweeping across the broad savannas brought with it the odors of countless flowers; from the moss−hung trees many birds poured forth their evening songs in floods of melody, and all nature was full of beauty and rejoicing.

In the camp of deerskin lodges and palmetto huts clustered beneath the grand trees, and occupied by those Indians who acknowledged the good old Micco as their chief, all were in the open air enjoying the cool of the evening. The hunters had returned from the chase laden with game, and now lay in comfortable attitudes on the soft grass, indulging in a well−earned rest. The women were busy about the fires, preparing the evening meal, and the children frolicked among the lodges or around the edge of the great spring, as free from care and as happy as the birds above their heads. From the bank of the river but a short distance away came the shouts of a party of lads who were bathing in the clear waters. To these the Indian mothers listened with a certain anxiety, fearful lest they should hear the shrill cry of warning that would announce the presence of Allapatta, the great alligator.

In the middle of the camp stood a lodge larger and taller than the others, and surmounted by the plume of eagles' feathers that showed it to be that of the chief. In front of this lodge, seated on outspread robes, and gravely smoking their long−stemmed pipes, were the old chief Micco, several of the principal men of his tribe, and Yah−chi−la−ne, the young Alachua chief. Behind the old chief, and ready to do his slightest bidding, stood a tall, slender, but remarkably handsome youth, in whose hair was braided a scarlet feather that shone against the dark tresses like a vivid flame. His face was lighted with a quick intelligence, and he evidently took a keen interest in the subject which the others were discussing, though, as became his years, he took no part in their conversation.

At length the old chief turned to the lad with a kindly smile and said, "What is thy opinion, my brave Bow−bearer? Can there be enmity between these white friends of thine and others of their own color who also come from across the great waters?"

Very proud of having his opinion thus asked, Has−se−− for it was none other than the beloved Indian friend of Réné de Veaux−− answered, modestly,

"It seems to me not unlikely that there should be. Do not different tribes of our own race and color often war against one another?"

"Well answered, my son," replied the chief; "thou art right, and I am inclined to believe that what we have just learned is only too true. If it be, then am I deeply grieved for the sad fate of those who were our friends."

The tidings of which Micco spoke had been brought that day by an Indian runner from a far−eastern tribe. They told of the arrival upon the coast of the Spaniards under Menendez, and of their destruction of Seloy and capture of Fort Caroline. The runner had also told of the brutal massacre by Menendez and his soldiers of Admiral Ribault and all who escaped with him from the wreck of the French ships. These, when they were cast ashore by the fearful storm already described, had thrown themselves upon the mercy of the Spaniards, and had met only with the mercy dealt out by the sword and the dagger.

That the pale−faces should thus destroy each other had been deemed so wonderful and of such importance by those eastern tribes who knew of these occurrences, that they had despatched runners to all the friendly tribes within hundreds of miles to acquaint them with the facts. Many of Micco's warriors were inclined to doubt that such things could be, and it was to discuss the matter that he had summoned his advisers and principal braves to his lodge.

While the chief and his wise men thus talked and smoked with a gravity becoming their years and position, and while Has−se, the Bow−bearer, listened to them with an eager interest, there came of a sudden loud shouts from

the lads on the river−bank. All eyes were turned in that direction, and some anxiety was felt lest Allapatta had indeed made his appearance, and was endeavoring to secure a meal off one of the bathers.

In another moment, however, all the lads were seen trooping towards the camp, and surrounding a young warrior who came willingly with them, but who was a stranger to all present. The lads conducted him directly to where the little circle was formed in front of the chief's lodge. Here one from among them explained that this stranger had come down the river alone in a canoe, and had asked of them information concerning the land of the Alachuas, and particularly for that tribe of Indians led by a chief called Micco.

As the young warrior, whose person bore every evidence of long and hasty travel, stood silently before him, the old chief said,

"I am Micco. Who art thou, and what is thy errand here?"

The stranger answered, "I am known as E−chee, and am of that place by the great waters called Seloy. He whom I seek most anxiously among thy people is named to me as thy son, Has−se, the Bow−bearer."

"Then is thy search ended," replied Micco, "for Has−se, my son and Bow−bearer, is even here in attendance. What is thy business with him?"

As Has−se, greatly surprised at being thus singled out, stepped forward, the stranger drew from his breast a scarlet flamingo feather. It was exactly like the one that glowed so vividly amid the dark tresses of the young Bow−bearer, and from it hung a slender gold chain, to which was attached a golden pin. Handing it to Has−se, E−chee said,

"He who sends thee this token is in danger of speedily losing his life, and he prays that thou wilt come to his rescue."

Eagerly seizing the feather, Has−se exclaimed, "It comes from Ta−lah−lo−ko, the young white chief! Where is he, and in what danger?"

Then, while all present listened with the closest attention, E−chee told of the destruction of Seloy and the capture of Fort Caroline by the Spaniards; of his own capture, and that of Réné de Veaux and two other white men, by the Seminoles; of his escape, and of the terrible fate now awaiting those still in the hands of the outlaws.

When he had finished, Has−se, who had followed the story with breathless attention and flashing eyes, turned to the chief and said,

"My father, this pledge I would redeem with life itself, for he who sends it is my best beloved friend and brother."

"And if he still lives, and it can be accomplished, he shall yet be saved," answered the old chief, promptly, with the fire of a young warrior blazing in his eyes. Then of E−chee he asked, "Dost thou know the trail back to this den of wolves? and is thy strength sufficient to allow of thy immediate departure to guide a party of my warriors to it?"

"As the wounded deer knows the trail marked by his own blood, so know I it; and if my strength should fail, hatred of these Seminoles would take its place and still bear me on," was the answer.

"It is well spoken," said the old chief. Then turning to Yah−chi−la−ne, his son−in−law, he said, "Take thou twenty picked braves, my eagle, and with them find out this hiding−place of Seminoles. If Ta−lah−lo−ko still lives, effect his rescue, and that of the other prisoners, and return with them. I send no more with thee, for fear that with a stronger party thy hot blood would lead thee to attack this nest of swamp foxes. Such a measure could only result in failure; for if it be situated as this young man describes, not the whole force of our tribe, together with that of thy brave Alachuas, could prevail against it. Therefore the rescue must be effected by cunning and not by mere valor; but take thou careful note of the locality, and bring again word to me. If there is any chance of success in attacking it, we will then send forth a war−party that shall blot from existence this plague−spot."

Gladly did the brave Yah−chi−la−ne set about the execution of this order; and within an hour he and his war−party of twenty picked braves, of whom Has−se was the first chosen, were ready to start on their dangerous mission.

During that hour E−chee, who was to be their guide, had bathed in the life−giving waters of the spring and eaten a hearty meal; so that he now felt like a new man, and equal to any amount of fresh hardships and fatigue.

In the darkness of the early night the little party entered their canoes, and with lusty strokes of the paddles started swiftly up the narrow river towards the terrible swamp, and the more terrible scenes that it concealed.

E−chee occupied the foremost canoe with Yah−chi−la−ne and Has−se; and as they sped onward he told them at greater length than before of the tragic events of the past few days, and of the captivity of Ta−lah−lo−ko.

He also told the story of his own escape, which would doubtless have interested the Seminoles greatly could they have heard it. Having made up his mind that if he was to be of service to the young white chief he must set about it immediately, he had determined to attempt an escape on the very night of his arrival at the Seminole village. As he knew that he would not be permitted on any account to pass the guard at the end of the trail, he conceived a plan that would draw the sentinel from his post for a few moments, and as soon as darkness came on proceeded to put it into execution.

He simply procured a billet of heavy watersoaked wood, that would sink like a stone, and carried it, undiscovered, to a thicket on the edge of the island near the end of the trail. There he flung his Seminole head−dress of feathers upon the ground, chanted a few notes of a death−song, cried out that he was thus about to rejoin his own people, and threw the billet of wood into the dark waters, where, with a loud splash, it instantly sank from sight. Then he crept noiselessly from the spot, and when the sentinel reached the thicket he had gained the unguarded trail, and, without waiting to listen to the comments upon his supposed suicide, made off with all speed. He had happily succeeded in retaining his footing upon the uncertain pathway, and in safely reaching the spot at the head of the lagoon where the Seminole canoes were hidden. Taking possession of one of these, he had travelled night and day towards the land of the Alachuas, guided by the directions given him by Réné.

Has−se and Yah−chi−la−ne listened attentively to this tale, and at its conclusion commended E−chee highly for the skill and bravery with which he had effected his escape and made his way to their encampment. Then they talked of their chances of still finding Réné alive, and of how they should rescue him, until E−chee, utterly exhausted by his prolonged efforts, dropped into a profound slumber, from which he did not awaken until daylight.

Meantime, in the Seminole village, the preparations for the great Feast of Rejoicing had been completed, and it had been begun on the very day of E−chee's arrival in Micco's camp, and of the setting forth of the rescuing party. For two days Réné de Veaux listened with a sickening dread to the sounds of savage revelry that penetrated the hut in which he lay. He heard the continuous beating of the kas−a−lal−ki, or Indian drum, and

the rattle of the terrapin shells, filled with dried palmetto berries, that accompanied the dancing. He heard the fierce, wild shouts and yells of the savages and shuddered at them. Above all he heard, and attempted to close his ears to the sound, the cries of agony forced from those of his own race who suffered torture at the stake. Of all these sounds he could only guess the meaning; for none came near him save the guard who brought him food and water, but who refused to speak to him, and once Chitta came and stood over him with a smile of triumph lighting his dark features. As he turned away he said, as though speaking to himself,

"On the morrow we shall see of what stuff pale−faced chiefs are made."

This was all, but to the quick understanding of the captive boy it meant everything. He knew at once that his turn had come, and that with the light of another day he would be led forth, and by his sufferings afford a brief amusement to a horde of yelling savages.

Could he endure it? Would his strength bear him bravely to the bitter end? Or would he too break down and cry out as he had heard the others? The agony of such thoughts was too great for the poor friendless lad, and, throwing himself face downward upon the ground, he burst into bitter tears.

How long he lay thus he knew not. At last, after passing what seemed like hours of anguish, he rose slowly to his knees and poured forth his whole soul in prayer to One who had also been tortured, and knew the agony that preceded such sufferings. His prayer was for deliverance; or if that might not be, then for His presence to support and strengthen him in the hour of trial.

Having thus resigned all care of his own affairs, and placed them with the only One who could bring him peace and strength, the boy felt greatly comforted, and as though he should bear bravely whatever tortures might be devised for him.

His cheerfulness astonished the guard who brought in his supper of sof−ka (soup) and koonti−katki (starch−root), and he thought within himself, "He cannot know what awaits him on the morrow; but he will wear a different face when he sees the stake."

Réné had hardly finished eating with a good appetite his rather scanty meal, when the guard again entered and loosened his bonds, and he was led forth from the hut for the first time since his arrival in the village. Guarded by a tall warrior on either side, he was forced to head a sort of triumphal procession, and, accompanied by the sound of the rattles and the kas−a−lal−ki, to march through and around the village, to be gazed at and taunted by its entire population.

The lad walked with a firm tread, in spite of his painfully swollen ankles, that had been cruelly bound for so long a time that they now hardly supported him. His head was proudly lifted, and his youthful countenance bore so brave and fearless a look that all who saw him marvelled at it. It also caused them great joy, for they said one to another, "He is so brave that the tortures must be many and long before he will cry out, and we shall have rare sport with him on the morrow."

As this noisy procession passed on that side of the village nearest the end of the trail that led away from the island through the swamp, it attracted the attention of the warrior who was there on guard. So great was his curiosity to see what was going on that he allowed it to carry him a few yards from his post to a point where he could obtain a better view.

While he thus stood, neglecting his duty for a moment and with his back turned to the trail, three dark figures, hardly distinguishable from the twilight shadows, glided noiselessly and swiftly from it. An instant later they had vanished in the little thicket from which E−chee had flung his billet of wood into the water on the night of his escape from the Seminoles.

The procession passed on, and the careless sentinel returned to his post, filled with thoughts of what was to take place on the morrow, but as utterly unconscious of the three pairs of eyes that regarded him from the thicket as though no human beings save himself existed. Could he have seen them, he would have instantly known them for those of enemies, for he would have recognized E−chee, though Has−se and Yah−chi−la−ne were strangers to him.

It was indeed these three friends and would−be rescuers of Réné de Veaux, who had thus been fortunate enough to gain the island without opposition and without bloodshed. From the time of their starting they had made no stop until they had reached the head of the little lagoon and taken to the trail through the swamps. Under E−chee's guidance they had followed it safely and without meeting a soul, so taken up were the Seminoles with their festivities. Within a short distance of the island Yah−chi−la−ne had halted his men, and bade them remain where they were while he, with Has−se and E−chee, approached more closely to the village, to discover the best mode of operation.

Unperceived, they had stolen close up to the warrior who guarded the end of the trail, and for some time they lay hidden within bow−shot of him, discussing in the lowest of whispers how they should pass him. The timely approach of the procession, with Réné at its head, had, by diverting his attention for a few moments, offered an opportunity too good to be neglected. They had seized it, slipped past the unsuspecting guard, and thus safely accomplished the first stage of their difficult undertaking.

As they lay concealed in the thicket, awaiting a later hour of the night, and for the revellers in the village to seek their lodges, fortune again favored them. Dense black clouds gradually spread over the sky, one by one the stars disappeared, the air grew thick and heavy, until at length, with a blinding flash, a terrific thunder−storm burst upon the village. Taking advantage of the intense darkness, the three made their way swiftly, but with every precaution against discovery, among the now silent lodges until, guided by E−chee, they reached the rear of the palmetto hut in which Réné was confined.

The lightning revealed to them the motionless figure of a warrior standing in front of it, and E−chee, lying flat on the wet ground, with a keen−headed arrow fitted to the string of his bow, was left to watch him. Upon the slightest alarm being given, the arrow would have found its way to his heart, and the three, taking Réné with them, would have attempted a desperate flight. As long, however, as all remained quiet and they could work undisturbed, they were to try another plan.

While E−chee kept watch, Yah−chi−la−ne and Has−se, with the knives given them by Réné, attempted to cut an entrance to the hut through the thick thatch at its rear. Fortunately the rain, which beat upon them in torrents, prevented any slight sounds they might make from being heard, and also moistened the palmetto leaves so that they did not crackle, as they would have done had they been dry. Thus, though they worked but slowly, they worked silently, and gradually cut their way into the interior.

Upon returning to his prison, after the trying ordeal of being subjected to the taunts and stares of the whole village, Réné threw himself upon the ground to gain what rest he might. Supposing that this was his last night of life, his mental sufferings kept him long awake, but at length he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. Suddenly he found himself sitting bolt−upright, as wide−awake as ever in his life. At first he supposed his sudden awakening to have been caused by a terrific burst of thunder that crashed overhead, but in the deep silence that followed he heard his own name pronounced in a whisper−−

"Ta−lah−lo−ko!"

Could he be dreaming? No; it came again−−

"Ta−lah−lo−ko!"

Truly he was called, and he whispered in reply, "I am here."

A slight rustling followed, and then the captive boy, whose wildly beating heart seemed like to burst from his breast, knew that a friend was beside him, cutting the bonds from his wrists and ankles, and whispering,

"It is Has−se, and thou art saved, oh my brother!"

Then tremblingly, and guided by the gentle hand of the Indian lad, Réné crept through the opening made by the keen knives of his friends. In spite of all precautions, his passage through the leaves rustled them so loudly that only a violent thunder−clap coming at the same moment prevented the noise from being heard.

Without a word being spoken, the four made their way as swiftly as might be to where the trail left the island.

The guard at this point was suddenly petrified by superstitious fear at the sight of E−chee, whom he supposed to have been drowned. The figure stood in front of him, and, as revealed by a flash of lightning, was haggard and dripping, as though it had just risen from a watery grave.

Ere the frightened warrior could give an alarm, a stunning blow from behind felled him to the wet earth, where he lay motionless and apparently devoid of life.

CHAPTER XVII. DEATH OF HAS−SE (THE SUNBEAM)

ON this night of storm and escape, Cat−sha, the Seminole chief, was more than usually restless. He tossed and turned on his couch of robes, but found it impossible to sleep. Finally he determined to make one of his customary midnight visits of inspection to the several guards, and to his sole remaining prisoner, the "young white chief." As he left his lodge Cat−sha bowed his head to the bitter storm, and drew his robe more closely about him.

On approaching the hut, in which he imagined the prisoner to be spending his last hours of life, he found the guard standing before it, motionless, but wide−awake, and with one corner of his robe drawn over his head to protect it somewhat from the pelting rain. Cat−sha questioned him as to the safety of the prisoner, and the warrior answered that he had looked in upon him just as the storm began, and found him quietly sleeping and securely bound.

The rain had extinguished the watch−fire, which it was customary to keep burning in the middle of the village during the night, and thus it would be somewhat difficult for the Seminole chief to procure a light with which to examine for himself into the condition of the prisoner. He therefore accepted the assurance of the guard that he was still safely confined within the hut; for, indeed, how could it be otherwise? Such a thing as escaping seemed too utterly impossible to be worthy a thought.

So Cat−sha passed on, and bent his steps in the direction of the sentinel who kept watch at the end of the trail. At first he was not to be discovered, nor did he answer when challenged, and Cat−sha was rapidly becoming both angry and surprised, when all at once he stumbled, and almost fell over the prostrate form of him whom he sought. The warrior was still unconscious, for the terrible blow that felled him had been delivered but a few minutes before Cat−sha's discovery of his condition.

At this state of affairs, the wily Seminole at once took an alarm. To be sure, he reflected that the sentinel might have been struck by a lightning−flash or seized with a sudden illness. Still he might have also received a blow from the hand of an enemy, and the mere thought that such might have gained access to the island, and even now be lurking within its limits, made the chief hot with anger.

His first thought was for the safety of the prisoner; and leaving the unconscious warrior where he lay, he hurried back to the hut he had just left, determined to trust only the evidence of his own eyes as to the condition of its occupant. Having after considerable delay procured a torch, he entered the hut, where a single glance revealed the startling truth. It was empty, and the severed bonds lying on the ground, and the hole cut in the rear wall, at once told the whole story. The prisoner of whom he had been so proud, the young white chief for whose torture such elaborate preparations had been made, and whom he had thought to be so safely secured, had escaped. He could not have done so unaided; and who had thus boldly penetrated the very heart of the village to save him? Such a thing was unheard of, and the knowledge that it had been successfully accomplished so angered the black−browed chief that he rushed from the hut in a terrible passion. As he passed the warrior who stood guard at the entrance, and who was still unconscious that anything had gone amiss, the angry chief struck him a staggering blow in the face as a punishment for his negligence, and then aroused the village.

While most of the angry and excited Seminoles searched the island and the village itself, in hopes that the escaped captive would be found somewhere in the vicinity of his late prisonhouse, Cat−sha followed another plan. Hastily gathering together a small band of his best warriors, he placed himself at their head, and they left the island by the trail. This they followed at the top of their speed, hoping that, had the fugitive and those who aided him taken it, they might be caught before they reached the canoes at the head of the little lagoon. With these went Chitta (the Snake), whose every instinct had by this time become that of the outlaws whose fortunes he had joined, and who was rapidly gaining the reputation of being the most cruel and vindictive member of their band.

Although these pursuers exerted themselves to speed, they would have made still greater efforts could they have known that those whom they sought had passed that way but a quarter of an hour before, and were even then delayed in their progress by the necessity of supporting, and nearly carrying, him whom they had rescued.

As soon as the first excitement of escape had passed, Réné's swollen ankles began to pain him so keenly that he found it almost impossible to walk, and, when he and his three rescuers reached the place where the rest of the party had remained, he sank to the ground with a groan.

They found the braves who had been left behind so impatient of their long delay, and alarmed for their safety, that they had been about to advance upon the village to learn, and if possible to avenge, the fate that they feared had befallen them. These were overjoyed to see their leader and his companions once more, and to learn of the successful issue of their hazardous undertaking.

There was no time for the exchange of congratulations, and Yah−chi−la−ne ordered the flight to be resumed with all haste, at the same time directing two of the strongest warriors to support the almost helpless Réné. He himself, with E−chee, occupied the post of danger in the rear; while Has−se kept as close as possible to his newly recovered friend at the head of the little column.

The storm had by this time passed away, and their path was made easier by the light of the full moon, that shone with the wonderful brightness peculiar to southern latitudes from an unclouded sky. Although this aided them, they knew that it also favored the pursuers, whom they felt certain must ere this have started after them, and many an anxious backward glance did Yah−chi−la−ne and E−chee cast over their shoulders as they hastened onward.

In this manner, and without mishap, they finally reached the end of the trail at the head of the little lagoon, where their canoes had been left. Here all breathed more freely, for they considered themselves almost safe from pursuit, and were jubilant over their success. Yah−chi−la−ne would, however, allow of no delay even here; but, after seeing Réné placed tenderly in the foremost canoe with two of the strongest and most prudent of his warriors, he ordered the rest to embark with all haste and follow it.

While they were doing this, he, with Has−se and E−chee, busied themselves with the canoes of the Seminoles, of which E−chee showed the hiding−place. In these they drove great holes, so that they would not float; or if they happened to lie in the water they cut them adrift, and pushed them far from the shore.

Just as they came to the end of their task, and had thus rendered useless the last of the fleet, a wild yell of disappointed rage close at hand warned them that their enemies were upon them, and that only the most instant and speedy flight could save them from their hands.

The Seminoles had uttered their yell of disappointed rage at seeing, by the moonlight, the flashing paddles of those canoes that had already departed; for they did not at first discover the three who had lingered to destroy or render useless the canoes of their own fleet. As these sprang into the only one they had left uninjured, and shot out from the shore, the Seminoles uttered loud cries of exultation, and rushed to the hiding−place of their fleet, in order that they might follow and capture these three who were now so widely separated from their fellows.

When they discovered what had been done to their canoes, and that they were indeed useless, their fury knew no bounds, and they sent flight after flight of arrows whizzing after those who had thus outwitted them. Many of these struck the canoe; but all, save one, fell as harmless to its occupants as so many drops of rain.

The one barbed shaft that sped so truly on its fatal mission was delivered with all the strength of venomous hate, just as the canoe was passing out of the lagoon, and beyond bow−shot. It struck the gentle Has−se between the shoulders, and, piercing his body, protruded its keen point from his breast. With a sharp cry the poor lad dropped his paddle, and sank into the bottom of the boat.

At this moment the others dared not stop; but, with hearts torn with anguish at seeing their best and bravest thus stricken, they paddled on, until they had rejoined their party and passed beyond the reach of Seminole pursuit.

A few hours later, on a grassy point that projected into the river, which was flecked by glints of the sunlight the lad had loved so well, and which sifted down upon him through the moss−draped branches of a venerable oak, Has−se (the Sunbeam) lay dying. Beside him, and holding one of his hands, sat Réné de Veaux, so numbed by this great and sudden sorrow that even the comfort of tears was denied him, and his eyes were dry and strained.

"Oh Has−se, Has−se!" he cried, "To think that it is for me that thy life is given, and that for my sake only thou art lying here thus stricken to thy death!"

"Grieve not so sorely, Ta−lah−lo−ko, my brother. A brave warrior fears not death in any form; and when it comes to him while he is truly performing his duty, it is to be hailed with joy for the honor it confers."

"But thy life was so full of promise, and they whom thou lovest will miss thee so terribly."

"If my life had promise, then is that promise fulfilled in my death. For those left to mourn I am truly grieved. It is for them that, while I am still able to speak, I would ask a favor of thee, Ta−lah−lo−ko."

"Name it, my brother, and if it be a thing within my power to compass, it shall be granted, even according to thy wish," answered Réné.

A grateful smile lighted the face of the dying lad, and Réné felt a faint pressure of the hand clasped in his, as Has−se said, almost in a whisper, so weak was he becoming,

"Thou hast lost thy people: my people are losing a son. Take thou my place. Be to the old chief, my father, a son, faithful and true, and to Nethla a brother."

Then after a pause, during which he gasped painfully for breath, he added, and a questioning look passed over his face−− "And thou wilt wear the Flamingo Feather?"

"Gladly will I be thy poor substitute for son and brother to those who are dearest to thee, if they will accept of me as such," answered Réné. "As to the Flamingo Feather, didst thou not say that its wearing was reserved for the chiefs and sons of chiefs of thy people?"

Very faint came the reply, "One adopted of a chief is adopted to all the honors of an own son. His wearing of the chief's token is a sign that he will never leave nor desert his father until death shall part them. Ha−−−−"

The effort of making this explanation was too great for the weakened frame of the dying lad, and it was followed by such a terrible flow of blood from the wound that those who witnessed it made sure that the end had come.

But once again the tender eyes were opened, and once more came the words to Réné de Veaux, faint but clear,

"And thou wilt wear the Flamingo Feather?"

"I will, Has−se! I will!" exclaimed the boy, choked by the great sobs that at length came to his relief−− "and with my life will I be true to its meaning."

A smile passed over the face of the dying lad, and there came into it such a look of great joy and perfect peace that it was glorified in the eyes of those who saw him. Then Réné felt once more the gentle pressure of his hand and heard one soft sigh.

With its utterance the brave soul of Has−se (the Sunbeam) took its flight, and, at the same moment, the sun sank from view, amid the unspeakable glories of the western sky.

Very tenderly they lifted the lifeless form, and carefully laying it in the bottom of a canoe, resumed that journey towards the land of the Alachuas which had been thus sorrowfully interrupted.

The withdrawal of the arrow that had pierced Has−se's body had caused him the most intolerable agony; but he had borne it without a murmur, and only his drawn features and clinched hands had indicated his sufferings. A stream of his life's blood that could not be wholly checked had followed the arrow upon its removal, and the same day that witnessed his receipt of the wound also witnessed his death.

He never knew whose hand had sped the shaft upon its deadly flight; but, when it was withdrawn from his body, the others had noted, rudely cut upon it, the form of a serpent, which was the token of Chitta (the Snake). Thus had the Snake gained a bitter revenge for his overthrow, months before, in the games at the Feast of Ripe Corn.

Sad indeed was the return of Yah−chi−la−ne and his party to the pleasant village beside the great spring, in the land of the Alachuas. The sight of the rescued captive was indeed greeted with joyous shouts of welcome; but they were hushed, almost ere they were uttered, as those assembled on the river bank noted the black paint with which, in token of mourning, the returning warriors had covered their faces.

In heavy−hearted silence did his comrades carry their dead back into the circle of lodges, from which he had departed so bravely and loyally to the rescue of his friend. As they bore it into the lodge of Micco, his father, the old warrior sat as though all hope and joy had departed from his life forever; while outside, the air was rent by the wailings and bitter lamentations of women.

They laid him to rest, after the manner of his people, in a tomb built of great tree−trunks, so cunningly fashioned that no wild beast should ever disturb its contents. Beside him they laid whatever he had possessed of value, and the things he had prized most highly. The young girls of the tribe threw over the sleeping form great handfuls of sweet−scented wild flowers; and, ere the tomb was closed, Réné de Veaux placed in the calmly folded hands the scarlet feather, with the slender gold chain and pin attached to it, that had been a token between them.

As they finished the simple rites, and were about to turn away from the spot, the old chief, thus bereft of the pride and hope of his declining years, took the hand of the white lad in his, and, in a voice that faltered with his strong emotion said, so that all present could hear him,

"I have lost a son, and I have gained a son. Has−se has gone from me, but Ta−lah−lo−ko has come in his place. It is your chief who speaks, and as the son of your chief shall this lad dwell among you."

Then the beautiful Nethla, taking Réné's other hand, kissed him gently on the forehead, and said,

"In the name of him who has gone from us I welcome thee, Ta−lah−lo−ko, as a brother."

As she spoke she offered him a Flamingo Feather, the same that had gleamed among the dark tresses of the dead lad. Réné took it, and twining it in his own sunny curls, said, in a clear voice,

"As the son of a chief I wear this emblem. Its significance has been made known to me, and, even as I vowed to him who lies yonder, I will, from this time forth, endeavor to act truly the part of a son to this old man. I will never fail him or desert him until death shall part us."

So Réné de Veaux became, to all intents and purposes, a member of this tribe of Indians. The Flamingo Feather which he wore proclaimed his position among them to all men, and obtained for him that regard and respect which his own manliness and ready tact enabled him to retain and increase. He became a skilful hunter, and from his Indian companions he soon acquired all their knowledge of woodcraft. In return for this he taught them so many of the useful arts of his own civilization, that his reputation for wisdom spread far and wide over the land, and many from distant tribes came to learn of him.

From time to time rumors were brought to these Indians of the terrible cruelties practised by the Spaniards upon such natives of the country as fell into their hands. For this reason the tribe into which Réné had been adopted returned not to their own lands in the far east, but remained in the land of the Alachuas. With these people they became so closely united by ties of kinship and mutual interest that after a while no distinctions were drawn between them, Thus, upon the death of the Alachua chief, the good Micco was chosen to succeed him; and from that time he ruled over the united tribes. Among his wise men and principal advisers, those upon whom he relied the most were Yah−chi−la−ne and Réné de Veaux.

At the time of Has−se's death, Micco's tribe and the Alachuas had determined to be no longer annoyed by the neighborhood of the Seminole outlaws, and had despatched a powerful war−party against them. When, however, this party reached the island village in the depths of the great swamp, they found it deserted. By some means the Seminoles had obtained a knowledge of their coming, and had fled from that part of the country. The Alachuas destroyed their village, and from that time for more than a year they were heard of no more, save by rumor, which located them among the savages of the far south.

Upon a certain occasion, after he had been for many months a member of the tribe, Réné led a hunting−party, who sought to secure a large number of alligators, to the edge of the great swamp. One night as they sat about their campfire, gravely smoking their stone pipes, and listening to some of the wild traditions of their race, related by the oldest member of the party, they were suddenly startled, and all but Réné were greatly alarmed,

by a flash of light and a loud explosion. It sounded from a small grove of trees not far from them, and Réné instantly recognized it as the explosion of a fire−arm.

As it had been followed by a loud cry of pain, and as groans were still to be heard, he succeeded in convincing his companions that the terrifying sound was of human origin, and in persuading them to go with him in search of its cause.

In the grove they found a young Indian writhing in agony upon the ground, while near him lay the shattered remains of a Spanish arquebuse or musket. He had evidently attempted to discharge it at some member of the hunting−party, and, either because it was overloaded or was too badly rusted to be of service, it had burst in his hands. Although he had escaped other wounds, an examination of his face showed that his eyesight had been totally destroyed by the burning powder, and it was the pain thus caused that had drawn from him the cries and groans they had heard.

In spite of the disfiguration of his face Réné knew him the moment he was dragged within the light of the camp−fire, and it was with sensations of dread and horror that he gazed upon the once familiar features. When he explained to his followers the nature of the weapon this enemy had attempted to use against them, they were filled with rage, and would have instantly slain the wretch, but Réné bade them spare his life.

"I know him," he said, "and he is too vile a being to be worthy to meet death at your hands. Besides, if he be now released, a lifetime of blindness will prove even a greater punishment than any you can inflict. Lead him far out upon the trail, and there leave him. Others must have accompanied him, and they will doubtless find and care for their own."

So it was done as Réné had ordered, and on the following day no trace of the wounded man could be found; but the imprint of other moccasined feet, near where he had been left, showed that his friends had discovered and borne him away,

When Réné was afterwards questioned as to who he was, he answered,

"Chitta, the Seminole."

CHAPTER XVIII. THE FRENCH HAVE COME AGAIN

THREE years had passed from the time the Spaniards established their power in this part of the New World, by their fearful massacres of the French at Fort Caroline and among the sand dunes of the coast, below San Augustin. They were years of cruelty and injustice on the part of the Spaniards, and of great suffering to those nations who fell into their hands; but to the dwellers in the distant land of the Alachuas, among whom Réné de Veaux had taken up his abode, they were years of peace, prosperity, and contentment. The little encampment, that the good chief Micco had established beside the great spring, had grown into a populous village, surrounded, in all directions, by broad fields of waving maize and yellow pumpkins, besides an abundance of other things pleasant and useful. The forests still teemed with game, and the rivers with fish, and the skill of the Indian hunter was such that both could be obtained in plenty at all seasons.

In this beautiful land, with every want anticipated, surrounded by devoted friends, and leading a life of active usefulness, it would seem as though no man could be unhappy. There was, however, at least one among its dwellers who was so, and he was their ruler, the chief of them all, whose word was their law, and whose slightest command they hastened to obey. They called him Ta−lah−lo−ko (the White Chief), though in another land he would be known as Réné de Veaux.

It was a great longing to visit once more this other land, the fair France of his birth, and the apparent impossibility of ever doing so, that made the white chief unhappy, and caused his people to regard him sorrowfully, as one troubled by an evil spirit. The old medicine men of the tribe used their most powerful incantations against it, and made charms with which to drive it away; but they did not succeed, because they could not understand it, and did not even know its name, which was "Homesickness."

When the good old chief Micco died, which he did a few months before the time which this chapter opens, greatly lamented by all his people, the person who would have naturally succeeded to his office was Yah−chi−la−ne (the Eagle). When it was offered to him, this brave young Indian declared that he was not nearly so wise or fit to become a ruler as his friend Ta−lah−lo−ko, who, though younger in years than he, was so much older in wisdom that his equal did not exist in all the land. He therefore begged them to hail Ta−lah−lo−ko as head chief of the nation. Greatly to Réné's astonishment, this was done, and he found himself anxiously wondering how he should act in this new and unexpected position.

His modesty, bravery, and ready tact were, however, as quick to aid him now as when they had guided the boy Réné de Veaux on his perilous journey in search of food for the starving garrison of Fort Caroline; and, day by day, the white chief steadily gained the love and approbation of his people.

He had entered upon the performance of his new duties with all his heart and soul, and it was only within a few days that he had felt the great longing to see once more his own land, and that his thoughts had been constantly turned towards the old chateau in which his early boyhood had been passed. He felt so strongly that in some way he was to receive tidings from his native land, that one day, when a travel−stained runner from the East was brought to his lodge, he at once asked "what word dost thou bring of the French?"

The runner stared at him for a moment in amazement and then answered,

"I bring word that the French have come again. With the new moon three great thunder canoes, bearing the banner of lilies, reached the end of the salt−waters. It is thought there will soon be fighting between those who come in them and the bad white men who already hold the land. The dwellers of the country of sunrise, by the great river, send a prayer to the chief of the Alachuas. It is that he will come, and with his wisdom aid these white men, and then tear down and tread in the sands the yellow banner of death and bondage."

"Ay, that will I, and right gladly, not only with my wisdom, which is but little, but with a hundred warriors, which is more to the purpose!" exclaimed Réné in a tone of such excitement as greatly to astonish the runner once more. Springing to his feet, the white chief ordered his bow−bearer, who was in attendance, to summon to him, without delay, all the principal men of the tribe, and in particular the chief Yah−chi−la−ne. He was also to issue orders to his own war−party of a hundred picked braves to prepare themselves, with all possible despatch, for a forced journey to the great river of sunrise.

These messages from their chief caused the greatest excitement and commotion among the Alachuas. They were obeyed without hesitation, and while the braves of his own war−party restrung their bows, or secured new heads of keenest flint to their lances, the principal men, with Yah−chi−la−ne among them, repaired to his lodge.

No word was spoken until all were seated and their stone pipes were well alight, when Réné, standing in their midst, addressed them and said,

"Wise men of the Alachuas: it is now many moons since thou didst receive Ta−lah−lo−ko into thy tribe, and open wide thy hearts to him. In all this time he has been as one with thee in everything. Now he would go. His own people, the pale−faces who dwell beyond the land of sunrise, and beyond the great salt−waters, have come again. The heart of Ta−lah−lo−ko sings for joy within him at the thought of seeing them once more. The pledge

of the Flamingo Feather holds him no longer, for the old man to whom it was given has passed away. But the singing and gladness of his heart is turned to sighing and to sadness by the thought that he may never again see the land of the Alachuas. This may not be; for if it is possible for him, he will come again from beyond the great waters. Now he must go to his own people, who have many wrongs to set right, and must do much fighting before they turn again towards the sunrise. They call for help from, the brave Alachuas. Ta−lah−lo−ko and his own war−party will hasten to them. When the fighting is done, they will return; but he must go first to the land of the pale−faces. Until he comes, the brave and wise Yah−chi−la−ne will guide your councils, and lead you on the war−path. Ta−lah−lo−ko has spoken."

As Réné sat down, Yah−chi−la−ne and others sprang to their feet, and begged him not to leave them. Yah−chi−la−ne declared that as he had taken the place of Has−se (the Sunbeam), so he had become a flood of sunlight to them, and that in losing him they would be buried in darkness.

These appeals stirred his feelings deeply, but could not alter his fixed purpose; and when they saw that he was determined to leave them, they opposed him no longer, but only begged of him that he would speedily return.

So Réné de Veaux, at the head of his own war−party of picked Alachua braves, set forth once more on the same journey that he had now made so many times, and under such different circumstances.

As the canoe which bore him shot out from the shore into the middle of the river, and was headed up against the current, there arose from the multitude collected on the bank a mighty cry of lamentation for the young chief who was departing from them. For answer Réné, standing up so that all might see him, took the Flamingo Feather that was entwined in his hair, waved it above his head, and replaced it. This was a sign that, though he was leaving them, he would return again, and by it they were greatly comforted.

Once started, the party moved with the greatest speed, those who plied the paddles being frequently relieved by fresh men, and never before had Réné accomplished the journey so quickly. At its various stages he received many reminders of former passages over the same waters, and of the brave and loyal Has−se who had accompanied him on most of them. Here was the point where his loving and beloved friend had so peacefully breathed his last, and there, at the edge of the great swamp, the place where Chitta had met with his self−inflicted punishment. Now they passed the mouth of the little lagoon, from the head of which the trail led away through the dark mazes of the swamp to the Seminole island, rising from its slimy waters; and soon they were gliding swiftly down with the current of that other river, that flowed eastward to the coast.

Finally they passed its last bend, and the leading canoe, in which Réné sat, shot out into the open waters of the sound. As it did so the heart of the white chief gave a great leap within him, and for a moment a mist swam before his eyes. He had not expected to find his countrymen before passing the vast salt−marshes and reaching the River of May; but, to his astonishment, he had already come upon them. Within a mile of him lay three tall ships, riding gracefully at their anchors, and from their mast−heads floated proudly in the light of the setting sun the lily banner of France.

They were indeed the ships of his own people, whom he had never dared hope to meet again. There was the emblem of his own land, which, when he had last beheld it, had been torn, amid sorrow and defeat, from above the walls of Fort Caroline, to give place to the yellow ensign of Spain.

When Réné had controlled his tumultuous feeling sufficiently to speak, he gave orders for his warriors to proceed to the shell mound in the midst of the marshes, on which he and Has−se had rested after their flight from Fort Caroline, and there encamp and await his coming. His own canoe he ordered to be directed, with all speed, towards the ships.

As he approached them closely, he saw that he was observed by many curious eyes from their decks, and finally a hoarse voice commanded him to halt and explain his presence there.

At his order, his men backed water so stoutly with their paddles that the canoe rested motionless. Standing erect in it, Réné, speaking in French, to the great surprise of those whom he addressed, and wearing a bold air that sat well upon him, asked,

"Who commands here? and in which ship is he to be found?"

There was a slight stir on the quarter−deck of the ship nearest him; and, from a group of gentlemen who occupied it, one, wearing a plumed hat and a velvet mantle, from beneath which peeped the richly jewelled hilt of his sword, stood forth and answered courteously,

"I, Dominique de Gourges, chevalier of France, am admiral here at thy service. Who art thou, that while in savage guise yet speakest our tongue as though born to it?"

"I am known as Ta−lah−lo−ko, and am chief of that western tribe of Indians called Alachuas," answered Réné, who was not yet ready to reveal his true identity. "If it suit thy convenience, I would have a word with thee in private concerning important matters."

Upon this De Gourges invited his visitor to come on board the ship and meet him in his own cabin, where he would with pleasure converse with him.

As Réné stepped upon the quarter−deck, and passed through the group of gentlemen who still occupied it, they regarded him with the liveliest curiosity. It was not unmixed with admiration; for his tall and handsome though slight figure was set off by a costume which, though becoming to him and fashioned with the best of Indian art, was strange to their civilized eyes.

The long tresses of his sunny hair were bound by a simple fillet, and in them was twined the Flamingo Feather that proclaimed his rank. His face was tanned by the burning suns of that country to a shade but little lighter than that of his Indian companions, and after the custom of the Alachuas he had added to it here and there a touch of war−paint. From neck to feet he was clad in garments of fawn−skin, that fitted like a glove to his person. These had been made soft as velvet by the Indian process of curing, and were exquisitely embroidered and fringed. Over his shoulders was flung a light mantle of feathers, woven of the glistening plumage of many rare birds and fastened by a clasp of two great pearls set in virgin gold. In his hand he bore a slender lance, of which the shaft was of dark wood highly polished, and the tip was a splinter of purest rock−crystal.

He crossed the quarter−deck, and descended to the admiral's cabin with a proud and dignified bearing, as became his station, but which greatly belied his feelings, for he was wellnigh overwhelmed by the joyful emotions he experienced at being once more among his countrymen.

In the cabin he was most courteously received by De Gourges, and invited to a seat; but before taking it he inquired with a trembling voice,

"Oh, sir, know ye aught of a certain noble chevalier of France, by name Réné de Laudonniere, and whether he be still alive or no?"

"Ay, that I do. He of whom thou speakest is not only alive, but is well known to me. Not only that, but it is owing to his pitiful tale of cruel wrong done to him and those with him in this country that I am here at this present moment. But thou art overcome with emotion; what had he to do with thee?"

Upon thus learning that his dearly beloved uncle had escaped, and was yet alive, Réné had sunk into a seat, and buried his face in his hands. In a moment he obtained mastery of himself, and looking up, answered,

"He was all and more to me than an own father; for I am his only nephew, Réné de Veaux."

At the utterance of this name De Gourges sprang to his feet, and regarding his visitor intently, exclaimed,

"What! Do I hear thee truly? Art thou indeed that Réné de Veaux so bitterly mourned by the Chevalier Laudonniere, and not the savage thou seemest? If so, there is the best part of my mission to this new world accomplished by this meeting."

As Réné satisfied the other of his identity as the nephew of Laudonniere, De Gourges embraced him warmly, and would have at once proclaimed the joyful intelligence to those on deck; but the young man begged of him to refrain from so doing for yet a short while, as there was still much that he would say to him alone.

De Gourges consented to this, and Réné continued:

"Although I am Réné de Veaux, I am also Ta−lah−lo−ko, head chief of the Alachua nation, and I have brought with me a party of chosen warriors which I will place at thy service, if, perchance, thou canst make use of them. Wilt thou not describe to me the nature of thy business in these parts, and something of thy plans, and what has been already accomplished?"

"That will I gladly, my noble savage," answered De Gourges, with a smile, "and truly I could but lately have made a most excellent use of these brave warriors of thine, whose service thou dost so promptly tender."

Then the admiral gave Réné a brief history of his expedition, its purpose and results, which was in effect as follows:

He himself had been a prisoner in Spanish dungeons, and had suffered as a Spanish galley−slave. Upon making his escape and returning to his own country, he had met his old friend, the Chevalier Laudonniere, and learned from him of the terrible massacres of the Huguenots, perpetrated by Menendez and the soldiers at San Augustin. Upon hearing this tale of wrong and outrage, he had then and there determined to devote his fortune and his life, if that should be necessary, to the punishment of these same Spaniards, and to the rescue of such of his countrymen as might have escaped with their lives, but who still remained in the New World.

By selling his estates, he had obtained the means to fit out three ships, and in them had induced a brave company of soldiers and seamen to accompany him upon what he considered his holy mission.

Ten days before the coming of Réné he had arrived off San Augustin, where the Spaniards, supposing his ships to be that of their own nation, had fired a salute of welcome from the guns of their newly erected fort.

As De Gourges deemed this place too strong for him to attack, and as he only wished to recover that which had belonged to the French, he had not tarried there, but had sailed northward to the River of May, the name of which the Spaniards had changed to Rio de San Mateo.

He found its entrance guarded by two small forts, one on either side, which Menendez had built after his capture of Fort Caroline. As the French ships were of too great draught to cross the bar, De Gourges had organized an expedition of small boats, and had carried these works, one after another, by assault.

Having thus effected a landing, and being joined by a large body of Indians, who had joyfully hailed him as a deliverer from Spanish cruelties, he had marched to the attack of Fort San Mateo, by which name Fort Caroline

was now called.

Through a series of blunders on the part of its Spanish commandant he had been able to capture this fort with comparative ease. By the aid of powder and fire the walls of all these forts had been levelled with the ground, and their total destruction effected.

Having thus accomplished the main objects of his expedition, De Gourges had regained his ships, and sailed still farther northward, to the deep harbor in which Réné had discovered him, and in which he was now preparing for the homeward voyage.

"This," he said, in conclusion, "brings my narrative to the present date, and my expedition to the place in which I am granted the great blessing of a meeting with thee, my noble countryman, who art become at the same time a noble savage."

Then in his turn Réné gave an account of his experiences at the overthrow of Fort Caroline, his capture by the Seminoles, his rescue from them, and his subsequent life and rise to power among the Alachuas. To all of this De Gourges listened with breathless attention; and when Réné had finished, he exclaimed,

"No knight of olden time had ever adventures more thrilling than these of thine, and greatly do I envy thee thy brave record."

After this exchange of experiences the two emerged from the admiral's cabin, where they had been so long closeted as to excite the liveliest curiosity of those on deck. When Réné was made known to the officers of De Gourges' command, he was most joyfully welcomed by them, as one of whom they had heard brave things, and who was most worthy to command their respect and esteem.

CHAPTER XIX. THE OLD WORLD ONCE MORE

THE moment in which the Chevalier Dominique de Gourges embraced the long−lost Réné de Veaux, and welcomed him as one who had been dead, but had again come to life, was one of as sincere pleasure as he had ever experienced. In his destruction of the Spaniards he had been filled with a fierce joy; for, according to his view, he was performing an act of solemn justice, and rendering the world a service in thus ridding it of those whom he regarded only as murderers and pirates.

It was, however, with far different feelings from these that he welcomed his young countryman, and he felt that to bear him back to France and restore him to the loving old man who had so long mourned him as dead, would indeed be a triumph worth all the other results of his expedition. He was not certain that Réné was disposed to give up the honors of his present position and return with him to France and civilization. Therefore, after he had introduced him to his officers, it was with a tone of anxiety that he inquired what the young chief purposed to do, now that the fighting was all over, and the services of himself and his warriors were not needed.

"I propose to accompany thee to France, where I may once more embrace him whom I hold most dear on earth an thou wilt take me," answered Réné, promptly.

Concealing somewhat his joy at this answer, De Gourges said, "I will take thee gladly, lad, an thou wilt go with us: but art thou prepared to relinquish thy chieftainship of these Alachuas, and become once more the plain citizen of a country where such rank is not recognized?"

"I would sooner be the humblest citizen of my own country, and dwell among those of my own blood, than be a ruler among strangers, even though they were the proudest nation of the earth," answered Réné, with flashing

eyes and a voice trembling with emotion. "Thou knowest what it is to have a country; but dost thou know what it is to lose it, without the hope of ever regaining it?"

"Ay, that do I. Did I not tell thee I had served in Spanish galleys?"

"And hadst thou served on a Spanish throne instead of in Spanish galleys, with the same hopelessness of escape wouldst thou not have hailed with gladness the chance of resigning it, upon condition of regaining thy country?"

"Indeed I would! my dear friend, and thou art right. A man's country and his own people are dearer to him than all the world besides. I did thee a great wrong in doubting for a moment that thou wouldst not relinquish all that thou hast gained in this new world; for the sake of again rejoining those dear to thee in the old. So now let us away with all speed; and ho, for the Old World once more!"

"Wilt thou, for my sake, delay thy departure for yet two days?" asked Réné. "There be certain papers belonging to my uncle Laudonniere which were removed by me to a place of safety upon the night of the capture of Fort Caroline. If I can again find and recover them, I doubt not but they will prove of value to him, and give him cause to welcome my return with the greater joy."

"Take thou whatever time is necessary for thy business, and I will await thy pleasure. If it so please thee I will accompany thee and thy savages to the River of May, and visit once more the ruins of that stronghold that the Spaniards boasted could not be captured by the half of France. The ships shall go outside and meet us at the mouth of the river."

Réné gladly agreed to this proposition, and De Gourges continued:

"As for making greater thy uncle's joy when he again beholds thee, I doubt if that will be possible; for he will have no eyes nor thoughts save for thyself. It may be, however, that these same papers will prove of greatest value to him, for he is in sore straits for want of evidence to make good certain claims. It is not forth−coming, and he alleges that it was destroyed by the Spaniards when they captured Fort Caroline. Be that as it may, he who should be loaded with honors and riches now suffers obscurity and poverty, and perchance thou art the very one who will bring him relief."

It only deepened Réné's love for his uncle to learn that he was in trouble, and increased his desire to hasten to him. Thus it was with the greatest impatience that he awaited the coming of the daylight, that should enable them to go in search of the hidden papers.

The next morning Réné and De Gourges were rowed in one of the ship's boats to the shell mound, where the war−party of Alachuas was encamped. Here the boat was dismissed, and the French admiral was given a place in the young chief's own canoe. He was highly delighted with this, to him, novel mode of travelling, and was also greatly interested in the grim Indian warriors by whom he was surrounded. Their unmistakable devotion to their young chief touched him deeply, and he said to Réné,

"I know not if, after all, thou hast not found thy truest happiness in this wilderness."

That night they encamped at the foot of the very bluff on which Réné had been captured by the Seminoles, The next morning he and his new−found friend, accompanied by Yah−chi−la−ne and E−chee, ascended the river to the fort which had lately been the scene of such thrilling events. Now, ruined and deserted, it was destined to be forever abandoned to its own solitude.

Although it filled Réné with sadness to witness this ruin of what had once been a home to him, and in the building of which he had taken such pride, he had rather see it thus than restored to all its former glory, but remaining in the shadow of the yellow banner of Spain.

Locating as nearly as might be that portion of the ruins beneath which the tunnel had penetrated, one, and those with him, began a search of the river−bank for its entrance. At length they discovered not a slab of bark, such as had formerly covered the entrance, but a block of stone, of such size that it required their united strength to remove it. It was also of a color so closely resembling the surrounding soil that; had they not been looking for some such thing and been aware of almost the exact spot in which to search, they would not have noticed it.

The substitution of this slab of stone for the one of bark proved that others had meddled with the passage since Réné last passed through it, and also that these others were white men, probably Spaniards. Nevertheless, though he greatly feared that the search would prove fruitless, for those who had discovered the passage must also have found its contents, Réné determined to keep on and explore it to the end.

Lighting their way with torches, and with Réné in the lead, the party entered the tunnel De Gourges lamented that he had not known of its existence sooner, in which case he would have used it as a mine, in which to place powder and blow the walls of the fort about the ears of the Spaniards.

When they reached the point at which Réné had left the books and papers, they found that, even as he feared, they had been removed, so that no trace of them remained. Réné bethought himself, however, of the small iron box which he had buried in the earth at one side of the tunnel. After thus burying it he had stopped the place again with clay, and now he hoped that this box at least might have escaped discovery. So they prodded the earthen wall of the tunnel for some distance with their daggers, and at length the point of Réné's weapon struck against metal. Here they dug, and directly he had recovered the box much rusted, but still sound, in which he felt sure his uncle had kept his most important papers.

While they had thus obtained all that they could now hope for in this search, both Réné and De Gourges were anxious to explore the passage to its extreme end, and so they continued on through it.

Of a sudden they found themselves in a place that had been so greatly enlarged beyond the original limits of the tunnel that a score of men might stand in it. By the light of their uplifted torches they saw, piled one above another, from floor to roof, on two sides of this little chamber, a number of chests, both of wood and iron, every one of which was inscribed with the royal arms of Spain. So heavy were these that two strong men could not lift one of them.

Instantly recognizing their character, De Gourges exclaimed,

"As I am a knight of France, thou art in luck, Réné de Veaux! Here thou hast unwittingly stumbled upon a treasure−vault of these Spanish usurers. If I mistake not, there is that contained within these chests that will place thee on an equality with the wealthiest noble of France."

"Nay," replied Réné, "it is not mine, but thine. To the conqueror belong the spoils. But for thee, these chests and their contents, whatever be their nature, would still remain with those who placed them here."

"Not so," answered De Gourges; "I came not in search of spoil, but to punish these insolent Spaniards for their many cruelties; and besides, but for thee I should never have dreamed of the existence of this passage. Thou alone didst possess its secret, and to thee alone belongs whatever it contains."

"Well," said Réné, unwilling to discuss the matter further at that time, "it may be that we are already counting unhatched fowls. Let us first take measures to remove these chests to the ships and discover their contents.

After that we shall have ample time to define their ownership ere ever we reach France."

The grave wisdom of this speech, proceeding as it did from one whom he still regarded as a mere boy amused De Gourges greatly. He, however, admitted that Réné was right, and that they were foolish to waste time in fruitless discussion, that might be better occupied in making good their escape from a place in which they might at any time be attacked by the Spaniards from San Augustin.

By an unusually high tide the ships had been enabled to cross the bar, and now lay inside the mouth of the river. So the coffers were removed to them, though the labor of so doing was so great that it occupied the remainder of the day. By sunset it had been accomplished, and everything was in readiness for their final departure from the River of May and the New World.

As the tide turned and flowed outward to the sea, the white sails of the ships were loosened, and they were made ready to go out over the bar with it. Then came an affecting scene of farewell between the Alachuas, who were to be left behind, and their chief. One by one the stern warriors came forward and kissed his hand, while he had for each some kind word that would long be cherished in the memory of him to whom it was spoken. He had loaded their canoes with all that they could contain of presents, furnished by the generosity of De Gourges, for themselves, and to be taken to that distant western country in which he had left so many friends.

So long as he remained in their sight Réné retained his costume as an Indian chief, and in his hair gleamed the Flamingo Feather.

At length the anchors were lifted, and the stately ships moved slowly down the broad river. As they drew away from the canoes in which, with heavy hearts and sad faces, the motionless Indians watched the receding form of their beloved young chief, of a sudden the banners of France were flung to the breeze from each masthead, and a tremendous roar of artillery gave voice to his final adieu.

Long after the ships had crossed the bar and left the coast, Réné, still in his Indian dress, stood alone, his feelings respected by those about him. With a swelling heart he watched the shores on which he had suffered and enjoyed so much, and where his boyhood had been left, and a noble manhood gained. As it finally disappeared in the gathering darkness, he slowly turned and descended into the admiral's cabin. When he again appeared he was at first unrecognized, for his Indian costume had been exchanged for that of civilization, and the Flamingo Feather was no longer to be seen in his hair.

The opening of the Spanish treasure−chests found in the underground passage revealed their contents to be of astounding value, consisting of jewels, gold coin, massive silver plate, and weapons of curious design and great worth.

The tunnel had been discovered during the building of a house for the Spanish commandant of the fort upon the site of that formerly occupied by Laudonniere, and he had conceived the idea of constructing within it his treasure−vault. The books and papers concealed there by Réné had been taken forth and burned with great rejoicing; for they were supposed to be filled with heretic magic and sorceries. Upon the sudden capture of the fort by De Gourges there had been no time to remove the treasure from its underground chamber, and the few Spaniards who escaped and fled to San Augustin had left it, hoping to return and recover it when the French should have departed.

After much discussion concerning it, De Gourges consented to accept of it an amount sufficient to recompense him for the sum expended in fitting out his expedition. It was, however, decreed by him and those with him that the balance belonged to Réné de Veaux, and to none other.

Thus the lad, who had never in all his adventurous career dreamed of acquiring worldly riches, neared his native land possessed of wealth so great that it might be envied of princes.

The homeward voyage was quick and prosperous, and unmarked by incident save their pursuit by a great Spanish fleet which they encountered in the Bay of Biscay. This danger was escaped by their superior speed and seamanship, and at length Réné de Veaux saw the spires and roofs of that same seaport from which he had sailed for the New World, in company with his Uncle Laudonniere, nearly four years before.

Tidings of their return, and some rumors of the brave doings of De Gourges and those who sailed with him, had preceded them. So, as the three ships sailed into the harbor with banners flying, sails glistening like white clouds in the bright sunlight, and strains of martial music issuing from them, the bells of the little town rang a merry peal of welcome, and the quay was thronged with people in holiday attire, eager to learn of their voyage to the New World.

A triumphal procession and fetes of various kinds had been arranged to give honor to the victors; but Réné de Veaux was too anxious to reach his uncle and be the first to take to him the tidings of his own safe return, to care for these things. So he eluded those who would have made a hero of him, and, travelling by post, made all speed towards Paris.

In the same little unpretentious dwelling in which he had first greeted his nephew years before, the old soldier, Réné de Laudonniere, sat one chill autumn evening, musing beside a small fire. His surroundings were poor, and his fine face was haggard and careworn. As he sat, in his loneliness, his thoughts were in the New World, and with the brave lad whom he had lost there.

His musings were interrupted by the entrance of an old servant, who was none other than that Francois who served the family of De Veaux for so many years, and who had now joined his poor fortunes with those of the old chevalier. As he quietly opened the door, he announced:

"There is one without who would have speech with thee, but he refuses to give his name."

"What manner of person is he?"

"As well as I may judge, he is young, tall, dark, and has the air of being from foreign parts."

"Well, show him in. His presence will at least divert my mind from sorrowful thoughts."

With a quick, firm tread, a young man entered the room and stood for a moment silently regarding Laudonniere. The light from the fire was not sufficient to disclose his features, and the other had no suspicion of who he was. At the same time he felt strangely moved by the young man's presence, and also remained silent, waiting for him to speak.

"Uncle."

The old man started at the word, and leaned eagerly forward.

"Uncle, dost thou not know thy Réné?"

"My Réné! Réné de Veaux? He is dead in the New World," cried Laudonniere, trembling with excitement.

"No, my uncle! my father! thy Réné is not dead in the New World. He is alive in the Old World, and has come to be thy comfort and support from this time forth."

In all France there was not such a happy household as that modest dwelling contained that night. Old Francois was called in to share the joy of his master, and until daylight did the two old men sit and listen with breathless interest to the strange history of him who had come back to them as one risen from the grave. Every now and then they rose to embrace him, and then resumed their seats, only to devour him with their eyes and ply him with questions.

He too had questions to ask, and now learned for the first time of his uncle's escape to the two small ships left by Admiral Ribault. With Laudonniere had also escaped the good Le Moyne and Simon the armorer. They had waited for him until forced to give over all hope of ever seeing him again, and had then sailed sadly away.

When Réné produced the little iron casket that he had recovered from its hiding−place within the tunnel, Laudonniere joyfully seized it. He cried out that it contained that which would restore him to honor and wealth, and blessed his nephew for thus bringing him that which was more precious than life itself.

The great riches that Réné had brought with him from the New World enabled him to restore to all its former glory the old chateau in which he was born, and which, of all places on earth, he held most dear. Here, for many years, he dwelt in happiness and contentment. At times he would be seized with a great longing to revisit the beautiful land in that far−away country beyond the western sea where lived the Alachuas. At such times he would close his eyes and fancy that he could again hear their musical voices calling him "Ta−lah−lo−ko," their white chief.

That he did revisit them, at least once before he died, is proved by existing manuscript; but he is not supposed ever to have resumed his position as their chief.

For many generations his descendants preserved among their most valued treasures, and may possibly retain even to this day, the exquisitely embroidered costume of an Indian chieftain. To it was attached, by a golden chain and pin, a curious scarlet feather, which was supposed to be that of a flamingo.

THE END