





INV. 18TH

LAST OF THE MOHICANS.

A Narrative of 1757.

BY J. FENIMORE

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LAST OF THE MOHICANS.

Register District of Pennsylvania, to wit:

REMEMBERED, that on the tenth day of January, in the fiftieth
Independence of the United States of America A. D. 1826,
of the said district, have deposited in this office
of their claim as proprietors, in the words

of 1757. By the Author of
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THE
LAST OF THE MOHICANS.

CHAPTER I.

Mine ear is open, and my heart prepared;
The worst is worldly loss thou canst unfold:—
Say, is my kingdom lost?—*Shakspeare.*

It was a feature peculiar to the colonial wars of North America, that the toils and dangers of the wilderness were to be encountered, before the adverse hosts could meet in murderous contact. A wide, and, apparently, an impervious boundary of forests, severed the possessions of the hostile provinces of France and England. The hardy colonist, and the trained European who fought at his side, frequently expended months in struggling against the rapids of the streams, or in effecting the rugged passes of the mountains, in quest of an opportunity to exhibit their courage in a more martial conflict. But, emulating the patience and self-denial of the practised native warriors, they learned to overcome every difficulty; and it would seem, that in time, there was no recess of the woods so dark, nor any secret place so lovely, that it might claim exemption from the inroads of those who had pledged their blood to satiate their vengeance, or to uphold the cold and selfish policy of the distant monarchs of Europe.

Perhaps no district, throughout the wide extent of the intermediate frontiers, can furnish a livelier picture of the cruelty and fierceness of the savage warfare of those periods, than the country which lies between the head waters of the Hudson and the adjacent lakes.

The facilities which nature had there offered to the march of the combatants, were too obvious to be neglected. The lengthened sheet of the Champlain stretched from the frontiers of Canada, deep within the borders of the neighbouring province of New-York, forming a natural passage across half the distance that the French were compelled to master in order to strike their enemies. Near its southern termination, it received the contributions of another lake, whose waters were so limpid, as to have been exclusively selected by the Jesuit missionaries, to perform the typical purification of baptism, and to obtain for it the appropriate title of "Saint Sacrement." The less zealous English thought they conferred a sufficient honour on its unsullied fountains, when they bestowed the name of their reigning prince, the second of the House of Hanover. The two united to rob the untutored possessors of its wooded scenery of their native right to perpetuate its original appellation of "Horican."

Winding its way among countless islands, and imbedded in mountains, the "holy lake" extended a dozen leagues still farther to the south. With the high plain that there interposed itself to the further passage of the water, commenced a portage of as many miles, which conducted the adventurer to the banks of the Hudson, at a point, where, with the usual obstructions of the rapids, or rifts, as they were then termed in the language

of the country, the river became navigable to the tide.

While, in the pursuit of their daring plans of annoyance, the restless enterprise of the French even attempted the distant and difficult gorges of the Alleghany, it may easily be imagined that their proverbial acuteness would not overlook the natural advantages of the district we have just described. It became, emphatically, the bloody arena, in which most of the battles for the mastery of the colonies were contested. Forts were erected at the different points that commanded the facilities of the route, and were taken and retaken, rased and rebuilt, as victory smiled, or expediency dictated. While the husbandmen shrunk back from the dangerous passes, within the safer boundaries of the more ancient settlements, armies larger than those that had often disposed of the sceptres of the mother countries, were seen to bury themselves in these forests, whence they never re-issued but in skeleton bands, that were haggard with care, or dejected by defeat. Though the arts of peace were unknown to this fatal region, its forests were alive with men; its glades and glens rang with the sounds of martial music, and the echoes of its mountains threw back the laugh, or repeated the wanton cry, of many a gallant and reckless youth, as he hurried by them, in the noontide of his spirits, to slumber in a long night of forgetfulness.

It was in this scene of strife and bloodshed, that the incidents we shall attempt to relate occurred, during the third year of the war which England and France last waged, for the possession of a country, that, happily, neither was destined to retain.

The imbecility of her military leaders abroad, and the fatal want of energy in her councils at home, had lowered the character of Great Britain from the proud elevation on which it had been placed by the talents and enterprise of her former warriors and statesmen. No longer dreaded by her enemies, her servants were fast losing the salutary confidence of self-respect. In this mortifying abasement, the colonists, though innocent of her imbecility, and too humble to be the agents of her blunders, were but the natural participators. They had recently seen a chosen army, from that country, which, reverencing as a mother, they had fondly believed invincible—an army led by a chief who had been selected from a crowd of trained warriors for his rare military endowments, disgracefully routed by a handful of French and Indians, and only saved from annihilation by the coolness and spirit of a Virginian boy, whose riper fame has since diffused itself, with the steady influence of moral truth, to the uttermost confines of Christendom. A wide frontier had been laid naked by this unexpected disaster, and more substantial evils were preceded by a thousand fanciful and imaginary dangers. The alarmed colonists believed that the yells of the savages mingled with every fitful gust of wind that issued from the interminable forests of the west. The terrific character of their merciless enemies, increased, immeasurably, the natural horrors of warfare. Numberless recent massacres were still vivid in their recollections; nor was there any ear, in the provinces, so deaf as not to have drunk in with avidity the narrative of some fearful tale of midnight murder, in which the natives of the forests were the principal and barbarous actors. As the credulous and excited

traveller related the hazardous chances of the wilderness, the blood of the timid curdled with terror, and mothers cast anxious glances even at those children which slumbered within the security of the largest towns. In short, the magnifying influence of fear began to set at nought the calculations of reason, and render those who should have remembered their manhood, the slaves of the basest of passions. Even the most confident and the stoutest hearts, began to think the issue of the contest was becoming doubtful; and that abject class was hourly increasing in numbers, who thought they foresaw all the possessions of the English crown in America, subdued by their Christian foes, or laid waste by the inroads of their relentless allies.

When, therefore, intelligence was received at the fort which covered the southern termination of the portage between the Hudson and the lakes, that Montcalm had been seen moving up the Champlain with an army "numerous as the leaves on the trees," its truth was admitted with more of the craven reluctance of those who court the arts of peace, than with the stern joy that a warrior should feel, in finding an enemy within reach of his blow. The news had been brought towards the decline of a day in midsummer, by an Indian runner, that also bore an urgent request from Munro, who commanded the work on the shore of the "holy lake," for a speedy and powerful reinforcement. It has already been mentioned, that the distance between these two posts was less than five leagues. The rude path which originally formed their line of communication, had been widened for the passage of wagons, so that the distance which had been travelled by the son of the forest in two hours,

might easily be effected by a detachment of troops, with their necessary baggage, between the rising and setting of a summer sun. The loyal servants of the British crown had given to one of these forest fastnesses the name of William Henry, and to the other that of Fort Edward; calling each after a favourite prince of the reigning family. The veteran Scotchman, just named, held the first, with a regiment of regulars and a few provincials, a force, really, by far too small to make head against the formidable power that Montcalm was leading to the foot of his earthen mounds. At the latter, however, lay Gen. Webb, who commanded the armies of the king in the northern provinces, with a body of more than five thousand men. By uniting the several detachments of his command, this officer might have arrayed nearly double that number of combatants against the enterprising Frenchman, who had ventured so far from his reinforcements, with an army but little superior in numbers.

But, under the influence of their degraded fortunes, both officers and men appeared better disposed to await the approach of their formidable antagonist within their works, than to resist the progress of their march, by emulating the successful example of the French at Fort du Quesne, and striking a blow on their advance.

After the first surprise of the intelligence had a little abated, a rumour was spread through the intrenched camp, which stretched along the margin of the Hudson, forming a chain of outworks to the body of the fort itself, that a chosen detachment of fifteen hundred men was to depart with the dawn for William Henry, the post at the northern extremity of the portage. That which at first was only rumour, soon became certainty.

as orders passed from the quarters of the commander-in-chief to the several corps he had selected for this service, to prepare for their speedy departure. All doubt as to the intention of Webb now vanished, and an hour or two of hurried footsteps and anxious faces succeeded. The novice in the military art flew from point to point, retarding his own preparations by the excess of his violent and somewhat distempered zeal; while the more practised veteran made his arrangements with a deliberation that scorned every appearance of haste; though his sober lineaments, and anxious eye, sufficiently betrayed that he had no very strong professional relish for the, as yet, untried and dreaded warfare of the wilderness. At length the sun set in a flood of glory behind the distant western hills, and as darkness drew its veil around the secluded spot, the sounds of preparation diminished; the last light finally disappeared from the log cabin of some officer; the trees cast their deeper shadows over the mounds, and the rippling stream, and a silence soon pervaded the camp, as deep as that which reigned in the vast forest by which it was environed.

According to the orders of the preceding night, the heavy sleep of the army was broken by the rolling of the warning drums, whose rattling echoes were heard issuing, on the damp morning air, out of every vista of the woods, just as day began to draw the shaggy outlines of some tall pines of the vicinity, on the opening brightness of a soft and cloudless eastern sky. In an instant, the whole camp was in motion; the meanest soldier arousing from his lair to witness the departure of his comrades, and to share in the excitement and incidents of the hour. The simple array of the chosen band was soon completed.

While the regular and trained hirelings of the king marched with ready haughtiness to the right of the line, the less pretending colonists took their humbler position on its left, with a docility that long practice had rendered easy. The scouts departed; strong guards preceded and followed the lumbering vehicles that bore the baggage; and before the gray light of the morning was mellowed by the rays of the rising sun, the main body of the combatants wheeled into column, and left the encampment with a show of high military bearing, that served to drown the slumbering apprehensions of many a novice, who was now about to make his first essay in arms. While in view of their admiring comrades, the same proud front and ordered array was observed, until the notes of their fifes growing fainter in distance, the forest at length appeared to swallow up the living mass which had slowly entered its bosom.

The deepest sounds of the retiring and invisible column had ceased to be borne on the breeze to the listeners, and the latest straggler had already disappeared in pursuit, but there still remained the signs of another departure, before a log cabin of unusual size and accommodations, in front of which those sentinels paced their rounds, who were known to guard the person of the English general. At this spot were gathered some half dozen horses, caparisoned in a manner which showed that two, at least, were destined to bear the persons of females, of a rank that it was not usual to meet so far in the wilds of the country. A third wore the trappings and arms of an officer of the staff; while the rest, from the plainness of the housings, and the travelling mails with which they were encumbered, were

evidently fitted for the reception of as many menials, who were, seemingly, already awaiting the convenience or pleasure of those they served. At a respectful distance from this unusual show, were gathered divers groups of curious idlers ; some admiring the blood and bone of the high-mettled military charger, and others gazing at the preparations with the dull wonder of vulgar curiosity. There was one man, however, who, by his countenance and actions, formed a marked exception to those who composed the latter class of spectators, being neither idle, nor seemingly very ignorant.

The person of this remarkable individual was to the last degree ungainly, without being in any particular manner deformed. He had all the bones and joints of other men, without any of their proportions. Erect, his stature surpassed that of his fellows ; though, seated, he appeared reduced within the ordinary limits of our race. The same contrariety in his members, seemed to exist throughout the whole man. His head was large ; his shoulders narrow ; his arms long and dangling ; while his hands were small, if not delicate. His legs and thighs were thin nearly to emaciation, but of extraordinary length ; and his knees would have been considered tremendous, had they not been outdone by the broader foundations on which this false superstructure of blended human orders, was so profanely reared. The ill-assorted and injudicious attire of the individual only served to render his awkwardness more conspicuous. A sky-blue coat, with short and broad skirts and low cape, exposed a long thin neck, and longer and thinner legs, to the worst animadversions of the evil disposed. His nether garment was of yellow nankeen, closely

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