

In the Wilds of

Florida

by W. H. G. Kingston



Chapter 15

Once more we were galloping in the direction of Ocoola's lodges. The warriors of the various tribes throughout the country had been summoned round the standard of their chief, so that the district through which we passed appeared perfectly destitute of inhabitants; not a red man did we meet to interfere with us. We thus hoped that having distanced the followers of Spotted Wolf, we might get Juanita off without having to encounter an enemy. Rochford knew the country perfectly, having frequently hunted over the whole of it for several months together; and he was able unerringly to guide us in the direction we wished to go. At last Rochford pulled up on the borders of a hummock. "Remain here with the horses, ready to start at any moment," he said. "Miss Kearney will, I trust, be on the look-out for me; and if we can but elude the vigilance of the old squaws, we shall be with you very soon."

Having mounted the horse we had brought for him, he set off, and was soon lost to sight. We remained under shelter of the trees; so that, unless any one approached close to the wood, we ran but little risk of being discovered. I was very anxious to accompany Rochford; but he considered that my appearance would excite suspicion, and that it would be safer to go alone. Though he had not spoken to me of the danger he incurred, I knew that it was very great; for should he be captured in his attempt to carry off the young lady, it would be looked upon by Ocoola as an act of treachery, and he would to a certainty be put to death. His intention was to enter the village as if he had just come from a hunting expedition, and offer to supply the squaws with venison; or should he be fortunate enough to shoot a deer on his way, he would carry it with him, as it would greatly facilitate his proceedings. That he would do this appeared very unlikely, as the distance was but short: still a deer might be seen in the hummock, and he was too good a shot, should he discover one, to let it escape him.

Directly he had gone, we dismounted to allow our horses to feed, and to drink from a pool which we found close inside the hummock. The time dragged slowly on; I had to look at my watch several times to satisfy myself that our friend had not been very much longer absent than we had expected. Waiting, indeed, is far more trying than when a person is actively engaged.

"Rochford ought to be here by this time," observed Captain Norton. "I fear that some accident has happened to him, or that he finds it impossible to get the young lady away. We shall have the Indians down upon us if we have to wait much longer."

"What do you say to making a dash on the village, and carrying off my sister in spite of the squaws or old men?" exclaimed Carlos.

"Sure that would be the finest thing to do, after all," cried Tim. "We'll just keep the old Redskins employed while Mr. Rochford or Mr. Maurice lifts her on her horse and gallops off with her."



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They're not likely to have any fire-arms in the place, except maybe a few old muskets without flints in them, as the warriors will have carried off all they own to fight the whites."

I thought Tim's proposal worthy of consideration. But Captain Norton was of opinion that the risk to the young lady would be too great; for though the Indians in the village might very possibly have no fire-arms, they had bows and arrows, and a chance arrow might strike her as well as any of us. "We will wait another half-hour," he said; "and if Rochford does not then appear with Miss Kearney, we will as Carlos proposes, gallop into the village, and making directly for the chief's lodge—which we shall know by its superior size and decoration—we will carry away the lady if she be within it. We may possibly also rescue our friend, should we find that he has been made a prisoner."

Captain Norton's plan exactly suited the ideas of the party; and I regretted that we had not attempted it at first: we should have gained much time, and run less risk than we were now likely to do.

That last half-hour appeared longer than any of its predecessors. Rochford did not arrive. We tightened our saddle-girths, saw that our bits were well fitted, and threw ourselves on horseback. There were but four of us to oppose some scores of squaws, and we could not tell how many old warriors, who, although unable to fight on the battle-field, might prove no inconsiderable foes when defending their lodges. We at first advanced slowly, that we might put our horses to full speed when the time came for action. As may be supposed, we kept our swords loose in their scabbards, and our rifles ready, with fresh ammunition for reloading.

We had as yet encountered no one: it was evident that the inhabitants, for some reason or other, must be all in the village. At length the tops of the lodges appeared in sight. Our hearts beat quickly. The sooner, after we were seen, we could reach the village the better.

"Forward!" cried Captain Norton. "Yonder is the point for which we must aim."

We struck our spurs into our horses' flanks. Scarcely had we done so than a chorus of yells and shrieks, in the shrillest of tones, broke on our ears; and the next instant we saw a horse burst forth from amidst the lodges with Rochford on its back, carrying Juanita before him. Close at its heels came a whole herd of women—or rather furies they appeared, from their fearful cries and wild gestures—while just over their heads we could see several of the old warriors coming from various directions, endeavouring as they moved along to fix their arrows in their bows.

"Come with me, Carlos," cried Captain Norton. "Maurice and Tim, take the other side; and let our friends pass between us. Then wheel round, and cover them as they gallop on. We shall soon distance these old hags, who, seeing that they have no chance of overtaking us, will soon give up the pursuit."

I could not help giving way to a loud shout as Rochford, with Juanita, almost fainting, in his arms, rode up. I was joined in it by my companions; and we were all in another instant galloping along at a rate which quickly enabled us to distance our pursuers, although not to get out of earshot of their terrific cries.

Not until we had galloped for a couple of miles did we pull rein, when we halted to allow Juanita to recover herself, and to congratulate her and Rochford on their escape. Captain Norton inquired



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whether Juanita felt able to mount the horse we had brought. She replied that she would do as Rochford advised; but was ready to do so, if necessary.

“Jump on its back, then,” said Carlos; “we shall go all the faster. You can manage a steed as well as any of us.”

Juanita looked at Rochford, and then allowed him and her brother to help her on her horse. When once she was seated in the saddle, she appeared herself again. There was no time to make inquiries as to how Rochford had contrived to carry her off. We had not only to escape from the people in the village who might come in pursuit of us, but also to avoid Spotted Wolf’s party, who would be certain, should they discover our trail, to follow us up and try to avenge his death.

In a way we had little expected, we had thus far accomplished the object of our expedition. Still, many dangers lay before us. Had it not been necessary to return to Fort King to rejoin my father, we should have felt inclined to push across the Ocklawaha for the banks of the Saint John River, and so make our way to Castle Kearney. The distance, however, was great; and unless we could find a boat, our ammunition might fail before we could reach it, and Juanita might be exposed to more fatigue than she would be able to bear. Towards Fort King, therefore, we directed our course. Juanita declared that she could gallop the whole distance if the horses could continue going. But we had great reason to fear that they could not accomplish this task; for although they had had a long noon-day rest, they had already been galloping for several hours. Still, we determined to push forward during daylight, and to continue on at night should the nature of the ground permit us. We kept a look-out over our left shoulders in the direction in which it was possible the Indians might appear. They might also, if they suspected the route we should take, have hurried on and formed an ambush; and although they were without fire-arms, their arrows at a short distance were as dangerous as bullets. We therefore kept at a distance from any clumps of trees or shrubs which would afford them shelter. Our steeds showed abundance of mettle; and by the time night approached we had every reason to believe that we had out-distanced all pursuers.

As the sun set we saw an open prairie before us, with here and there clumps of pine. The night was clear, and the stars would serve to guide us. Rochford offered to lead the way, that he might warn us of any danger. Carlos rode on one side of Juanita, and I on the other; and the captain and Tim brought up the rear. On we went, though at a slower pace than that which we had pursued during the day-time.

“But how in the world did you allow yourself to be carried off, and give us all this trouble?” asked Carlos, who was accustomed to speak in a somewhat brusque manner to his sisters.

“Depend upon it, I could not help myself,” she answered, not apparently wishing just then to enlighten him.

He, however, again and again pressed her.

“It is a painful subject, and I would rather not think about it,” she answered. “However, if you insist upon knowing, I will tell you. You remember when we were out riding how I galloped on ahead. I did so under the belief that the others were following; when, looking round, I saw that I was alone, and to my horror directly afterwards found myself in the presence of five mounted Indians, one of whom I recognised as the chief who had come to the judge’s house while we were there. He advanced



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and addressed me, courteously enough, in a long speech full of flowery language, the tenor of which was that I must become his wife. I answered, with as much composure as I could command, that such a thing was impossible, and that I must beg to decline the honour he intended me. I avoided, as I thought, saying a word to annoy him; but I suppose I exhibited the indignation I felt. Suddenly seizing the bridle of my horse, and ordering his braves to follow, he set off at a gallop. I screamed out, threatening to throw myself to the ground; but I was afraid of doing so lest I should break my neck, or that the Indians would gallop over me, which from their looks I thought they would have very little scruple in doing.

“On we went for miles and miles, until we reached a large camp of several hundred warriors. Here a hut was quickly built, which the chief begged me to occupy; and I was treated with every courtesy, although there was not even a squaw to attend on me. It was impossible to escape; and although I was dreadfully frightened, I tried hard to recover my composure and presence of mind, so that I might be able to act on an emergency. The chief, who spoke very good English, said he intended to convey me to the lodges of his tribe, where the squaws would take care of me and attend to all my wishes, provided I made no attempt to escape; and that I should remain there until the white men were driven out of the country and the natives had regained their rights, when he would claim me as his bride. I thanked him for the honour he intended me, but entreated that he would in the meantime carry me back to my father and mother, who would be greatly alarmed at my disappearance. He answered that it was with regard to my safety that he had carried me off from the whites, who would ere long be exterminated; and that he could not bear to see one for whom he had so great an affection remain to share the fate prepared for them. He paid me all sorts of absurd compliments, likening me to a lily, an angel, a star, and I don’t know what else; though I scarcely listened to what he said on that subject. In vain I pleaded, notwithstanding any risk I might run, to be allowed to return home: he was deaf to all my entreaties. As I was careful, however, not to say anything to irritate him, he continued as courteous as at first.

“We set out with a strong escort, and galloped on till nightfall; but not until the end of the fourth day did we reach the chief’s lodges. He there committed me to the charge of his mother, who had, no doubt, in her younger days been very handsome. She received me very kindly, and I had no reason to complain of the way I was treated; in fact, had I been a princess of their tribe, more attention and respect could not have been paid me.

“I now first learned that the chief was no other than Oceola, the great leader of the Indians in the present rebellion. When he visited me I tried to persuade him to make peace with the whites, and to abandon his attempt to regain the country; trying to explain to him how hopeless it was, as, should every settler and soldier be killed, others in overwhelming numbers would ere long pour into the country and revenge their people. He replied that the red men had been victorious everywhere; that hundreds of the Palefaces had been killed; and that such would be the fate of all who should come to the country. At last he took his departure. I was very glad he was gone. I feared, however, that I had not succeeded in impressing him with the hopelessness of his cause.

“Though I saw no means of escaping, I tried to keep up my spirits, and resolved to take advantage of any opportunity that might occur. Imagine my surprise, after I had been some days in



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the Indian village, to see a white man dressed as a hunter enter it. I felt sure that he was your friend Rochford. Though I pretended not to notice his arrival, I resolved as soon as possible to communicate with him. He must have seen me or heard that I was there; for within an hour a note was brought me, written on a small scrap of paper, containing these words:—

“‘Trust me; I will assist you to escape.—R.’

“Tearing off the small blank piece of the note, I simply wrote ‘Yes,’ fearing lest by any chance it might fall into the hands of the chief. By some means or other, Rochford managed to throw the squaws off their guard, by bringing either venison or some other game each time he came to the village; and he managed to hold frequent communication with me. The rest you know. My great fear now is lest he should fall into the hands of the Indians, who would, on finding that he had assisted to carry me off, wreak a dreadful vengeance upon him.”

I assured Juanita that there was little danger of this; and quieted her fears as well as I could by promising to do my best to prevent our gallant friend running any unnecessary risk.

At last we found so many impediments in our course—Rochford having two or three times narrowly escaped breaking his neck—that we were compelled to halt. As well as we were able to do so in the dark, we put up a shelter for Juanita. The night passed quietly, and the next day we reached Fort King.

Nothing of importance had occurred during our absence. My father was still far from well, and very anxious about my uncle and the party who had accompanied him; for nothing had been heard of them, and it was feared that they might have been surprised by the Indians and cut off, as many other parties had been. Our great wish, therefore, was to set off to ascertain their fate. Should we discover my uncle, it would be a great relief to him to know that his daughter was in comparative safety.

Juanita’s position, however, was far from pleasant: though she had her brother, her uncle, and me, there was no female in the fort to attend on her, and the best accommodation which could be provided was rough in the extreme.

How to proceed was now the question. If she were left in the fort, either Carlos or my father must remain with her. My father was ill, and unfit for any fatigue, though he might have been able to perform an easy journey of short stages. It was therefore decided that he should remain in the fort, and that as many men as could be spared,—including Lejoillie, Carlos, and I,—under the command of Captain Norton, should set off to search for my uncle. Should we discover him, our plan was to return directly to Fort King, and from thence make our way to the Saint John River, by which we could descend to Castle Kearney. It was possible, however, that by this time my uncle had returned home, though he was not likely to have done so without having obtained tidings of his daughter. We therefore resolved, after giving the horses a day’s rest, to set out on our fresh expedition.

To my surprise, Rochford excused himself from accompanying us, although he did not intend to remain in the fort. “I have a duty,” he said, “to perform to others; and while fully alive to the dangers I shall run in passing through the country alone, it must be done.”

I asked him what it was.

“There are some who have put confidence in me, and I cannot disappoint them; besides which, I have still some hopes of inducing Ocoola to sue for peace, and to endeavour to obtain by lawful



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means the object he desires," he answered.

"But should he discover that you assisted to carry off Juanita, how will he treat you?"

"As he has hitherto done. He is not likely to be informed of the circumstance; and if he were, I do not fear the consequences to myself," he replied.

Before we set out, Rochford had left the fort.

Black Hawk had hitherto remained a prisoner at large in the fort. He was narrowly watched, but he had not made the slightest attempt to escape. When he heard of the death of Spotted Wolf, and that he had been killed by Carlos, he remarked that it served him right, as he had come for the purpose of betraying us, and would have succeeded had we trusted him.

This frank avowal of Black Hawk fully satisfied the commandant and Captain Norton of his honesty; and as they considered that he would be of great service to us, they asked him whether he would join our expedition. He appeared to hesitate, observing that should any of his countrymen capture him, his death would be certain.

Captain Norton replied that we would protect him to the best of our power, and he finally accepted our offer.

Besides those I have mentioned, we had only fifteen men—a small party to venture through the country in its present state. More, however, could not be spared. We on horseback would be detained by those on foot; but they were active fellows, well inured to fatigue, and would get rapidly over the ground, and we expected to make rapid marches, absolutely necessary in an expedition of the nature we had undertaken.

Carlos was in high spirits, and seemed not to have a doubt as to his father's safety. It was proposed to place Black Hawk on horseback, but he declined the offer, saying that he could march faster and with less fatigue than any of the Palefaces, and that he would accompany us on foot.

For the first two days we pushed on at a rapid rate, not meeting with any recent Indian trails. Black Hawk, indeed, declared his belief that the red men had retired to the north-west, and that we should not fall in with them. At length, however, at the end of the third day, we came upon the remains of recent campfires and trails, which showed that a considerable body of Indians had lately been in that part of the country. We kept very close together, although the direction which the trails took showed that Black Hawk was right in his conjecture as to the insurgents having moved to the north-west, and we hoped therefore to avoid them. In case, however, any should have remained in the neighbourhood, we moved to the right, and chose as eligible a spot as we could find for our camp, with a thick wood to the west, which would conceal our fires, and an impassable marsh on the opposite side. To prevent the risk of a surprise, scouts were sent out to examine the country, to ascertain that no enemy was near at hand. Carlos and two men, accompanied by Black Hawk, went in one direction, Tim and I in another, intending to separate, while Lejoillie remained with Captain Norton in the camp. We were charged not to go far, and to return before darkness came on. My companion and I each made a tolerably wide circuit, examining every spot which could conceal a foe, when we again met.

"Not the shadow of an enemy," observed Tim. "It's my belief that the Redskins have taken themselves off as far as they can get from the whites, and won't be eager to meet any of us."



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It was quite dark by the time we got back to the camp; but neither Carlos nor the men who had accompanied him on foot had made their appearance. We waited for some time, until we began to grow anxious. At last footsteps were heard, and two men were seen coming towards the camp. They proved to be those who had accompanied Carlos and Black Hawk. They reported that they had got separated in a wood from the young master and the Indian, and that although they had searched about everywhere, they could not find them or discover their trail.

This announcement caused considerable anxiety. Captain Norton blamed the men for their carelessness; but they declared that Carlos himself had told them the course they were to take, and that they had followed no other. We waited for some time, hoping that my young cousin would, guided by the fire, find his way to camp. The Indian would, at all events, be able to lead him right. But what if, after all, Black Hawk had proved treacherous? I was thankful when Captain Norton, after waiting for another hour, decided to send out three or four men. Tim and I begged that we might go; and Lejoillie offered to accompany us. As our horses were tolerably fresh, we should get over more ground than the men on foot, so we at once set out in the direction Carlos had taken. The moon, we knew, would shortly rise and enable us to see our way. We knew that in the immediate neighbourhood of the camp there was but little risk of our falling in with an enemy; but it was possible, should we continue on to any distance from it, that we might find ourselves unexpectedly in the presence of a band of Redskins. Lejoillie at last proposed that we should return, observing that Carlos could not intentionally have gone as far, and that if he had met with any accident, we should find him nearer the camp.

Just after he had said this, I noticed, near the edge of a wood, a light, as if from a small fire. I pointed it out to Lejoillie and Tim. We at all events were bound to examine it, and at once rode forward. As we drew nearer, we could hear the howling and yelping of wolves. Presently the moon rose beyond the far-extending prairie, and showed us a wood on one side, with a number of large birds flitting to and fro, or hovering about the fire.

"Some one lies there, depend upon it," said Lejoillie. "Those birds, like the wolves, gather only to feed on the dead."

We galloped forward. On the ground before the fire lay the body of a man, with an arrow sticking in his breast. If dead, he was only just so, for the savage brutes had not yet commenced their banquet. As we approached they retreated, still howling, to a distance. I threw myself from my horse, oppressed by a terrible dread that the body was that of my cousin. A glance at the features, on which the light of the fire fell, convinced me of the sad fact. It seemed as if only just then the breath had left his body, for it was still warm. I was joined by Lejoillie, while Tim held the horses.

"We can do nothing for him, I fear," said my friend, feeling his pulse. "Even had there been life in him, the moment we withdrew the arrow he would have died. Let me warn you it is no safe place; the fellow who killed him may be watching to shoot us. We must be away from this, and it will be time enough to consider as we go along how he came here and met with his death. We will carry him with us to the camp, poor boy, and prevent him being torn to pieces by the wolves."

Tim was inclined to give way to a howl of sorrow in honour of the young master, but I stopped him. He insisted, however, on carrying the body, as the last mark of respect he could show to my



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uncle's son. "It would have broken my heart entirely, Mr. Maurice, if it had been you. It's bad enough, sure, as it is," he exclaimed, as he placed the inanimate form across his saddle.

We galloped on, feeling that it was more than likely that we should have a flight of arrows whistling after us.

"Sure, as I'm a living man, it's that villain Black Hawk did the deed!" exclaimed Tim. "I saw the look he gave when he heard that Mr. Carlos had killed Spotted Wolf. He had planned the black deed for many a day."

Lejoillie and I agreed with Tim, though how Carlos came to have been led so far away it was at first difficult to say. Perhaps Black Hawk had induced him to dismount, and then, taking his gun, had galloped off with his horse. Carlos, not being able to find his way back to the camp, had probably lighted a fire to keep off the wolves; and while seated before it, either Black Hawk or some other Indian had shot him. Such was the only way we could account for the position in which we had found him.

Captain Norton was much grieved, and blamed himself greatly for having allowed Black Hawk to accompany Carlos. We dug his grave close to our camp, and spent a portion of the night in piling up logs over it to mark the spot. Though I had before been looking forward to the satisfaction of falling in with my uncle, I now dreaded the meeting and the task I should have to perform of telling him of the death of my cousin. As no more was seen of Black Hawk, we had no doubt that he had committed the deed.

We had now reached as far north as there would be any use in going, as my uncle and his party must have come by this time fully as far south as we then were if they had not already passed us. Though the country was almost in as wild a state as in the southern parts, there were a few log-huts and other primitive buildings scattered about; but the inhabitants had fled for fear of the Indians. Both we and our horses being pretty well tired by a long day's journey, we took up our quarters in one of these huts. The men were encamped outside, with the usual sentries placed at equal distances; and we had thrown ourselves on the rough tables and benches, the only remaining furniture, when the sound of distant firing reached our ears.

"Sure there's fightin' goin' on!" cried Tim.

We started to our feet. The horses were saddled, the men fell in, and we hastened on, hoping to arrive in time to assist any whites who might be engaged, whether my uncle's party or others. We had still light enough to see our way, though the sun was near setting. At last we came within sight of another hut of some size, near which the fighting had been taking place, of which we had sad proof by seeing the bodies of three white men stretched on the ground. But their comrades were advancing, driving the enemy before them.

"They will be led into an ambush!" cried Captain Norton; and ordering Tim to halt the men a little in advance of where they then were, he dashed forward to prevent the catastrophe he feared, I was about to follow, when a black, whom I recognised as one of my uncle's servants, rushed out of the hut.

"Is dat you, Massa Maurice?" he exclaimed. "Whar Massa Carlos? we 'fraid dat his fader die an'



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he want very much to see him. Come in; he in here; come in!"

Giving the reins of my horse to one of the men, I threw myself from the saddle, and hurried into the hut. My uncle lay on a low bedstead covered with straw, while one of his followers stood near him with his rifle in his hand. The black, taking a lamp, led the way to the bed. As the light fell on my uncle's countenance, I saw that his features were set, and his eyes had lost their expression. I knelt by his side and took his hand: though warm, it failed to return my pressure.

"Speak to me—speak to me, uncle!" I exclaimed, but no reply came.

The black shook his head. "Him gone, massa," he said; "no 'gain speak."

I turned to the other man for an explanation.

"He was shot, sir, leading us on against the Redskins. We brought him in here at once to look to his hurt, and when we saw you coming we hoped that you might have a doctor with you; but the bullet had done its work, and he was dead before you entered the hut."

I was deeply grieved, for I knew how my father would feel the loss of my uncle, who was, however, thus saved the pain of hearing of his son's death.

I had no time to give way to sorrow, for the rattle of musketry showed me that the fight was still continuing; the shouts and shrieks of the Indians, which came from no greater distance than before, proving that they held their ground. It was not a time for any one with a rifle in his hand to be idle; and bidding the black remain by his master's body, I called to the other men to accompany me, and hurried out to join my companions. There was barely sufficient light to enable me to distinguish them, but the cracks from their rifles showed where they were posted. Just as I joined them, Captain Norton appeared, and ordered us to charge the enemy, who, as we advanced, broke and, fled. We fired, pouring in a couple of volleys, which brought down several of the Indians, and hastened the flight of the rest. The captain then ordered us to retire to the neighbourhood of the hut, where we could the better defend ourselves should the enemy rally. Had we not arrived, the whole of my uncle's party would probably have been destroyed; as it was, several had fallen, and we lost two, besides three wounded. We could not ascertain how many of the Indians had been killed, as their friends had carried off most of them. Two or three bodies, however, were still in the open, but at such a distance from our camp that it would have been dangerous to have approached them, for some of the Redskins might be lurking in the wood. As it was more than probable that we should be attacked during the night, one-half of our party remained under arms, while the rest slept with their rifles by their sides, ready for action at a moment's notice.

I was patrolling with Tim, the moon, high above the trees, casting a bright light over the ground where the fighting had taken place, when Tim exclaimed,—“Arrah! sure, thin, one o’ them Redskins is moving.” I looked in the direction he pointed to, and directly after saw one of the apparently dead Indians rise to his feet and make towards the wood. At the same instant Tim fired. The Indian dropped, and before I could stop my companion he had rushed forward, supposing, I believed, that the man was feigning to be shot, and might still make his escape. He quickly came back, dragging the body after him.

“Sure he’s dead enough now, anyhow; but I thought I’d bring him along to show you who he is. See, it’s Black Hawk, who killed Mr. Carlos; he’s got what he deserves for his treacherous murder.”



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I at once recognised the features of Black Hawk. That he could not do us further harm was certain; and as no attempt had been made to rescue him, we were satisfied that the enemy had retreated to a distance. Part of the night was spent in the melancholy duty of digging graves, and burying the bodies of my poor uncle and those who had fallen with him, as we could not take them with us, the wounded requiring all the men who could be spared to carry them. The Indians, we hoped, finding us too strong for them, had retreated.

The night passed quietly away, and at early dawn we commenced our march back to Fort King.

