

In the Wilds of

Florida

by W. H. G. Kingston



Chapter 16

We had a weary march back to Fort King, not knowing at what moment we might be attacked by our persevering foes, who were constantly hovering in our rear; but from the admirable arrangements of the captain, and the vigilant watch kept at night, finding that they could not surprise us, they did not venture on an attack. No attempt during our absence had been made on the fort, although the garrison had been kept constantly on the alert. I need not describe the grief which the news of my uncle and cousin's death caused to my father and Juanita. They were, of course, now more anxious than ever to get back to Castle Kearney. As the men who had followed my uncle would form a sufficient escort, it was resolved that we should set out for the Ocklawaha River, where we hoped to find boats in which we could descend to the Saint John, and from thence to continue on to Castle Kearney. The point we aimed at was known as the "Silver Spring," a stream celebrated for the extraordinary transparency of its water, and much venerated in consequence by the Indians. It was supposed, indeed, to be the fountain of youth, of which they spoke to the Spaniards who first visited this country, and induced them to believe that its waters had the power of renovating the most aged, and restoring strength and beauty to the wrinkled and decrepit.

A landing-place, with two or more planked houses, stood on the bank of the stream, which would afford accommodation should they not have been destroyed by the Indians, though the inhabitants had long before made their escape to a less dangerous part of the country. As the whole distance could be performed in little more than a day, it was considered advisable to send forward two scouts, who would ascertain the condition of the place, and whether any Indians still remained in the intervening district.

Three days having passed, and the scouts not making their appearance, we began to fear that they had been cut off, and that we should be doomed to be shut up in the fort for an indefinite period. The commandant was anxious to get rid of us, for we, of course, consumed the stores destined for the garrison. It was with no small relief, therefore, that we saw the two men approaching the fort early on the third day. They brought the satisfactory intelligence that the Government had sent a steam-vessel up the river to the mouth of the Ocklawaha, above which she could not proceed, but that a smaller craft had been despatched up the stream to Silver Spring with stores for the garrison.

As we were prepared for our journey, we lost no time in setting out, accompanied by Captain Norton, who led a party intended to escort back the stores. Juanita was thus even better protected than we had expected. We had been somewhat anxious on her account, lest by some chance the Indian chief should get notice of our intended journey, and make an attempt to cut us off. There was, however, not much chance of his doing so, as it was believed that he was fully occupied with fresh



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

troops sent against him in the north-west; still so wonderful were the means of obtaining information possessed by the Redskins, and so rapid their movements, that it was impossible to say in what direction they might not appear. A road had been cut between the fort and the river, which greatly facilitated our progress; although, not having been used for some time, it was overgrown with long grass and low bushes, which it was necessary in some places to cut away.

My father and I endeavoured to cheer poor Juanita. During all that she had previously gone through, her spirits and courage had never once flagged. Now, she appeared to be sadly despondent. She told me that she had a foreboding that Castle Kearney had been destroyed by the Indians and all within it massacred. I of course tried to persuade her that such fears were without foundation, and that we should find her mother and sister well, with the house standing where we had left it.

“Can you surmise, Maurice, what has become of Mr. Rochford?” she asked suddenly, showing that, at all events, she had not forgotten our friend, who had so gallantly rescued her from the Indians.

“I am constantly thinking on the subject, and wondering why he does not appear,” I answered. “My father is as puzzled as I am; but we are certain no unworthy motive keeps him away. I can only conjecture that he has either gone to try and induce Ocoala to make such offers to the Government as he thinks will be accepted, or else he has returned to the black fugitives with a view of benefiting them in some way or other. Whatever he may be doing, I have no doubt that he is influenced by good motives, although his plans may not be so feasible as he supposes.”

“Of that I am very sure!” exclaimed Juanita, warmly. “I did not understand your friend when he was at Castle Kearney, and I thought him very presumptuous; but I have since learned to appreciate him as he deserves.”

I thought it better to make no answer to this remark of my fair cousin. I could only say that I hoped Rochford would escape the dangers to which he was exposed, and reappear some day or other.

We camped at night in a secure position, fully one-third of our force being under arms, so that should any savages attempt to surprise us, they would be kept in check until we were ready to repel them.

It was not until nearly the end of the next day that we saw the bright waters of the “Silver Spring” glittering through the trees. On reaching the buildings, we found that, although empty, they were uninjured. The Indians, if they had visited them, had perhaps looked upon them as temples built in honour of the spirit presiding over their sacred spring. No boats, however, were there; and unless some should arrive, we should be obliged to construct rafts or canoes to carry us down the river. To stay where we were without provisions was impossible: although we might shoot birds and perhaps deer in the neighbourhood, yet we dared not exhaust our ammunition. The scouts told us that they had received the information they had brought from a canoe which had been sent up to ascertain if any Indians were in the neighbourhood, and that it had afterwards returned down the river.

Lejoillie and I offered to go down, if we could obtain a canoe, to learn what had happened; but though we searched about in every direction, none could be found. Dawn had just broken, when one of the sentries announced that he saw a thin column of smoke over the trees in the direction in which the stream ran.

Presently afterwards we heard a peculiar sound, which we all declared must be produced by



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

the paddle-wheels of a steamer. A cheer rose from us when a curious craft, with high paddle-boxes, and machinery rising above her deck, hove in sight, and came gliding up the stream. She brought the greatly required stores for the fort; and the skipper undertook to convey the whole of our party down the stream to the man-of-war steamer waiting her return. He relieved poor Juanita's fears in regard to Castle Kearney, by assuring her that the house still stood uninjured, and that it had not been attacked by the Indians.

We were very sorry to have to part with Captain Norton, who had to return to the fort. He promised to pay a visit to Castle Kearney as soon as his duties would allow. He also assured me that he would not fail to try and induce Rochford to rejoin us.

"Should you be able to send him a message, you may hint that he will not find my cousin Juanita quite as hard-hearted as he once supposed; indeed, I suspect that she would break her heart should any harm befall him," I whispered.

I cannot fully describe the varied beauties of the stream, bordered by picturesque woods festooned with graceful creepers, many of them producing rich blossoms of many hues. At night we proceeded, lighted by pitch-pine-torches stuck in the bows of the vessel, which cast a lurid glare on either bank, scaring the numberless alligators which ever and anon put their heads above the surface of the water. At times I fancied that I could see the figures of Indian warriors brandishing their spears, and handling their bows ready to shoot at us; but the next moment they changed into bushes or the distorted trunks of trees.

After a voyage of some miles, with the current in our favour, we found ourselves alongside the Government steamer which waited the return of the boat. As I stepped on her deck, I enjoyed a sense of security which I had not enjoyed for many months. We heard sad news, however. Fearful atrocities had been committed by the Indians in different parts of the country—farm-houses attacked, their inhabitants massacred, and whole villages destroyed. The romantic admiration with which I had been inclined to regard the red men was completely dissipated; though I was compelled to acknowledge that, barbarous as was their conduct, they had been cruelly treated, and had bitter wrongs to avenge.

The distance which had taken us so long a time when we came up the river was quickly got over, although we had to stop at several places to take persons on board who had escaped from the Indian massacres. Our party, with the remainder of my uncle's followers, were landed at Castle Kearney. My aunt and Rita had bravely held out, notwithstanding the advice they had received to abandon the house. My father broke to them, as gently as possible, the sad intelligence we brought, as poor Juanita was utterly unable to do so.

Donna Maria, it seemed to me, would never get over it. For many days and nights her daughters, overcoming their own anxieties, were in constant attendance on her.

The poor girls, though they mourned for their father and brother, were, I knew, troubled about Rochford and Captain Norton. Lejoillie had gone on, as he said, to finish his visit to Judge Shurtleff at Roseville, that settlement being one of the very few which had escaped an attack from the Indians, owing to the due precautions taken by the inhabitants.

Several weeks passed away. Donna Maria appeared to be slowly recovering; but it was evident that she still remained in a very precarious condition. The judge and Mrs. Shurtleff kindly sent up to



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

invite one or both of my cousins and me to pay them a visit. They, however, declined the invitation, being unwilling to leave their mother. My father, guessing that I was getting somewhat weary of being shut up within the narrow boundary of the little island, advised me to return in the boat which brought the messenger, but desiring me to come back again in a few days, lest he should require my services. He had not expected to remain so long in the country, but while Donna Maria continued so ill, he was unwilling to speak about their arrangements for the future. I accordingly set off, and arriving at Roseville was received very kindly by the judge and his wife, who had heard as much of our adventures as Lejoillie was able to give them. They spoke in great admiration of the gallant way in which Rochford had rescued Juanita.

“Brave fellow! noble fellow!” exclaimed the judge. “I only wish that he had got over his somewhat wild notions of helping the Indians and negroes. He can do them no good, and will only run a great risk of getting into trouble himself.”

“He would not have gained that influence over them which enabled him to rescue my cousin, if he had not attempted to help the Indians,” I observed. “Probably no other white man in the country could have done so. I only wish that he was safe back again here or at Castle Kearney.”

I found Lejoillie very busy in obtaining specimens of natural history; but he ran a great risk, in his excursions, of being caught and scalped by any Indians who might be prowling about. The Roseville militia were, however, always on the alert.

I had nearly stayed out my time at the judge’s, when a hunter belonging to the place, who, notwithstanding the unsettled state of the country, continued the pursuit of game, often at long distances from the settlement, brought word that he had come upon the lately-deserted camp of a considerable body of Indians or blacks. He suspected, he said, from the numerous bones of deer and fowl scattered about, that they were provided with fire-arms and might have some evil intentions towards the settlement. He had followed up the trail, and found them again encamped, but had not ventured near enough to ascertain their numbers and character. He advised, therefore, that a party should be sent out to surprise and disperse them, which he was of opinion could easily be done by surrounding their camp at night. When I heard this account, I was almost convinced that the party were those blacks who had placed themselves under Rochford, and that he, of course, would not permit them to injure the settlers. I did not, however, feel sufficiently certain that Rochford was with them to allow me to express this opinion; but I begged permission to accompany the expedition, which was willingly granted me. It was not expected to last many days, and I hoped still to get back before I was wanted by my father. The Roseville Rifles, commanded by Captain Seth Nockelles, to whom I was introduced by the judge, wore as uniform broad-brimmed straw hats and shooting-jackets, with belts round their waists, in which they stuck their bowie-knives and pistols, while they carried their long rifles slung across their backs. We took with us several powerful blood-hounds, such as I have before described.

I have already given so many accounts of marches through the country, that I must not fill up my journal with a description either of the scenery or the adventures we met with. At this time a strong force of regular troops had compelled the Indians to evacuate the eastern part of the country, and had, it was supposed, driven the larger number westward, so that we did not expect to meet the



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

enemy in any considerable force. We therefore advanced with confidence, though we sent out scouts, as usual, to avoid the risk of being surprised. We had thus pushed on for four or five days, when one of the scouts brought word that he saw the smoke of a fire ascending apparently from the midst of a thick wood, which was, in his opinion, very likely to shelter an enemy. It was considered advisable, therefore, to enter cautiously, feeling our way as we advanced. As we got to the borders, the dogs were loosened and sent in, and we followed knowing that they would give us timely notice should they come upon an enemy. We had not got far when we heard several shots; but no bullets came near us.

“The dogs must have shown themselves, and, depend upon it, those shots were aimed at them,” observed our leader. “Come on, lads! or the rebels will be making their escape by the other side of the wood, and we shall have no chance of meeting them.”

We accordingly pushed on through the dense foliage, Captain Nockelles, a hardy backwoodsman, leading. Soon I caught sight of a couple of blacks, and a white man with a pistol in his hand standing before them, while two of the blood-hounds lay dead at his feet. The blacks held their rifles ready for action. On seeing the white man, our captain, refraining from firing as I thought he would do, shouted out,—

“Who are you?”

“A friend!” answered the stranger, stepping forward, when what was my surprise to recognise Rochford, though no longer in hunter’s guise, but dressed as he was when staying at Roseville. The blacks had in the meantime lowered their weapons, but showed no inclination to follow their leader.

“What brought you here, my fine fellow?” exclaimed the militia captain, looking hard at Rochford.

“I was on my way to Roseville, with my two attendants; and if you mean to return there soon, I shall be very glad to accompany you,” answered Rochford.

“You cannot expect us to believe that story,” cried the captain; “but whether you do or do not, you and your black fellows must go back with us to Roseville, and we shall then find out who you and they are. My idea is that they are runaway slaves, and that you are the Britisher who, it is said, has been encouraging them.”

As he said this, he turned round and ordered some of his men to arrest the blacks, who suddenly sprung back, and disappeared behind a thicket.

“Tell those fellows to stop,” cried the captain to Rochford.

“They are free agents, and I cannot interfere with their movements,” answered the latter.

“What should you say if we were to hang you on the next tree for refusing?” exclaimed the captain. “Call them back, I say, or take the consequences.”

“Even though I wished to do so, I have no right to exercise any influence over them. If you hang me you will be guilty of murder. I am perfectly ready to go with you, and will give you my word of honour that I will do so without attempting to escape,” replied our friend calmly.

The captain, notwithstanding what Rochford had said, became more violent; and fearing that he would proceed to extremities, I thought it time to interfere, so stepping forward, I said,—

“I know this gentleman, and I am very sure that he has no intention of committing any illegal act.



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

Judge Shurtleff is also well acquainted with him; as is Captain Norton, to whom he is related.”

“All very fine, Mr. Kearney; but people don’t go about the country with a troop of blacks at their heels without intending mischief. If he won’t order those negroes to give themselves up, we must try and catch them. If we can’t do so, it will have a very ugly look for him.”

But the blacks were active and cunning, and knew the country, which was more than their pursuers did. The latter, after a long chase, came back declaring that not a nigger could they find, and swearing at the trouble which had been given them.

So angry were they with Rochford, that had I not energetically interfered, it would have gone hard with him. I at length, however, persuaded the captain to carry him before Judge Shurtleff. The party indeed were anxious to get out of the wood as soon as possible, for we had already gone further in pursuit of the supposed rebels than was intended; and as no other camp could be found in the neighbourhood besides the small one lately formed by Rochford and his attendants, our leader was pretty well satisfied that it would be useless to continue the search. In spite of my representations, he treated Rochford as a prisoner, making him march between two armed men, who were ordered to shoot him should he attempt to run away. When we halted at night, greatly to my indignation, they lashed his arms behind him, so that he could neither sit nor lie down with any comfort.

Rochford bore this ill-treatment without complaint. “Thus end all my schemes for the amelioration of the red and black races of this hapless country,” he said to me, as I was sitting near him, which I was allowed to do. “I found them very different, I confess, to what I expected. With some noble qualities, the Indians are savage in the extreme; and the blacks must be educated before they are fit to take care of themselves. I have, however, more hope of them than I have of the Indians.”

I was not sorry to hear Rochford say this, as I trusted that he would now be induced to abandon his wild schemes, and turn his attention to a more profitable employment of his time.

Captain Nockelles, who was exceedingly vexed at the escape of the blacks, refused, notwithstanding my representations, to set my friend at liberty. I undertook to be answerable for his making no attempt to escape; but all I could say had no effect, and Rochford was kept with his arms pinioned, unless when two men were standing by him with loaded rifles in their hands. Our journey was therefore a far from pleasant one. Rochford found it very disagreeable; and I felt greatly annoyed at the way he was treated; but as I should have been accused of mutiny had I made any further attempt to get him released, I was obliged, as he was, to submit. He begged me not to make myself unhappy about him.

“It will be over in a few days,” he remarked; “and I trust I shall be able to exonerate myself from the absurd charges which may be brought against me. The very fact that I had assumed a civilised costume, proves that I was about to return to the settlement. Had I been captured dressed as a hunter, at the head of a party of blacks or Indians, my conduct might have been open to suspicion.”

I was very glad when at last the buildings of Roseville appeared in sight; though somewhat annoyed when Captain Nockelles ordered me to remain with the main body, while he took his prisoner, under charge of a guard, before Judge Shurtleff. I begged to go likewise, urging that there was no possible reason why I should remain behind, when I had not even a command in the regiment. At last, not having the face longer to refuse me, he consented, and I followed the party which had



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

gone on before.

Our old friend was seated in his judicial chair, at a small table, with pen, ink, and paper before him. I arrived just in time to hear him say, "A rebel caught in the very act. Bring him in—bring him in." And Rochford, with Captain Nockelles on one side, and a guard armed with a brace of pistols on the other advanced towards the table.

"What! a white man having the audacity to induce blacks to rebel against the authority of the State!" exclaimed the judge not recognising him. "What have you to say to this accusation?"

Rochford seemed to have an idea that the judge intended to ignore any former acquaintance with him, and replied,—

"It has not been proved that I am a rebel; and I certainly had no intention of committing any act contrary to the laws of the United States."

"Bless my heart! are you my friend Rochford?" exclaimed the judge, jumping up, almost overturning the table in his eagerness to shake hands. "Gentlemen, there is some mistake here. Mr. Rochford came out with me from England, and I know him to be a thoroughly honest and excellent young man. He cannot possibly be guilty of the crime of which you charge him. Set him at liberty immediately. These ropes must make him feel very uncomfortable." And the judge commenced pulling away at the knots, not thereby expediting his object; which Captain Nockelles, finding he had made a mistake, very quickly accomplished. The judge then shook Rochford warmly by the hand. "I am very sure that our friend here will be able to give a satisfactory account of himself, although he might not have been inclined to explain matters when he found himself treated as he has been. You'll come and dine with me, Captain Nockelles, and I will hear all about it. You will meet the great naturalist Lejoillie, who knows Mr. Rochford as well as I do, and who will, I am sure, answer for his being a person of high character, and not at all likely to commit any act unworthy of a man of honour.—Oh! there's my friend Kearney. Glad to see you back, my boy. You'll join us. I must then send you to Castle Kearney, as your father is anxious to have you back to assist in looking after your young cousins, who, poor girls, will not only have to mourn the loss of their father and brother, but of their mother also, of whose life, I fear, there is but little hope."

I was very sorry to receive this latter piece of information, though it did not prevent me joining the party at the judge's dinner-table, where Rochford was seated as an honoured guest, instead of being, as his captors expected, sent off to the State prison. Little Paul was brought in after dinner, and the company were informed of the gallant way in which Rochford had saved his life at the hazard of his own.

My friend gave us an account of his adventures among the Indians and blacks, which fully satisfied the patriotic militia captain that he had no hostile intentions towards the Government of the United States.

After dinner, I found that a boat was in readiness to carry me to Castle Kearney.

"Our friend Rochford will, I suspect, be happy to accompany you," said the judge. "It will be as well for him to get out of this place, in case any disagreeable gentlemen should take it into their heads that he has been too leniently dealt with. And, in truth, the sooner he leaves the country, perhaps, the better; though we shall be delighted to see him back again when affairs are more settled, and this



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

Seminole war has been brought to a close.”

I was not exactly surprised to find that Rochford was very willing to follow the judge’s advice.

Wishing the judge, his wife, and their friends good-bye, we embarked shortly before sunset, and were able to continue our journey at night without difficulty. As we approached Castle Kearney, we were hailed by a voice which I recognised as that of Tim Flanagan, who was keeping watch on the castle walls. On hearing my reply, he quickly descended to the little postern-gate to admit us.

“Sure, I’m glad to see you back, Mr. Maurice, and you, Mr. Rochford, though I’ve bad news to welcome you with about the mistress. She’s gone, sir, she’s gone. An’ the young ladies are in a sad way; so that the captain finds it a hard matter to comfort them, an’ he’ll be glad to have you to help him.”

On ascending to the upper floor, we met my father, who gave a cordial welcome to Rochford. My aunt, he told us, had died that morning, never having recovered from the loss of her husband and son. The young ladies bore up as well as could be expected, and he hoped that we should be able to assist in consoling them. Notwithstanding the report that the Indians had been driven westward, he considered it prudent to maintain a strict watch in the castle, lest another attempt might be made by her Indian admirer to carry off Juanita.

“I congratulate myself on having come to assist you, sir,” said Rochford. “Although, when I first came to the country, my wish was to benefit the natives, I would treat them as my worst enemies should they make so audacious an attempt.”

“I will trust you, Mr. Rochford,” said my father, smiling.

Our friend insisted on taking his turn as one of the sentries, and I felt very sure that the castle would not be surprised during his watch.

Early in the morning after our arrival my poor aunt was interred in the centre of the garden, as there was no grave-yard near to which she could be carried.

My father was now very anxious to return home as soon as possible, and he invited my two cousins, according to their father’s wish, to accompany him. Juanita was willing enough to go, but Rita showed much disinclination to leave Florida, though, at the same time, she had no wish to be separated from her sister. My father explained that by his brother’s will he had no choice in the matter. He must either take them with him, or remain with them in the country. The property, however, could only be disposed of at a great loss while the troubles with the Indians continued. He proposed, therefore, returning in the course of two or three years to settle their affairs. This arrangement somewhat satisfied Rita, though she still implored me to try and persuade my father to remain. I, as may be supposed, was very willing to do so, as I liked the country, and hoped to meet with more adventures. Rochford was quite ready to remain, for he had every reason to believe that he had won Juanita’s affections. How my father might ultimately have acted I cannot say, for matters were settled in a way we little expected. The sun had set, and we were seated at supper—the pleasantest meal of the day in that hot climate. My cousins had somewhat recovered their spirits, and Rochford was doing his utmost to make himself agreeable, when Tim walked into the room, rifle in hand, with his usual military air, and making a salute, said,—

“Capt’n, if ye please, step up to the gallery on the west side an’ take a look-out. I was peering



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

over the drawbridge, when I caught sight of some creatures moving among the plantations; either they're wolves or Injins."

"Indians!" we exclaimed in chorus, my father, Rochford, and I jumping up.

"Do not allow honest Tim's report to alarm you," said Rochford to my cousins; "he has very likely mistaken a few stray cattle for an army of Indians. At all events, let me entreat you to remain quietly here until we ascertain the true state of the case."

I repeated what Rochford said, and then hurried up to the gallery, where I found my father and Tim, with three or four of the other men. They were crouching down so as not to expose themselves to the view of those below. Rochford and I, doing the same, looked through the loopholes left for the purpose. Though the night was somewhat dark, by watching attentively we could distinguish a number of figures darting here and there among the trees, making their way towards us, evidently endeavouring, if possible, to keep themselves concealed as much as possible from sight.

"That these are Indians I have no doubt, and also that they have come here with hostile intent; so we must be prepared for them," whispered my father.—"Rochford, I leave you in charge of the gallery; do not fire, however, until the enemy show an intention of attacking the house.—Maurice, I must leave you and Tim, with two hands, to work the guns above the entrance. I will station the other men where they can best defend the approaches."

All these arrangements were quickly made. It was pretty evident that the Indians fancied that they were undiscovered. We lay down under cover of the balustrade, which was of a thickness impenetrable to bullets. We could distinguish the figures of the Indians, as they emerged from the wood in the distance, stealing nearer and nearer the water which separated us from the mainland. It was very evident that they were in strong force, and fully expected to surprise the castle. We waited for my father's word to open fire. As yet, indeed, none of those near had shown themselves, being concealed by the shrubs which grew on the farther shore, and which, we were thus shown, ought long ago to have been cut down.

There had been no light on the west side of our house, the windows of the sitting-room opening in the opposite direction, so that probably the Indians supposed we were all fast asleep. We kept a profound silence. The time seemed very long; and had I not been assured that I had seen human beings moving about, I should have fancied that we must have been mistaken.

I was waiting, ready to fire, when I heard the door leading to the platform open. Looking round, I saw my two cousins.

"What is happening?" exclaimed Juanita.

Rita asked a similar question.

"Go back! go back!" I cried out, louder than I ought to have spoken; "the enemy are close at hand."

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth than an arrow whistled through the air. For a moment the dreadful thought seized me that one of them had been struck; but the missile was quivering in the woodwork above their heads. They quickly retreated, and I heard the door closed behind them. I calculated the spot from which the arrow had been shot, and with the help of my companions, training my gun towards it, fired.



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

Before the sound had died away, the most fearful yells and shrieks rose from the brushwood before us. Showers of arrows, mingled with bullets, came pinging against the walls, the bright flashes from the Indians' muskets lighting up the whole shore. Tim was not slow to follow my example; and at the same moment the rest of the garrison began blazing away at our enemies, although it was difficult to distinguish them among the brushwood, behind which they took good care to conceal themselves. We were well sheltered; but this sort of work might continue until the whole of our ammunition was exhausted. Though we had every reason to believe that some of our bullets took effect, it was impossible to ascertain what number of the enemy were killed; their fire, however, did not appear to diminish. They probably calculated on our having no large amount of ammunition, and intended to make their assault when they found our fire slackening. It occurred to me, while I was working away at my gun, that we ought to ascertain what quantity of ammunition we possessed. I asked Tim if he knew.

"Sure there was enough to defend the place for a whole day or more, when we first came here; but I don't know how much your uncle and his party carried away with them, or whether any has been used since. It is to be hoped the Redskins won't be any better off than we are in this respect, and will soon get tired of blazing away to no purpose," he answered.

I was not satisfied, however, and was anxious to go and ascertain, that we might, at all events, reserve some for an emergency.

We had been exchanging fire with the enemy for nearly an hour, when I observed some bright flashes of light circling over our heads.

"Arrah! now, they haven't got rockets with them?" cried Tim.

"No, these are more dangerous even than rockets," I answered. "They are sending fiery arrows on to the roof. Should any fall where they cannot be got at, they may set the place in a blaze. I must go and let my father know, as he may not have observed them."

Making my way to the door so as not to expose myself, I opened it and sprang in. Hurrying down to where my father was directing the men in the lower part of the building, I told him what was taking place. I mentioned also my apprehensions in regard to the limited amount of ammunition we possessed.

"I am afraid you are right, Maurice. We must hope to drive the Indians away before the whole is exhausted," he answered. "Come with me; we must try to prevent these fire-brands doing any damage."

We were ascending to the top of the building, when we met my cousins in the passage.

"O uncle! what is happening? Cannot we help you in some way?" exclaimed Juanita.

"Not without more risk than I would desire you to run," answered my father. "I don't wish to alarm you, but I would advise you to collect the valuables you possess, so that you may preserve them should it be necessary to leave the house, which the Indians are trying their best to set fire to. They may not succeed; but if they do, it will become untenable. Now, brave girls, do as I bid you, and wait in the room next the garden, so that we may run out quickly if necessary."

I should have mentioned that there was on the north side of the house a little dock or harbour, in which the boats belonging to the estate were kept. The largest had that very morning been got ready



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

to carry us and our baggage to Roseville, in case we should determine to go; while there were three others sufficient to hold all the people on the island. We had thus, should we be reduced to extremity, the means of escaping.

My father and I now hurried up to the top of the house. While he examined one side, I looked to the other. What was my dismay, as I passed close under the roof, to find our worst fears realised. Already sparks in thick showers were falling down on the north side of the building. Through a small hole I could see the flames flickering up, while the fire was running along the planks with which the roof was lined. I hurried over to tell my father.

“The fire has burst out on the other side also!” he exclaimed; “and I have no hope of extinguishing the flames. No water which we could bring up could do it.”

We had no time to exchange further words, for wreaths of thick smoke were descending, filling the place where we stood, and we had quickly to make our way down to avoid suffocation.

“Call Tim and the men from the guns; they will not be able to serve them much longer,” said my father. “But we must defend the lower story as long as we can. I will prepare your cousins. We shall have but few minutes, I fear, to get away.”

I hurried out to obey my father’s directions, and tell Tim what had happened.

“Let me have but another shot or two at the Redskin rascals. See what they’re about!” he exclaimed.

I looked down, and could distinguish a number of figures dragging forward some long trunks of trees, with which they either intended to form a bridge or float themselves across. Tim and the other men fired, but the Indians did not appear to be disconcerted; indeed, the shot from the small cannon did little more damage than the bullets from the rifles. Had they been placed on a lower level, they would have been much more effective.

Before the guns could be again loaded, sparks in thick showers began to descend from the roof, and unhappily some fell among our cartridges. An explosion followed, severely injuring one of our men. To stay longer where we were would have been madness. We therefore retreated through the door, amidst a volley of bullets and arrows, dragging the poor wounded fellow with us. I told his companion to carry him into the garden, while Tim and I hastened downstairs to assist Rochford; for the men in the lower story were as yet not aware that the building was on fire. When I told them, some showed an inclination to escape; but urged by Rochford, Tim, and me, who set them the example, they continued firing away as before through the loopholes. We could, of course, see but little of what was going on in front of us, but we guessed, by the shouts of the Indians, that they were aware of the progress the flames were making. The hot fire we kept up, however, compelled them to remain under shelter. We were now joined by my father, who ordered me to take four of the men, that we might get the boats ready and the gates opened which enclosed them in the dock. He begged Rochford to take charge of the ladies, while he and Tim remained to the last to cover our retreat, so that the Indians might not discover that we were about to abandon the house, I lost no time in executing his orders, desiring the men to carry along with them their wounded comrade. The Indians were probably not aware that we had the means of escaping. At all events they had not, as far as we could see, succeeded in their attempt to reach the shore of the island, which they might have done on logs of wood, or



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

by swimming across—at the risk, however, of being caught by alligators, had the saurians not been driven to a distance by the noise of the shouts and firing. Just after we had reached the dock, and were getting the oars ready for use, I saw, to my great relief, Rochford and my two cousins approaching, followed by three female servants and several other women, carrying whatever valuable property they could lay hands on.

Already the flames were bursting out from all sides in the upper part of the house. In another minute or two the whole roof would, I feared, come crashing down. I looked anxiously for my father and Tim, but the continued crack of their rifles showed that they were still at their posts.

“Oh, they will be burnt, they will be burnt!” cried my cousins, as they saw the flames rapidly encircling the building.

I was on the point of hastening back to warn them, when Rochford sprang forward.

“I will do it. Get all hands ready for a start;” and before I could answer, he was already half-way across the garden.

I had still much to do. My first care was to place my cousins and the servants in the large boat, and to distribute the women in the others, while I ordered the men on board, and got the gates of the dock opened; which required considerable exertion, as the lower parts had to be forced through the mud which had collected at the bottom. The burning house afforded us light enough for all that was required.

At length the firing ceased. As I turned my eyes towards the building, it seemed as if no one could exist within it, for now, from every story, either flames or smoke were bursting forth. Again and again I looked. Had it not been my duty to remain and protect my cousins, I should not have been able to refrain from hastening back to the house. A cry of dismay rose from my cousins and those around me, when a loud crash was heard, and flames, brighter than before, rose from the centre of the building. The roof had fallen in. I was almost giving way to despair, when I caught sight of several persons hurrying forward from among the trees. At length I recognised my father, Rochford, and Tim among them. They were carrying three wounded men, having, I found, been compelled to abandon the bodies of two others who had fallen. My father and Tim were both wounded, and several others were more or less hurt, but they said nothing.

“On board, my lads, and shove off without delay!—Maurice, do you take charge of one of the boats; and, Tim, go in the other, and tumble overboard all those things if you find that they hamper you. Now, shove off, and give way, boys,” he continued, as he sprang on board the boat into which Rochford had already stepped and taken the stroke oar. I followed as closely as I could; and Tim’s boat brought up the rear. The smaller boats being lighter, we were able to keep good way with the larger.

“Keep up with us, Maurice,” shouted my father; “I took a look around just as I came away, and caught sight of several objects in the distance, which I feel pretty sure are canoes. The Indians have evidently brought them down.”

The island had hitherto concealed us from the enemy; but the blaze of the burning house casting its glare across the water, now revealed us to their sight, as we knew by the shots which dropped into the water astern of us. But we were already too far off to be reached, and I heard Tim cry out,—



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

“Ye’ll spend your powder to no purpose, my boys; so I’d be askin’ ye to reserve your fire until ye can get some one within your reach.”

The effect, however, was to make our crews still further exert themselves.

It was melancholy to see the house, one of the largest in the country, fiercely blazing away. Our only satisfaction was that the Indians would be disappointed, not only of us, but of any booty they might have expected to obtain.

We had still the danger my father apprehended of being pursued; and at length, looking astern, I caught sight of several canoes filled with Indians, on which the bright flames of the burning house cast a ruddy glare and brought them clearly into view.

That they had intended to land on the island and take the castle in the rear I had little doubt; but finding that we had made our escape, they resolved on capturing us. Urged by numerous paddles, they made greater way through the water than we did. We had one advantage over them, however, that, should they approach near, a few bullets would send them to the bottom. They might, however, before this kill or wound many of our party, exposed as we were, crowded together in the open boat.

Our men pulled away for their lives. I told Tim to steer close to me, so that I might place our boat between the savages and that containing my cousins. Unhappily our ammunition was very low. The party who had been defending the house to the last had expended all their powder, and Tim and I, with a few other men, had only two or three rounds a-piece. My father, recollecting this, ordered us not to fire a shot until the enemy came near, and then to aim rather at the canoes than the men; for even should we not sink them, we might compel their crews to cease paddling while they stopped the holes made by our bullets. Brave as the Indians are on land, they are not willing in general to expose themselves; so I was surprised at the daring way in which our pursuers came on. They were getting, indeed, disagreeably near, and I expected every moment to hear my father order us to fire. Of course, even when they should come up to us, we might defend ourselves and beat them off, and our strongly-built boats would then give us an advantage over their light canoes. Still the struggle would be a fearful one. We were hampered by several women and the numerous articles which they had brought.

Already the Indians had begun to fire; but their bullets fell short, their powder probably being none of the best. In a few minutes, however, unless we could sink their canoes, they would be up with us. I tried the effect of one shot; but though I am sure I hit the canoe between wind and water, the Indians in her did not cease paddling; and I was afraid of throwing another shot away by making a second attempt.

I won’t say how I felt—and it was too dark to see the countenances of those in my boat—but I know that they pulled until I thought that the oars would break with the vehemence of their strokes. A few minutes more went by. The enemy were gaining on us, for a couple of shots struck the stern of my boat. In a few more minutes they would be alongside, and then the desperate struggle would begin. When we had discharged our last shots, we should have only the butts of our rifles and our knives with which to defend ourselves against the muskets and axes of the Indians. Just as I was about to despair, a shout, coming from the direction in which we were pulling, greeted our ears.

“Hurrah!” cried Tim; “none but white men could have raised that cry.”

It was repeated, and presently we saw emerging from the darkness several boats, apparently



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

of large size, full of men. On they came, slowly. The Indians must have seen them too; for without waiting to give us a parting salute, they turned round their canoes, and paddled away up the stream as fast as they could go. In another minute we found ourselves up to three boats, each containing a dozen or more men, commanded by Captain Norton, who told us that he had received information of the intention of the Indians to attack Castle Kearney; that his party being too small to intercept them, he had resolved to come by water to our relief as the quickest mode of reaching us. He expressed his regret at not having arrived in time to preserve the house; though it was very doubtful what would have been our fate had he not followed out his idea of coming by water. I heard my cousins assuring him how grateful they were, and they seemed much disappointed when they found that he intended to continue on, and endeavour to punish the enemy for their attack on Castle Kearney. For fear, however, that the Indians might turn round and again attack us, he considered that his duty would allow him to escort us part of the way to Roseville, where he told us the militia were under arms, ready to repel any assault which might be made on the place. At length, with much regret, we saw him and his party proceed up the river, while we continued on our course to Roseville. Here we were received with much kindness and sympathy by the worthy judge and his wife. Our wounded men were looked after, and the rest kindly taken care of by the different inhabitants. We were still, however, not free from anxiety about Captain Norton and his party.

On the evening of the following day he returned, saying that on approaching Castle Kearney, although the house was still burning, he found that the enemy had fled, having evidently been warned by the Indians in the canoes of the approach of a military force. Being unable to land until daylight, he found, on getting ashore, that pursuit was useless.

We were now waiting the arrival of the steamer which was to convey us the first part of the voyage I must pass over several days. Juanita had promised, with my father's sanction, to become the wife of Rochford soon after our arrival in Ireland; which I was very glad to hear. All doubts about making the journey were now at an end, as we had no house to live in. Rita appeared unusually sad, and although Mrs. Shurtleff invited her to remain, she refused to quit her sister. Rita's spirits, however, suddenly revived; and Juanita told me the next day that her sister had accepted an offer from Captain Norton to marry her as soon as the war was over, and he could with honour retire from the service. Meantime she would be very happy to pay a visit to the Old World and see something of its wonders. With the assistance of our friend the judge, an honest overseer was found, to whose care the estate was left.

At length we arrived safely in Ireland. Juanita fulfilled her promise, and became Mrs. Rochford. But nearly three years passed by, and still the Seminoles held out, in spite of the large force brought against them. The history is a sad one, and I would rather not touch upon it. At length we received the satisfactory intelligence from Captain Norton that the war was over; and he soon after arrived to claim Rita as his wife. And I cannot better conclude my narrative than by giving a brief account of the contest as described by him; of the way, melancholy as it was, in which a race of brave aborigines—for I will not call them savages—was finally driven from the territory:—"You remember the Indian Powell, or Ocoola, as his countrymen called him. Though not a chief by birth, he was one of their bravest warriors, and was loved and respected as a chieftain. Their nominal head was Omatla. Though



In the Wilds of Florida

Chapter 16

not esteemed as a warrior, he was sagacious and crafty. His character being known, the Government won him over, by a bribe of several thousand dollars, to put his name to a treaty which had been prepared. In vain, however, he tried to induce his subordinate chiefs to follow his example. At length a place of meeting was appointed, and Omatla, with those he had won over, appeared. The treaty was spread out on a table before him; he advanced and signed it; but scarcely had he done so than a bullet from Ocoola's rifle pierced his bosom. It was the signal to the rest of the hostile chiefs to fire, and he fell, six more shots having struck him. Ocoola and his warriors, springing on their steeds, fled towards the desert, leaving the parchment behind them. It was carried to Washington as a proof that the property had been legally purchased. He who kills a chief, unless forthwith slain, becomes himself leader of the tribe. All the Seminoles, immediately gathering round the standard of Ocoola, hailed him as their leader. For six years did the brave chief set our troops at defiance. All sorts of stratagems were employed to capture him, but cunning as he was brave, he avoided them. It was resolved at length to make a last effort; and an officer, whose name I will not mention, undertook to capture Ocoola by a stratagem which it is impossible otherwise than to condemn. The chief received notice that the Government were willing to enter into a fair and honourable treaty with him and his people. He too was anxious to terminate the unequal contest. Addressing his chiefs, he expressed his willingness to go forward alone and meet those who had so long proved his relentless foes. To this proposal his friends would not consent; but they finally agreed that he, with four of his principal chiefs and two hundred warriors as a body-guard, should meet the Government agent, Ocoola advanced with a flag of truce at the end of a long spear—the only weapon among all the band. Seeing the number of troops in front, he hesitated, when the agent observing this, advanced also, holding a flag of truce. Ocoola, to show his confidence in the honour of his former foes, dashed forward, his unarmed followers pressing after him. On either side were thick woods. Suddenly from among them appeared strong bodies of soldiers. Ocoola and his party were surrounded. He was dragged from his horse, and he and all his attendants made prisoners. In vain he protested, as indeed did every soldier, that such treachery was unwarrantable. The prize had been obtained. The interests of the public required that Ocoola and his chiefs should remain prisoners. Fetters were placed on their limbs, and they were carried off as captives. But such they did not long continue; for accustomed to roam the desert wilds and to breathe the pure air of heaven in untrammelled freedom, they pined within their prison walls. Ocoola sunk first; the rest soon followed him to the grave; and with the exception of a few scattered families, the survivors of the Seminoles were compelled to follow the Creeks and Cherokees across the Mississippi.”

We could not help regretting that no attempts had been made to spread the truths of Christianity among the Seminoles, and that a happier fate had not been the destiny of the brave Ocoola.

The End.

