

CHAPTER VI.

MASSACRE AT THE DEVIL'S HOLE — BRITISH CONVOY — INDIAN
AMBUSCADE — ATTACK, SURPRISE, DEFEAT, CATASTROPHE
— ESCAPE OF STEADMAN AND ONE OTHER — RELICS, ETC.

“War mounts his iron car — and at his wheels
In vain soft Pity weeps, and Mercy kneels;
He waves his flaming dart, and o'er the plains,
In mournful silence, Desolation reigns.
What tides of ruin mark his ruthless way!
How shriek the fiends, exulting o'er their prey!
In vain, with trembling heart the coward turns,
In vain, with generous rage the valiant burns;
One common ruin, one promiscuous grave,
O'erwhelms the dastard, and receives the brave!”



THE Devil's Hole, the upper bank, receding from the river, and leaving the rock nearly bare, forms a sort of amphitheatre, bounded on one side by the precipice, and on the other, by the hills that circle round it. The road across this plain or hollow, passing the very brink of the fearful gulf with the demon-name, rises the bank or hill, in either direction, and stretches away to the Falls and Lewiston. A thick forest covered, — at the time of which we speak — the little vale or plain, and the ascent by which it was environed, rendering it one of

those advantageous points for an ambuscade, of which Indian sagacity so frequently availed itself during the early struggles of the country.

In 1759, after the English had obtained possession of Fort Niagara, and established a post at Schlosser; and while the war with the French was yet raging, a supply of provisions and stores for the latter place, left Fort Niagara, under the convoy of about one hundred British regulars. Nothing disturbed their march for many miles; and at length, the close military order they had hitherto preserved, was gradually relaxed, and they straggled carelessly on — the drivers whistling merrily to their sluggish oxen, the soldiers scattered along the banks of the stream, gazing eagerly at the romantic and beautiful scenery which its course constantly presented, and impatient to catch a glimpse of the wonderful cataract, the sound of whose mighty roar had been for miles in their ears, — some, pressing ahead with an animated and impatient curiosity; some, lingering, to feast their eyes on the sublime progress of the river, threading its walled and winding passage; and others, lounging indolently behind, and often pausing to rest in the cool shade, for the season was summer, and the day intensely hot; — a fatal sense of fancied security had fallen upon all.

The Indians, on the frontier, were devoted to the French interest, and this was too good an opportunity to be lost, of showing their zeal in the cause of their allies, and striking terror to the hearts of their enemies. Farmer's Brother, a distinguished Chief of the Senecas, with a band of his best warriors, to the number of several hundred, ambushed the party, at the Devil's Hole, extending his line along the hill, quite around the little plain, leaving only a narrow entrance by the road, thus cutting off every hope of escape. Silent as the grave, and yet watchful as the eye of Fate, lay these human tigers, waiting for their prey.

On came the convoy, in the broken, formless, scattered order we have described, — each pursuing his march as best suited himself. Without a suspicion of danger, they reached the valley, and pausing at the Devil's Hole, huddled around its brink, and knew not that death lay couching in the awful depth that confronted their gaze. When all were in the snare, the net was sprung.

Suddenly, the profound stillness that had hitherto, unbroken except by the cataract's roar, reigned over all, was burst by a tremendous volley of fire-arms, and the more terrible yells of the savages, who closed in, and rushed upon their prey. There was no time to rally, for prayers,

or for defence. The tomahawk and the knife were at their deadly work. Drivers were brained in their seats, and soldiers stabbed where they stood. So sudden was the onset, and so violent the assault, that half the convoy was killed in the first moments of surprise, and the remainder thrown into hopeless confusion, almost before they had time to raise an arm or level a gun. Never was surprise more successful, or destruction more complete. The little run poured its torrent again over the precipice, and down the chasm — but it was a stream of blood! Men, horses, wagons, cattle, stores, all in one promiscuous mass were forced over the bank, and dashed to pieces on the rocks below, while the fiendish yells of the savages drowned their shrieks and groans, and thundered from the rocks and cliffs above, wild, terrible, and triumphant!

But two persons escaped. One, a Mr. Steadman, striking spurs into his horse, a fine and fleet steed, and dashing forward at the first moment of alarm, succeeded in breaking through the Indian line, and making good his retreat. He reached Fort Schlosser in safety, and without a wound, though his clothes and saddle, were pierced with balls. The other, a soldier, who was forced down the precipice, in the general fall, was providen-

tially caught by the belt, on the pointed limb of a tree, where he hung, concealed by the foliage, from the lynx-eyed search of the Indians, who despatched every thing they could find, that had life — until the return of night and stillness, convinced him the foe had retired, when he cautiously descended, and groped his toilsome way to Fort Niagara, which place he reached, with the first intelligence of the fate of his party.

It is but a few years since, bones, bits of broken wagons, and many other relics of this fearful catastrophe, were to be seen at the bottom of the gulf; but they are now concealed beneath the rubbish, swept away by the stream, or returned to dust.

The Indians held Mr. Steadman in great respect, ever after his so narrow and fortunate escape, believing that he was a "Great Medicine," and gifted with magical powers. They gave him, it was said, all the land he had encompassed in his flight, which would include all between the river and a line from the Devil's Hole to Fort Schlosser. His heirs set up a claim to this tract in after years, but as they could prove no formal grant, and of course establish no title, it was denied.