MISSION ENDEAVOR.

"IT has been clearly proved, Richard Herndon, that you have shed the blood of this man, your comrade and friend. The Bible saith, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'"

A dark October evening in the Northwest; a circle of Indians seated on the ground; an inner circle of white men, also seated; a shrouded something laid out in the centre of the inclosed space; and the tall form of the elder confronting the accused, they two the only standing figures. A large Bible lay on a table. Behind it a knot of women knelt, clinging together as if in horror or grief. One sat a little apart, and soothed a slight young girl who with hidden face lay in her arms, trembling. The glare of two log fires outside the circle shone on the dusky figures of the Indians, the intent faces of the white men, all close shaved, thin, and grave, and in the foreground on the white hair and piercing eyes of the elder and the stalwart outline of the accused. It left in shadow the group of women, the shrouded thing on the ground, the log walls of the Mission building behind, and the aisles of the pine forest stretching away in every direction, like spokes of a dark wheel around the hub—this little point of human life and human interests in the solitude of the great forest and the night.

Endeavor Mission to the Indians owed its existence to the iron faith and will of Ephraim Danvers. This old man had gathered to himself, by means of letters and written placards posted on trees where horses stopped to breathe while going up long hills, men of like natures from all New England. These had he bound with a vow of brotherhood, and had then journeyed with them westward across the cool dark lakes, into the gateway of the Sault Sainte Marie, and out again and along the wild metal-ribbed shores of Superior, to this far point, where he had made a lodge, and raised the standard of God in the wilderness for the saving of souls—the souls of the red men, pagans in the land, inconvenient and neglected heathen, spewed out and left to themselves, while missionaries journeyed over oceans to far countries preaching salvation, forgetting those of their own households outside their own door. Endeavor Mission had lived its precarious life here for two long years. The brethren had worked faithfully. They learned the Chippewa tongue; they taught the dusky boys; they lived in careful peace with the braves, showing them by example and instruction the white man's methods of sowing and reaping; and they prayed with them and for them three times each day, and talked to them of God, the great Father, and of His written laws. With all this they lived sparingly, and toiled, as only the old Puritan obstinacy can toil, in a hard and constant contest with the forest and the soil for bare food and life. The sisters made friends with the gentle-eyed squaws, and did good work among them; for there were eight white women at the mission, all wives of brethren save two—Miriam, a teacher, and fair little Ruth, the elder's daughter.

Endeavor stood alone; it owed allegiance to no one. Whatever feeble connection it had had with the weak, struggling American Board of Missions was long since broken; too vast a wilderness of forest and water lay between. It was one of the many outcomes of that deep, silent religious enthusiasm of New England which in the earlier part of this century manifested itself in so many ways. Of a like spirit in another age were the martyrs made. Into this life of the mission two strangers had drifted—Richard Herndon, the accused, and Edward Brown, once his friend, now his shrouded victim. This day the brethren had found the slain body in the wood, and borne it homeward silently. They had then returned to seek for the slayer, and found him coming in of his own accord.

"'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,'" said the elder. "Richard Herndon, what have you to say in defense?"

"Defense?" said Herndon. "But I tell you there is no need of defense. He aimed at me before I aimed at him. His bullet is deep in some tree out there, I suppose. Mine was truer. It was all chance."

"There is no chance," said the elder, gravely.

"But we were both drunk, old man."

"Was it chance, too, that made you drink?"

"Of course it was. We had been hunting all night in the rain, and were wet and tired. We took a little, and took too much, and fell to quarreling—a thing that might happen to any man."

"No, not to any man, Richard Herndon. Such excuses avail you not. Patiently have we weighed the evidence for this full hour past. There remains no door of escape for you. The penalty of your crime is death."

"Death!" cried the accused, starting forward. "You dare to take to yourself the office of judge? Unbind me! You have taken away my arms; you are forty to my one. Unbind me!"

"Brethren, unbind him not," said the elder; "he is but one, yet is his strength great. Richard Herndon, I have somewhat to say to thee."

"And so have I somewhat to say to you, old fanatic. Who are you that you take to yourself legal powers in this way? By what authority do you pass sentence upon me?"

"By the authority of the Bible, poor sinner."

"I acknowledge it not," cried Herndon, hotly.

The faces of the brethren grew stern; a trace of compassion visible in one or two vanished: blasphemy was the unpardonable sin.

"Young man," said the elder, "you came into our borders three months ago, you and your friend, and you have dwelt voluntarily with us for these many days. We asked you not to remain, yet we gave you of our substance, and slackened not to provide you daily with all things needful. It was not that we loved you; your life, your aims, were different from ours. Yet we suffered you for hospitality's sake, all of us being, as it were, in the power of the wilderness, with the hand of the cold and of famine and of death by violence ever over us. Then came the time when you took the entrance vow of our society upon you. You sought me by night, and asked to be admitted as a preparing member. This was your own doing; no one urged you to take the vow. No influence was cast around you to draw you to our work or to our life."

"Are you quite sure of that?" said Herndon, surlily.

The light of the fire fell on his face as he changed his position; his hands were bound behind him, his brown beard flowed over his broad chest, his short, crisp hair, bronzed features, and angry eyes were full of strong life. He was like a ruddy Samson among those lean, wiry New England men; and he too had fallen into danger through love of a woman—a pure, innocent, pious little Delilah, who prayed for him three times every day, and whose soft pleading had drawn him on into this vow of membership, which he meant to break some time, but which now encircled him with an iron grasp. Cursing his folly at having put himself into the power of these stern visionaries, yet still strongly moved by the affection he felt for the little maiden, Herndon, for the first time, shot from under his bushy eyebrows one glance toward the group of women. He could not see Ruth, her face was hidden; but over the girl's quivering shoulder the eye of Miriam met his, and held it, saying, with all the power of strongest will, "Thou shalt *not* betray her." He turned his face away instantly, doubly angered by that look, which judged him in advance, as it were, and found in him a possibility of betrayal. "When, Heaven knows," he said to himself, "I'd let them hang me ten times over first!" He would have liked to go across and take that woman by the throat for daring to suspect him—that woman, that Miriam, with her steel-colored, unwavering eyes. All this passed in a breath. The elder, stern old Puritan, with his belief founded on the Book of Genesis and its laws rather than on the Gospel, never once dreamed that his daughter might have a heart in spite even of her training and of herself. He could never have comprehended that she loved this stranger, and that this was the cause of the man's long stay among them, and of his preparatory vow. He had thought at times vaguely that perhaps she would marry one of the brethren by-and-by; at present she was still a child.

"No influence was used, Richard Herndon; you chose to enter our society of your own accord: you are one of us. Bound by your vow, I have authority over you as over all the brethren. I hold also such legal powers as I could obtain from the government on coming here. I possess the delegated authority of the Word of God. You have slain a fellow-creature; it is the greatest crime the human hand can commit. We can not let you go. For our own sake, and for the sake of these listening red men, we must, as an example, execute the sentence of death upon you. Prepare, therefore, to die!"

"But I will not die," said Herndon, hotly. "Let me see the man who will dare come near me."

"We outnumber you, young man."

"Cowards, all of you," cried the prisoner, looking around the circle with fierce, scornful gaze. "Not a man dare meet me on a fair field. Come, unbind me; I can easily fight you all, for you are all cowards."

Which was not true. Those quiet New Englanders had a deep staying power of their own, which could go beyond mere fiery blood and muscle. There was not one of them who could not have died at the stake calmly, with a smile on his lips, counting the breath of the flame as the first airs from paradise.

The elder now turned to the Indians, and explained to them in their own tongue this man's crime and its impending punishment. "Human blood can not be lightly shed, my brethren. The Great Spirit commands that the murderer shall be put to death. Hear the words of the Holy Bible." And then he read again that ancient verse, which has come down on the stream of Time from unwritten ages, the guard around our mysterious gift of human life. The Indians listened, their deepest immobility assumed for the dignity of the white man's evening council. They assented to the elder's speech, and one of them arose and offered to sing the death-song for the criminal.

"The white brethren will sing it," said the elder.

Herndon chafed against his bonds. "To die like a dog!" he said to himself.

The elder took his seat, and laid the Bible open before him. "Do you see any reason, brethren, why sentence should not be pronounced upon this person?" he asked.

The oldest brother, as spokesman, arose and answered him, "We see no reason."

"He is guilty of murder?"

"He is."

"He is worthy of death?"

"Yes."

"Richard Herndon, I now give you a last opportunity to speak. If you have any words to say, say them now; hereafter hold your peace."

He leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and waited. The accused stood alone in the centre of the circle. There was a silence. Some one heaped light branches upon the fire; a brighter glare lit up the circle of gazing faces round about the criminal. He had regained his composure; he spoke calmly. "I protest against all these proceedings," he said; "they are irregular and illegal. You have no authority to put me to death, even if I was guilty of murder, instead of being by chance the survivor of a drunken quarrel. You are surprised to hear me speak thus? In this language? You have thought me a rough Western hunter? You are mistaken. Good blood flows in my veins —of a better quality than yours. Inquiry will certainly be made for me, and, as sure as the sun rises, your turn will come; my blood will be required at your hands. So much for you. Now for myself. I did not commit willful murder. Every border man goes through hundreds of just such quarrels as ours of yesterday. He expects them, and bears no malice if he is the one to fall. Ned was a chance companion, not a friend; but he was a good fellow in his way. He would be the first to cut these cords if he could come to life again. Dead, I call upon him to speak against me if he will." And, with a sudden movement, Herndon, his hands being tied behind him, stooped and drew away the blanket from the shrouded form with his strong teeth.

It was a dramatic action. The New England men leaned forward, almost expecting to see fresh blood flow from the wound, according to the old superstition. But the dead man did not accuse his friend; no blood appeared; neither was there a look of anguish on the face. He seemed to be peacefully sleeping. (No one there knew, or could know, that the poor fellow was almost glad to die, and be out of it all—out of this weary, bewildered life, where a series of fatalities had seemed to trip him up ever since he was born; for, deny it as we may, some men are the foot-balls of Fate from the cradle to the grave.)

The living man stood there by the dead, his head erect, his eyes defiant. He was a splendid specimen of manhood. It almost seemed as though no law could be right which should slay him. A murmur of voices had arisen; the brethren spoke to each other in low voices.

But the old man remained unmoved. He said of a man, "He is large," or "He is small;" beauty and strength, for themselves alone, touched him not. "Your threats do not trouble us, Richard Herndon," he said, hushing the murmured voices with a grave gesture. "Your friends may come here after you if they will; they will find no wrong-doing. I hold, as I told you, legal powers. But it is not by those powers that I now pronounce sentence upon you. No; it is by the law of Jehovah, the Almighty God. I can not show you mercy, Richard Herndon, on account of these Indians, who are still very near to savagery, and who need this lesson of the white man's justice. But I would not if I could. Wert thou my own son, I should not hesitate; nay, I wish that thou wert my son indeed, that this painful duty might be also a sacrifice on my part, and that a father's prayers might avail, perhaps, to soften thee ere death. Richard Herndon, to-night thou must die."

But Ruth sprang from Miriam's arms, and knelt at the elder's feet. "Not to-night, father," she cried; "oh, not to-night! Do not be so cruel."

The women gathered around her and tried to soothe her pitiful sobbing. "It is too hard a thing for little Ruth," they said; "she is so tender-hearted."

"Bear her away," said the elder. "Go with the good sisters, my daughter. But pray for this man, if you will, as oft as you please; he needs all your prayers. It may be that God will hearken unto your voice. You have never known what sin was, my child; no wonder that it is so horrible to you."

But Ruth tore herself from the sisters, and came back to her father's feet. "Oh, spare him, father, spare him—for my sake! Let me be slain in his place!"

"Poor lamb, who offerest thyself for the sacrifice! Thou knowest not what thou sayest, Ruth."

"For *my* sake, father—my sake!"

"Nay, were he my own son, as I said before, I would not spare him, either for my sake or yours. And I would curse with a father's curse the child who dared interfere with my sentence."

The old man's voice had grown terrible; his eyes flashed; he was not thinking of poor little Ruth then. Perhaps he was thinking of some dark event of his own past which had made him what he was.

Ruth quailed and sank before him to the ground. The pitying sisters raised her in their arms. But, ere they could bear her away, the grave Miriam came forward. "Ruth," she said, gently, taking her hand, "stand down on your feet one moment, my child." The girl obeyed. "If you have any thing to say to Herndon, now, Ruth, now, *now*, for the last time, Ruth; your fa-

ther can not restrain you," she whispered; at the same time she led the young girl swiftly across the small inclosed space until they stood close to the doomed man. For Miriam alone, of all that company, knew the secret of these two.

The girl, pallid as death itself, looked up into the face of Richard Herndon. Miriam sustained her. She was a small, fragile creature, her large eyes were strained wide open with fear, like the eyes of a hunted hare, her little lips were parched, her breath came in gasps. Her small head—the arched head of the timid and highly reverent temperament—lay back against the elder woman's arm; it almost seemed as though she would die there, looking mutely upward into her lover's face. Yes, her lover; and she loved him. But the horror of a crime and of a father's curse lay between. The man read her face like the open page of a book, and, loving her as he did, he pitied her, and with an inward malediction upon woman's innate weakness, he helped her to turn from him by a cold and vicious look which suited well a murderer's countenance. Ruth saw it, shuddered, and closed her eyes. She had had her moment, and she spoke not. The sisters came forward, and bore her away fainting; Miriam stepped back into the shadow.

The elder felt constrained to offer an apology for his daughter. "She is but a child," he said, "too fragile for such scenes as this. Small wonder that her heart failed her, and that nervous incoherence overcame her speech. Pardon the maid, brethren; she knew not what she did."

There was a pause. The old man bowed his head for a moment; they saw that he prayed. When he lifted his face again, it was set to fulfill all his purpose. "Let the dead be covered," he said.

Two of the brethren stepped forward and reverently drew the blanket over the slain man. Herndon had withdrawn a few paces, and stood leaning against a tree; he seemed to scorn making any further attempt, or even speaking again. "I wish I had a cigar, though," he thought, with the *insouciance* which natures like his feel when they have once made up their minds to accept fate and struggle no longer.

"Richard Herndon, your crime is murder; its penalty is death. By the legal power I hold, by the authority I wield over you as a member of this society, and by the law of Jehovah, I now pass sentence upon you; and seeing that we have no proper prison, and that each day is filled to the full with our mission duties, I now decree that at dawn you be led forth and hanged from a convenient tree until life be extinct. And may God have mercy upon your soul!"

Herndon did not speak; he looked around the circle contemptuously. "A nice lot of executioners," he thought. The elder turned and repeated the sentence to the Indians. "Ruth might get a pistol to me if she tried, some time during the night," thought Herndon, "and at least save me from the hanging. Why do women never think of such things?" But poor little Ruth would have considered it a mortal sin to aid a man in taking his own life under any circumstances. In New England, fifty years ago, burial at four cross-roads, with a stake through the heart, was still the popular verdict upon *felo-de-se*. The Indians had given their "ugh," "ugh," of assent, the council was about to break up, the brethren advanced to lead away the prisoner, when, "Wait, friends, I have a word to speak," said a woman's voice. It was Miriam. She came forward into the centre of the group, the only woman present: the others had gone with Ruth. The circles were broken; the white men and Indians looked at her wonderingly, and pressed nearer. She stood among them—a tall, dark-skinned woman, clad in the plain garb of the sisters. In her every-day life she spoke rarely, save when engaged in her teacher's work; she was counted especially holy by all. With the far-off, faintly cool holiness of some distant star, however, very different from the fervid, loving piety of the other sisters who were wives, and the gentle, girlish religion of fair Ruth. The brethren esteemed Miriam; but they were also somewhat afraid of her. They felt that she was almost too saintly for a mission such as theirs—a mission of common human life, where husbands and wives lived and labored together in the same good cause; they thought that her place should be higher, among those who had renounced altogether the joys of this life, and who lived as the angels lived. The elder counted Miriam as almost on a level with men, so far above the weaknesses of her sex she seemed to him. She was the one woman to whom he paid a mute respect; in all his life the only one; for Ruth's mother had been, as Ruth was now, a fragile little creature, fitted for love and timid obedience.

"Friends," said Miriam, breaking the grave surprised silence, "you have done justly in sentencing this man to death; indeed, you could do no less. He is guilty of a great crime."

Herndon looked at the speaker with indifference. She was the one woman at the mission for whom he felt dislike. He was kind to women by nature, and liked them without effort; but his idea was that they should be either pretty or gentle-tempered. This woman was neither. He said to himself, "She wants to try her hand at a speech."

"Having duly performed your part according to law," continued Miriam, "I ask you to suspend the execution of this man's sentence, brethren, and to give him to me."

There was a murmur of astonishment. Herndon himself drew back, darkly frowning. What was this woman to him?

"You have a custom," said Miriam, turning to the Indians, and speaking in their tongue, "that when a man is condemned to die, if a woman will come forward and take him for her own, and give herself to him, his life is spared, and she and he are banished together to the wilderness to fare as they can. Is this so?"

The Indians assented.

"I am that woman. I now take him as my own. Give him to me. Have I not the right to ask it, according to your law?"

Again the Indians assented.

"And you—you will not go against this favor I ask, the last I shall ever ask, brethren?" said the woman, turning to the white men. "You will give me this man's life?" Her eyes passed from face to face.

"But it is too much, sister—too great a task even for your goodness. Why should you sacrifice yourself for this hardened reprobate?"

"He is hardened now; but it may be that I can soften him. It is a great thing to bring a sinner to God's feet."

"But what a suffering life for you, sister! You are holy, and he is vile."

"And can you not see, my brother, that that makes the very strength of my appeal? Of what use is holiness if not to rescue vileness? Shall I keep my religion as a garb too costly to work in—I, vowed to labor? Besides, so deeply dyed a sinner as this man is is marked, set apart, as it were, for a great and special pity by reason of the sore punishment surely, so surely, awaiting him. He is consecrated by his very crime. Bearing the mark of Cain upon his forehead, he must suffer the punishment of Cain; nothing we can do will alter that. But, oh, my brethren, will it not be better if he comes to his punishment humble and repentant? And, in God's mysterious providence, it seems to me that this work is given into my hand to do. Oh, my brethren, love the red man and help him; but turn me not from saving a white man's soul also, if so be that I can!"

"But your own life, sister?"

"Can I do better with it?"

The brethren stood irresolute, looking upon the woman's steadfast face. One and another, they had spoken to her, and she had met their words. They turned toward the elder, hesitating. It was noticeable that she had not addressed him; she had appealed directly to the lay brothers and to the Indians. The old man noted not this slight—he was above small thoughts of self—but he sat amazed. To leave her place, her work, forever, and go forth with this godless man! He looked, looked fixedly upon her, and she returned his gaze. The two strong wills met.

"You would take this man to yourself, Miriam?"

"Yes, father."

"To save his life?"

"Yes."

"But you must be his wife, then—you must take him as a husband. In no other way can I let you go."

"I know it."

He gazed at her silently; and as he gazed, slowly the conviction came to him that here was a sacrifice greater than death: it would be harder for her to live with him than to die for him. He rose, and with outstretched arms gave her the benediction. Her prayer was granted: the doomed man was hers.

Life is sweet to us all; but Richard Herndon was of a dogged temper, and proud. "I am not going to owe it to her," he said to himself. He turned to the men. "Unbind me," he said, shortly. The brethren, who still held him, began to undo the cords; but the elder checked them.

"Not yet," he said; "this man is not yet free. At dawn, united as one, the two may go forth together. But first we must make some preparation for their journey, we must give them a chance for life; the rest is in God's hands. Let Richard Herndon remain here, bound and guarded, until morning; I will then perform the marriage ceremony over them, and they may go."

"But look here—" began Herndon.

Almost as the words left his mouth, Miriam, coming forward, whispered swiftly in his ear, "Do not object, or say one word. I promise to leave you at the first town."

She would not meet his eyes. He surveyed her doubtingly. She went back quickly among the others, who were receiving the old man's instructions. "If her game is to marry me because she thinks I am somebody, I can block it finely," he thought. "I do not believe the marriage will hold in law; and even if it does, once out of this trap, I will never see her face again as long as I live. If it is money she's after, I shall have the satisfaction of telling her that there's precious little." Then he fell to thinking of his little love sobbing her heart out in the Mission-house behind, and his anger rose again fiercely. "Can't a man have what he wants?" he said to himself. That she had not strength enough to make one effort to save him made no difference in his estimation of her; he liked women who were timid and yielding; he hated Amazons and martyrs. Then his thoughts went back to Miriam. "I will outwit her yet," he said to himself, watching the group around the elder, and her averted face.

At dawn the marriage service was spoken over the two. The dead had been interred in the little burial-ground back of the Mission-house, the one service preceding the other. The fires had died down now; the

gray light of dawn lit the sky. Miriam, in her sisterhood garb, stood by the side of Richard Herndon, and before the assembled company repeated the vows of love and obedience which the elder's voice pronounced. Herndon would not speak; he was sullen and angry. Yet during the long night hours he had made up his mind to take the life offered to him at any cost. A man can not keep himself up to the point of *insisting* upon death when youth and strength are stirring within him. Still he would not speak. Miriam, however, took his hand, hanging bound behind him, and held it in both her own. "I accept him even as he is, without spoken vows," she said. "Go on with the service, father."

The old man went on. He prayed for the welfare of the two. In measured terms he acknowledged the special intervention of Providence in the affair, and the submission they all gave to the decree. He commended "this woman, Thy handmaid," and "this Ishmaelite whom she hath taken to herself for pity's sake," to the especial mercy of God. He then pronounced the final benediction, and the service was ended: the two were one. Ten minutes later they had left the mission together, walking through the forest on their way to the lake, where a canoe containing a few provisions and stores awaited them.

Herndon had his gun, the woman a small bag of clothing. The man's hands were swollen from the pressure of the cords. Without a word the woman took the gun from him and carried it. He made no objection. "She can do as much of the work as she pleases," he said to himself.

They were together eight days. Herndon paddled the canoe, hunted now and then, or fished, in order to help out their provisions, and smoked his pipe while Miriam took her turn at the oar. The autumn air was cool. By day they went steadily on toward the Sault; by night they camped on the beach, the man sleeping by the fire, rolled in a blanket, the woman in the canoe, anchored off the shore. The journey was long. At first Herndon did not look at his companion; but when he found that she as studiously looked away from him, he fell to watching her now and then, wondering when she was going to begin her persuasions; for he was quite convinced that she meant to persuade him into acknowledging the marriage, and taking her eastward as his wife. "She might as well try to move granite," he thought.

On the fourth day he talked a little, vaguely and irrelevantly, on all subjects save the one in hand. She answered him quietly, but he could not draw her out. He spoke of the mission and its work; she said nothing. He abused the fanaticism of the elder, and the blind obedience of the brethren; she did not defend them. On the fifth day he told her the true story of the quarrel. Ned was a chance acquaintance; they had met at the Sault, and had agreed to go on a hunting expedition together. By chance they had come across the mission, and had staid there longer than they ought to have staid. Ned was a good fellow, but he would drink now and then. Twice before, when under the influence of liquor, he had shot at the speaker, and barely missed him; this time he, Herndon, was half drunk himself, and had fired too. It was an even chance which one would be hit; it happened to be Ned. Didn't really know the man from Adam; merely a boon companion for the summer. Intended to publish his death in the Eastern papers, and tell the whole story to whoever wanted to hear it. Was sorry he was gone, poor fellow. Good luck be with him wherever he was in the next world! he certainly didn't have much of it in this.

On the sixth day he fell to talking of Ruth. He really loved the little maiden in his way, and whenever he thought of her, he turned angry against fate. The sweet clinging affection of the young girl seemed to him all that there was of higher love; her dependent nature and her little fears charmed him. He loved to think of soothing her, as one soothes a frightened little child. Then—so complex is the train of human motives—he felt a desire to stir up this silent woman, and see if she had any life in her. All women were alike: there must be a spring to touch somewhere, if one could only find it. So, as he paddled steadily on, he talked of Ruth, of her loveliness, and her love. Miriam sat unmoved. He said more. She remained silent. He burst forth into a rhapsody, partly real, partly assumed.

"Yet she failed you at the last," said the woman, looking up suddenly, and fixing full upon him her dark-fringed, steel-colored eyes.

"And I love her the more for her very failure," said Herndon, returning the gaze with one equally fixed. "Do you think I like being saved by a woman?"

She turned her head away quickly, and for the first time showed some emotion. "There seemed to be no other way," she said, in a low tone.

"Oh, you are referring to yourself? In that case it was different, of course. I am nothing to you, and you are nothing to me. You would have done the same for any dying wretch, being moved thereto by—by—shall we say pity? You are so strong-minded, you know—not timid or retiring, like other women. All the same, I am very much obliged to you, of course, and if there is any thing I can do for you, pray command me." He stopped paddling for a

moment, and relighted his pipe. "Do you think of returning to the mission?" he asked. "She might as well understand that her future movements are nothing to me," he added, mentally.

"No."

"Ah! perhaps you intend to remain at the Sault?"

"No."

"Well, in any case, you must allow me to recompense you in some small degree for the loss of time or change of plans I have involuntarily occasioned."

"If I need aid, I will send you word."

"Oh, that will not do at all. I can give you no fixed address. I think of going abroad, perhaps to Spain or Egypt. But before I go I should like to do something for you, although I myself am far from rich. In fact, you have had the misfortune to rescue only a poor man," said Herndon, looking into her eyes, with a little mocking smile. It was too much. A spasm passed over her face, a sudden sobbing seized and shook her; tears poured down her cheeks between the fingers that tried to hide them. There was no doubt but that she was crying now in the most weak and womanish way possible.

Herndon remained motionless, paddle in hand, staring at her. He was so amazed that he did not speak. What! this hardened manœuvrer overcome at last—this skillful player throwing up her hand, and sitting there crying like a baby, because he had said a word or two showing that he had found her out! He could not bear to hear her sobbing; he began to feel ashamed of himself, and to suspect that he had been mistaken all along. The longer he looked at her, the more he felt inclined to think that he had judged her wrongly; that here was a character which he had not understood, one of those religious enthusiasts that people talked about now and then in books. "She must think me a brute," he said to himself. Then he began aloud, blundering, but in earnest. "Miss Miriam," he said, "I beg your pardon with all my heart. I have made a huge mistake all along. I thought you were marrying me for my name or my money, and I now see that I was all wrong, and that my suspicions have been positively insulting. Do forgive me. I am a worldly sort of a fellow, not fit to associate with such a religious person as yourself; and such things *are* done in the world, I assure you. Indeed, it would have been a first-class manœuvre for—for such a woman as I supposed you to be. Come, forgive me. I am deeply ashamed of myself. I will do now whatever you please. I will even let the marriage stand if you wish it."

The woman shook her head.

"I thought you would refuse. It would be highly repugnant to you, of course, or to any right-minded woman; but, understand me, I am willing now to hold to it and to have it publicly acknowledged. Perhaps you are alone in the world, or desolate. In that case it would be better to let it stand, for then I could provide for you without comment. We need not be together at all, you know; we could live quite apart, as so many husbands and wives do nowadays. For, of course, I know that I should not suit you at all, being so worldly-minded, and so forth, while you are a sort of a—a saint—I mean a nun," he added, hastily changing the word, which held so low a place in his own estimation. (He had never known "a saint" of either sex who was a pleasant or even a sensible companion on earth, whatever he or she might be eventually in heaven.) "You are not willing? Well, I suppose it *would* be an infliction. The truth is that I do not know much about religious people." He paused. "Please tell me, then, what I *can* do for you," he said, beginning to smoke again.

"Nothing," said Miriam.

She had dried her eyes and turned her head away. After a while, silence being once more established between them, he saw her, while he paddled briskly on to make up for lost time, take out a half sheet of paper, and begin to write upon it with a pencil, steadying it with a piece of bark.

"What are you writing?" he asked, after half an hour had passed.

"Prayers," she answered.

"Suppose you make some for me; I need them."

For now that he believed in her sincerity, such as it was, he felt himself no longer on guard before her, and fell back into his old half-bantering tone.

"You do; but Ruth will pray for you."

"No, she won't; I shall not allow it. Do you think I am going to have her holding herself above me in that way? If I marry Ruth (you have refused to let our marriage stand, you know), she shall pray—you will think this is dreadful, but I do not know any other way to express it—she shall pray to me."

"You mean that you wish to be her god?"

"No wish about it; it will be so of itself."

"It will indeed. May you be very happy with her, Mr. Herndon! A sweeter nature I never knew." She said this quietly, and went on with her writing.

"Those prayers do not get on very fast," said Herndon, at the end of another half hour, watching her sit motionless, pencil in hand. "Come, give me a little of your time and tell me your plans. In another day we shall be at the Sault."

"Yes; and I will answer you before we reach the Sault. In the mean time, please leave me to myself."

"Cool!" said Herndon, half laughing, half vexed.

"As we near civilization, Mr. Herndon, we necessarily resume our proper places," continued the woman. "I am glad that you have righted me in your own mind." She raised her eyes and looked at him. "I never once thought of your name or your money," she said.

A flush rose in his cheek. At that moment the man felt himself contemptible before her. "I judged you by low standards," he said, hurriedly. "I am not accustomed to being with religious people, Miss Miriam."

Clouds came up and darkened the lake at sunset. Hitherto they had had fine weather.

"Rain," said Herndon.

"Yes, and cold," said Miriam, looking at the sky.

"We have had wonderful luck," continued Herndon. "If the weather had been bad, I could not have hunted or fished, and we should have been twice as long on the way, besides. It would have been a close shave for life. But I suppose it all comes from having a religious person on board," he added, half believing it himself. "I think we had better camp here, Miss Miriam, in this little bay."

They ate their supper; then Herndon piled the fire with branches dragged from the forest behind. "It is the last night we shall be together," he said. "Sit a while, won't you?" for hitherto Miriam had withdrawn to the canoe early in the evening. She sat down upon a blanket, with her back against the two-foot sand bluff of the shore. Darkness came down rapidly; the blaze of the fire made a circle of light around them and shone upon her face. She took off her broad straw hat and the close cap of the sisterhood; the heavy braids of her black hair crowned her head and gave depth to her gray eyes. Herndon lay on the sand at a little distance, his hands under his head, his pipe in his mouth. "By Jove!" he said to himself, "she is almost handsome." (But she was not; it was only the fire-light and the night.)

At nine o'clock the woman rose. She had sat quietly enough under his gaze, occasionally replying to his desultory remarks, and he felt somewhat vexed: women generally either turned away from or toward his look; they did not sit unmoved like that. "I suppose it is because she is so religious," he said to himself.

It had grown very dark, and the wind began to moan through the pines. "Perhaps you had better not stay out there to-night," said Herndon.

"It is quite safe," said the woman, going on with her preparations as usual. Then she stepped into the canoe and pushed it off with the paddle. "Mr. Herndon," she said, standing outlined in the fire-light against the darkness of the water behind, "have you entirely exonerated me from all inclination to insist upon that marriage service that was spoken over us, on account of your name or fortune, whatever they may be?"

"I have indeed," said Herndon, warmly. "I am ashamed of myself for ever having thought so, Miss Miriam."

"I am very glad; thank you. And I have one more thing to say: you need not have been afraid, for—I am married already." And the canoe went out into the darkness.

The next morning, when he woke, a cold fine rain was pouring steadily down. He felt very uncomfortable in his damp blankets, and rose. The fire was out. He looked seaward: the canoe was gone. Miriam had left him in the night, taking the boat with her. She would reach the Sault twelve hours before him, since it was slow walking by the beach. "Why did she do it?" he said, angrily. He threw off his coat, and went down to the lake to bathe his face and hands. When he came back, something caught his eye. Pinned to the inside of the garment was the half sheet of paper upon which he had watched her writing. "She must have come in to shore and placed it there while I was asleep," he thought. And this is what he found:

"I have taken the canoe and gone on to the Sault: when you reach there, I shall have gone. There is no use searching for me; I shall not be found. Besides, you have no rights over me, I am married already; and I have rights over you, for I saved your life. Do as I ask you, then; make no attempt to find me, either now or at any time: I assure you it will be time lost.

"I hate hypocrisy. Therefore I wish to say that it was not religious enthusiasm or self-sacrifice that made me try to save you when Ruth failed. (For she *did* fail; you can never alter that.) I *was* religious—once. I had deep religious enthusiasms—once. I was capable of making just such a sacrifice for a doomed criminal—once. But that was long ago—before I loved you!

"Yes, Richard Herndon, I loved you, I love you now. But through all the complications and temptations of my fate I am coming out right; I am leaving you forever.

"Go back to Ruth if you like; I do not care, nor shall I know. For I can not marry you if I would, being a wife, at least in name, already; and I would not if I could, being very proud. For you did not love me first, Richard; therefore you shall not love me last. MIRIAM."

Richard Herndon sat down on his wet blankets in the rain, and thought. Then he rose, cooked his breakfast, packed his traps, and set off on his long beach walk to the Sault.

"Those gaunt, dark, hollow-eyed women are the very ones for this sort of thing," he said to himself, not without a vague wonder at the power of his own attractions. "All the same, I am more than half in love with her myself," he added. "Perhaps—"

Yes, perhaps. But years afterward he said that it was "a happy escape; she would have been very inconvenient."

And so she would, I fear.