The Scalp Tree.

May, 1837.

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Many years ago, in one of the most romantic and beautiful portions of the earth, where the primeval forests are still untamed by civilization, and the wild freedom of Nature is but little tampered with by the hand of Art, there stood, embossed in the silent woods, a small but sturdy Indian village. Its ruler was a young chief, the son of a great Cherokee tribe, and though scarcely twenty summers had passed over his head, he was already well rounded in respect to the councils of his nation. Bold and determined at heart, and tall and manly in person, none of his years was so active in the chase, so fierce in battle, or so wise and prudent in deliberation. His lodge was always filled with the game that had fallen beneath his arrows, and his long bow was decked with the scalps of foes who had already yielded to his prowess. But not many wars had called him from his home, and among his wild brethren, he was rather noted for a disposition that preferred peace and quiet to the bloody scenes of strife. He was a quiet, reserved, and easy-going man, and his voice was seldom heard ringing through the woods in the mad excitement of the chase. In usefulness and energy he soared high above his fellows, and all the old men of the tribe knew him by the name of the Young Eagle. He had taken to his wigwam the daughter of a neighboring chief—a fair, obedient, girl, whose voice fell so sweetly on the ear, and whose presence was so gentle and refreshing, that all knew her as the May Shower. It was said the pine straw cover was beneath her gliding feet, and that the mock-bird paused to listen to her voice, as she walked forth some low, native song, while rocking, in her dark cradle, the little babe that gazed into her lustrous eyes.

The village stood perched upon the declivity of a gentle hill, in the midst of a grand, solemn forest. As the foot of the slope was a wide lawn, that stretched far away in the distance; its dark waters shaded by the dense vines that grew up in close array, like the ranks of some silent army, guarded by voiceless sentinels that stood in the shape of giant pines, rearing their heavy heads to the sky. In the summer days, fair fields of Indian corn grew by the side of the village; the corn brought forth her products, and Nature luxuriated in her natural dress. The cricket chirped in the long, rank grass, the locust piped softly from the tree-tops, and the mock-bird and red-winged, sweet-voiced bird of the forest, mingled their notes with the organ-like tones of the solemn wind that moaned through the forest. The squirrels danced in sportive gambols upon the verdant carpet of the woods, and the bird peeped, with cunning eye, from his mossy couch on the limbs of the venerable oaks. The cow wheeled in lazy flight through the air, and the buzzard soared high in the regions of the sun, till he looked like a speck in the distance. All sorts of shrubs and blossoms decked these beautiful woods. The perfume-laden breeze came murmuring among the tender leaves, and shook the dwarf palm-trees, till they framed the drooping flowers into life and beauty. The honey-suckle peeped from every corner; each tree was crowned with a garland of some flowering vine, that stopped from limb to limb, and, at last, gaily waved its arms above the summit. The sweet myrtle, the tender morning-glory, and the spartina Cherokee rose, vied with each other among the tree-tops, while aloft hung the wild woodbine and the radiant yellow jasmine. The balsam and flowers, their drooping flowers, that render it the pride and glory of the forest. Here, the birds were green through the live-long year; for, in this land, Nature never put on her mourning dress of bleak, cruel skies, and said, leafless trees; here, the birds always sang, the flowers always blossomed; the wind was as merry as a marriage-bell, and the sweet Summer was not buried by the stern undertaker, Winter, but her gay youth was renewed like the eagle's. And here stood the Indian village in the full enjoyment of peace and plenty. The May Shower tripped through the woods, singing the dew-drops from the grass, or sang her native songs,
stood in the dark, silent woods, and the eye of the Great Spirit alone looked on him from the spotless sky. No tears came to his relief—the woof was too deep for that—but the fire of hell kindled in his dark soul, and his many frame shook like an aspen. In a moment the Young Eagle was changed. All the love and kindness of his heart froze into vengeance and despair. It seemed as though some demon hand had been placed before his eyes, and shut out the night of all that was gentle and peaceful, to usher in a horrid vision of bloodshed and revenge. He slowly gathered the mangled bodies of his people, placed them in the ground, and piled the earth upon them; and then he arose, by the Great Spirit above him, that he would rest neither by night nor by day, until his knife had drank deeply of the white man's blood; for he knew that his people in the happy hunting-grounds were crying for revenge, and their words smote upon his ear in the black night, when the wind storm-wind roared through the forest.

Far away, in the dark lagoon, was a small island, hidden in the gloomy shade of the cypresses that hung over it like a pall. Below, the ruins of the former forest lay piled in wild confusion, while loftier soared the mournful trees, wrapped in the sable livery of the gray mass, that wound around their branches, or hung in wavy tresses to the very surface of the water. Here and there, an enormous pine reared its heavy head to the heavens, and shook its skeletal arms, like some grim and terrene spectre. On the tree-tops, the wild conornants and herons hatched their young; while here and there might be seen the greatest of the eagle or fish-hawk. A dense growth of vines fringed this gloomy island; the moose glided along its muddy banks; and the gull alighted from point to point, or raised his head above the surface, and bellowed till the very waters trembled. The reclusively night-bird crested on his passing flight, and the ill-boding owl "grated the moon with demoniac laughter." To this dismal spot the Young Eagle guided his fatal course, for he knew that, in its gloomy shades, he was safe from all pursuit. Here, on this lonely island, he built a solitary hut, and nursed his wrongs and needs his heart in its black solitude.

Time flew on, and the white man pioneered his way into the wilderness. The forest began to yield to his axe, and the smoke of his cabin ascended among the tree-tops. Cattle began to crop the long, wild grass, and gardens bloomed where once only the boughs of the forest stood. But a strange, terrible fear haunted the settlers, and it was said that a demon stalked through the woods. For often the hunter started out with wild hawks, the old men went to walk through the forest, the maidens to pull flowers in the glades, and the children to sport beside the water; but oftimes they never returned—they were never again seen, or but their mangled bodies were found grimly gazing into the
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Mensalia.

With too many of our fellow-students the University Literary Magazine has ceased to be an object of interest. They do not condemn it openly, but they throw out insinuations against it, that it is more harm than their open opposition would; while professing to be its warmest friends, they do all they can to arrest its progress, and then point to its languishing state as an evidence of what they assert. They are in favor of tearing down everything, and building up nothing. The consequences of such speeches are ridiculous; these persons do not write for the Magazine itself, and do all they can to dissuade others from doing so. Now all we ask of these gentlemen is to be left alone. All we want on our part is non-intervention; and though the Magazine may languish, or, perhaps, prove a failure, yet we would have the consolation of knowing that we fall with the sincere regrets of many, and without the opposition of any of our fellow-students. We have never known a man to succeed who folded his arms, and waited for the tide of events to waft him upward. All the great achievements which grace the historic page have been accomplished by men, who, seeing the proper course, have followed it with zeal and energy. And though there may be a tide in the affairs of men, which takes at the flood leads on to fortune, yet the right moment for resigning oneself to the current has never yet been discovered, except by those who, animated by a lofty ambition, have liberal readiness for their own advancement. So it is with our Magazine: if left to the tender care of those who are so constantly predicting its downfall, it would, indeed, soon perish; but if its friends would rally to its aid, and give it the support of both their brains and their purse, then would we see only evidence of the Literature of the University of Virginia be preserved, and remain always as an open theatre for the exhibitions of the talents of the Sons of the South, and a constant rebuke to those who have endeavored to retard its progress.