

**TOKEAH; OR, THE
WHITE ROSE. IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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Tokeah; Or, The White Rose. In Two Volumes. Vol. II by Charles Sealsfield

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TOKEAH;

OR,

THE WHITE ROSE.

Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom?
Where the gold orange glows in the deep thicket's gloom?
Where a wind ever soft, from the blue heaven blows,
And the groves are of laurel and myrtle and rose?
Knowest thou it?

Thither! O, thither!
My dearest and kindest with thee would I go.
Goethe.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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TOKEAH;

OR,

THE WHITE ROSE.

CHAPTER I.

We charge you in God's name, and the king's,
To go with us unto the officer's.

SHAKESPEARE.

THERE are few countries in the western hemisphere, which nature seems to have more distinctly pointed out for great purposes, than that to which we are now shifting our scene; and yet there is scarcely one of less inviting appearance. Emerging from the bosom of the sea, or rather from the great channel that sweeps the collected waters of hundreds of rivers through its plains, it forms, as it were, the key stone of the endless valley, and probably of the future empire, which time, and the restless hand of man will raise there. The whole country, however, is studded and intersected with lakes and swamps, and traversed with rivers and streams, and the foot of man may there be literally said, to rest on watery ground.

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The painter who is desirous of forming a vivid idea of chaos in all its grandeur, ought to visit the passes of the Mississippi. The endless waste of waters rolling towards the gulf; the low mud-slope, scarcely discernible from the muddy stream, and overgrown with a dwarfish cane; haply the trunk of a tree borne down by the current, and sticking in the low mud bank, with perhaps a mast of a wrecked vessel, raising its dismal head above the surface, are the only objects that arrest the eye: no habitation of man, no herb, no bird, is to be seen. The wind sighing mournfully through the cane, the hoarse cry of the pilot, or the hissing of the steam boat, are the only sounds that interrupt the oppressive dreariness.

For more than a century the boundless tract of country, then called Louisiana, was little better than a forgotten and neglected colony; ceded and exchanged with a carelessness that showed how little importance was attached to it. A new era began to dawn, upon its incorporation with the great republican family of North America, and the new impulse which it received by the Union, soon began to be felt in the vast improvements that were every where carried on. Little more than ten years had elapsed since this period, and the face of the country was already changed in a manner, that, considering the great difficulties which man had to overcome, must have filled the mind of a somewhat more than common observer, with astonishment.

Even at this early period, that is, some fourteen years ago, the banks of the Mississippi up to Baton Rouge, and as far as Natchez, presented a long, and but seldom interrupted range of old-fashioned, but substantial mansions:—the capital itself had, from a forlorn nestling place of a

few thousand colonists, become an important commercial city, the seat of wealth and luxury, which even attracted the eye of Great Britain.

What may have been the reason, why the careful mother fixed her eye on this newly adopted child of the disobedient republican family; whether she wished to retain the key of the western country and of its trade, or whether the incursion was only intended as a chastisement to her relative, presuming to dispute their element with the lords of the ocean, and, to say the least of it, in a manner more serious than might have been expected, or whether it was meant as a mere visit to the cotton bales and sugar hogsheads, we leave to sage statesmen, as a point foreign to our purpose. Suffice it to say, that a powerful expedition, and such a one as had never before appeared on the peaceful banks of the mighty river, spread terror and dismay among the good people of the new sovereign state.

There scarcely seemed any conquest easier than that of this country. The inhabitants had never known of war before, if we except a few Indian irruptions; and the warlike spirit of their French and Spanish ancestors, had been kept down under a long line of satraps, to ensure their allegiance to the remote mother country. The union seemed too young to be firmly cemented; little jealousies existed inseparable from the incorporation of a new country into a vast republic; and the irruption of a throng of new and enterprising adventurers, was looked upon by the settled inhabitants with that sort of feeling, with which an old store-keeper might be supposed to regard a young and enterprising Yankee rival.

The larger and more enlightened part of the community, could not but be highly sensible of

the immense advantages they had gained, without shedding a drop of blood, and they embraced the cause of their new country, with all the warmth of native Americans, and burning with desire to show themselves worthy of their newly acquired citizenship. But still there were some—and where are there not such?—who looked upon their northern fellow citizens with an unfavourable eye; some who were perhaps better inclined to their visitors, and talked of surrender and so forth. This indeed was here, as it was every where else, where each one has his own opinion, and is at liberty to declare it freely. But other, and more serious impediments, or rather wants, were to be overcome. There were no arms, no ammunition, no troops; none of those necessary evils, invented by human ingenuity, for the successful destruction of the species: in short, such difficulties as must arise in a country, that has enjoyed a long and almost uninterrupted peace.

These few and imperfect outlines of the situation of things, in the southern parts of the state, could not be strictly applied to the northern and north-western districts. The settlers of these counties, or, as they are called in the language of the country, parishes, were for the greater part Americans, of that sturdy and fiery race that hover on the borders of the western states, without sufficient means to purchase the more prolific and fertile tracts on the margin of the Mississippi; they therefore contented themselves with the second rate lands, where a few negroes, added to their own nervous arms, and the herds of wild cattle dispersed over the boundless savannas of Opelousas, Natchitoches, and Attacapas, promised them what they came for, wealth and independence, in their own way. If they had not the same means of grati-

fyng their desires, as their more southern neighbours; the fresh air, the chase, and hard steady working, kept them in that vigour, which they had inherited from their fathers, and augmented, in their native states. They were a fiery, stout race, rather rough, but vigorous in body and mind.

The news of the invasion had scarcely spread, before they rushed with their rifles, or what came next in their way, to meet the invaders.

It was less from fear of seeing their property destroyed or their peaceful habitations pillaged—the former could easily be removed on a couple of wagons into the interior of the woods, the latter might with the assistance of a dozen of hands be rebuilt in a week. It was a certain restless spirit, that animated these sons of the forest. They expected a sort of frolic, a chase—a fight—and they would have it.

It was on a bright December morning, the sun was just sufficiently cool to dispel the mists and fogs, that had hung about the rivers and swamps during the preceding weeks. There was a great bustle and commotion in the country-town of Opelousas. It seemed indeed wonderful, where the people came from, in a country apparently so thinly settled. Any person whom chance might have thrown into this medley of men and women and children, white, yellow, and black, evidently dressed in their best, would have been puzzled to guess at the meaning of the gathering. From the hard drinking, dancing, fighting, romping, and “cutting up high,” that reigned throughout the assembly, one might have imagined that there was a general frolic; but there were also arms, and an attempt at military uniform, and to form into a line. Some shouldered their rifles, others their fowling-pieces, a third carried an old cara-

bine without a lock, while a fourth had a rusty pistol, with a broken barrel or a stout club in his hand.

This was the general aspect of the motley assembly, out of which were soon formed two separate groups, that drew towards their respective head-quarters. One of these was a tavern, with an old sign, embellished by a painting whose rough faded outlines would have baffled the researches of a Denon, and a host of antiquarians: the inscription immediately below, informed those who could decipher the legend, that, "eNTeR-taINMent For man And beast," was there provided. The interior of the tavern presented a scene worth the pencil of Van der Velde. The favourite dance of the backwoodsmen, the hopsesa, was here performed to the music afforded by a wretched fiddle. We spare our readers a fuller detail of the steps of these gallants, who figured with their hats on their heads, and their pint glasses in their hands.

The second group was of rather a more serious description. It was gathered before one of those miscellaneous stores, which are so frequently to be found, and so characteristic of the smaller towns, in the back woods. A few earthen jugs, a keg of chewing tobacco, and a barrel of whiskey, or a flask of gunpowder, with a brown wool hat, and a pair of shoes, to which a few rusty jack knives might be added, exhibited the whole merchantable commodities of the owner.

Over the door an old sign was nailed, with the inscription, "NEW STORE CHEAP FOR CASH," and on the walls of the ricketty frame house was written with chalk, "Whiskey, Brandy, Tobacco, Post-office." The persons assembled around this dwelling, consisted of a knot of double-jointed, square-