

**CORONA OF THE  
NANTAHALAS,  
A ROMANCE**

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Corona of the Nantahalas, a romance by Louis Pendleton

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BUT THE MAN DROPPED HIS WEAPON, AND FELL HEAVILY BACKWARD AGAINST A TREE. Page 8.

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OF THE  
NANTAHALAS

*A Romance*

BY

LOUIS PENDLETON

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"IN THE WIRE-GRASS," "KING TOM AND THE  
RUNAWAYS," ETC.



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## CORONA OF THE NANTAHALAS.

### I.

GIDEON McLEOD had lived, from childhood up, in the North Carolina mountains, as had his father before him ; but it was not until the year 1864, when the conscript officers, under the spur of necessity, became unusually active, that he removed into the fastnesses of the wild Nantahalas. The mountaineers as a class were notoriously indifferent to the issues of the war, and Gideon McLeod was no exception to the rule. With his childless wife and such of his belongings as could well be transported, he retired from view at the first note of alarm, and was seen no more.



The refuge he had selected was a sheltered nook or cove high up in the mountains, and fully fifteen miles remote from any other human dwelling-place. Here a rude cabin was built, and gradually a few acres of ground were cleared. At the outset it was the intention of the refugees eventually to return to the lower valley and the neighbourhood of their friends, but time passed, and they remained where they were. The war was over long before they knew of its termination, and their desire to return had meanwhile weakened. Sensitive at first because they had had no children—a calamity almost unheard of among their prolific neighbours—their alienation was intensified later on, when a son was born to them, who by-and-by proved to be both deaf and dumb.

So the seasons came and went, and the McLeods thought no more of leaving their hiding-place. The husband gradually cleared more land, ploughed his fields, sowed and harvested his crops. The wife spun and wove, kept her house, and watched the boy, who, despite his sad affliction, was none the less her joy and pride. They were simple, unschooled folk, to begin with,

born in the lonely mountains, and were contented and happy in their solitary situation to a degree quite inconceivable from our point of view. A few times a year Gideon McLeod descended to the settlement in the lower valley, in order to procure certain necessaries, such transportation as he required being accomplished by means of a pack-mule. A mountain bridle-path was as yet the only highway. And this was their sole communication with their kind.

As the years passed, as he made additions to his house and became more comfortable, and as he saw his few sheep and cattle develop into considerable flocks and herds, Gideon McLeod gave thanks that the wherewithal of life was within his grasp. He had no money and needed none. The few farm implements and articles of household use purchased now and then in the lower valley were all paid for in hides and furs, fruit of the hunting and trapping of leisure hours. The wild mountains were his kingdom. The outside world might go to war, or be wasted with pestilence or with famine; he was free and independent of it all.

It was when the boy, whom they had named Dan, was about five years old that an event occurred which was the beginning of a new epoch in their lives.

Gideon McLeod was walking in the forest on the slope of the mountain below his farm, one afternoon, when his attention was attracted to a very unusual sound—the sound of horse-hoofs on the flinty path leading down toward the lower valley. He was at once stirred with curiosity and wonder, perhaps even with something of alarm. Concealing himself behind a tree, he awaited the appearance of the horse on that portion of the path in view from where he stood.

No one in the lower valley ever toiled up to Lonely Cove, either on business or to make a social visit, and if this were a stranger from other parts, what could be his object? If the perplexed mountaineer had guessed for a whole year, he would not have anticipated what he saw.

In a few moments a horseman appeared and drew rein, horse and rider thus being thrown in relief against the opposite green wall of trees. Gideon McLeod saw at a glance that the horse was a fine animal,