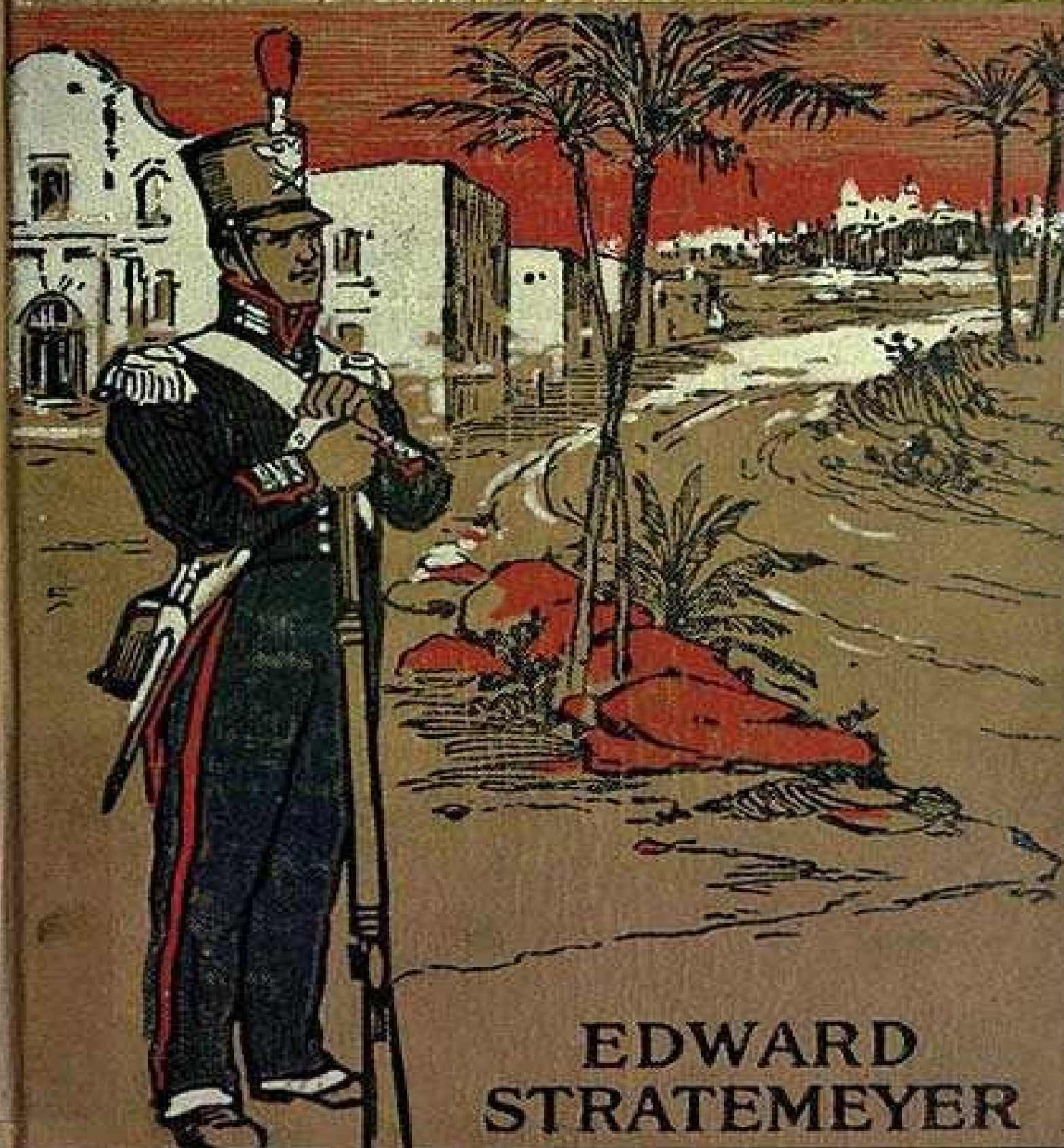


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LIBERTY
TEXAS



EDWARD
STRATEMEYER

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REMEMBER THE ALAMO! DOWN WITH SANTA ANNA!

"REMEMBER THE ALAMO! DOWN WITH SANTA ANNA!"

Mexican War Series

FOR THE LIBERTY OF TEXAS

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "With Taylor on the Rio Grande," "Under Scott in Mexico,"
"Dave Porter Series," "Old Glory Series," "Pan-American Series,"
"Lakeport Series," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY LOUIS MEYNELLE

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FOR THE LIBERTY OF TEXAS

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PREFACE.

"For the Liberty of Texas" is a tale complete in itself, but it forms the first of a line of three volumes to be known under the general title of the "Mexican War

Series."

Primarily the struggle of the Texans for freedom did not form a part of our war with Mexico, yet this struggle led up directly to the greater war to follow, and it is probably a fact that, had the people of Texas not at first accomplished their freedom, there would have been no war between the two larger republics.

The history of Texas and her struggle for liberty is unlike that of any other State in our Union, and it will be found to read more like a romance than a detail of facts. Here was a territory, immense in size, that was little better than a wilderness, a territory gradually becoming settled by Americans, Mexicans, Spaniards, French, and pioneers of other nations, a territory which was the home of the bloodthirsty Comanche and other Indians, and which was overrun with deer, buffalo, and the wild mustang, and which was, at times, the gathering ground for the most noted desperadoes of the southwest.

This territory formed, with Coahuila, one of the States of Mexico, but the government was a government in name only, and the people of Texas felt that it was absolutely necessary that they withdraw from the Mexican Confederation, in order to protect themselves, their property, and their individual rights, for, with the scheming Mexicans on one side of them, and the murderous Indians on the other, nothing was safe from molestation.

The contest was fought largely by men who knew little or nothing of the art of war, but men whose courage was superb. At first only defeat stared the intrepid band in the face, and hundreds were lost at the Alamo, at the massacre of Goliad, and elsewhere, but then there came upon the scene the figure of the dashing and daring General Sam Houston, and under his magnetic leadership the army of the Mexican general, Santa Anna, was routed utterly, and the liberty of Texas was secured beyond further dispute.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER

- I. THE HOME ON THE FRONTIER**11**
- II. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE DEER**19**
- III. A QUARREL AND ITS RESULT**28**
- IV. SOMETHING ABOUT THE INDIANS IN TEXAS**36**
- V. THE ATTACK ON THE RANCH**44**
- VI. POKE STOVER TO THE FRONT**53**
- VII. IN AND OUT OF THE BURNING CABIN**62**
- VIII. AN UNSUCCESSFUL PURSUIT**71**
- IX. BIG FOOT AND THE MISSING PAPERS**81**
- X. THE SITUATION IN MEXICO**89**
- XI. THE OPENING OF THE WAR**97**
- XII. THE MARCH ON SAN ANTONIO**105**
- XIII. A FIGHT WITH A PUMA**113**
- XIV. THE BATTLE OF CONCEPCION**121**
- XV. DAN TURNS THE TABLES**129**
- XVI. AFTER A MISSING MUSTANG**137**
- XVII. THE GRASS FIGHT, AND WHAT FOLLOWED**145**
- XVIII. DAN COMES TO GRIEF**154**
- XIX. THE CAVE IN THE RAVINE**161**
- XX. FLIGHT AND PURSUIT**169**
- XXI. WHAT HAPPENED TO RALPH**177**
- XXII. THE ATTACK ON SAN ANTONIO**185**
- XXIII. THE SURRENDER OF THE CITY**194**
- XXIV. A MIDNIGHT DISCOVERY**204**
- XXV. MARCH OF SANTA ANNA INTO TEXAS**212**
- XXVI. WILD TURKEYS AND ANOTHER TRAIL**223**
- XXVII. THE MEXICAN ARMY AT SAN ANTONIO**233**
- XXVIII. WITHIN THE WALLS OF THE MISSION**242**
- XXIX. THE FALL OF THE ALAMO**250**
- XXX. ESCAPING TO THE RIVER**257**
- XXXI. SOMETHING ABOUT GENERAL SAM HOUSTON**265**
- XXXII. IN WHICH THE TEXAN ARMY FALLS BACK**274**
- XXXIII. THE VICTORY OF SAN JACINTO**283**
- XXXIV. BACK TO THE RANCH—CONCLUSION**293**

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

"REMEMBER THE ALAMO! DOWN WITH SANTA ANNA!" *Frontispiece*

"YOU SHA'N'T LEAVE THIS SPOT UNTIL YOU GIVE UP THAT DEER,
AND THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT!" **27**

"FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE COMANCHES" **70**

"HOLD ON,' HE CRIED TO HENRY PARKER. 'SOMETHING IS IN
THAT BUSH!" **98**

"HOLD BACK!' YELLED DAN" **157**

"YOU RASCAL! GET BACK, OR I'LL SHOOT!" **212**

"THAT'S WHAT I CALL A PRETTY GOOD HAUL,' CRIED DAN,
ENTHUSIASTICALLY" **229**

"HE BEGAN TO LOWER HIMSELF INTO THE HOLE" **258**

FOR THE LIBERTY OF TEXAS.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME ON THE FRONTIER.

"Dan! Dan! Come quick and see what I brought down with the gun!"

"Why, Ralph, was that you I heard shooting? I thought it was father."

"No; I was out, down by the river bank, and I brought down the finest deer you ever set eyes on. He was under the bunch of pecan-trees, and I let him have it straight in the neck and brought him down the first crack. Now what do you think of that?"

Ralph Radbury's rather delicate face was all aglow with excitement and pardonable pride, as he spoke, leaning on his father's gun, a long, old-fashioned affair that had been in the family's possession for many years. Ralph was but a boy of eight, although years of life in the open air had given him the appearance of being older.

"What do I think?" cried Dan, who was Ralph's senior by six years. "I think you'll become a second Davy Crockett or Dan'l Boone if you keep on. It's a wonder the deer let you come so close. The wind is blowing toward the stream."

"I trailed around to the rocks where we had the tumble last winter, and then I came up as silently as a Comanche after a scalp. I was just about ready to fire when the deer took alarm, but I caught him when he raised his head, and all he gave was one leap and it was all over. Where is father? I must tell him." And Ralph looked around impatiently.

"I don't know where father is, if he isn't down by the river. I thought he went off to look up those hogs that got away last Saturday. In these times, so he says, we can't afford to lose six fat porkers."

"Perhaps those rushers who were on their way to Bexar rounded them up on the sly."

"No; father put the crowd down for honest men, and he rarely makes a mistake in judging a man, Ralph. Either the hogs got away by themselves or else some of those sneaking Comanches have been around again."

"Oh, Dan, that puts me in mind,—when I was up at the rocks I was almost certain I saw one of the Indians farther up the river. As soon as I looked that way he dodged out of sight, so I only caught one glimpse of him—if he really was an Indian."

At his younger brother's words, Dan Radbury's face took on a look of deep concern. "You are not real sure it was an Indian?" he questioned, after a pause.

"No, but I'm pretty sure, too. But even if it was an Indian it might have been Choctaw Tom, you know."

"You're wrong there, Ralph. All the Caddo Indians are friendly to the whites, and if it was Tom he wouldn't hide away after you had spotted him. More than likely it was a dirty Comanche, and if it was—well, we had better tell father about it, that's all."

"Why, you don't think——" Ralph paused, abruptly.

"I know a Comanche isn't to be trusted. Come, let us look at the deer, and let us try to find father at the same time. Is the gun loaded?"

"No." Ralph looked sheepish. "I—I was so pleased to bring down the deer I forgot all about loading again."

"Then you're not such a famous hunter, after all, Ralph. The wise man, especially in these parts, loads up before his gun-barrel has a chance to cool. Put in your load at once, and I'll bring along that Mexican *escopeta* father traded in for a mustang last week. I don't believe the old gun is of much account, but it will be better than nothing."

"Father wouldn't take it from the greaser if it wasn't all right. But why must we both be armed? Do you think the Indians are close by?"

"As I said before, I don't believe in trusting these bloodthirsty Comanches.

Poke Stover knows them like a book, and he says they are just aching to go on the war-path, now the government is having so much trouble of its own."

"If the Indians are around it won't be safe to leave the cabin alone," was the younger boy's comment.

"I reckon we can leave it for awhile, Ralph. We won't be gone more than an hour, at the most," concluded Dan Radbury, as he disappeared into the cabin for the firearm he had mentioned.

The scene was that of a typical frontier home, in the heart of Texas, close to the Guadalupe River, and about ten miles from what was then the village of Gonzales. It was the year 1835, and the whole of northern and western Texas could truthfully be put down as a "howling wilderness," overrun with deer, bison, bears, and other wild animals, wild horses, and inhabited only by the savage and lawless Comanche, Apache, Cherokee, and numerous other tribes of Indians. As regards the rest of the State, it may briefly be stated that this immense territory of thousands of square miles contained not over twenty-two thousand white and black people combined. How many Indians there were is not definitely known, but they have been estimated at fifteen to eighteen thousand. The main cities were San Antonio de Bexar, San Felipe de Austin, Nacogdoches, San Augustine, Columbia, and the seaport town of Velasco, but not one of these boasted of more than thirty-five hundred inhabitants.

To this territory had come, three years before, Amos Radbury, the father of the two lads introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The family were from Georgia, where Mr. Radbury had once owned a large interest in a tobacco plantation. But a disastrous flood had robbed him not only of the larger portion of his property, but also of his much beloved wife, and, almost broken-hearted, the planter had sold off his remaining interest in the plantation for five thousand dollars, and emigrated, first to New Orleans, and then to his present home. The trip from New Orleans had been made in a prairie wagon, drawn by a double yoke of oxen, and had consumed many weeks, and that trip over the prairies, through the almost trackless forests, and across numerous dangerous fords, was one which the boys were likely never to forget. On the way they had fallen in with a small band of treacherous Indians, but they had been saved by the timely arrival of some friendly Caddos, under the leadership of Canoma, a chief well known throughout the length and breadth of Texas.

On reaching the Guadalupe River, a stop of two weeks had been made at Gonzales, and then Mr. Radbury had obtained possession of a grant of land embracing over five hundred acres, the tract lying on both sides of the stream. The price paid for the land was ten cents per acre. This is not to be wondered at, since land in other portions of the State was sold as low as two cents per acre!

The three years spent in the wilderness had done wonders for all of the members of the family. The hard work of clearing off the timber, planting, and of building a cabin and a cattle shelter, had done much to make Mr. Radbury forget his grief over the loss of his wife and property, and the rough outdoor life had made Daniel Radbury "as tough as a pine-knot," as he was wont to say himself. It had likewise done much for little Ralph, who had been a thin and delicate lad of five when leaving the old home in the magnolia grove in far-off Georgia. Even yet Ralph was not as strong as Dan, but he was fast becoming so, much to his parent's satisfaction.

Amos Radbury's venture had prospered from the start. The land was rich and his crops were consequently heavy, and no disease reached his cattle, which speedily grew to the number of several hundred heads. In addition to his beeves he had nearly a hundred hogs, and during the last year had taken to raising horses and mustangs, for the market at Bexar, as San Antonio was commonly called.

The raising of mustangs had been a source of much satisfaction to the boys, who speedily learned to ride so well that even the liveliest of the animals failed to shake one or the other off, although, of course, neither could do a thing when the beast got down and began to roll over.

"It's immense, to ride like the wind!" Dan would cry. "There is no better sport in the world! I don't wonder the Indians enjoy it so much."

"Yes, the Indians enjoy it, and they'll enjoy getting our mustangs, too, if we give them the chance," had been Mr. Radbury's reply. But so far only one mustang had been taken, and that by a Comanche half-breed named Hank Stiger. Stiger had been accused of the crime by Mr. Radbury, but had pleaded his innocence, and the pioneer had dropped the matter rather than have more trouble, since it was known that the half-breed and the Comanches in the neighbourhood were closely related in all their underhanded work. In those days it was no uncommon thing to hang a horse thief, but had this happened to Hank

Stiger, it is likely that the Comanches under Bison Head, who had their hunting-grounds in the Cross Timbers, so-called, of the upper Colorado River, would have gone on the war-path immediately following.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE DEER.

The cabin was a strongly built affair of rough logs, fifteen feet deep by thirty feet long. It was divided into two apartments on the ground floor, the first used as a general living-room and the second as a bedchamber. From the bedchamber a rude ladder ran to a loft, used as extra sleeping-quarters when the Radburys had company, and also as a storeroom. There were two windows in the sleeping-room below, and a window and a door in the general living-room. Each of the windows were shuttered with slabs of oak, secured, inside, by square bars of ash. All of the furniture excepting one bed, a table, and two chairs was home-made, and consequently rather primitive in style, and built more for use than for ornamentation.

At one side of the living-room was a wide, open fireplace, and here, above the mantel-shelf, hung the old Mexican *escopeta*, or cavalry musket, which Dan intended to take along on his expedition to the spot where Ralph had brought down the deer. Taking the gun down, the youth saw to it that the weapon was loaded and ready for use, and rejoined his brother.

In those days every Texan trusted his neighbour implicitly, and nobody thought of locking up his home even though he expected to be gone several days, unless it was thought that unfriendly Indians were about. The Radburys had gone away frequently, leaving everything open, and had never suffered, excepting as previously mentioned. Once, on returning, they had found that some other settlers from fifty miles away had stopped there over night, but this was explained in a note stuck to the eating-table, the "neighbour" offering to "square up" on demand. When the two parties met, Mr. Radbury told the other that the only way he could settle up was by calling again,—which was the usual Texan method of rounding out such hospitality.

"I've a good mind to lock up," remarked Dan, as he reached the dooryard. "I don't like this idea of Indians spying about."

"Oh, come on," interrupted Ralph. "We won't be gone long, and no Indian could do much in such a short time."

The elder brother shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know," he mused, but when Ralph took hold of his arm, he suffered himself to be led away; and soon they were hurrying for the river. There was quite a clearing to cross, and as they gained the timber Dan paused to look back and to gaze around them. But neither man nor beast was in sight.

On hurried the two boys, through a tangle of brush and tall pines, the latter of the long straw variety and smelling strongly of turpentine wherever the last storm had broken off a top or a heavy branch. Closer to the stream was a stately row of cottonwoods, with here and there a fragrant magnolia, which reminded the lads of the former homestead left so many miles behind. It was the spring of the year and the magnolias were just putting forth their buds, and Dan paused for a second to gaze at them.

"I'll tell you what, Ralph, it will be a long while before Texas is as civilised as Georgia," he observed.

"Will it ever be as civilised, Dan? I heard father say last week, when he was talking to Brossom, that he never thought it would be,—so long as Texas was joined to Coahuila and belonged to the Mexican Confederation. He said Texas ought to be free."

"He is right, too,—we ought either to be free, or else belong to the United States. It's all well enough for the Mexicans living in Coahuila to belong to the Confederation if they want to, but they don't care for us Americans, and they are going to grind us under if they can."

"But they were glad enough to have us come in, weren't they?—I mean at first."

"Yes, when Stephen Austin came in with his first batch of emigrants they welcomed the newcomers with open arms, and gave each man a large tract of land for himself, one for his wife, and more land for each child or servant, and they were mighty glad to have other *empresarios* bring in emigrants, too, so I've

read in the papers. But now they are getting afraid that the Americans will overrule them, and there is bound to be a lot of trouble sooner or later."

Ralph was anxious to show his brother his prize, and as they neared the spot where the big deer had been brought down he ran on ahead, and so the talk on State affairs came to an end. But Dan was right, there was much trouble ahead, as we shall see as our story progresses.

The cottonwoods passed, the boys faced another small clearing, where a forest fire years before had lain many a towering pine low. Beyond this burnt and barren spot were the pecan-trees overhanging the river, where the deer had come to slake his thirst when Ralph had trailed him and brought him low.

"Oh, Dan! The deer's gone!"

The cry came straight from Ralph's heart, as with staring eyes he ran in under the pecan-trees and gazed at the spot where the game had rested less than an hour before.

"Gone?" repeated the brother. "Then you didn't kill him?"

"Yes, I did,—I am sure of it, for I turned him over after he was shot. Could some wild animal have carried him off?"

"More than likely, although it would take a pretty fair sized animal to tote a deer, especially if he was as big as you say. Let us see if we can find any tracks."

They began to search around the bank of the stream, and soon discovered a number of footprints.

"Indian moccasins!" exclaimed Dan. "Ralph, you were right about that Indian. He was watching you, and after you left the deer he came in and took possession."

"But he hadn't any right to do that," burst out the smaller boy, angrily. It cut him to the heart to have his first big game taken from him. "It's downright robbery."

"It certainly wasn't fair, but about its being robbery, that's questionable. You shouldn't have left your game without leaving something on top of it, a knife or anything, just to show that you were coming back for it."

"But this is father's land."

"It isn't fenced yet, and the Indians don't recognise such ownership, anyway."

"But they must have known I was coming back. No one would throw away such choice venison as that was." Ralph heaved a sigh. "I wish I was a man,—I'd go after that redskin in short order, and make him either give up the game or bring him down with my gun."

"If you shot him you'd bring on a regular war, more than likely. But if you wish, we can follow this track for a stretch, and look for father at the same time."

Ralph was more than willing to do this—anything to learn what had really become of his game, and so they continued up the river bank for the best part of half a mile. Here they came to a creek, leading directly west, and saw that the footprints followed this new water-course. Along the creek the way was rocky and uneven, and it was plain to see where the deer had been dragged along.

Ralph was going on, with his eyes bent to the trail, when suddenly his brother caught him by the arm, bringing him to a halt. In silence Dan pointed to the opposite side of the creek, at a distance a hundred feet farther up the water-course.

"It's Hank Stiger, the half-breed!" burst in a low tone from Ralph's lips. "And see, he is tying my deer fast to his pony."

"You are right, Ralph."

"I'm not going to let him get away in this fashion!" went on the younger lad, excitedly.

"He's got to give up that meat, or I'm going to know the reason why."

"Don't be rash. Hank Stiger is a bad man to deal with."

"Are you going to let him go without doing anything?" demanded Ralph. "I'm sure you wouldn't if it was your deer!" he added, bitterly.

"No, we'll talk to him and put our claim as strongly as we can. But be careful, that's all."

With this caution Dan ran along the bank of the creek until he reached the ford

where the half-breed had crossed. He went over, with Ralph at his heels and both boys were within easy speaking distance of Hank Stiger before the latter discovered them.

"Hi there, Stiger! what are you doing with that deer?" demanded Dan, as he came closer, with his gun in both hands across his breast.

At the sound of the boy's voice the half-breed turned quickly and his repulsive reddish-brown face fell sullenly. He was a short, stocky fellow, with a tangled head of hair and wolfish eyes which betrayed the Comanche blood that flowed in his veins from his mother's side.

"Who are you?" demanded the man, hardly knowing what to say, so completely had he been taken by surprise.

"I am Dan Radbury, as you know very well. This is my brother Ralph, and he shot the deer you are carrying off."

"Not much!" ejaculated the half-breed. "I brung that deer down myself—shot him through the neck."

"It's not so!" burst out Ralph. "The deer is mine, I brought him down over in the pecan grove on the river."

"Why, youngster, you're dead wrong, I tell you. I shot this deer right down thar on this creek, two hours ago. He limped off after I hit him, but I followed the trail easily and found him in the pecan grove, dead from whar I had struck him in the neck."

This cool answer almost took Ralph's breath away from him. "It was I struck him in the neck, Hank Stiger, and the deer belongs to me, and you sha'n't bluff me out of my meat, either."

"Hush, Ralph, don't be so headstrong," remonstrated Dan, in low tones. "You'll gain a good bit more by keeping cool."

At Ralph's words the half-breed let out a rough, unnatural laugh.

"Boy, you must be daft, to tell me I don't know when I bring down a deer. The deer is mine, and if you shot at him you wasted your powder, that's all."

So speaking, Hank Stiger swung himself on the back of his mustang, which

little beast looked all out of proportion to the deer and man mounted on him. His gun was slung over his shoulder, and there he allowed it to remain while he gathered up the reins and urged his pony forward.

Ralph was white. As told before, he was but a boy of eight, yet his life on the frontier had given him the appearance of being ten or more. Rushing in front of the mustang, he raised his gun and pointed the muzzle at Stiger's head.

**'YOU SHA'N'T LEAVE THIS SPOT UNTIL YOU GIVE UP THAT DEER,
AND THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT!'**

**""YOU SHA'N'T LEAVE THIS SPOT UNTIL YOU GIVE UP THAT DEER,
AND THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT!""**

"Stop where you are!" he cried, commandingly. "You sha'n't leave this spot until you give up that deer, and that's all there is to it!"

CHAPTER III.

A QUARREL AND ITS RESULT.

It must be confessed that Hank Stiger was badly frightened when Ralph confronted him with the loaded gun. He was naturally not an overly brave fellow, and while the boy before him was young, yet he realised that Ralph could shoot as well as many a man. Besides this, Dan was there, and he was also armed, and now had his finger on the trigger of the ancient cavalry musket.

"Don't shoot!" The words came from Dan. He could not help but admire his brother's pluck, yet he was sorry that the affair had taken such an acute turn. His caution was unnecessary, for Ralph had no intention of firing, excepting Stiger should attempt to rush by him or use the gun slung on his shoulder.

The mustang took several steps, and then the half-breed brought him to an abrupt halt. "You're carrying matters with a putty high hand, to my notion," he remarked, sarcastically.

An awkward pause followed, Ralph knowing not what to say, and glancing at Dan, half afraid that his brother would be tremendously angry with him over the hasty threat he had made. Yet he felt that he was in the right, and he kept his gun-barrel on a line with the half-breed's head.

"Stiger, you might as well give up the deer," said Dan, as quietly as he could. "It's Ralph's first big game, and of course he feels mighty proud of it. A good shot like you ought to be able to bring down lots of game of your own."

Dan imagined that this tempered speech and side praise would put the half-breed in good humour, but he was mistaken. Stiger glanced from one lad to the other, his face growing more sullen each instant.

"This deer is mine, and you can't force me to give it up," he muttered. "Put

down that gun, or we'll have trouble."

"You put down the deer, first," said Ralph, sturdily.

"It's my deer, not yours, and I won't put it down. I'm not afraid of two youngsters like you."

Again Ralph's temper got the better of him. "You shall put it down, Hank Stiger. You are nothing but a horse-thief, and I——"

"Ha! call me a hoss-thief!" ejaculated the half-breed, in a rage. "I won't stand that, boy. You shall suffer for it."

"You are a horse-thief, and stole one of my father's animals last year. Now you want to steal my deer, but you shall not do it. Dan, he's got to give it up, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he has got to give it up," answered the older brother, seeing that matters had gone too far for either of them to back down. Dan was slow to make up his mind, but, once it was made up, he was uncompromising to the last degree.

"Supposing I refuse to give up the deer?" came from the half-breed. He spoke in a brusque manner, but there was a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"You had better not refuse."

"You wouldn't dare to shoot at me."

"Don't you be too sure of that," put in Ralph. "You must remember that father could have had you shot down for a horse-thief, had he wanted to do so. I don't want any trouble with you, but I am bound to have my game."

"All right, then, you keep the game!" ejaculated Hank Stiger, in deep rage, and, turning on his mustang, he picked up the deer and flung it to the earth. "But remember, I say I shot that deer and that he is mine. Some day you'll rue your work here, mark my words!" And with an angry shake of his dirty fist at them he kicked his mustang in the sides and was soon lost to view in the forest to the north of the creek.

The two boys watched him carefully, and they did not lower their guns until they were certain that he had gone too far to turn and fire at them. Then Ralph knelt over the deer and examined the torn open neck.

"There, I was sure of it!" he cried, triumphantly. "There is my bullet, and that's the only shot he received."

"Let me see." Dan took the bullet. "You are right, Ralph. But, even so, we have made an enemy of Stiger for life. He will never forgive you for calling him a horse-thief."

"I don't care,—I got the deer. Do you believe he'll come back to make more trouble?"

"There is no telling. I think we had better be getting back to the house,—father doesn't seem to be anywhere about. There is a tree branch. You can tie the game to that, and we can both pull it down the creek to the river and then over to the burn. It won't be worth while bringing a pony out to do it."

Both set to work, and in a few minutes the deer was fastened to the branch and slid into the creek. The bottom was sandy, and the water made the load slip along readily. The lads had just crossed the burn with their drag when a gunshot rang out, coming from the direction of the ranch home.

"Listen!" ejaculated Dan. "A shot from the house! What can that mean?"

He dropped his hold on the branch and leaped forward, unslinging the *escopeta* as he did so. For a moment Ralph hesitated, not wishing to leave his game again, but then, as his brother disappeared into the belt of timber hiding the cabin from their view, he also dropped his hold, feeling that, even though a boy, his presence might be needed elsewhere.

When Dan reached the clearing about the ranch home he found his father in the doorway, rifle in hand, gazing anxiously in one direction and another. Mr. Radbury was tall and thin, and constant exposure to the sun had browned him considerably. A glance sufficed to show what he really was, a Southern gentleman of the old school, despite the rough life he was at present leading.

"Dan!" cried the parent, gladly. "I am happy to see you are safe. Where is Ralph?"

"He is just behind me, father. But what's the trouble? Has anything happened here while we have been away?"

"I hardly think so, but the Indians are around,—I saw two of them directly across the river, and half a dozen at the big tree ford, all Comanches, and several of them in their war-paint. I was afraid you had had trouble with them."

"No, we've had trouble with somebody else," answered Dan, but before he could go any further Ralph appeared. The tale about the deer and Hank Stiger was soon told, Mr. Radbury listening with close attention.

"And do you think I did wrong, father?" questioned the youngest Radbury, as he concluded his narrative.

"No, I can't say that, Ralph," was the grave answer. "But I am afraid it will make us more trouble all around. Stiger and Bison Head are intimate friends, and if the Indians are going on the war-path again, the half-breed may direct an attack upon us. It was a great mistake to speak about that stolen horse. We can't prove that Stiger took it, although I am morally sure he was the guilty party."

After a short talk, it was decided that Mr. Radbury should go into the timber for the deer alone, leaving Ralph and Dan to watch around the cabin and the cattle shelter. At the shelter were several cows, used for milking, and a number of pigs. The other stock was off on the range between the ranch and Gonzales, grazing.

"I'd like to know if the cattle are safe," remarked Dan, after his father had left. "If those Indians should take it into their heads to round them up and drive them off it would be a big loss."

"Perhaps Hank Stiger will put them up to it," returned his brother. "I suppose he is mad enough to do most anything."

Leaving Ralph to see to the defences of the ranch home, Dan hurried down to the cattle shelter. This was in plain view of the cabin and could readily be covered from two firing-holes left in the shutter which covered one of the windows of the sleeping apartment.

Everything was as the youth had left it that morning, and there were no indications that any marauders had been around during the absence of Ralph and himself. The gate to the cattle enclosure was open, and some of the cows were outside. These he drove in and then barred up the gate.

Back of the cattle shed, at a distance of several hundred feet, was a slight hollow, where there was a pool of water surrounded by mesquite-trees and bushes. This pool could be seen only from the back of the shed, and as Dan walked in that direction, something caught his eye which instantly arrested his attention.

It was a plume of feathers waving above the bushes close to the pool. There was a similar plume a short distance away.

"Turkey feathers," he muttered to himself. "But there are no wild turkeys down there, and I know it. Father was right, the Comanches are watching our home and surrounding it."

As soon as he had made his discovery, Dan felt inclined to run back to the cabin with all speed. But this would let the Indians know that they were discovered and probably make them hasten their plans. So instead of running he took his time, walked completely around the shed, stopped to pat a favourite cow on the nose, and then sauntered slowly to the cabin.

Once inside, however, his manner changed. "Ralph, father was right, the Comanches are on the war-path!" he exclaimed. "Bar up the windows, and I'll look to it that every gun and pistol in the house is ready for use."

"Then you saw more of them?"

"Yes, two down by the hollow."

"Do they know that you saw them?"

"I hardly think so." Dan began to look over the stock of pistols, several in number, including a "hoss" nearly two feet long. "I wish father was back," he added, anxiously.

"Shall I fire a signal?"

"Not yet, for it may only make the Comanches hurry up. But you can watch for father from the doorway, and if you see him, beckon him to run for it," concluded the elder brother.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE INDIANS IN TEXAS.

While the two boys are waiting for their father's return, and wondering what will be the next movement of the Comanches surrounding the ranch home, let us turn aside for a moment to consider the state of affairs in Texas in this momentous year of 1835.

As said before, Texas and the territory known as Coahuila, lying on the southern bank of the Rio Grande River, formed one of the states of the Mexican Confederation. At the time Texas became bound to Coahuila there was a clause in the constitution which allowed her to become a separate state whenever she acquired the requisite size, although what the requisite size must be was not specified.

The Texans were satisfied, at that time, to belong to the Mexican Confederation, but they soon discovered that to be tied fast to Coahuila was going to become very burdensome. The latter-named territory was inhabited almost entirely by Mexicans who had nothing in common with the Americans, and these Mexicans kept the capital city of the state at Monclova or Saltillo, so that the settlers in Texas had to journey five hundred miles or more by wagon roads for every legal purpose. Besides this, the judiciary was entirely in the hands of the inhabitants of Coahuila, and they passed laws very largely to suit themselves.

The first troubles came over the land grants. A number of men, headed by Stephen Austin, had come into Texas, bringing with them hundreds of settlers to occupy grants given to these leaders, who were known as *empresarios*, or contractors. Each settler's grant had to be recorded, and the settlers grumbled at journeying so far to get clear deeds to their possessions. At the same time, Mexico herself was in a state of revolution, and often one so-called government

would not recognise the grant made by the government just overthrown.

The next trouble was with the Indians. The Comanches, Apaches, Shawnees, Wacos, Lipans, and separated tribes of Cherokees, Delawares, and Choctaws, some driven from the United States by the pioneers there, overran the northern and central portions of Texas, and those on the frontier, like Mr. Amos Radbury, were never safe from molestation. The Mexican government had promised the settlers protection, but the protection amounted to but little, and at one time only ninety soldiers were out to guard a frontier extending hundreds of miles, and where the different tribes of the enemy numbered ten to twenty thousand. The only thing which saved the settlers from total annihilation at this time was the friendliness of some of the Indians and the fact that the red men carried on a continual warfare among themselves.

Some of the Indian fights had been notable. One of the worst of them was an encounter between a band of over a hundred and about a dozen whites under the leadership of James Bowie, better known as Jim Bowie, of bowie-knife fame,—this knife having become famous in border warfare. In this struggle the whites were surrounded, and kept the Indians at bay for eight days, killing twenty odd of the enemy, including a notable chief. The loss to the whites was one killed and two wounded.

This fight had occurred some years before the opening of this tale, but, only a month previous to the events now being related, another encounter had come off, on Sandy Creek, but a few miles from the Radbury home. A party of French and Mexican traders, thirteen in number, had gone up to the house of one John Castleman, and during the night the Indians came up, murdered nearly all of the number, and made off with the traders' packs. Castleman hastened to Gonzales with the news, and a posse was organised to follow the red men. This resulted in another battle, in the cedar brakes along the San Marcos, and some of the Indians were killed. But the majority got away, taking most of the stolen goods with them.

The mentioning of these two encounters will show with what the early settlers of Texas had to contend while trying to raise their crops and attend to their cattle. Often a bold settler would go forth into the wilderness, erect his rude hut, and then never be heard from again, his habitation being found, later on, either deserted or burnt to the ground. And men were not the only sufferers, for women and children were often either killed or carried off into captivity. Once two well-

known ladies were spirited away in the most mysterious fashion, and they were not returned to their homes until both had spent several years among the red people.

Dan and Ralph thought over many of these affairs as they set about preparing the ranch home against any attack which might be made upon it. Ralph especially was much agitated, for, some six months before, several Indians had stopped at the ranch for the purpose of trading ponies, and one of them had eyed the soft-haired boy's scalp in a manner which had given the youth a shiver from head to foot.

"They sha'n't have my scalp," he murmured to himself. "I'll die first!" And, young as he was, it may be believed that he meant what he said.

"Do you see anything of father?" called out Dan, as he finished inspecting the last of the pistols.

"No."

"He ought to be coming up by this time."

"I really think we ought to fire a shot for a signal."

"We'll wait a few minutes longer."

They waited—every minute seeming like ten. It was a clear, sunshiny day, and outside only a faint breeze stirred the trees, otherwise all was silent. At the end of five minutes Dan stepped to the doorway.

"Father!" he called, at the top of his voice.

No answer came back, and then Ralph joined in the cry, which was repeated several times.

"He ought to hear that," said Ralph, as the silence continued. Then his face grew pale. "Perhaps they have killed him, Dan!"

"I heard no shot; did you?"

"No, but some of the Indians may have bows with them. I heard one of those Indians who was here last say he didn't like the white man's fire-bow because it made so much noise it scared all the game. If they've got bows and arrows they

could easily crawl up behind father, and——" Ralph did not finish in words, but his brother understood what he meant only too well. Reaching for one of the pistols, Dan ran outside of the door, and fired it off.

Mr. Radbury had gone for the deer with his gun slung over his back, so he could easily fire a return signal if he wished. Eagerly the brothers listened, but the exasperating silence continued.

Then, as Dan reloaded, Ralph fired a second shot.

"Something is wrong," said the older brother, after several more minutes had gone by. "If father was coming with the deer he would be in sight sure. Either the Indians have surrounded him or killed him, or else they have got between him and the house so that he can't get in. I'm going up to the loft with the spy-glass and take a squint around."

Glass in hand, Dan ran up the rude ladder to the loft, which was some six feet high at the ridge-pole and two feet high at the edge of the sloping sides. There were windows on all four sides, but those at the slopes were small and only intended for observation holes.

Ralph had closed all of the shutters, so the loft was almost dark. With caution Dan opened one shutter after another and swept the woods and country around with the glass.

He could not see the hollow, but at the crest of the hill by the cattle shed he made out the heads of several Indians gathered back of some bushes and talking earnestly. Presently the Indians, separated, and two of the number walked off in the direction of the river, on the opposite side of the ranch home.

"They are up to something," reasoned the boy, and took up a position on the other side of the loft. From this point he could see a small portion of the river as it wound in and out among the trees and brush. He waited impatiently for the Indians to reappear, and at last saw them cross a glade close to where he and his brother had met the half-breed. As the Indians came out into the open, Hank Stiger met them.

"He will join them now if he wasn't with them before," thought Dan, and in this he was right. The Indians and Stiger held a short talk, and then all three disappeared in the belt of timber surrounding the burn.

"Can you see anything?" called up Ralph.

"Yes, several Indians, and Stiger has joined them."

"Stiger! And what of father?"

"I see nothing of him. Ralph, I am afraid we are in for it this time, and no mistake."

"You think the Indians really intend to attack us?"

"I do."

"Right away?"

"No, they will probably wait until it grows dark, especially now, after they have seen us barring the windows."

"Then I had better be ready to bar up the door, too."

"Yes, but keep a lookout for father. He may come in on the run, you know."

Dan continued to use the glass, stepping from one window to another. But the Indians had disappeared from view, and not another glimpse of a feather or a painted face was to be seen.

Presently he found himself looking toward the burn. Back, in the timber bordering the river, was a tall tree which reared its head a score of feet above its fellow trees. As he turned his glass in that direction, something unusual in the top of the tree attracted his attention.

He gazed long and earnestly at the object, and at last made out the form of a man, who was waving some dark thing, probably his coat, to and fro.

"It must be father!" he thought. "I'll signal in return and make sure," and catching up a bed sheet he stuck it out of the window for a minute and swung it vigorously. As he did this, the party in the tree flung up the coat and caught it, then disappeared from view. At once Dan drew in the sheet, closed all the shutters of the loft, and went below.

CHAPTER V.

THE ATTACK ON THE RANCH.

"Well, I've just seen father and signalled to him."

"Where was he, Dan?"

"In the top of the king pine by the river. He was waving his coat to attract my attention. I waved a bed sheet at him and then he threw his coat up in the air and caught it, and got out of sight as soon as he could."

"Then he was going off."

"Yes," answered Dan. For among these pioneers to throw an object from one and then catch it meant to go away and return. "Probably he is going away for assistance."

"I shouldn't think he would leave us alone," mused Ralph, his face falling perceptibly.

"That makes me feel certain that the Indians don't intend to attack us until dark. Perhaps father heard some of their powwowing, or some talk between them and Stiger. Anyway, I am sure he is going away."

"Then we may as well close up tight."

"All but the door. But bring in all the buckets full of water first. We may be in for a regular siege of it."

Dan's suggestion was carried out, and the older boy also made a raid on the cattle yard and brought in one of the cows, tying her close to the door. "Now we'll have milk and meat too, if the worst comes to the worst," he observed. No matter what else happened he did not intend to be starved out.

Their regular chores done, the two boys locked up below, but left the door unbarred, and then went to the loft, taking with them their guns and the spy-glass.

"I suppose we can count this something of a fort," remarked Ralph. "But I don't care to play soldier—I'd rather have the Indians leave us alone."

"So would I. But I guess I can play soldier if I have to," added Dan, with quiet emphasis. Secretly he loved soldiering much better than life on the ranch, but in those days he never dreamed of the adventures on the battle-field which were still in store for him.

The afternoon wore away slowly until the sun began to set behind the timber west of the ranch. In the meantime, the boys, having had no dinner, grew hungry, and Ralph spent some time below in boiling a pot of coffee and stirring and baking some ash-cakes, serving both with a bit of broiled steak.

"It's too bad we can't have some venison," he sighed to his brother. "But I reckon my first big game is going to get us into a whole lot of trouble."

"I reckon the Indians were getting ready to come down on us, anyhow," answered Dan. "It seems they can stay quiet just so long, and then their animal nature breaks loose for a shindy."

Dan had just returned to the loft after his repast, when he uttered a shout.

"An Indian is coming toward the cabin, Ralph!"

"Do you know him?"

"No, but he is a Comanche."

"In war-paint?"

"I don't know if it's war-paint or not, but he is daubed full of all the colours of the rainbow."

"It must be war-paint. Is he alone?"

"Yes, and riding a white pony. His gun is on his back, and he doesn't look as if he was up to mischief."

"Oh, I wouldn't trust him!" cried the younger lad. "He may be up to some of their treachery."

"But I can't stop him from coming to the cabin. I'll be on my guard, and you must be, too," concluded Dan, and went below. With quickness he hid away all the weapons but two pistols, one of which he stuck in his shirt bosom and gave the other to Ralph.

"We must keep apart," said Ralph. "Then if he attacks one or the other the free one can fire on him."

"That's good generalship," returned Dan, with a grim smile.

By this time the Indian rider was close to the dooryard, and Dan walked outside to meet him. As soon as the youth appeared, the savage halted his steed.

"How! How!" he said, in guttural tones, meaning "How do you do?"

"How are you?" returned Dan.

"Wolf Ear is sick—got pain here," and the red man pointed to his stomach.

"Sick, eh? What have you been doing,—eating and drinking too much?"

"No, Wolf Ear big sick two moons past,—sick come back,—can't ride and must lay down," groaned the savage, grating his teeth as if in intense pain. "White boy help Wolf Ear, me lof him."

Under ordinary circumstances Dan would have been touched by this appeal, for he knew that the Indians suffered just as many aches and pains as did the white folks.

"I am no good at doctoring sick men," he answered. "Wolf Ear had better go back to his own medicine man."

At this the Indian stared at the boy stolidly for fully half a minute. He understood that he was not wanted, and that he would not be allowed into the cabin.

"White boy have no medicine for Wolf Ear?" he said, slowly.

"I don't know what would be good for you."

"Where white boy's fadder?"

"He has gone away." A sudden idea came to Dan's mind. "I think he has gone to Gonzales to bring along some of the lumbermen to look over the plans for a sawmill. There are about a dozen men thinking of setting up a sawmill around here."

The Indian pursed up his mouth, trying to conceal his chagrin. "He come back soon?"

"I expect him every minute. But you had better not wait for him. Perhaps you'll feel better if you wash off that war-paint on your face."

At this Wolf Ear scowled viciously. "White boy big fool!" he cried, and reached around for his gun. But before he could raise the weapon both Dan and Ralph had him covered with the pistols. Not having seen the weapons while speaking, the Indian was taken aback.

"Put that gun down," said Dan, sternly. "I am not such a fool as you think."

"Wolf Ear only make fun," grinned the savage, feebly. "No mean to shoot."

"I don't like your fun, and I want you to leave this place."

At once the red man straightened up like an arrow on his pony. "Wolf Ear will go," he said, loftily. "But Wolf Ear shall not forget you!" And he turned his steed to ride away. Evidently he had forgotten all about his alleged pain.

"Dan, make him give up his gun," cried Ralph, in a low voice. "If you don't he'll try to shoot us as soon as he reaches cover."

"Halt!" exclaimed the older brother. "Wolf Ear, you must leave your gun with us. You can come back for it when my father is here."

At first the Indian pretended not to hear, then he turned back to look at them, but without stopping his pony.

"My firearm is mine," he said. "The white boy shall not rob the poor Indian," and digging his heels into his pony's sides he set off at a breakneck pace for the nearest patch of timber. Ralph was about to fire on him, but Dan stopped the proceedings.

"No, let him go," he said. "Whatever happens, don't give them the chance to say that we opened the fight. If we start the affair we'll get into all sorts of trouble with the agency."

Before they could argue the matter Wolf Ear had gained the timber. Both of the boys were now in the doorway of the cabin. Bang! went the redskin's gun, and the bullet embedded itself in the door-post close to their heads. Like lightning the boys leaped into the living-room and barred the oaken barrier behind them.

"He has opened the attack!" gasped Ralph, the shot, coming so close, temporarily unnerving him. "I told you he'd do it."

Dan did not answer, but, running to the closet, brought out the best of the guns belonging to his father. Leaping up to the loft, he opened the firing-hole fronting the direction Wolf Ear had taken, and squinted through. But the Indian horseman was long since out of sight.

"Can you catch him?" asked Ralph, from the foot of the ladder.

"No, he's gone."

"Do you think he'll bring the others down on us now?"

"No. They know we are armed, and they couldn't rush across the clearing and break in without one or more of them being shot, and they are too afraid of their hides to undertake the job. But they'll close in as soon as it's dark, beyond a doubt."

"I hope father comes back by that time."

"So do I. Do you suppose they are driving off the cattle on the range?"

"There is no telling. For all we know they may be up back of the cattle shed, too."

It was now so dark that but little could be seen beyond the clearing immediately surrounding the cabin. Each of the boys stationed himself in the loft, Dan watching to the north and the east, and Ralph to the south and west.

With the coming of night the silence seemed more oppressive than ever, and only the occasional mooing of the cow tied near the door broke the stillness around the cabin. From the woods came now and then the cry of a night bird, but

that was all. The breeze had died out utterly.

But presently came a cry that caused the hearts of both lads to thump vigorously within their breasts. It was the note of a night-owl, repeated six times.

"That's a Comanche signal," said Dan, in almost a whisper. "Ralph, they must be coming now, and if they are, God help us to do our best in repelling their attack!"

"Amen!" came almost solemnly from the younger Radbury. "Can you make out anything yet?"

"No—yes! Somebody is sneaking through the timber toward the river. It's an Indian with a gun! He's turning toward the house, and two other Indians are behind him!"

Several minutes more passed—minutes that seemed like hours to the boys, whose hearts thumped as never before. Both felt that a crisis in their lives had arrived.

"They are coming, five strong," whispered Dan, at last. "Perhaps I had better fire a pistol to warn them off."

"Do it," answered his brother, and soon the report broke the stillness. At the sound the Comanches came to a halt in the clearing, midway between the cabin and the timber. The halt, however, was only temporary, for an instant later a wild war-whoop rang out, and they charged swiftly on the ranch home!

CHAPTER CHAPTER VI.

POKE STOVER TO THE FRONT.

"Here they come, Dan!"

"Yes, Ralph. Watch your chance, and fire at the fellow on the left. I'll take the one on the right."

There was no time to say more, for now the Comanches were close to the cabin. Both youths were tremendously excited, but they felt that it was a case of life or death, and did their best to nerve themselves accordingly. Each picked his man, and both guns rang out at the same time. The reports had not yet died away when the redskin aimed at by Dan flung up one arm and sank back, badly wounded in the side. Ralph had missed his mark by a few inches.

The sudden attack brought the remaining Indians to a halt, and for a second they appeared not to know what to do next. Then the wounded man staggered back toward the timber, and with another war-whoop the others continued toward the cabin.

The boys had no time left to reload, and caught up the pistols and let drive again. This time it was Ralph who hit his man, a slight wound in the leg. Hardly had the pistols belched forth than the Indians opened fire, and four bullets buried themselves close to the firing-holes in the loft openings.

"They mean to overpower us if they can," cried Dan. "We must load up as fast as we can!"

The Indians, or at least the three that were not wounded, had now gained the door, and were trying to force it open. But their hatchets and the axe they had brought along failed to make much of an impression on it, and all they could do was to shout in their rage and demand that the boys open the door at once.

"Open! Open!" came in Wolf Ear's voice. "Open, or we will scalp you!"

"Go away, or we'll shoot you all down!" answered Dan, who had now reloaded his gun.

"We will not go away. What is in the house belongs to the red man, and he must have it."

"It belongs to our father, and you shall not have one thing," retorted Dan.

He had unbarred the shutter of one of the upper windows, and now, leaning out swiftly, he took aim at the forms grouped below, and fired.

A howl went up, for the bullet had nipped one red man in the ear and glanced along the shoulder of a second. Then came a quick fire in return, and Dan gave a scream that caused Ralph's heart to almost stop beating.

"You are struck?" queried the younger brother.

"It's not much," came from Dan, and, breathing heavily, he flung to the window-shutter and bolted it again. Then he came down the ladder, the blood flowing from a wound in his neck. Had the bullet come two inches closer, Dan would have been killed on the spot.

The Indians were now trying to batter the door down with a log of wood picked up close at hand. The cow bothered them in their efforts, and one of the red men had to take time to cut her loose, at which the cow ran off to the cattle shed once more.

Thus far three of the attackers had been wounded, one quite seriously. The other two continued to hammer away at the door, which presently showed signs of giving way.

"Let us try to fire through the door," whispered Ralph, when he saw that his brother was still able to continue the struggle. "We may hit them, and, anyway, we'll give them a scare."

Dan nodded, and both drew closer to the barrier with their guns. But before they could level their firearms, there came a report from the edge of the timber next to the burn, and one of the Indians was heard to yell in mortal agony and fall on the doorstep.

"Somebody is coming!" cried Dan, joyfully. "It must be father!" Then a second report rang out, and another red man was struck, in the arm. This was the savage who had previously been nipped in the ear, and, without waiting for another shot, he sped away in the darkness, and his two companions after him, leaving the dead Indian where he had fallen.

There was now no use of trying to fire through the door, and Dan motioned Ralph to run up to the loft.

"See if you can make out who it was that fired," he said, "and if it is father, and he wants to come in, call for me to open the door."

The boys had lit a single lantern, but now this was put out, since they were afraid some treacherous red man might still be lurking at hand, to fire at them through a crack in the cabin walls. While Ralph made his survey from above, Dan stood at the door, his hand on the bar, ready to throw it back on an instant's notice.

"A man is coming on the run!" announced Ralph, presently. "He is waving for us to open the door. I can't make out who it is."

"Is it father?"

"No, I can't make out—— It's Poke Stover! Let him in, quick!"

Back shot the bolt and up went the heavy bar, and as the door was opened to the width of a foot, the figure of a tall, heavily bearded frontiersman slipped into the cabin. He helped hold the door while Dan secured it again.

"Poke Stover!" cried the youth. "I'm mighty glad you've come!"

"Are you and Ralph safe?" was the question, as soon as the man could catch his breath, for he had been running with all the swiftness at his command.

"Yes, although I've got a scratch on the throat. But father—do you know anything of him?"

"Yes, he has gone to Gonzales to bring help. He says he signalled to you from the tall pine."

"So he did. Did he have a fight with any of the Indians?"

"Yes, he was attacked by Bison Head and Hank Stiger, the half-breed. He put a bullet through Stiger's left calf, and knocked the Injun down with the butt of his gun. That's the reason the two were not with the party that attacked the cabin."

"How many are there, all told?" asked Ralph, who had come down the ladder again.

"Not more than ten, and one of 'em's dead outside."

"And two or three of them are wounded," added Dan.

"The wust on it is, they'll be gittin' thicker and thicker," resumed the old frontiersman, who had drifted into Texas from Missouri several years ago, and who had spent all of his life on the plains. "I've half a notion as how Bison Head is tryin' to git the whole Comanche nation on the war-path."

"If that's the case, they may organise around here," said Ralph. "How long do you suppose it will be before father gets back?"

"He said he would try to make it by daybreak," answered Poke Stover. "It's accordin' as how he finds his men."

The talking now dropped off, as the frontiersman said it would be best to remain silent and keep on guard at the various port-holes in the shutters.

Slowly the night wore away, until it was three o'clock in the morning. Only one alarm had come, but this had amounted to nothing.

"I see a light," announced Dan. "Can it be a camp-fire?"

"Not likely, lad," answered Stover. "Comanches on the war-path don't light 'em. It's a signal."

"Another signal to attack?" queried Ralph.

"More'n likely. We must keep our eyes peeled for 'em."

Another half-hour dragged by, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the morning breeze, as it began to stir through the timber surrounding the clearing. Outside not a soul was to be seen.

"Perhaps that was a signal to withdraw," suggested Dan. "I hope it was." But Poke Stover shook his head, for he had seen much of the Comanches and understood them thoroughly.

"They won't go until they've had another round at ye," he said. "I'm expectin' 'em every minit now."

Scarcely had he finished, when something attracted Dan's attention back of the cattle shed. An object was moving around. Presently it started straight for the

cabin.

"It looks like one of the cows—and it is," he announced. "I wonder what started her up?"

"Let me take a squint," said the frontiersman, and covered the port-hole searchingly for half a minute. Then he raised his rifle, took careful aim, and blazed away. There was a grunt of dismay, and an Indian, who had been driving the cow and dodging directly behind, ran back, while the cow kicked up her heels and flew in the opposite direction.

"Thar, I reckon he'll know enough to keep back after this," growled Poke Stover, with much self-satisfaction. "He thought he was goin' to sneak up unbeknown to us, but I crossed his trail fer him that trip."

"What do you suppose he was going to do, if he had gotten close to the cabin?" asked Ralph.

"He had a bunch of brush in his hand, lad, and probably a bit o' fire about him, too, although I allow as how I didn't see no light."

"Then he wanted to burn us out!" ejaculated the youngest Radbury.

"That was his game."

Ralph shivered at the thought. It was bad enough to be shot at, but to be burned out! He wished daylight would come and his father would return with the much-needed aid.

With the coming of daylight those in the cabin could see with greater clearness under the tall timber, and soon Poke Stover announced that several Indians were in sight.

"They are making something," he announced. "Looks like a stone-boat," meaning thereby a sort of flat drag-sled often used for removing stones from a field.

"I know what it is!" exclaimed Dan. "It's a shield! One or two of them will come up behind it. See if I am not right."

The three waited anxiously, Ralph fairly holding his breath in expectancy. At last the shield, for such it was, was done, and slowly two Comanches came

forward, holding it in front of them, and taking care that neither should expose so much as a hand or foot.

"Hang 'em!" muttered the tall frontiersman, and, taking deliberate aim at a slight crack in the wooden shield, he fired. But the barrier was thick and tough, and the bullet failed to penetrate to the opposite side.

One of the Indians behind the shield carried a bunch of dry grass and some brush, and as they came closer this was lighted. Then the burning stuff was hurled forward. It was tied into a bundle with some strong vines, and had a stone attached to give it weight. It landed on the roof of the cabin, blazing brightly, then rolled off to a spot directly below one of the windows.

CHAPTER VII.

IN AND OUT OF THE BURNING CABIN.

"The roof is on fire!"

"The wall is on fire under one of the sleeping-room windows!"

The first cry came from Ralph, who was in the loft, the second from his brother, who saw the flames and smoke coming through the cracks where the wall and the flooring of the cabin joined. The breeze was increasing, and soon both fires were burning merrily, as if such flames were not tending toward a tragedy.

"Some water—we must put it out!" came from Poke Stover, and, catching up one of the buckets the boys had thoughtfully provided, he ran to the window beneath which the conflagration was spreading. "Unbar it, Dan, and I'll souse it out. Look out that you don't expose yourself."

The shutter was unbarred and opened for the space of several inches. At once the smoke began to pour into the cabin, setting them all to coughing. Then the breeze carried the smoke in the opposite direction.

Suddenly Poke Stover set down the bucket of water and grabbed Dan's gun. A quick aim and a flash, and one of the Comanches let go of the shield and danced around with a broken elbow. Then both of the enemy retreated far more rapidly than they had come.

"Got him that trip," was the frontiersman's satisfactory comment. "But be careful, Dan, there are others watching us from the timber."

The shutter was pushed open a little more, and with much skill Poke Stover

dashed the water on the blaze and put the most of it out. Then he wet an old coat and beat out what remained.

"It's a pity we didn't have no dirt handy to shovel on," he said, pausing to catch his breath, while Dan locked the shutter again. "We may need this water afore we git through. How is it up thar, Ralph?" he called.

"It's burning pretty lively," was the reply. "But perhaps we can beat it out with the coat."

"The Indians can spot you on the roof," said Dan.

"Go down and unbar the door and swing it partly open," said Poke Stover. "That will attract the attention of the Injuns, and they won't be a-lookin' at the roof. But wait a minit, till I'm ready fer ye!" he added, as he laboured up the ladder with a second bucket of the precious water. The old coat was soused thoroughly, and Stover opened the shutter nearest to the fire.

"Now go ahead!" he called out, and Dan opened the door, and swung it back and forth several times. He also showed his hat on a stick, and in a trice came several shots, one going through the head-covering and entering the closet in the corner. Then he swung the hat out again, and another shot followed.

During this time the old frontiersman had reached out of the upper window and beat out part of the fire and hurled the remainder to the ground, far enough away from the cabin to keep it from doing further harm. One shot was aimed at him, as the breeze exposed him through the smoke to the Comanches, but this luckily flew wide of its mark.

"By gosh, but that was a close shave!" ejaculated Stover, as he dropped back into the loft, while Ralph closed the shutter. His beard was singed in two places and his face was red and hot. "It's a good thing that fire wasn't allow to gain no more headway."

He bathed his face and took a drink of water, and then all three began to speculate upon the next probable movement of the Comanches. By the clock on the living-room mantel it was now half-past four.

"Father ought to be coming now," said Ralph. "But perhaps he has been unable to get anybody to come back with him."

"Don't worry about that," returned Poke Stover. "They'll all come if only they git the word. The buck ague don't go around here." By buck ague the frontiersman meant the fright which occasionally takes possession of a pioneer or soldier when facing Indians who are on the war-path.

It was not long after this that the Indians began to show their activity once more. Others of the tribe had arrived, until they numbered eighteen or twenty, the majority of whom were armed with guns, only one or two of the older warriors sticking to their bows and arrows.

"I reckon they suspect we are waiting for help, and they mean to do something before it gits too late," observed Poke Stover. "Perhaps they'll give us another rush before they withdraw fer good. We had better inspect all of our shootin'-irons, fer we may want 'em badly."

The frontiersman was right, the Comanches were organising an attack, to be divided into three parts,—one party to come from the timber skirting the burn, the second to come up behind the cabin, and the third to make a dash from behind the cattle shed. The first division carried a heavy log, with which they hoped to batter down the door in short order.

"They are coming!" The cry came from Dan, who was watching the timber in front of the burn. "There are six of them!"

"Here comes another crowd from the shed!" ejaculated Ralph.

"They have divided up," said the frontiersman. "Boys, I'm afraid we now have a stiff piece of work cut out for ourselves. A third party is coming from the rear, and there is no telling but what there may be still more. We must do our best and fight to a finish, for they are on the war-path for fair, and they'll show us no mercy if once they git at us. Load up and fire jest as quick as ye can! Give it to 'em hot!"

As Poke Stover finished, he leaped to the window nearest to him, shoved the muzzle of his weapon through the port-hole, and pulled the trigger. A yell went up as one of the redskins threw up his arms and fell. But then the others came on faster than ever, yelling and shouting in a manner to cause the stoutest heart to falter. Surely, as Stover had said, it would be a fight to the finish, and they were but three to seventeen.

Dan was at one port-hole and Ralph at another, and now both fired simultaneously. Whether the shots were effective they could not tell. Certainly none of the Indians dropped.

In two minutes more the Comanches were running around the house in every direction, trying to batter down the door with the log, and likewise trying to pry open several of the shutters with their hatchets.

At such close quarters it was next to impossible to fire on them, although several gun and pistol shots were exchanged. Once an Indian fired through a port-hole into the bedchamber, and the burning gun-wad landed on one of the straw bedticks.

"Put it out!" roared Poke Stover, and while Dan trampled on the fire to extinguish it, the frontiersman let the Indian have a shot in return.

Crash! crash! The heavy bombardment on the door was beginning to tell, and already there was a long crack in the oaken slab, and the splinters were flying in all directions.

"We'll take our stand here!" cried Poke Stover, motioning to a spot facing the door. "Give it to 'em the minit daylight shines through!" And they did, with such serious results that the party with the ram dropped that instrument and ran to the opposite side of the house. But their places were quickly taken by others, and now it looked as if the door must give way at any instant.

Suddenly, just when it looked as if the next shock to the door must smash it into a hundred pieces, there came a scattering volley of rifle-shots from the timber near the river, answered almost instantly by a second volley from the forest opposite. Then came a yell from the Comanches, and a cheer in English.

"Hold the cabin! We are coming!" came in Mr. Radbury's well-known voice, and never had it sounded more comforting to the two boys than at that moment. Then followed more shots, some striking the cabin and others hitting the Indians, who were so demoralised that for the moment they knew not what to do.

"Down with the redskins!" came in the tones of a settler named Whippler, who had lost his wife in a raid about a year previous. "Kill every one of 'em! Don't let them escape!"

In his eagerness to annihilate those he so hated, he rode to the front of the others, discharging his gun and his pistol as he came, and then leaping upon the nearest redskin with his long hunting-knife. He brought the red man down with a stroke in the breast, and was then laid low himself by Red Pony, an under chief, who was in charge during the absence of Wolf Ear and Bison Head. Red Pony then ran off for his very life, followed by fourteen others, the remainder being either killed or wounded.

"Boys! Are either of you wounded?" asked Mr. Radbury, as he leaped from the mustang he was riding, and rushed into the cabin.

"We are all right, father," answered both lads.

"Thank God for that!" murmured the parent, reverently. "But, see, your neck is bleeding," he added, to Dan.

"It's only a scratch."

"Good. Poke, I see you managed to get to them. You are a brave fellow, if ever there was one."

"We've had a hot time of it, father," put in Ralph. "If it hadn't been for Mr. Stover, I don't know what we would have done."

"Ralph is right," assented Dan. "If he hadn't put out the fire we would have been burnt out, and the cabin would have gone up in smoke in the bargain."

"I shall not forget your kindness, Poke," said Mr. Radbury, taking the frontiersman's horny hand. "But, as you are all right, I fancy I had better join the others, and follow the miscreants."

"And I'll go with ye," said Poke Stover, who disliked too much praise, although not averse to some laudatory speech. "We ought to round up every mother's son of 'em while we are about it."

"Shall we go too?" asked Dan. "I'd rather do that than remain behind," he continued.

"You may come, if you'll promise to keep to the rear," answered the father. "Remember, the Indians are wily, and may set a trap for us."

All went outside, crawling through the battered doorway, and were soon

mounted on several extra mustangs Mr. Radbury had brought along. The planter informed them that he had brought with him twenty-four men, including Jim Bowie, who had happened to be in Gonzales at the time. Soon the party of four were riding hard to catch up with the other whites, who were following the trail of the Comanches along the bank of the upper Guadalupe River.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE COMANCHES.

"FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE COMANCHES."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL PURSUIT.

After leaving the vicinity of the cabin, the Comanches struck a trail leading through a cedar brake over the hill back of the cattle shed. Here they came together, and without halting swept straight along the Guadalupe River, as previously mentioned. They felt that the whites would follow them, and their one hope of safety lay in gaining the wilderness about San Saba Hill, sixty to seventy miles north of San Antonio.

The leadership of the whites naturally fell to Colonel Jim Bowie, for he had been in numerous Indian quarrels, and was a good man on the trail. It may be here mentioned that Bowie, who was afterward to become so well known in Texas, was one of two brothers who came to that territory from Louisiana, after having been engaged for years in the slave-trade. The man was as bold as he was daring, and it was said that he knew not the meaning of the word fear.

The Indians were all on horseback, and as their steeds had had a long rest they were fresh, and made rapid progress. On the other hand, the mustangs of the whites were tired from the hard night's ride from Gonzales and vicinity, and they could not keep up the pace, although urged to do their best by their riders. All of the whites bewailed the fate of Whippler, and swore to be revenged if given "the ghost of a chance."

When Amos Radbury, Stover, and the two boys gained the other whites, they found Bowie's party fording one of the creeks running into the Guadalupe. The Indians had passed there about ten minutes before, and it was to be seen that they had not even stopped to water their horses. All of the settlers' horses were thirsty, and some refused to budge from the stream until they had slaked their thirst.

"Do you think they will be caught?" asked Dan, as he swept along beside his

father.

"They will not be caught if they can help it," replied Mr. Radbury, with a faint smile. "They know it will go hard with them if we do come up with them."

"What of the wounded?" asked Ralph. But his father merely shrugged his shoulders.

"They'll crawl off in the bushes, and either git away, or die," answered Poke Stover, philosophically. To him the life of an Indian was of no account. He had never considered that an Indian might be educated into becoming a useful member of the great human family.

On and on swept the little body of determined whites, each with his gun in his hands, and his eyes on the alert for the first sign of danger. The trail was still along the river, but presently it branched off, and entered an *arrayo*, or gully, thick with thorny plants and entangling vines. At the end of the *arrayo* was a rocky plateau, and here for the time being the trail was lost.

"The Indian that's leading them knows his business," remarked Colonel Bowie, as he brought his command to a halt.

"That's right, but we'll soon be on his tail ag'in," returned Poke Stover, who had come to his side. "Let's spread out in a fan, colonel;" and this was done, each man examining his part of the great semicircle with extreme care. A short while after, the trail was again struck, and they swept on. But at both this place and at the ford valuable time had been lost.

Noon found the Comanches still out of sight and hearing. But the trail was fresh and easily seen, and it seemed only a question of endurance upon one side or the other.

"If it wasn't for the jaded hosses," sighed Poke Stover. His own steed was fairly fresh, but it would have been foolhardy for him to have gone on ahead of the main body, with perhaps only one or two others being able to do likewise. The Comanches would have liked nothing better than to have gotten at the whites one at a time.

As the afternoon came and went, the party in pursuit began to grow hungry. A few of the horsemen had brought rations with them, and these were divided,

each man and boy eating as he rode on. Some of the men likewise carried liquor, and this was also divided, although Ralph and Dan procured drinks of water at a spring instead. In those days it was share and share alike with all of the settlers, and one man was considered as good as another so long as he was honest and willing to work. For dandies, from Philadelphia, New York, or other large cities, the Texans had no use, nor did they love those who tried to show off their learning. They were whole-souled, as it is called, to the core, and they wanted everybody else to be so, too.

It was growing dark when Bowie called a halt on the edge of a small clearing leading up to a hill thickly overgrown with scrub pines.

"We must be careful here, men," he said. "They may be scattered along yonder timber belt, watching for us to uncover ourselves. We had better move to the right and the left, and give the old signal if any of the redskins appear in sight."

The split was made, but the Radburys and Poke Stover kept together. One Indian was discovered, and the settler who saw him at once shouted, as prearranged. Then the Indians, seeing that the attempt to draw the whites into the open had failed, dashed along up the hillside, as rapidly as the tangle of growth permitted. A number of shots were exchanged, but nobody was hit.

During the afternoon one of the men had brought down a wild turkey, and another several hares, for game of all kinds was still thick.

"That will do for supper," said Mr. Radbury. "But we will have to be careful how we build a fire."

At seven o'clock the chase came to an end for the day, the jaded ponies refusing to climb the hill that loomed up before them. One of the ponies was a buckner, and threw his rider over his head into a mesquite-bush.

"Thet settles Bill Darson," drawled the Texan, as he extricated himself from his difficulty. "When the pony kicks, I kick, too. We don't go no further jest now, hyer me!"

But Bowie, Mr. Radbury, and several others insisted upon gaining the brow of the hill, as a point of vantage, and all plodded to the top, where they went into camp in the midst of the trees, half a dozen men being sent out to do picket duty, so that Bison Head's band might not crawl up during the night and surprise them.

"I'd like to know what became of Wolf Ear and Hank Stiger," remarked Dan, as he flung himself on the ground, glad enough to get out of his high and uncomfortable Mexican saddle.

"They know enough to git out o' sight when thar's a fight on," answered Poke Stover, with a broad laugh. "Them kind o' varmin always does." Usually the frontiersman spoke fair English, but at times he dropped into the vernacular of the plains.

"I hope he doesn't go back to the cabin, now it's deserted," put in Ralph.

"He may do that!" burst out Dan. "I never thought of it before." And he mentioned the matter to his father.

"He will hardly dare to go back, for other settlers will be coming up from time to time," said Mr. Radbury. "He knows only too well that he is already in bad favour with all straight-forward men."

"He's a sneak," said Ralph. "But by the way, father, you haven't told us your story yet, although we have told ours."

"There is not much to tell, Ralph. I went for the deer, as you know. I was dragging it back to the cabin, when I caught sight of several Indians, and, by their movements, I saw that they wanted to cut me off and, more than likely, slay me. I at once abandoned the deer and ran deeper than ever into the woods."

"Of course they followed you?" came from Dan.

"Yes, they followed me, but only one or two shots were exchanged, and I was not hit. I think I wounded one Indian, but I am not certain. Then I gave them the slip and climbed into the king pine, as you boys named the tree. You remember the signal I gave you?"

"To be sure."

"I meant I would try to get help near by, if possible. I had seen several lumbermen around, and I fancied they might be down the river a mile or so. I ran along the river with all my might, and there met Poke Stover and told him what was happening. He at once agreed to go to your aid, and urged me to arouse the settlers around Gonzales. He promised to hold the cabin and stand by you as long as he could draw his breath."

"And he did it!" cried Ralph. "He's a noble man."

"At first I could find nobody at home," went on Mr. Radbury. "Joel Nalitt was away, and at the Runyons' only the women folks were in. But over to the Powers's ranch I met Powers, Anderson, Striker, and a German, who was a stranger, and they said they would all come along. Anderson rode over to Whippler's, and those two brought along the other men. It's too bad that Whippler was killed."

All in the party agreed with Mr. Radbury in this, although some said that it was better Whippler should be killed than some man with a wife and children. Whippler and his late wife had never had any offspring.

The night was raw and cold, and toward morning a fine rain set in, adding greatly to the discomforts of the whites. The game brought down proved but a scanty meal all around, and for breakfast there remained absolutely nothing.

"This is too bad," said Dan, referring to the rain. He was soaked to the skin, and so was everybody else in the party.

The trail was taken up as soon as it was light enough to see, and the Indians were followed fully fifteen miles, over a winding way leading over hills and rocks, and through immense belts of timber land. They had to ford several streams, and at one of these points they stopped for an hour to catch and cook some black bass, which were plentiful. Toward nightfall the chase came to an end.

"It's no use," said one of the oldest of the settlers. "They've got too good a start of us, and it will be foolishness for a mere handful of whites to ride right into the Indian country. They'll lay a trap and massacre every one of us."

All of the others agreed with the spokesman, and it was not long before the party was riding back toward Gonzales. At first they followed the winding trail, but, coming to one of the numerous creeks of the vicinity, they branched off and took almost a direct route to the town.

"Will you go back with us?" asked Mr. Radbury of Poke Stover, when it came time for the Radburys to separate from the others. The ranch home could be seen from the top of a neighbouring hill, and all seemed to be as they had left it two days before.

"Yes, I reckon I will," answered the frontiersman. "I ain't got nothin' else to do, and ye may want an extra man about fer a day or two, jest for to keep his eye open."

The storm had cleared away, and the sun was shining brightly as the party of four rode up to the battered door of the deserted cabin. Down around the cattle shed the cows were browsing away as usual, and several of the pigs gave Ralph a grunt of recognition as he passed them.

"Home again!" cried Dan, and hopping to the ground he crawled through the doorway into the living-room of the cabin. As he went in he noticed that the body of the dead red man had been removed from the doorstep.

"Is it all right?" asked Ralph, when a cry from his brother aroused him.

"An Indian!" came from Dan. He had discovered a wounded red man lying on the floor in the corner. Then he gazed around the room and glanced into the sleeping apartment.

"Father, come in, quick!" he went on. "Somebody has been here, and has carried off a dozen or more things. And your desk is broken open, too, and all your papers are scattered about. Did you have any money in the desk?"

CHAPTER IX.

BIG FOOT AND THE MISSING PAPERS.

Dan's cry brought Mr. Radbury into the cabin without further delay, followed by Ralph and Poke Stover.

"What has been stolen?" queried Amos Radbury. "I see that old Revolutionary sword of your grandfather is gone."

"So are two of the pistols, and that half dozen solid silver spoons mother got from Aunt Elizabeth," answered Dan. "But what of money in the desk?"

"I had but little—not over twenty dollars all told, Dan." Mr. Radbury walked over to the little desk, which was a rude affair made by himself during his leisure hours. "Yes, it's been ransacked pretty thoroughly."

"Is anything missing?" asked Ralph.

"I can't say." Amos Radbury looked over a number of the papers. "I guess they are all right. No, there is my discharge from the army, after the war of 1812. The rascal who broke open the desk took the pleasure of tearing that in half." He rummaged about a bit more. "Hullo, it's gone!" he cried.

"What's gone?" came from both boys.

"The papers relating to this grant of land."

"Are you sure?" asked Dan.

"Yes, it isn't anywhere about."

Mr. Radbury was more worried about the papers pertaining to the land grant than over anything else, and at once a search was instituted, outside of the ranch

home as well as indoors. It proved of no avail,—the papers were gone.

"Will it do much harm?" asked Ralph, who knew very little as yet about real estate matters.

"It may and it may not," answered the father. "Of course the grant is recorded, but with matters in such a revolutionary state the records may at some time be destroyed, and then somebody else might come forward and claim this grant."

"Well, I reckon you won't give it up, partner," put in Poke Stover, suggestively.

"Not without a fight, Stover," was Mr. Radbury's firm answer. "The land is mine, paid for, and I'll hold it, papers or no papers, and no matter how the affairs of the government turn."

"I wonder who was the thief," mused Dan. "I don't believe it was an Indian. He might take the other things, but he wouldn't know anything about the papers, nor care for them."

"He might be cute enough to take the papers just to throw us off the scent," suggested Ralph.

"You're wrong, Ralph, for he wouldn't know one paper from another."

"But he'd know the land papers were important, because of the seals on them," persisted the youngest Radbury.

The Indian in the corner now demanded their attention. He was plainly in a bad way, and Poke Stover said it was very doubtful if he would live.

"If he does pull through it will only be because he's a redskin and as tough as all creation," added the old frontiersman.

In his guttural tongue the redskin appealed to Dan for a drink of water.

"Certainly, I'll give you a drink," answered the boy, kindly, and went out to get some water that was cool. After the Indian had had his fill, Dan used the remainder of the water in washing his wounds and then bound them up. After this he got out an old blanket, and he and Ralph placed the wounded fellow on this. Before, the red man's face had had a scowl on it, but now it became more friendly.

"White boys heap good," he grunted. "Big Foot no forget dem," and he nodded his head suggestively. He had been shot in the leg, and was suffering from loss of blood.

"Tell me who robbed the cabin," said Dan, for he felt that Big Foot had had nothing to do with it.

The Indian knit his brow in speculation.

"White boy ask Big Foot hard question," he said, presently.

"But you must know."

"Big Foot t'ink know, not sure. Big Foot crawl in here out of hot sun. He half dead. Udder man come, rob place while Big Foot half dead."

"Well, who do you imagine the other man was? It couldn't have been one of your tribe."

"I t'ink him half my tribe. I t'ink him 'Merican-Indian, um Hank Stiger."

"Hank Stiger!" cried Dan. "Father, did you hear that?"

"What is it, Dan?"

"This Indian was half in a faint when the cabin was robbed, but he thinks the thief was Hank Stiger."

"That is not improbable, for Stiger was around this vicinity and did not fight with the Comanches. He could easily have come in after we went off on the trail. When was the robbery committed?"

"Him come in at the last sundown," answered Big Foot, meaning the evening before.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"And which way did he go?"

The wounded red man could not answer this query, and he now became so exhausted that the others questioned him no further.

The fire was started up, and a generous meal for all hands was prepared, of which the Indian was given all that was good for him. Then the red man went to sleep, while the Radburys began to mend the battered door and put things into shape generally. Poke Stover went off to the timber, to find out what had become of Ralph's deer, and to see if any of the enemy were still lurking in the vicinity.

It was learned by nightfall that no Indians were around for miles, and this made the Radburys breathe much more easily. Strange to say, Stover had found the deer just where Mr. Radbury had left it, and now brought it in.

"A good shot, lad," said the old frontiersman to Ralph. "No one could have made a better."

"Yes, it was a good shot," answered the boy. "I'm afraid I'll not be able to do as well every time."

"You mustn't expect it. If you could do as well every time you'd be as fine a shot as Davy Crockett himself."

"They tell me Crockett thinks of coming down to Texas," put in Mr. Radbury. "They say he is tired of things up in Tennessee."

"Yes, I heard he was coming down," replied Poke Stover. "Well, he's a wonderful old fighter, and if we have any trouble with the Mexicans ye can reckon on it as how he'll be to the front from the very start." How true was the old frontiersman's prediction the future chapters of our tale will show.

They hardly knew what to do with the Indian. Stover wished to turn him out to shift for himself, but the boys pleaded for the wounded red man, and in the end he was allowed to remain where he was. The Radburys retired to their sleeping-apartment, while Stover made himself comfortable in front of the big open fireplace. All, however, slept, as the saying goes, "with one eye open."

The next week was a busy one. It was found that not only had the Indians attacked the cabin, but they had also tried to wreck the cattle shed, and both structures had to be mended and put into order. During the absence of the settlers some of the cattle and the mustangs had strayed away to other ranges, and these had to be rounded up, for in those days men of limited means, like Mr. Radbury, did not allow their live stock to wander far away, to be rounded up once or twice a year. If they had allowed this, cattle and ponies might have gotten into the

Indian country and never been heard of again.

At the end of the week Poke Stover left, stating that he was going to make a trip to San Antonio de Bexar, to learn how matters were going politically.

"There may be a scrap on already," he remarked, "and, if so, I don't want to be sitting here, sucking my thumbs."

"I admire your sentiment," replied Mr. Radbury. "If there is trouble, can I rely upon you to give me warning?"

"Certainly," answered Poke Stover.

He left on Saturday morning, and on Sunday Big Foot sat up for the first time. The Radburys had done their best for him, and for this he was extremely grateful.

"Big Foot pay back some day," he said. "Pay back sure." The boys hardly gave attention to these words, but had good cause to remember them later.

During the next few months matters ran smoothly, until one day when some of the settlers from Gonzales came in. They reported another Indian uprising farther eastward, and declared that the local government was doing nothing to check the red men.

"We must take the law into our own hands, neighbour Radbury," said one, who lived a matter of thirty miles away, yet considered himself a fairly close neighbour. "The Mexicans don't care a rap for us, and I reckon they'd just as lief see the Injuns ride over us as not."

"I trust Santa Anna does the right thing by us," answered Mr. Radbury.

"I wouldn't trust any of 'em."

"Well, if they don't do right, they had better look out for Sam Houston, or he'll be on their heels."

"Yes, I've great faith in Houston," was the other settler's answer. "He's a lawyer and a fighter, and I reckon he can whip 'em both in the court-room or on the battle-field."

CHAPTER X.

THE SITUATION IN MEXICO.

In his conversation with his neighbour, Mr. Radbury had mentioned Santa Anna, and it may be as well to look for a moment at this remarkable personage, who at that time, and for several years to follow, was the most important man in Mexico.

Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna was born in Jalapa, in 1795, and entered the army at an early age. With Iturbide he joined in the revolution and came out a brigadier-general, and was made commandant of Vera Cruz. A few years later he organised a revolt and overthrew the man he had aided, and in 1828 he deposed Pedraza and put Guerrero in his place.

So much of war would have satisfied any ordinary man, but it did not satisfy General Santa Anna, who was cruel and cunning to the last degree, and prided himself on being "The Napoleon of the West," as he styled himself. He wanted Mexico for his own, and in 1829 he defeated a large division of the Spanish army, that had landed at Tampico for the purpose of reconquering the country.

Having saved the Confederation, as he put it, Santa Anna considered that he had more of a right to Mexico than ever, and in 1832 he got into a wrangle with Bustamente, who was then occupying the Mexican presidential chair, with the result that Bustamente was banished by Santa Anna's followers, who forthwith made the general president. At this Santa Anna went still further by dissolving the Mexican congress, which action made him virtually a dictator. How it was that the Mexicans at large stood such treatment is one of the political mysteries of the age that has never been explained.

Yet Santa Anna's dictatorship, if such it may be called, was a position full of peril. There was constant wrangling in nearly every state of the Confederation,

and in a number of places there were actual outbreaks, which might have resulted seriously had Santa Anna not nipped them promptly in the bud. Stephen Austin had gone to Mexico to further the interests of the Texans, and been there imprisoned for political reasons. This helped along the war between Texas and Mexico, which was bound to burst sooner or later.

The first dark cloud came in the passage of a decree reducing the number of the militia to one man for every five hundred inhabitants, and requiring all the remaining armed persons to give up their weapons. The Texans refused to submit, stating that they needed all the protection they could get, on account of the Indians and because of the desperadoes who flocked into the territory. In the meantime Mexico had sent many of her jailbirds to settle in Texas.

While this was going on, during the summer of 1835, Austin returned from his imprisonment in Mexico, and was given a grand public banquet at Brazoria. In his speech there he counselled moderation, but declared that the civil government was going to pieces, and that the Texans must take care of themselves. He still believed in Santa Anna and his golden promises, hoping against hope for a peaceful change for the better.

At San Antonio were stationed five hundred Mexican soldiers, under Colonel Ugartchea, and, according to orders, this command commenced to disarm such of the Texans as had failed to comply with the decree regarding firearms. At Gonzales, fifty miles to the eastward, the settlers had a four-pounder, a brass cannon given to them by the government for protection against the Indians.

"The people of Gonzales must give up the cannon," said Colonel Ugartchea. "Tell them to send it to Bexar without delay."

"We need the cannon," said the people of Gonzales. "It's the only cannon we have along the whole river front."

"Santa Anna's orders must be obeyed," was the Mexican colonel's comment, and he despatched a force of one hundred and fifty dragoons, under Captain Castinado, to take the cannon by force. The Mexican soldiers arrived at the river on September 28th. On the opposite side of the stream was Gonzales, but the ferry-boat was on that side, too.

The Mexican commander waved for the boat, but no attention was paid to his movement. Then a horn was blown, but still the Texans paid no attention.

"We will march to the ford," cried the Mexican captain, and the dragoons started. But on reaching the ford, half a mile below the town, they found themselves confronted by Captain Albert Martin, a merchant of the place, backed up by several dozens of determined-looking Texans.

The alarm had now gone forth, and express riders rode their steeds almost to death to summon the people of Bastrop, Victoria, and other places. Soon the settlers began to flock in, all on horseback and armed, ready to do or die for Texas, as the case might be. With the number were Mr. Radbury and Dan. Dan had been to Gonzales to buy some household stores, and his father, hearing of the uprising, had hastened down the river to find his son and see that no harm befell him. This had left Ralph home alone, saving for the company of Pompey Shuck, a negro, who had, during the summer, followed Mr. Radbury from the old home in Georgia and insisted that he be taken in and set to work, "jess as on de ole plantation, Mars' Radbury." Big Foot, the Indian, had departed some time before Pompey's arrival.

"This looks like a fight, father," observed Dan, as his parent joined him on the bank of the stream, where Dan had gone, following Captain Martin.

"It certainly looks like trouble," answered Mr. Radbury, as he gazed at the Mexican dragoons with anxiety. "That cannon may be responsible for a whole lot of bloodshed."

"Well, they haven't any right to disarm us," returned the youth, determinedly. "You'll fight first, won't you?"

"Perhaps I will; it will depend upon circumstances," was the non-committal reply. Amos Radbury was no "fire-eater," and, like Austin, preferred a settlement without a passage at arms.

At the ford the Mexican commander had ridden into the water to consult with the leader of the Texans.

"I am sent here to obtain the cannon you are holding," he said. "There is my order," and he held it out.

"We don't dispute the order, captain," was the reply. "But we consider it unjust to ask us to give up a piece that we may need against the Indians."

"If you will give up the cannon you will be protected."

"We haven't been protected for a long while. We have had to protect ourselves."

"You are thinking of using that cannon against the government," was the angry remark of the Mexican commander.

"We are not thinking of doing so,—but it may be we will be forced to do so," was the significant reply.

"I am coming over, and I demand the cannon," went on the Mexican leader, pompously.

"If you dare to come over, it will be at the peril of your life," was the calm return.

The Mexican commander continued to bluster and threaten, but all to no purpose, and at length he withdrew his force from the ford, and went into temporary camp in a valley opposite to Gonzales.

It was now night, and the town was at a white heat. Meetings were held in half a dozen places, and while some counselled delay others were for forcing the fighting. In the end, however, it was decided to wait, and in the meantime pickets were sent out to watch the Mexicans so that they might not enter Gonzales by stealth.

"I wonder if they will come over to-night," said Dan, as he and his father picked their way along the river to where forty or fifty horsemen who owned ranches in the vicinity had pitched their headquarters, the taverns in the town being already overcrowded.

"I doubt it, Dan. We have fully as many men, if not more, and a Mexican soldier never loves to fight in the dark."

"Perhaps the Mexican captain has sent back for reinforcements."

"That may be. Well, all we can do is to watch and be on guard."

By this it will be seen that Mr. Radbury was as anxious as any one to keep the cannon. He had refused to give up any of his firearms, and had buried two of his pistols under the floor of the cabin home.

The night wore away without any alarm sounding, and the next day the Mexican commander sent another demand for the cannon, and on the day following he asked that a time be set for a general conference regarding the now precious bit of property.

The conference was refused, and instead he was asked to vacate his position so close to Gonzales. This he would not do, and all of the settlers now agreed that he was awaiting reinforcements from Bexar.

"He will wait for Colonel Ugartchea to come up with the balance of the command, and then wipe us out altogether," said one.

"Or perhaps he is waiting for Cos to come up," said another. It was known that the Mexican general, Cos, was on the march for San Antonio de Bexar with six hundred additional troops for the garrison of that city.

The morning of the first of October came foggy and disagreeable. But little could be seen beyond the river bank, and it was not known if the Mexican command was advancing, retreating, or standing still. Again the leaders of the Texans met, and it was unanimously decided not to delay action longer, but if the Mexicans were still on the opposite side of the stream to compel them to move away before their force could be increased. Volunteers were called for to cross the river with the brass cannon and begin an attack, and a hundred and sixty Texans rode to the front for that purpose. Mr. Radbury was too loyal-hearted a man to hang back, and as Dan begged very hard to go too, he was permitted to join half a dozen young men who brought up the rear.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OPENING OF THE WAR.

To get so many men across the river by boat would have taxed the resources of Gonzales to the utmost, so the majority of the Texans went around by way of the ford, only a few going over in the ferry with the four-pounder.

The trip was made during the night of October first, and every man was cautioned to be as silent as possible.

"We'll give them a surprise," said Dan to one of the young men, a *ranchero* named Henry Parker. He had known Henry Parker for over a year, and the two were warm friends.

"Or get a surprise," was the answer. "They may be watching us just as hard as we are watching them."

"Pooh! I am not afraid of a greaser!"

"Neither am I. But it will pay to be careful."

They had passed the ford, and now in the utter darkness the little band made its way through the brush toward the spot where the Mexican command had been in camp before the fog settled down.

Coming closer, the Texans were spread out in a sort of skirmish line, with the four-pounder in the centre. Dan and his friend were on the extreme right, down by the water's edge.

Here there was more than one little inlet to cross, and while Dan's horse was picking his steps the youth fancied he detected a sudden movement among the bushes overhanging the water's edge.

'HOLD ON!' HE CRIED TO HENRY PARKER. 'SOMETHING IS IN THAT BUSH!'

""HOLD ON!' HE CRIED TO HENRY PARKER. 'SOMETHING IS IN THAT BUSH!'"

"Hold on," he cried to Henry Parker. "Something is in that bush."

"Man or beast?" whispered Henry, and placed his hand to the trigger of his gun.

"I can't say. Wait till I investigate."

Leaving his mustang in his friend's care, Dan leaped to the ground and ran close to the bushes. As he did this, he stumbled into a hole and fell. He picked himself up, and while doing so heard a splash and saw some dark object disappear beneath the river's surface.

"Come here! Something is up!" he called to Henry, and at once his friend complied, and both ran down to the water's edge and strained their eyes to pierce the gloom and the fog.

"What did you see?"

"Something slipped into the water, and I am half of the opinion it was a man."

"Then it must have been a Mexican!"

"To be sure. Stay here and watch, and I'll go down the stream a bit. He ought to come up soon."

Dan had hardly spoken when he espied a head coming up but thirty or forty feet away. It was the head of a Mexican soldier, evidently a spy.

"Halt there!" cried Dan. "Come back here, or I'll fire!"

It is doubtful if he would have fired on the swimmer, having no desire to open the war in person, but his threat had considerable effect.

"No shoota me!" cried the Mexican. "No shoota!" And then he continued to talk in Spanish, which Dan and his friend understood, but imperfectly.

"I want you to come back here," went on the youth, and he pointed his gun.

At this the Mexican dove out of sight, not to come up for a distance of a rod or more.

"Shoot him—you have the right," urged Henry. "Or else I'll do it."

"Don't, Henry, it might be murder. Besides, we were ordered not to discharge any firearms until we received orders. A shot down here would alarm the whole Mexican camp."

"But we don't want that rascal to escape, Dan."

"I have it." Dan looked around and soon found several fair-sized stones. "Come back at once!" he ordered, and, taking aim, he let drive with one of the stones.

Dan had always been good at that sort of thing, and the stone landed, as intended, on the Mexican's back. He let out a howl of pain, so loud that several Texans at once rode up to the vicinity to learn what was the matter.

"Yes, he's got to come ashore," declared one of the men. "He may be a spy who has been over to Gonzales, and carries some kind of a message." He raised his voice in Spanish. "Come ashore, or we'll shoot you; do you hear?"

"*Si, capitan*" ("Yes, captain"), was the answer, and without further ado the Mexican turned and came back to the river bank. As he crawled out, wet and muddy, he looked the picture of despair.

"It's Pietro the gambler, from Bastrop," said one of the Texans, after a close scrutiny. "I'll wager he was going to give us away to the greasers in camp."

"No, no, me watch fight, dat's all, señor," said the Mexican, who was noted not only for his skill at cards but also for his skill at cheating. "Pietro fight for Texans when fight 't all."

"That don't go down, you card-sharp!" cried another of the men. "I know him well, and he would cheat his own grandmother if he could. Let us make him a prisoner, at least until this business we are on is over."

So it was agreed, and despite the gamblers' protests he was bound hands and feet and tied up to a near-by tree. Had he not been captured, the fight so close at hand would probably not have come off.

On went the Texans, until a point was gained overlooking the camping spot of the Mexicans. The advance guard reported that Captain Castinado was still at the place with his dragoons.

"Then we'll wait until daybreak and open up on them," said the Texans, and went into temporary camp. It is doubtful if any of the number closed his eyes for the balance of that never-to-be-forgotten night. To them this contest was to be like that of Concord and Lexington to the patriots of 1775,—it was to mark the dawn of Texan liberty.

The Mexicans had located at a spot called DeWitt's mound; while the Texans occupied a position farther down the valley and close to the river. As soon as it began to grow light, the four-pounder was placed in position, and the rough but rugged little army was drawn up in battle array. Only here and there was there a man in uniform, and the weapons were of all sorts and sizes. Leaders and privates had come over, some on horseback, some on ponies, and others on foot.

"Give it to them!" came the sharp order, when it was light enough to locate the Mexicans with certainty, and the brass four-pounder belched forth its contents, and the battle was opened at last.

"Forward!" was the cry down the line, and away swept the Texans, in two long lines, Mr. Radbury well to the front, and Dan not very far behind.

The Mexicans had been taken completely by surprise and for the moment knew not what to do. But they quickly organised and returned the fire, and then the Texans swept closer, and the constant crack, crack, of the musketry could be heard upon every side.

"Gracious, this is war, sure!" cried Dan, as he discharged his gun and proceeded to reload with all speed, while still riding forward. "It looks as if we were going to have a hand-to-hand encounter."

"Forward, for the liberty of Texas!" shouted one of the leaders, and a score of voices took up the cry. "For the liberty of Texas! For the liberty of Texas!" It was

a battle-cry fit to inspire any body of men.

The Mexicans could not withstand such an onslaught, and, having fired several rounds, they broke and began to retreat before the Texans could get within two hundred yards of them. Away they went for the road leading to San Antonio, the Texans following them for some distance and then giving up the chase.

The first fight for Texan independence had been fought and won, and a mighty cheer went up, which was several times repeated. It was found that four of the Mexicans had been killed and several wounded, while the Texans had suffered little or nothing.

"Father, we have gained the day!" exclaimed Dan, as he rode up to his parent. Somehow, he had never felt so proud before in his life.

"Yes, we have gained the day," answered Mr. Radbury. "The question is, what next? You may be sure the government will not let this go by unnoticed."

"The government! What government?" put in one old settler. "I acknowledge no government but that of the independent State of Texas!" And a cheer went up.

"Let us hope it will be so, neighbour Johnson," went on Mr. Radbury. "But what if Santa Anna send out a large army to crush us?"

"He can't do it!" came from a dozen voices. "Let him come, and we'll show him what real American blood and backbone can do."

"We must organise, and without further delay," said one of the leaders. "We must have a regularly formed Texan army inside of thirty days, or else we'll have to pay the piper, and that means with Santa Anna that we'll either get a dose of lead or else dance on nothing," meaning they would all be shot or hung. This may seem an extravagant statement, but in view of what followed it was far from being so.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MARCH ON SAN ANTONIO.

The Mexicans had been routed, and for over a week matters went along quietly in the vicinity of Gonzales; that is, there was no further fighting. Meetings there were without number, and young and old began to drill and to talk of nothing but military matters.

"Will you join the army, father?" asked Dan, when, two days after the fight, he and his parent returned to the ranch home.

"I do not see how I can avoid it," answered Mr. Radbury. "Many of the neighbours are going, and it might appear cowardly to hang back. Besides, I must say that, after long thought, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing for us to do but to fight for our rights."

"Hurrah! I knew you would say that," cried Dan. "We must be free by all means, and then perhaps some day we'll become joined to the United States."

"That is for after consideration," smiled Mr. Radbury, but the thought had often crossed his own mind.

Ralph and the negro were anxious to hear the particulars of what had occurred, and the boy listened to his brother's tale in open-mouthed amazement.

"A real battle! Oh, Dan, how I wish I had been there!"

"Well, to tell the truth, it was rather one-sided. The Mexicans did not stand up in front of us long."

"And what are they going to do next?"

"Nobody knows. But there will be war, beyond a doubt."

"Oh, yes, I suppose General Santa Anna will be as mad as a hornet when he hears of the affair. And all over an old brass cannon, too!" And Ralph gave a laugh.

Matters were going along smoothly at the ranch, for Pompey was a faithful worker and had dropped into the routine without an effort. Mr. Radbury was glad that he had come, for he felt that he wanted a man around, in case the coming war carried him a distance from home.

As intimated, the fight at Gonzales became the talk of all Texas, and, the day after the contest, the committee organised at San Felipe issued a statement and called upon each man in Texas to decide for himself whether or not he would submit to the destruction of his rights and liberties by the central government of Mexico, and stating that the war had begun.

While meetings were going on in a dozen places or more, and frontiersmen and settlers were hurrying to the scene of action, a force of about forty men, under the leadership of Captain Collingsworth, gathered for the purpose of capturing Goliad, a small town on the lower San Antonio River. The river was gained on the night of October 9th, and while scouts were out reconnoitring, the brave little band was joined by Colonel Ben Milam, an old Texan *empresario*, who had been confined for political reasons in the jail at Monterey. Of this gallant man we will hear more later.

Finding the coast clear, the band entered the town, and silently made their way to the quarters of Lieutenant-Colonel Sandoval, the commandant. They were less than a hundred feet from the garrison when a sentry discovered them and gave the alarm. The sentry was shot down on the spot, and then the door was splintered to kindling-wood with axes, and the Texans poured into the building, and the commandant was made a prisoner. There was great surprise for several minutes, but the Mexican soldiers had been taken off their guard, and could offer little resistance. Twenty-five were captured, and the rest escaped in the darkness. By this quick movement the Texans gained a quantity of valuable army stores, horses, three pieces of artillery, and five hundred guns and pistols.

As Gonzales had been the starting-point of the war, it now became the general centre for the gathering Texan army, and by the middle of October there were gathered there between three and four hundred men who were willing and anxious to serve their country. By common consent Austin was appointed chief

in command, with the title of general. The volunteers, as they were called, were formed into a regiment, with John H. Moore as colonel. Old Colonel Milam, who had just arrived from Goliad, was made chief of a band of scouts,—men who did valiant service from the beginning to the end of the war.

It was to this regiment that Mr. Radbury became attached, and Dan and Ralph rode down to Gonzales to see their parent join. As Mr. Radbury was a veteran of the war of 1812, he was given the position of a lieutenant. Drilling went on constantly, and the little regiment was gotten into the best condition that the means at hand afforded. In the meantime other volunteers poured in daily.

At first the Texans had thought to act only on the defensive, but, as the days slipped by, the war spirit grew on the settlers, and they said they wanted the thing "over and done with," that they might return to their homes and prepare for the winter. It was then decided to march toward San Antonio, to see if the Mexicans would come out of the stronghold to do them battle.

"Good-bye, boys," said Mr. Radbury, when the order was passed around to prepare for the march. "It may be some time before I see you again."

"I wish I could go," answered Dan, pleadingly.

"Your time may come, Dan. But for the present I think we have enough men for this expedition. I think you and Ralph will have enough to do around the ranch, with me absent."

"But if I hear you are in trouble, father, I shall come on at once," went on Dan, and from this decision his parent could not dissuade him.

The troops were soon on the way, Dan and Ralph riding several miles with their parent. Then, at the top of the hill, they separated. But the boys remained on the hill until the soldiers were lost to sight in the distance on the dusty plain below.

"Good-bye, and may success go with them!" cried Ralph, half sadly. "I do hope father comes back safe and sound."

"If he doesn't, I shall take his place in the ranks," replied Dan, quickly. "But come, we must be getting home now, or Pompey will be anxious about us."

"Here comes a horseman, riding like the wind," came from the younger

Radbury, a moment later. "I declare, it's Poke Stover!"

"Hullo, boys!" cried the old frontiersman, as he came up. "What are ye a-doin' here?"

"We just saw the troops off for San Antonio," answered Dan.

"Gone this way?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"An hour ago. See that black line over yonder? That's our army."

"Whoopee! I was afraid I'd be too late. Good-bye. We are bound to bring them greasers to terms this trip!" And, with a wave of his sombrero, Poke Stover rode off as rapidly as he had come.

"He'll be a whole company in himself," was Ralph's comment. "He doesn't think any more of a Mexican soldier than he does of a fly, to bother him."

They were soon on the way to Gonzales, where they loaded their ponies with stores for the ranch. This accomplished, they set on up the river, hoping to reach the ranch home by night.

In those days the banks of the Guadalupe River were altogether different from to-day. Where numerous settlements now exist were then immense belts of timber, with here and there a burn, or a stretch of thorns and entangling vines. In some spots the banks were steep and rocky as to-day, and these rocks were the homes of numerous wild animals, including the fierce Texan wolf, the puma, the jaguar, the wildcat, and the black bear. The stream was full of fish, the best of which was the black bass, which, I believe, still holds its own in many Texan waters.

As the boys passed along the narrow wagon trail, which their father and other pioneers had blazed for themselves, they kept their eyes on the alert for any wild beasts that might appear, having no desire to let a fierce and hungry wolf pounce down suddenly upon themselves or their steeds, or a black bear stalk out to embrace them. Their packs lay behind them, and they held their guns on the saddle in front.

They were thus passing through the largest of the timber belts when the howl of a wolf reached their ears. It was immediately answered by a similar howl from another wolf. Both came from directly in front.

"Hullo! a wolf—two wolves!" cried Ralph, as he brought his pony to a halt. "I don't like that much."

"Is your gun all right?" came quickly from his brother.

"Yes."

The two lads remained motionless in the saddle for several minutes, listening. No other howl reached their ears, and the only sounds were that of the rushing stream as it tumbled over some rocks, and the cries of the night birds and the humming of the insects.

"Let us set up a yell," suggested Dan. "That may scare them off."

They called out at the top of their lungs several times. One distant howl answered them, then all became as silent as before.

"We may as well go on," said the older brother. "We'll be as safe moving as standing still. But keep your eyes peeled, Ralph."

They moved on slowly, with eyes turned to the right and the left, and keeping as far as possible from the brushwood and the low-hanging boughs of the trees. The mustangs seemed to realise that all was not right, and pricked up their ears and smelled the air.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FIGHT WITH A PUMA.

"By George! Something is wrong now!"

It was Dan who uttered the words, as he again drew rein, followed by Ralph. They had passed along a distance of less than quarter of a mile, and the end of the forest was still a goodly distance ahead.

A fierce howling had arisen, followed by a snarling and a snapping which caused the hearts of both boys to beat violently. The mustangs trembled, and acted as if they wished to turn and run.

"It's a wildcat or a painter, or something, and he's got into a fight with the wolves," continued Dan, as he strained his ears to catch the sounds of the encounter. "They are having a lively tussle, aren't they?"

"Let them fight it out," answered Ralph, with something of a shudder. "I hope they all kill each other, too," he added.

The howling and snapping and snarling continued for several minutes, then gradually died away in the distance. Still listening, they heard some large beast trailing through the brush to one side of them. They turned in the direction, and levelled their guns, but the animal did not show itself.

Darkness was now coming on, and the boys wished themselves safe at the ranch. It was one thing to ride through the timber in the daylight; it was quite another to do so at night, and especially when the wild animals were on the move.

"The worst of it is, one wild beast sets the other to fighting," said Dan.

"And it's so dark a fellow can't see fifty feet ahead of him."

What to do was indeed a question, but neither of the lads wished to remain in the timber all night, and, after another consultation, they decided to rush their ponies along until the next burn was gained.

"If we go fast enough, no wild animal will have time to organise an attack," said Ralph.

The wind was coming up, setting the dying leaves to scattering in all directions. As the wind increased, the boughs of the trees swayed violently over their heads.

Suddenly Dan, who was ahead, set up a shrill cry of alarm. He had seen two eyes glaring down at him from the branches of a tree he was just passing. He tried to pull back his mustang, and on the same instant a huge puma, or, as he is commonly called in the southwest, a painter, landed almost directly on his pony's neck.

The attack was a fierce one, and had it not been for a lucky accident either Dan or his steed must have been killed within a few seconds, for the puma is a heavy-built and powerful beast, and its bite, or a stroke of its huge paw, is generally meant to be deadly.

But, as mentioned before, Dan held his gun over his saddle, and as the painter came down the weapon went off, and the beast received the full charge in the upper part of his left shoulder. The wound did not kill him, or even seriously wound him, but it shocked and surprised the beast so much that he fell back, and tumbled to the ground.

"Oh, Dan, look out!" shrieked Ralph, and pulled in his own steed. Then, as his brother's mustang reared to one side, and the puma prepared to make a second leap, he endeavoured to get a bead on the beast.

The puma had struck on his back. Now he had turned over and was crouching down, like a cat getting ready to pounce upon a bird, his bushy tail sweeping the grass with quick, nervous motion.

Bang! Ralph's gun spoke up just as the painter was in the act of springing for Dan, and the shot took the beast in the stomach, making a jagged and ugly wound. Again the beast dropped back, uttering a mingled snarl of rage and pain. The snarl was exactly like that the boys had previously heard, and they felt that

this must be the beast that had gotten into the fight with the wolves. Probably the wolves had gotten away from him, and this and the taste of their blood had angered him into making the present attack.

Both mustangs were now kicking and plunging, and the boys had all they could do to keep their seats. The steeds backed away from the wounded painter, and then Dan's mustang started to bolt. His course was under a tree with low branches, and in a second the youth was brushed from his back, and sent spinning to the ground.

Half stunned by his fall, Dan had yet sense enough left to know that he must get away at once or the painter would be on him to rend him to pieces. He leaped up, and as the fierce beast came on, grabbed the nearest tree limb, to which he clung with might and main.

"He's coming!" roared Ralph. "Pull yourself up!" And he started to reload with all possible speed, no light task while on the back of a mustang that was so nervous and inclined to bolt.

Dan was doing as advised, when the puma limped up, his eyes blazing with a fury which is indescribable. He did his best to make the leap, and his teeth struck one of Dan's boot heels. But the boy kicked him away and drew himself still higher, and for the moment was safe.

The wounds of the painter were now beginning to tell upon him, and he could scarcely suppress a whine of pain. But his savage nature was not yet conquered, and, unable to leap directly into the tree, he sprang for the trunk and came up, slowly but steadily. When he was opposite to where Dan lay, he paused, as if uncertain what should be his next move.

If the puma was undecided, so was the youth. If he leaped to the ground again he was certain the beast would follow him, and he had no desire to face the painter at such close quarters, especially as he had no weapon of any kind with him, unless the jack-knife in his pocket might be brought into play.

Ralph settled the question, both for his brother and the puma. As the mustang refused to come closer, the youngest Radbury slipped to the earth and ran up directly under the bough upon which Dan rested. At this point he could get a fair view of the painter, and once more he blazed away, aiming for the beast's neck and head.

Ralph's shot was all that could be wished for, and it was lucky that, having fired, he leaped back, for, the instant after, the painter came tumbling down, with a thud that fairly shook the earth. The shock also brought down Dan, who landed just in front of the beast and lost no time in retreating to his brother's side.

"Good for you, Ralph!"

"Look out, he's not dead yet!" answered Ralph. "See, he is going to make

another leap!"

But in this the youngest Radbury was mistaken. Fatally wounded, the painter was merely endeavouring to get up on his legs, that he might crawl into the bushes. He stood for a moment, then stumbled and fell flat. Twice did he try thus to rise, then with a final whining growl he lay out, stretched himself, and gave a quiver or two—and all was over.

"He's dead," said Ralph, when he could collect himself sufficiently to speak. He was trembling like a leaf in a gale of wind.

"Don't be too sure,—they are as tough as a pine-knot," answered Dan. "Load up again," and he picked up his own gun, which had fallen when he was thrown from his saddle.

But the puma was dead, beyond a doubt, and they gradually drew closer to inspect the beast they had brought down. He was at least four feet long, and correspondingly tall and heavy, with a powerful tail and a rather small head. His colour was of a tawny tint, fading out to a dirty white between the limbs. The tip of the tail was black.

"He's a big fellow," remarked Ralph. "I wish we could get that skin home. It would make a splendid rug."

"That's true, Ralph, but do you want to stay here long enough to skin him?"

"No. But maybe we can tie him up in the tree and come back for him tomorrow or next day."

This was decided upon, and then Dan set about catching his mustang. The pony had run to a considerable distance, but he knew Dan's whistle well, and after this was repeated several times he came back timidly, although he would not go within a hundred feet of the dead puma.

Ralph carried a lariat, and this was tied to the dead beast and the carcass was swung to the breeze, so that the other beasts of prey might not get at it.

"Of course the vultures and hawks may attack him, but that can't be helped," said Dan.

The work finished, they lost no time in continuing on their way, riding rapidly,

and keeping their eyes and ears on the alert as before. But nothing else happened to alarm them, and shortly before midnight they came within sight of the cabin.

"Home, sweet home!" cried Ralph. "I'll tell you I am glad to be back."

"And so am I," added Dan. "No more fights with a painter for me."

Pompey Shuck had heard them coming, and now ran out with a lantern to take care of the horses, just as he had been in the habit of doing for his master in Georgia, years before.

"I'se dun glad to see yo' back," he said, with a broad smile on his ebony face. "Did de sodgers git away?"

"Yes, they are off for San Antonio," replied Dan. And then he told of the adventure in the timber.

"A painter!" gasped Pompey. "I declar' to gracious, Mars' Dan, yo' an' Mars' Ralph dun gittin' to be reg'lar hunters, he! he! I'se glad dat beast didn't cotch dis chile!"

"I'm not anxious to hunt any more, at least for the present," said Ralph, soberly. "I'll go back for that skin, and then I'm going to work around the ranch, and wait for news from father and the army."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE OF CONCEPCION.

At the time of the war between Texas and the government of Mexico, San Antonio de Bexar could truthfully be said to be a city of importance gone to decay. Many of the churches, convents, and missions were deserted and fast going to ruin. The friars had returned to Mexico, and with them had gone many of the best of the old Spanish families, although here and there some Castilians remained, to keep up the style of the times as best they could.

All told, the city numbered about twenty-five hundred inhabitants, the majority of whom were Mexicans, with a fair sprinkling of American trappers and traders. It was situated mostly on the west bank of the river, at a point where both banks of the stream were lined with pecan and other trees. There were two large public squares, once the scene of much gaiety, but now overrun with grass and weeds, and between the two squares stood the grand old buildings of the San Fernando Church. On the east side of the river, about half a mile from the city proper, stood the mission, with its church, convent, and walled courtyard, commonly called the Alamo.

General Cos had now arrived at San Antonio with six hundred Mexican militia, and as soon as he learned that the Texans were gathering for another contest, he sent down to the Rio Grande for additional troops and extra pieces of artillery. In the meantime, the troops under Austin moved up to Salado Creek, four miles from San Antonio.

The time was a momentous one, and, arriving at the creek, the Texans sent forth a flag with a message to General Cos, demanding the surrender of the place.

"I refuse to surrender," was the Mexican commander's answer. "And if you

send another such flag it will be fired upon." This, of course, brought negotiations to a complete standstill. Austin waited for reinforcements, and the Mexicans spent the time in barricading the highways leading out of the city and in strengthening their several fortifications.

"We are not getting along very fast," remarked Mr. Radbury, to one of his brother officers, while in the camp at Salado Creek.

"I believe Sam Houston is coming on to take charge," was the answer. "He's an old war-horse and will be certain to lead us to victory."

Everybody felt that under Houston the Texan cause could not fail. But, although Houston came up, he did not take command, declaring that the expedition was in the hands of Austin, and that he was needed elsewhere.

Several days passed, with much anxiety on both sides, and then Colonel Bowie and Colonel James W. Fannin were ordered to take a band of scouts with them and reconnoitre the enemy's position, with a view to moving the Texan army still closer to San Antonio.

"We'll do it," said both officers, without hesitation, and hurried off, taking about ninety men with them. In this body was a detachment under Mr. Radbury, and Poke Stover was also along.

The party moved along slowly and cautiously through the clumps of trees and mesquite-bushes, until some time during the afternoon, when they came to a bend in the river known as the Horseshoe, where was located the Mission Concepcion.

"This is a strong position," said Colonel Bowie. "The river and timber will shelter us from behind, and in front is the bluff. It's an ideal place."

"You are right," said Colonel Fannin. "General Austin cannot do better than bring the army here."

The orders had been to return, if possible, before nightfall, but at this time in the year it grew dark rapidly, and it was decided to go into camp for the night; and outposts were accordingly stationed in all directions, that they might not be surprised.

Although the Texans were not aware of it, the Mexican scouts had been

watching them closely, and no sooner did the party go into camp than the enemy resolved to surround them in the darkness, and either shoot them all down, or take them prisoners. For this purpose General Cos sent out four hundred of his best troops, determined to teach the Texans a lesson that they should never forget.

Lieutenant Radbury, as we must now call him, had charge of the outposts along the river, and, anxious to see that his men did their duty, he remained out with them, travelling slowly from one sentinel to another. On duty at one point was Stover, as alert as though after some big game.

"Any alarm, Poke?" asked the lieutenant, in a whisper, for it was not known but that the Mexicans might be close at hand.

"Yes, and no," answered the old frontiersman, slowly. "Perhaps my hearsight is deceivin' me, but I 'most reckoned as how I heard the creakin' o' wheels about—thar they go ag'in!"

He broke off short, and held up his hand for silence. Both men listened intently, and from the river bank they heard the steady, lumbering creak as of heavy wagon wheels.

"Am I right, leftenant?" demanded the frontiersman, when the sounds had come to an end.

"You are, Poke; do you know what it was?"

"Can't say exactly."

"It was the creaking of artillery wheels."

"Whoopee! Then they must be comin' over fer fair!"

"Yes. I will report at once."

Lieutenant Radbury lost no time in making his way to the tent in which Colonel Fannin was poring over an old map of San Antonio.

"I have to report the coming of some artillery," he said, as he saluted.

"Artillery?" repeated the commander. "Mexican artillery?"

"I think so, colonel." And Lieutenant Radbury related as much as he knew. He had scarcely finished, when Colonel Bowie came in on the run.

"They are starting to surround us!" he cried. "They are bringing over men and cannon!"

The whole camp was soon in alarm, and, after a short talk among the officers, it was decided to bring up the men in a semicircle, close to the bluff's edge. While this was going on, a shot rang out, and then another, showing that one of the outposts had been fired upon.

As the night wore away, a heavy mist swept up the river, and even when dawn came but little could be seen. Yet, anxious to avenge the loss at Gonzales, the Mexicans opened fire at once, which, however, did no harm. As the mists cleared away, the Mexican cavalry surrounded the whole front of the Texans' position.

"Give it to 'em!" shouted the Texan officers. "Give it to 'em hot!"

The cry was drowned out by a solid fire from the Mexicans, who continued to pour in volley after volley just as fast as they could reload.

The Texans did not fire by volleys. The orders were: "Fire at will, and make every shot bring down a greaser!" And there was a constant crack! crack! and the Mexicans were seen to fall in all directions.

Lieutenant Radbury now found himself under actual fire, and instantly his mind took him back to his service in the war of 1812. He carried a rifle as well as a pistol, and did as good work as any man on the field.

"They are preparing for a charge! They are bringing up a cannon!" was the cry that soon rang along the line, and then the Mexican bugler sounded out the command, and the cavalry came on with a rush calculated to sweep everything before it. But the Texans stood firm.

"Drop 'em!" roared Colonel Bowie. "The first line, boys!" And a score of shots rang out, and the first row of saddles was emptied almost completely. Some of the horses were killed or wounded, and these, falling, caused some confusion. In the meantime, other Mexicans continued to drop, and soon the cavalry retreated to reform.

"Now they are going to use the cannon!" was the cry which went up directly afterward, and then a four-pounder, stationed on a bluff, was discharged. The cannon was aimed much too high, and it is said that every shot from the piece went over the Texans' heads.

The cavalry now came on again, and it was seen that the Mexicans intended to shift the position of the cannon so that they might enfilade the line,—that is, shoot from one end to the other.

"Not much ye don't!" sang out Poke Stover, and, leaping to a slight knoll, he took careful aim at one of the mules attached to the piece and fired. Then he discharged his pistol at a second mule. Both beasts were badly wounded, and, breaking away, they tore first through the cavalry and then through the infantry, throwing the latter into much confusion.

"We have 'em on the run!" Like magic the cry arose from nearly every Texan's throat. The cavalry had charged again, and again the leading line had gone down. Now they were retreating, with the infantry beside them. Seeing it was of no use to remain longer, the cannoneer attempted to spike the four-pounder, but a Texan sharpshooter cut him down in the act.

"Come on, boys, let us follow 'em into San Antonio!" cried several, but this the leaders would not allow, for they were only ninety strong, and all were exhausted from the battle, which had been sharp if not of long duration. So the Mexicans were allowed to form in the plain half a mile away, and from there they marched rapidly back to the city. Their loss was sixty-seven killed and forty wounded, which showed how deadly had been the Texans' aim. The Texans lost but one killed and several slightly wounded.

CHAPTER XV.

DAN TURNS THE TABLES.

To the boys at the ranch the days passed impatiently enough. But few settlers came that way, so that they were cut off almost entirely from communication with the outside world.

The puma skin had been brought in and cared for, and now they turned their attention to getting ready for the winter, which was close at hand.

One day, unable to stand it longer, Dan rode down to Gonzales for the news. He found the town bubbling over with joy because of the victory at Concepcion.

"They can't stand up against our men," said the storekeeper who was talking to Dan. "The Texans are brave and nearly all good shots, and they are fighting for their homes. The greasers, on the other hand, are lazy and unreliable, paid to do what they are doing, and consequently think of nothing but saving their own skin."

"Oh, I reckon some of them are patriotic enough," answered Dan. "But they are in the minority."

"How can they be patriotic, and follow such a man as Santa Anna, who is continually leading all Mexico by the nose? No, they are doing it for the pay, and nothing else."

At the post-office Dan found a brief letter from his father, stating that he was well, and that if no more fighting came off in the near future he would come home on a short visit. So far there had been no regular enlistments in the Texan army, and volunteers came and went pretty much as they pleased.

From the storekeeper Dan learned that several bands of Indians had been seen

in the vicinity, moving to the west and north. Some were Comanches, and others friendly Caddos.

"Well, I don't mind the Caddos," thought the boy, "but I don't want to fall in with any more Comanches."

He had thought to go home that afternoon, or evening, as it is called in Texas, but, after learning about the Indians, resolved to remain in Gonzales all night and make the journey the first thing in the morning.

On the outskirts of Gonzales was the farm belonging to Henry Parker's father, and thither he went, satisfied that he would be sure of a warm welcome. He found Henry at home, and also Mrs. Parker, Mr. Parker being away on business.

"Why, of course you must stay," said Mrs. Parker. "I am glad to have company."

The balance of the day passed pleasantly, and after supper the young man and Dan took a stroll up into the town to learn if any later news had come in.

They had just gained the main street of the town when Dan saw before him a figure that looked familiar. He quickened his pace, and soon ranged up alongside of the man, who proved to be the half-breed, Hank Stiger.

Stiger was partly under the influence of liquor, or otherwise he would not have shown himself in Gonzales at that time, when the Indian raid was still fresh in the settlers' minds. He glared angrily at Dan when he saw the boy.

"Stiger, I want to have a talk with you," said Dan, with more firmness than is usual in one of his age.

"What you want now?" demanded the half-breed.

"I want to know what you have done with my father's papers."

"What papers do you mean?"

"The papers you stole from my father's cabin while we were out after the Indians."

"I was not near your house—I took no papers!" cried the half-breed, fiercely. "Who says so tells a lie."

"I know you did take them, and unless you give them up I will have you placed under arrest."

"Ha! don't you talk to Hank Stiger that way, or you will be sorry for it." The half-breed's hand stole under his coat, and he showed the handle of his hunting-knife. "Do you see dat?"

Dan sprang back, for he knew how treacherous the man before him could be. But now Henry Parker stepped up.

"None of that, Stiger," he said, sharply, and placed his hand on the handle of the pistol he carried in his belt.

"He wants to make trouble for me. He says I stole some papers," growled Hank Stiger, sullenly.

"And I guess he is right, too," returned Henry. "If I understand the matter, he has proof against you."

"Ha! did Big Foot tell——" Stiger broke off short, realising that he was exposing himself.

"Yes, Big Foot told me everything," said Dan. "And you must give up those papers, or take the consequence."

Hank Stiger's face grew as dark as a thunder-cloud.

"I'll pay off that Injun for it!" he cried. "I knew he wasn't to be trusted, the skunk! But I ain't got no papers, never had 'em! This is a put-up job to get squar' on account o' that deer," he continued, trying to change the subject. "You got the deer, what more do you want?"

"I am not talking deer now,—I am asking for those papers,—and the other things which were stolen," resumed Dan, doggedly. "What have you done with them?"

"Find out fer yourself!" growled Hank Stiger, and turning swiftly, he started on a run for the nearest corner.

"Stop! or I'll fire!" cried Henry Parker, as he drew his pistol, but before he could make up his mind whether or not he had a right to fire on the half-breed, Stiger was out of sight. Dan ran after him, and his friend joined in the chase.

Stiger's course was toward the river, and having reached this, he leaped into a canoe which was handy and began to paddle with all speed for the opposite shore. A large lumber-raft was lying in midstream, and this he kept as much as possible between himself and his pursuers.

"He's bound to get away if he can," observed Henry, as the pair gained the bank of the Guadalupe almost out of breath.

"Here is another canoe—let us follow him in that," replied Dan.

Henry was willing, and they were soon on the river. Dan could paddle well, and they made rapid progress around the raft and in the direction Hank Stiger was taking.

Reaching the opposite shore at a point some distance below Gonzales, the half-breed leaped into the bushes and made his way to a pine grove farther away from the bank. The pursuers followed him to the point of embarkation with ease, but here came to a halt.

"If it wasn't so dark we might follow his trail," observed Henry. "But I can't see a thing under the trees."

"Here it is," came from Dan, who was on his hands and knees. "He went into the pines. I'm going a bit farther," and he stalked off. Henry remained behind to fasten the canoe, that the current might not carry the craft off.

Dan had scarcely come up to the first row of pines when he saw something moving over to his left. Satisfied that it was Stiger, he sped in the direction. The half-breed saw him, and ran on.

"I've spotted him!" cried Dan to his friend. "Come on!"

"All right, I'm coming!" answered Henry.

On through the tall pines ran pursued and pursuers, until nearly quarter of a mile had been covered. Dan was in front, with Henry close behind.

"You are fools to follow me here!" roared Hank Stiger, as he came to a halt. "Take that for your foolishness."

"Hide! he is going to fire!" exclaimed Dan, but before either he or his friend

could gain any shelter Hank Stiger discharged a pistol which he carried. The bullet missed Dan, but struck Henry Parker across the temple, and the young man went down, stunned and unconscious.

The unexpected turn of affairs made Dan's heart leap into his throat, and he felt how imprudent both had been to thus expose themselves in such an out of the way spot to a man in Stiger's condition. He drew his own pistol, but the half-breed knew enough to dart out of sight behind a thick clump of bushes.

"Henry, are you badly hurt?" questioned the boy, anxiously, but no reply came back, and running to Parker, he found the young man flat on his back and as still as death.

Never had Dan felt so badly as at this moment, for if his friend was dead he felt that he would be more or less responsible for the murder.

He bent down and made a closer examination, and as he did this Henry gave a deep shudder and opened his eyes for an instant.

"Thank God, he is alive!" burst from Dan's lips. Then, noticing the blood trickling from Henry's temple, he bound up the young man's forehead with his handkerchief.

In the meantime, Hank Stiger was making a détour, expecting to come up behind Dan and surprise him. He had drank just enough to be utterly reckless, and carried his pistol in his hand ready for another shot.

Providence saved Dan from the anticipated attack. While Stiger was still two rods off, the boy happened to turn and catch sight of him. His pistol was still in his hand, and, without stopping to think twice, he fired on the half-breed.

The effect of the shot was curious, and the feat performed would be hard to duplicate. The bullet from Dan's pistol struck the hammer of Stiger's weapon, and while the pistol exploded and the ball sank into the ground, the hammer was knocked off and hit the half-breed in the cheek, inflicting an ugly wound. The bullet itself, having hit the hammer, glanced downward and lodged in Stiger's leg, close to his half-bent knee. The man gave a howl of pain and then fell flat.

In a moment Dan was ready for a second shot, but it was not needed. Stiger's pistol was now useless, and as he could not stand up, because of the intense pain

in his knee, handling his knife was out of the question. As he sat up, the boy faced him sternly.

"Up with your hands, Stiger," he said, sternly; and the hands went up, and Dan was master of the situation.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER A MISSING MUSTANG.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Hank Stiger, after a moment of painful silence, during which Dan glanced toward Henry, to find his friend reviving rapidly.

"You'll find out later, Stiger. I can tell you one thing, you've gotten yourself in a pretty tight box."

"It wasn't my fault,—you forced the shooting," was the sullen response. "Why didn't you leave me alone from the start?"

"Because I am bound to have those papers and the other articles you stole, that's why."

"I took nothing, I swear it."

"Do you expect me to believe you,—after what has happened here, and after that affair of the deer?"

At this Stiger was silent. He wanted to get up and rush at Dan, despite the levelled pistol, but the wounded knee held him back. Had he been a full-blooded Indian he would have suffered in silence, but, being only a half-breed, and of poor Indian and white blood at that, he groaned dismally.

"Dan!" The cry came faintly from Henry, who had slowly raised himself. "Where—what—oh, I remember, now!" And he sank back again.

"It's all right, Henry; I've made Stiger a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" whined the half-breed. "Ain't I suffered enough already? My leg is somethin' fearful!" and he groaned again.

"You brought it all on yourself, Stiger, so you need not complain to me."

"I didn't, you——"

"I won't listen to any more explanations. Throw your knife over here, and be careful you don't hit anybody with it."

The half-breed fumed and raved, but all to no purpose, and at last the knife came over, and was followed by the broken pistol.

"Now don't you dare to move," went on Dan, and then turned his attention to Henry. Not far away was a little brook flowing into the Guadalupe, and here Dan procured some water with which he bathed his friend's wound.

The departure from the town shore had been noted by several lumbermen, and, having heard the pistol-shots, several came over to learn if a fight was going on. By calling out, the lumbermen managed to locate our friends and soon came up to them. They listened to Dan's tale with close attention.

"We ought to go fer to string the half-breed up," was the comment of one of the woodsmen. "We've got enough trouble on hand without allowin' sech chaps to make more."

"Thet's jest the size on it," added another. "String him up on the spot."

But Dan would not countenance this, nor would Henry, who had now fully recovered, although the bullet had left an ugly scratch which he was bound to wear to the day of his death. Finally a compromise was made with Stiger, who offered to hobble down to the river, although scarcely able to walk. The threat to hang him had rendered the half-breed thoroughly sober.

The return to the town was made without incident, and at the local lockup Dan told his story, and it was decided to keep Stiger a prisoner for the time being. He was searched, and in one of his pockets was found some small silver trinkets, which Dan at once identified as belonging to his father. But no trace was there of the papers relating to the land grant.

"But these trinkets prove that Stiger was the thief," said Dan. "I would like you to keep him a prisoner until my father can come here and make a regular charge against him." And so the matter was allowed to rest. Stiger was in a rage, and vowed that he would surely get even with Dan some day.

When Henry Parker arrived home his mother was much alarmed to find that he had been shot. Yet beyond the shock the young man had suffered little, and after having the wound properly dressed he felt as well as ever.

"I might rather have gone off to the war," he grumbled. "Dan and I are getting all the fighting by staying at home."

It was hardly daybreak when Dan started to return to the ranch. He would not have gone back at all just then, only he knew Ralph would grow anxious if he did not return. As soon as he could arrange it, the youth had determined to ride over to where the army was encamped, to tell his parent of the encounter with Stiger, and learn if Mr. Radbury wished to take up the case.

Dan had not to take the trip alone, as two of the lumbermen were going up the Guadalupe on business. As yet only a small portion of the Texans had joined the army, many of the others having no idea that a regular revolution was at hand.

"It won't amount to shucks," said one of the lumbermen, as the three rode along the river trail. "We'll have a lot of meetings and a scrimmage or two, and then Santa Anna will come over with a big army, and our leaders won't dare to call their souls their own."

"I cannot agree with you," answered Dan. "Our folks have suffered too much to turn back now."

"But we ain't got no army,—only a lot o' farmers and rancheros, and blacklegs who have run away from the United States to escape justice. Mexico has a finely trained lot o' soldiers."

"Well, the United States didn't have any trained army at the opening of the Revolution," retorted Dan, warmly. "But we showed King George's men a thing or two before we got through with them."

"Well, if we do fight 'em and obtain our liberty, what then?" put in the second lumberman. "The politicians will run everything to suit themselves. We won't have any more rights than we have now."

"Never mind, I think matters will be a good deal better," answered Dan. "Anyway," he added, with a peculiar smile, "do you believe in giving up your arms?"

"Not much!" answered both lumbermen, promptly. "That's a fool law."

"Then what are you going to do, if the greasers demand your guns and pistols, as they demanded that cannon?"

This proved a clincher, and the lumbermen changed the subject. They were for peace, but it may be as well to state here that, in the end, they joined the army, and fought as nobly for liberty as did the average Texan soldier.

Before the journey was half over, it had begun to rain, and by the time the ranch home was reached, Dan and his companions were wet to the skin. As it still poured down steadily, the lumbermen were glad to avail themselves of the Radburys' offer to stay at the cabin for the balance of the day.

"Hurrah for our side!" cried Ralph, when told of the battle at the Mission Concepcion. "If they have a few more such fights, perhaps the Mexicans will wake up to the idea that we have some rights they are bound to respect."

He was glad to hear that Stiger had been jailed, and sorry that Henry Parker had been wounded. "Henry can make a charge even if father doesn't," he said.

Ralph and Pompey had had troubles of their own during Dan's brief absence. Two prize mustangs, not yet broken in, had gotten out of the corral near the cattle shed, and although the boy and the negro had managed to round up one of the steeds, the other had persisted in keeping just out of their reach.

"I tried to lasso him," said Ralph, "but I wasn't equal to it, and, of course, Pompey knows nothing of a lasso."

"Well, we can go after him when the storm clears away," answered Dan.

Pompey had prepared a substantial dinner, and the balance of the day passed off pleasantly enough. By morning the storm had cleared away, and the lumbermen took their departure. Then Dan procured a lasso, and he and Ralph mounted their steeds and set off on a search for the missing mustang, which was a beauty, and which Mr. Radbury prized very highly.

"He went off to the southwest," said Ralph, as the brothers rode away. "Of course, there is no telling how far he ran. I suppose it will be a good deal like looking for a needle in a haystack to locate him."

"Well, we can do our best, Ralph. I know father set a great store by that white pony. He was thinking of breaking him in for his own use."

"I know it, and that is why I tried so hard to capture him. But I can't get the hang of the lasso," and Ralph shook his head, for he had tried to land the loop over the mustang's head at least a score of times.

"You'll learn in time. It's more the knack of it than anything else. Come, let us hurry!" and Dan set off at a gallop. He was thinking altogether of the mustang, and never dreamed of the other odd adventure in store for him,—an adventure which was to make a soldier of him almost before he was aware.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GRASS FIGHT, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

The victory at Concepcion, as was natural, greatly strengthened the cause of the Texans, and immediately afterward the number of volunteers in the army increased. Seeing this, Austin moved his command still closer, and settled into a regular siege of San Antonio. The scouts, under Colonel Bowie, surrounded the town, to give warning of the approach of any reinforcements for General Cos, who remained within, still barricading the streets and wondering how soon the revolutionists would attack him.

In the meantime, a general meeting of citizens and political leaders was held at San Felipe, and at this convention, as it was termed, Austin was elected as a commissioner to seek aid in the United States. This left Austin's place in the army vacant, and General Edward Burleson, an old Indian fighter, was selected to fill the position.

General Cos was boxed up in San Antonio with a force estimated at from twelve hundred to sixteen hundred men. Many of his soldiers belonged to mounted companies, and it became a problem, not only how to feed the men, but also how to feed so many animals. There were rations to hold out for some time, but little forage. To make the matter still more difficult for the Mexican commander, Bowie and others ordered all the grass in the immediate vicinity of San Antonio burnt. This caused one or two small fires among the huts on the outskirts of the town, and came near to starting a panic.

At last General Cos felt that he must either have forage for his soldiers' horses, or else slaughter them, and he hired bodies of the Mexican farmers to go out, during the night, to gather such grass as could be gotten within a reasonable distance of the town. These bodies of men invariably went out under the protection of one or more companies of cavalry.

The expeditions after forage brought on what was called the Grass Fight. Among Bowie's scouts was an old frontiersman called Deaf Smith, and one day when Smith was out he discovered a body of farmers and cavalry, about a hundred strong. The panniers of the horses and mules were stuffed with grass, but as the body was a long way off, Smith mistook them for some troops come to reinforce General Cos, and supposed the stuffed panniers to be filled with silver to pay off the Bexar garrison.

Without waiting to make certain about his discovery, Deaf Smith rode pell-mell into the camp of the Texans. "The reinforcements are coming!" he shouted. "Ugartchea is here!"

"Ugartchea! Ugartchea!" was the cry taken up on all sides, and it was not long before Colonel Bowie set off with a hundred of the best Texan horsemen to intercept the supposed newcomers.

The Mexicans saw them approach, but it was too late to get back into San Antonio, and while a few of the farmers managed to escape, the Mexican cavalry took up a position in the bed of a dry creek. The plight of those outside of the city was seen by those within, and General Cos instantly despatched more cavalry to the relief, and also two pieces of artillery.

The creek, which was in reality a deep gully, was overgrown on either side with tall brush, and Bowie had some difficulty in bringing up his command to a firing position. But some of the scouts could not be held back, and rushing up they speedily laid several of the Mexicans low.

"Now then, fire on them!" shouted Bowie, when the proper range was obtained; but the Texans had scarcely opened up, when the relief guard of the Mexicans swung into position behind the Texans, and they found themselves caught between two fires. They wheeled about, and charged those behind them, who speedily scattered in every direction, leaving their dead and dying behind them.

In the meantime, the main body of the Texan army was coming up, and, arriving at the gully, they drove out the cavalry, killing a dozen or more of them, and capturing many mules and horses, and a large quantity of grass, the so-called "silver" which was supposed to fill the panniers, and which caused many a laugh for long afterward. The loss to the Texans was small.

In the midst of the conflict one of the officers dashed up to Amos Radbury. "Lieutenant, several Mexicans are escaping in yonder direction," he said, pointing with his sword. "You will take a detachment of twelve men, and go after them."

"I will, major," answered the lieutenant, and saluted. He was soon on the way, with Poke Stover, and eleven others, for Poke happened to be near him when the order was given. The Mexicans they had been sent to capture were four in number, and one of them looked like an officer of considerable rank.

"I think we can ride them down, Poke," observed Lieutenant Radbury, as he dashed over the prairies at the full speed of his mustang.

"Well, we kin give 'em a putty tough ride fer it, anyhow," drawled the frontiersman.

"We must catch them, if possible, before they gain yonder timber land."

"Thet's so. If we don't, it won't be no easy work to locate 'em in the brush."

The party of thirteen were all fair riders, but for once the number seemed fated to be really unlucky. Less than quarter of a mile had been covered when one of the mustangs, going at full speed, stepped into the hole of some wild animal, and pitched headlong with a broken leg. The rider behind the one to go down, pitched in on top of him, and in a thrice there lay on the prairie a mustang so badly injured that he had to be shot, and two men so bruised that further pursuit for them of the Mexicans was out of the question.

"Halt!" cried Lieutenant Radbury, and brought the balance of his command to a standstill. "Are you much hurt, Readwell?"

"I—I reckon not," was the answer, but when Readwell attempted to stand up he found his foot and back badly strained.

"And you, Alton?"

"My left arm is bruised,—I don't know but what it is broken."

"The mustang is done fer," put in Poke Stover, after examining Readwell's steed. "Might as well shoot him, and put him out of his misery."

This was ordered by the lieutenant, and the command carried out on the spot.

The second mustang was slightly injured, but could still be ridden.

"Both of you had better go back, on the one mustang," said Amos Radbury. "And, Glenwood, you can go back with them, for fear they may have trouble with other Mexicans who may be wandering about."

So it was arranged, and this brought the lieutenant's force down to ten men. The two parties separated without delay, and those in pursuit of the flying Mexicans went on as fast as before.

But the delay had given the enemy an advantage, and before the Texans could come within good firing distance the four Mexicans reached the timber. At the edge they came to a halt.

"They are going to fire on us, lieutenant!" cried Stover.

"Down!" cried Amos Radbury, and the Texans had scarcely time to drop to the sheltered sides of the steeds, a favourite trick with old frontiersmen, when a volley sounded out, and the bullets whistled over their heads. Another volley followed; then, as the Texans swept closer, and fired in return, the Mexicans disappeared into the timber.

Ordinary soldiers would have hesitated about following the Mexicans into the forest, but all of the Texans were expert in woodcraft, and thought they could keep out of an ambush as well in the woods as out of it.

"Stover, supposing you and Dilberry go ahead and reconnoitre," suggested the lieutenant. "I know I can trust you to keep out of trouble."

"Certainly, I'll go ahead, if ye want me to," answered Poke Stover, in his free and easy manner, and rode on with the other soldier mentioned. As soon as they got into the thickets of the timber, they dismounted, tied their steeds to a tree, and advanced on foot. In the meantime, Amos Radbury spread out the balance of his party into a line fifty yards long, extending from a deep ravine on the right to a steep hill on the left. He felt that the Mexicans could not climb the hill very well, for it was covered with large and loose stones, and to take their ponies down into the ravine would be equally difficult.

The advance of Stover and his companion was necessarily slow, for they had no desire to be picked off by some Mexican concealed behind a tree. Yet they

kept on for a dozen rods before finding any trace of the enemy.

"The trail goes toward the ravine," said Stover, presently. "They are following an old Comanche path."

"Right ye air," answered the other frontiersman. "Years ago, them air Comanches had a village in this ravine, erbout four miles from hyer."

"I've heard tell on it, Dilberry, though I never sot eyes on it myself. It war the home o' thet Bison Head, the wust of 'em as ain't dead yet."

Having made certain that the Mexicans had gone straight on for a goodly distance, the two scouts so reported, and the entire party set off along the ravine, which at some points was broad and shallow and at others narrow and deep.

Suddenly the report of a gun rang out, coming from a point where the ravine made an abrupt turn to the north. Several other reports followed.

"They must be shooting at something," said Lieutenant Radbury. "But they are not aiming at us, for no bullets have come this way, so far as I can ascertain."

"Perhaps they are having a brush with some Indians," suggested another of the party. "They may—Hello, what's this coming along the trail? A white mustang, I declare, with a black blaze on his forehead. None o' those greasers rode that animal, I'm certain on it."

"A white mustang!" cried Amos Radbury, and then, as the animal came closer, he gave a start. "It's the same, I declare!"

"The same?" queried Poke Stover. "What do ye mean, leftenant?"

"That mustang belongs to me. I was trying to break him in when the call to arms came. He must have gotten away from my boys. But what is he doing away out here?"

That question could not be answered just then, and in another moment the white mustang was out of sight. Then, as the firing ahead had ceased, the movement forward was continued.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAN COMES TO GRIEF.

"Well, this looks as if it was going to be a long-winded search."

"So it does, Ralph; but you must remember that a wild mustang who had been shut up in a corral for a couple of weeks will feel very much like stretching his legs when he gets out."

"We must have come at least eight miles."

"It's nearer ten."

"And we haven't seen the least sign of him."

"Oh, yes, we have; we discovered that trail."

"But we are not sure it was the mustang's."

"I take for granted that it was, for I do not believe any other pony passed this way since it rained."

The boys had not gone on straight ahead, but in a grand semicircle, until the footprints mentioned had been discovered. Now they were riding over a broad patch of prairie land, with a belt of timber to the north and another to the south.

"I wonder if there are any Indians in the vicinity," resumed Ralph, a while later. "I won't care to fall in with some of those Comanches who made it so hot for us at the cabin."

"Oh, they were chased a good many miles off, Ralph. Besides, they won't dare to show up here while they know that all of our best fighters are massing between Gonzales and San Antonio."

"I wonder how matters are going on at the front. I should think our army would march on Bexar without delay."

"They don't want to make an attack until they are strong enough to overcome General Cos's force. He may have considerable reinforcements by this time."

So the boys talked and rode until noon was passed. Both were now hungry, and coming to a pool in the prairie surrounded by mesquite-trees and bushes, they drew rein and tethered their ponies, and sat down to enjoy the midday meal they had brought along.

Pompey had packed for them a tempting hamper, and the boys remained over the repast rather longer than anticipated. The sun shone bright, and as there was no wind, the day was pleasant, even though late in the season.

"I suppose some day all this territory will be built up with towns and villages," remarked Dan, as he dug his knife-blade into the earth in a meditative way. "And when it is, I wonder if the boys of that generation will ever remember what a howling wilderness it was in our generation."

"A few will, but not many," laughed Ralph. "We are too much of a go-ahead people to do much looking back." The youngest Radbury leaped suddenly to his feet. "What's that, Dan?"

The brother sprang up also, and gave a searching glance in the direction Ralph pointed out.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, it's the mustang."

"Just what I thought. He seems to be grazing just at the edge of the timber. How had we best get at him?"

The matter was talked over for several minutes, and they came to the conclusion to ride to the timber at some point below where the pony was grazing and then work up behind him.

"Then, if he bolts, it will be for the prairie," said Dan. "That will give me a chance to lasso him."

The timber was soon gained, and they skirted this with the silence of Indians until within a hundred yards of the white mustang. Then the older brother called

another halt.

"Now you take the north side, and I'll keep to the south," said Dan. "Have you got your lasso ready?"

Ralph had, and it was decided that he should make the first throw, but not until Dan was prepared to make the second.

With great caution the two boys advanced to the point agreed upon. Then they rode out to where the lassoes could be used freely.

In the meantime the mustang was grazing peacefully, utterly unconscious of their presence in the vicinity. But now, as they drew still closer, he stopped cropping the grass and raised his head as if to listen.

"Throw!" cried Dan, and the lasso left Ralph's hand with a whizzing sound. A few seconds later Dan made his own cast.

As luck would have it, both landed over the mustang's head, but while Dan's was drawn tight with great quickness, Ralph's remained loose, so that in a twinkle the mustang shook it off, and then of course the line tightened around Dan's lariat instead.

'HOLD BACK!' YELLED DAN.

""HOLD BACK!' YELLED DAN."

"Hold back!" yelled Dan, as he saw Ralph sit bewildered in the saddle. "Run off to the other side!"

The younger Radbury attempted to obey, but as quick as a flash the mustang turned and rushed forward, bringing the lasso around Ralph's own steed. Then came a snap of the lariat, and Ralph went down, with the mustang on top of him.

All this took scarcely more time than to describe it, and now Dan found himself holding the white mustang alone, with Ralph's lariat end entangled in his own. Then off went the wild animal, kicking and plunging in a desperate

fashion, which even the tightened leather about his neck did not appear to hinder. His course was straight for the timber, and he went on dragging Dan's pony after him. It is true the pony might have held back, but he was not well broken for such a purpose, having participated in but few round-ups.

"Look out! You'll be killed!" yelled Ralph, as he struggled to get out from under his pony. The wind had been knocked out of him, but otherwise he was uninjured.

Dan scarcely heard him, so busy was he trying to bring the white mustang to a halt. Soon he disappeared into the timber, and then Ralph arose, mounted the pony once more, and came after him.

The white mustang did not enter the forest far before the lariat around his neck began to hurt him. He tried to circle around several trees, and thereby cut himself short to such an extent that he was in great danger of choking to death.

"Hold my pony!" shouted Dan to Ralph, and slipped to the ground. The free end of the lariat was passed around a tree and tied, and Dan sprang forward toward the white mustang, who was now acting as if ready to give up the battle.

"Easy now, easy," said Dan, soothingly, and watching his chance, he hopped up on the mustang's back. Immediately the animal bucked and plunged, trying his best to throw his rider. The lariat was depriving him of his wind, and of a sudden he stopped short and trembled, as if about to fall.

Not wishing to strangle the animal now he had caught him, Dan cried to Ralph to come up and help hobble the steed, that he might walk but not run. At the same time he continued to talk soothingly to the mustang and patted him on the neck. Then, fearing he would breathe his last if the lariat remained as it was, he drew his knife and cut the leather.

In a twinkling the whole manner of the mustang changed, and, before Ralph could reach his big brother's side, the steed was off like a streak of lightning, with Dan clinging fast to his neck. Over some low brush the pair went, and then under some tall pines and out of sight.

"Hi! hi!" cried Ralph, but Dan had too much to do to call back to him. On and on went the mustang, and the youth could neither stop him, nor did he dare try to leap to the ground, for fear of a kick from one of those flying hoofs. It was such

a wild ride as Dan never forgot.

By instinct the white mustang seemed to know the best course to pursue, and went on where the trees were high branched and tolerably far apart. This was lucky for Dan, for had the limbs been low he must certainly have been knocked off and killed. He bent as low as he could.

"Go it, if you must," he thought, grimly. "You'll get tired some time. But I hope you don't go all the way to Bexar."

Fully two miles were covered, when the white mustang came out of the woods at the edge of a ravine. He ran like the wind until the very edge was reached, then stopped short all in an instant.

Dan was holding on with might and main, but no boy's grip could withstand such a shock, and up flew his body, and over the pony's head he sailed. Then he felt himself going downward, toward the bottom of the ravine. Some brushwood scratched his hands and face, there followed a great thump,—and then he knew no more.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAVE IN THE RAVINE.

When Dan came to his senses all was dark around him. The sun had set over the timber in the west, and scarcely a sound broke the stillness of the night.

For several minutes the youth could not imagine where he was or what had happened. Then slowly the realisation of the events just passed dawned upon his muddled brain.

He tried to pull himself together and sit up, but the effort was so painful he was glad enough to give it up and rest just as he lay. The brushwood had saved him from death, but it had not saved him from a nasty fall on the flat rocks which rested at the bottom of the ravine at this particular point.

"It must be at least two or three hours since I went over," he thought, dismally. "I wonder what became of the mustang, and where Ralph and the ponies are?"

He tried to see the face of the silver watch he carried,—an heirloom from his mother,—but it was too dark, and he had to give it up. Then he attempted to call out, but his voice was so feeble no one standing fifty yards off would have heard it. And Ralph was miles and miles away, hopelessly lost in his hunt after his missing brother.

Not a bone had been broken nor a muscle strained to any extent, yet it was almost daybreak before Dan felt like getting on his feet, and in the meantime he had fallen into a doze and dreamed all manner of horrible dreams. When he awoke, his mouth was parched for water, and his first move was in the direction of the wet portion of the ravine, beyond the rocks.

As it was the fall of the year, the night had been cold, and after procuring a drink he was glad enough to sit down again beside a fire made of leaves and

such small brush as was handy. He was now hungry, but nothing was at hand to satisfy the cravings of the inner man. His gun had been left behind, but in his belt still rested his hunting-knife,—something he had taken to carrying constantly since the brush with the Comanches.

Dan could not help but wonder what had become of Ralph, and wished that he had some firearm by which he might discharge a shot as a signal.

Slowly the morning wore away, and by noon the lad felt that he must make a move. "I'll get out of the ravine first," he thought, but this was no easy matter, for the sides were steep and he was still too weak to exert himself in climbing.

Presently he imagined that he heard, at a great distance, the firing of a volley of shots. To make sure he was right, he laid on the ground and listened. Soon the volley was repeated, and a number of single reports followed.

"There is a fight on of some sort," he thought, but could not locate the direction of the shots with any degree of accuracy. "I trust Ralph is out of danger."

He walked along the ravine, looking for some convenient spot where he might ascend to the level of the timber beyond, until he came to where there was a split in the hollow. Here, in the centre of the ravine, was a huge pile of rocks, overgrown with a tangle of vines and thorns, which hid a cave of fair dimensions. In those days this cave was known to the Indians as the Haunted Rock. It is said that many a Mexican trader was lured there, only to be killed and robbed.

As Dan was passing the cave he saw, with much surprise, a Mexican soldier leading two mustangs into the opening. Each saw the other at the same time, and instantly the Mexican set up a shout in Spanish, and, letting go of the horses, levelled a pistol at the boy's head.

Dan did not understand the Spanish, but he understood the motion of the soldier.

"Don't shoot!" he cried. "I am unarmed!" And he held up his hands to verify his statement.

"You surrender?" asked the Mexican, in broken English.

"I suppose I'll have to," answered Dan. "But what are you doing here, and why do you wish to make me a prisoner? I am not a soldier."

At this the Mexican shrugged his bony shoulders and called out again in Spanish, whereupon three other Mexicans showed themselves at the mouth of the cave.

"Come in here, boy," said one of the three, who was evidently a captain, by his uniform. "Are you alone?"

"I am," answered Dan, as he entered the mouth of the cave.

"Where are the soldiers?"

"What soldiers?"

"The rascally Texans who were after us."

"I know nothing of any soldiers, captain."

"You are telling me the truth?" And the Mexican captain turned a pair of piercing black eyes on the youth.

"I am, sir; I have seen no soldiers for a week or more, and they were nowhere about here."

Dan's frank manner apparently impressed the Mexican officer favourably, for he breathed more freely. He paused for a moment, as if in deep thought.

"What brought you here, boy?"

In a few simple words Dan told his tale. When he mentioned the white mustang, two of the Mexicans smiled.

"I saw him," said one. "He was running like the wind, directly for those soldiers, too."

"And who are the soldiers you speak about?" asked Dan.

"It is not for you to ask questions," answered the captain, abruptly. "Sit down on yonder rock and keep quiet. A noise might betray us, and then it might become necessary to put a bullet in you."

As there was no help for it, Dan walked still farther into the cave, and sank down on the rock pointed out. He noted that there were but four of the Mexicans, and that each had a mustang that seemed to be much exhausted.

"I reckon I am worse off than I was before," was his mental comment, after reviewing the situation. "These chaps are evidently in hiding, and they won't let me go for fear of exposing them. Well, I sha'n't stay any longer than I have to."

In the matter of eating, the Mexicans were as badly off as the youth. "You have had nothing, eh?" said one. "Well, we are just as hungry, and perhaps more so. It cannot be helped, and we must make the best of it."

"But we can't remain here and starve to death," insisted Dan.

At this the Mexican drew up his face into a scowl and turned away. To comfort themselves, the men smoked cigarettes incessantly, being used to the tobacco habit from childhood. Dan had as yet found no comfort in the use of the weed.

While two of the Mexicans remained in the cave to care for the mustangs, the others went out on guard, one stationing himself just above the opening and the other below. The numerous rocks afforded both excellent hiding-places.

From those in care of the mustangs Dan learned but little, yet, during the Mexicans' talk, the youth managed to gain a bit of information which led him to believe that there had been a battle, and the four had become separated from their companions and had been pursued. The Mexicans thought to remain in the cave until night, and then escape under cover of the darkness.

As the hours went by Dan became more hungry, and with this empty feeling came one of desperation. He must escape, be the cost what it might.

"If only I could collar one of their mustangs, and get away on it," he thought. "Perhaps I might find those soldiers and have the Mexicans made prisoners."

The more he thought of this plan the more did it appeal to him, and then he cast about for some means of putting it into operation.

The chance came shortly before sundown. A distant shot was heard, and the two Mexicans in the cave hurried to join their companions, to learn what it might mean. Dan had cast himself down as if asleep, and one of the soldiers did not, therefore, pick up his gun as he hurried past the entrance of the cave.

No sooner were the men out of sight, than Dan leaped upon the back of the nearest mustang, and turned him straight for the entrance. He made the animal do his best from the start, yet, as he passed the entrance to the cave, he hung out from the saddle and managed to pick up the gun that rested against the wall.

"He is escaping!" cried one of the Mexicans, in Spanish, and leaped in front of the mustang. The next instant the horse knocked him flat and galloped over his body.

The Mexicans were bewildered, for, on the brink of the ravine, one of them had caught sight of several Texan soldiers in the distance. If they fired on Dan, they would betray themselves, and, if they did not, the youth would surely escape.

"After him!" cried the captain, and two of the soldiers made a dash for the boy. But they might have as well tried to catch the wind, for the mustang was fresh from his rest, and Dan made him do his level best.

Then along the ravine sped animal and boy, Dan riding as never before, and expecting a shot at any moment. He knew not where he was going, and hardly cared, so long as he made his escape from the Mexicans.

CHAPTER XX.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

Lieutenant Radbury's party had come up to the ravine at a point opposite to the cave, about half an hour before Dan attempted to make his escape.

"I see nothing of the Mexicans here," he remarked to Poke Stover, as he swept the ravine from one end to the other with his well-trained eye.

"No more do I see anything," answered the old frontiersman. "But they may be behind yonder rocks, leftenant. If ye say the word, I'll climb down and scout around a bit."

"There is a cave among yonder rocks," put in another of the Texans. "It is called Haunted Rock by the Indians. The Comanches used to use it as a meeting-place when they were out for plunder. I've often heard old Si Bilkens tell about it."

"I have heard of such a cave," answered Amos Radbury. "If the Mexicans knew of it, they might think it just the right sort of a hiding-place. Yes, Poke, you can scout around. But be careful. They may be watching for a shot."

The frontiersman nodded, to show that he understood, and went off immediately on foot, it being impossible to go down the ravine's side on mustang-back, no matter how sure-footed the animal might be.

The descent into the ravine took time, and Poke Stover was still some distance from the cave's entrance when he heard a commotion among the bushes and rocks.

"A mustang a-comin' this way," he muttered to himself. "And somebody ridin', too. It must be one of them dirty greasers trying to git away. I'll cut him short."

He raised his rifle, and stepped out into the open to get a better aim. Then of a sudden his weapon dropped to his side.

"Dan! Dan Radbury! What in thunder are you doing out here?"

At first Dan did not hear the call, for the hoof-strokes of the mustang made considerable noise on the rocks over which he was clattering. But then the youth caught sight of the old frontiersman and his face beamed with joy.

"Poke Stover! and is it really you?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. What are you doing here?"

"I just escaped from four Mexican soldiers, who are hiding in a cave up the ravine."

"The greasers we are after!"

"Are you after them? They said something about being followed."

"Yes, I am after them, and so is your father, who is in command of our party."

"Father! Where is he?"

"At the top of the ravine—in that direction," and Poke Stover pointed it out. "He jest sent me out to do a bit o' scoutin'."

"To locate the greasers?"

"Yes."

"I can tell you all about them. They are at the cave on guard. I took this mustang from them, and also this musket."

"Then thar won't be no need fer me to scout any more, Dan, and we might as well join the rest," answered Poke Stover. "We must capture them greasers."

"How did you come to go after them?"

Stover told the particulars as they were climbing out of the ravine, Dan leading the mustang by the head. In a short while, the youth was with his father.

Of course the parent was astonished to find his son in this wilderness, so many

miles from the ranch home, and Dan had to tell his story in detail.

"I am glad you are safe," said Amos Radbury. "But what of Ralph?"

"I can tell you nothing of him, father."

"We saw the white mustang twice, but nothing of him," added Amos Radbury, thoughtfully. And then he decided to go on a hunt for his boy as soon as the affair of the four Mexicans was settled.

To the others Dan pointed out the exact location of the cave, and the entire party drew within a hundred yards of the opening, without exposing themselves. The Mexicans, also, kept out of sight.

"We are now eleven to four," said Amos Radbury. "I believe if they understood the matter, they would surrender, rather than risk being shot."

"If they won't surrender I know what you can easily do," returned Dan.

"And what is that?"

"Starve them out. They are all as hungry as bears,—and so am I, for the matter of that."

"An excellent idea. But if you are hungry, here are rations in the saddle-bags," and Dan was speedily supplied with sufficient food to stay his hunger for the time being.

One of the party, who could talk Spanish fluently, was now ordered to show a white handkerchief tied to a stick, and this he did, moving to the very edge of the ravine for that purpose. At first, owing, probably, to the darkness, the Mexicans did not see the flag of truce, but at last the captain came forward, and demanded to know what was wanted.

"We want you to surrender," said the Texan.

"We will not do so, and you will attack us at your peril," was the Mexican's sharp reply.

"You are but four, while we number twelve."

"We will fight, even so, señor. A Mexican never surrenders."

"What if we starve you out?"

"You cannot do that. Still, you may try it, if you wish," continued the *capitan* hurriedly. If the Americans tried starving them out, it would give them time in which to perfect some plan for escape.

The talk continued for several minutes, and then the Texan came back with the information that the enemy would agree to nothing.

"He's willing to be starved out," went on the ranger. "But I think he wants the chance to get away in the darkness."

"We will draw closer to the cave as the darkness settles down," answered Amos Radbury. This was the first time, as an officer, that he had been sent out on a commission, and he was resolved not to fail.

The night came on swiftly. Evidently a storm was brewing, for not a star lit up the heavens.

"We'll catch it, in more ways than one, soon," said Stover to Dan, suggestively.

The Texans had had a small fire, but now this was deserted, and the party moved down into the ravine on foot.

Just as the first rain of the coming storm began to fall, one of the men of the party set up a shout.

"There they go!"

He was right. The Mexicans were making a mad dash for liberty up the ravine, the four men on three mustangs.

"Fire at them!" ordered Lieutenant Radbury, and instantly half a dozen shots rang out. None of the enemy was hit, but two of the mustangs pitched headlong, carrying three of the riders down with them. The fourth Mexican, the captain, continued on his way, forcing his steed along at a greater pace than ever.

Before those on the ground could rise, they found themselves surrounded.

"Surrender!" cried Lieutenant Radbury. "Surrender, or we must shoot you down!"

"I surrender!" cried one of the Mexicans. "No shoot me!" And he held up his hands.

But the others were game, so to speak, and, rising, they discharged their muskets, and continued their flight on foot. They had scarcely gone a dozen steps, when the Texans opened fire again, and one dropped, shot through the heart. The second man was wounded, but kept on and disappeared up the side of the ravine, in a thick pine brake, where all was now pitch dark.

"Make that man a close prisoner!" shouted Lieutenant Radbury to two of his followers. "Come on!" and he dashed away after the Mexican captain. Several, including Poke Stover and Dan, followed him, while others went after the fellow in the pine brake.

It was largely a go-as-you-please hunt, for, as mentioned before, the army was not yet sworn in, and every man felt that he could do about as he wished.

Before leaving the Mexican who had surrendered, Lieutenant Radbury had appropriated his horse, consequently he readily outdistanced those who followed. But he could not catch his man, although he got close enough to note that the fellow left the ravine where there was a cut upward, and took to the timber on the north.

"We can't follow him in this darkness," said Amos Radbury. "We will have to wait until morning. It is raining now, and probably there will be an easy trail to follow."

They returned to the others, and then the entire party went into camp in the cave the Mexicans had just vacated, the horses being also brought in, to keep them out of the storm, for it was now raining in torrents. A fire was kindled and a warm supper prepared.

"Two out o' four," declared Poke Stover. "That wasn't so bad, after all."

The captured Mexican was questioned, and said the missing officer was Captain Arguez, from Santa Cruz.

"He belongs to a most noble family," said the prisoner. "He will never give up."

"He will if I lay my hands on him," said Amos Radbury, quietly.

Both father and son were much worried over Ralph, and wondered what had become of him. It was agreed that while looking for Captain Arguez they should hunt for the boy also.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO RALPH.

"I'm lost, and that is all there is to it!"

Ralph sat on the back of his mustang the picture of dismay. He had tried to follow his big brother and had failed, and had spent the night on the bank of the ravine, but at a point several miles from the cave.

Ralph was not nearly as well versed in woodcraft as his big brother, and he hardly knew how to turn or what to do. All about him was one vast wilderness, and the silence and loneliness made him shiver in spite of himself.

"If I only knew what had become of him," he said, over and over. "But perhaps he is dead!" And the tears started to his eyes.

He had eaten nothing since the evening before, but he was too worried now to satisfy the cravings of his stomach. He had his own mustang and that of Dan with him, and they were feasting on the rich grass close at hand. Procuring a drink at a stream near by, he watered the animals and set forth once again on the hunt.

The day drifted by swiftly, and Ralph found neither Dan nor the way out of the belt of timber. He was now weak from so much travelling, and was compelled to rest and partake of the scant lunch still left in the hamper Pompey had provided.

As night came on so did the storm, and with the first fall of rain he sought shelter under some overhanging rocks near the top of one side of the ravine.

It was anything but a pleasant position, and no wonder Ralph wished himself safe at home again.

The storm increased until the rain came down in a deluge, forming a good-

sized stream in the basin of the ravine. Ralph was thankful that there was but little thunder and lightning.

Having found a dry place in a corner of the rocks, he was on the point of falling into a doze when a clatter not far off aroused him.

"It must be Dan," he thought. "Dan! Dan!" he cried, starting up. "Is that you?"

At the sound of his voice the clatter ceased, and only the violence of the storm broke the stillness. Then Ralph called again, that his brother might not go astray.

"Who calls?" The voice was a strange one, and the words were spoken with a Spanish accent. Ralph fell back in dismay, but it was too late, and soon the newcomer showed himself, riding a jaded steed, and carrying a long horse-pistol in his hand.

"Ha, boy, are you alone?" demanded the man, who was none other than Captain Arguez.

"I am," answered Ralph.

"And what brought you here?"

"I was out looking for a lost mustang, and missed my way."

"Ha, that is what the other boy told me!" muttered Captain Arguez, half savagely.

"The other boy? Then you have seen my brother?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"I cannot tell you. He ran away, taking one of my soldier's mustangs."

"But I don't understand," stammered Ralph. "Are you a Mexican army officer?"

"I am."

"And Dan was with you?"

"I think he fell in with us by accident, and he got away just as we were having a brush with some of your accursed Americans." The Mexican captain looked around suspiciously. "You are quite sure you are alone?"

"Yes, señor."

"You have two ponies."

"One belongs to my brother. He got on the white mustang,—the one that ran away,—and that is the last I saw of him. You have no idea where he is now?"

"Probably with the Texans who attacked my party."

"And where are they?"

Captain Arguez's brow grew dark. "You are asking too many questions for a mere boy," he growled. "I do not know where they are, nor do I care, so long as they do not bother me any more," and in this he spoke the exact truth. He cared nothing for his men, and wished only to get back to San Antonio in safety.

The Mexican had had nothing to eat throughout the day, and was glad enough to avail himself of what little was left in the hamper. Then he put his mustang beside the others, and made himself as comfortable as possible near Ralph.

"Do you know the way to Bexar?" he demanded.

Ralph shook his head. "I don't know the way anywhere; I am totally lost."

"From whence do you come?"

"From the Guadalupe River, at least thirty or forty miles from here."

"Then I must be almost as far from Bexar?"

"Yes; perhaps farther."

"It is too bad! I was foolish. But let that pass, what is done cannot be undone."

Captain Arguez had relapsed into Spanish, so Ralph did not understand his last words. He remained silent, wondering what the officer would say next. But instead of talking, the Mexican rolled a cigarette, and began smoking vigorously.

Ralph was sleepy, and in spite of his repeated attempts to keep awake, he soon

dozed off, and then fell into a sound slumber, from which he did not rouse up until daylight.

The captain was asleep, snoring loudly, and with a half-smoked cigarette between his fingers. At first Ralph thought to leave without disturbing him, but no sooner had the boy risen to his feet than the Mexican opened his eyes and stared about him.

"So it is morning?" he muttered. "Very good. Let us be on our way."

"I do not know which way to go," returned Ralph.

"That is easily answered, boy. You will go with me."

"With you?"

"Yes. I am lonely and want company."

"But you are going to San Antonio de Bexar."

"You are right. It is an ancient Mexican town, and there you will be quite safe."

"But I don't want to go there,—I want to go home."

"You will be better off with me; anyway, you must come on. If I let you out of my sight, and you fall in with those Americans, you will betray me to them. Come, we must lose no time."

Ralph attempted to argue, but the Mexican officer would not listen, and soon they were in the saddle, riding side by side, and with the extra mustang behind. Captain Arguez had noted how the water was flowing in the ravine, and now he crossed the hollow, and struck out down the water-course, but on the opposite side to where the Texans had encamped.

It must be confessed that Ralph felt more downhearted than ever. It was true he had wished for company, but this Mexican was not desirable, and the thought of being taken to the fortified town filled him with dismay.

Yet there was no help for it, and he rode along as directed, and thus they journeyed for many miles, until they struck a road leading directly into San Antonio. Here Captain Arguez met the Mexican who had escaped into the brush, and the two compared notes, the result of which was that both, along with Ralph,

made a long détour to the north and the west.

Once on the way the party passed several Indians, but no words were exchanged. In this party was Big Foot, the Comanche, who had been nursed at the Radbury ranch, but Ralph did not recognise the red man, for he was too far away.

The storm had let up a little during the day, but now as night came on it broke forth once more, as furiously as ever.

"This just suits me," said Captain Arguez. "It will wet us to the skin, to be sure, but it will put the Texans off their guard."

Once during the afternoon Ralph had thought to escape, but the captain had threatened to shoot him on the spot, and the attempt had amounted to nothing. The boy's weapons had been taken from him, and the mustang belonging to Dan had been appropriated by the Mexican private.

The private knew the vicinity of San Antonio well, and said they had better halt at a certain gully until two or three in the morning. This was done, and by four o'clock they were safely inside of San Antonio without the Texan pickets being the wiser, the rain and darkness proving the Mexicans' best ally.

As soon as he was safe, Captain Arguez went to headquarters to report, taking the private and Ralph with him. Ralph was put in a side room of the quarters, and left under guard for several hours.

"We have resolved to keep you here for the present," said the soldier, who came to him at last.

"Keep me here!" gasped Ralph. "What for? Surely you don't count me a prisoner of war?"

"Captain Arguez is convinced that your brother was a spy, and that you will help him if you can. It will, therefore, be safer for us to keep you here."

This was all the satisfaction Ralph could get, and soon after he was marched away to the San Antonio jail, there to remain for some time to come.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ATTACK ON SAN ANTONIO.

"This looks like a hopeless task, father."

"So it does, Dan, but while I am willing to give up looking for that Mexican captain, I am not willing to give up looking for Ralph."

"Nor I. But the question is, which way shall we turn next?"

Amos Radbury shook his head slowly. The party had been out in the timber two days, and, though they had followed several trails, it had availed them nothing.

"Perhaps Ralph went back to the ranch," suggested Poke Stover.

"We found no trail leading in that direction," said Lieutenant Radbury.

"That is true, but he might have gone back, even so, lieutenant."

Amos Radbury shook his head slowly. "You only wish to give me a little encouragement, Poke," he said, with a sad smile. "I am afraid he has fallen into the hands of the Indians."

"Talk about Indians, here come several Indians now," put in Dan, who was riding beside his father. "They look like Comanches, too."

The red men, who were three in number, had appeared at the brow of a small hill. Now, on discovering the whites, they seemed on the point of turning to run away.

One, however, gave the Texans a searching look, and then his face lit up with satisfaction. He came running toward Dan, holding up both hands in token of

peace.

"Big Foot!" exclaimed the youth, as he recognised the Indian.

"Good Dan," answered the Indian. "I glad I see you. How! How!" and he looked at Amos Radbury and the others.

"I reckon this is the critter ye nursed at the ranch," remarked Stover.

"It is," answered Dan. He turned to the Indian. "So you are glad to see me, eh?"

"Yes, much glad." The Indian looked at one and another of the party. "Where little brudder Raf?"

"Ralph is missing," put in Lieutenant Radbury; and then added, quickly, "Do you know anything of him, Big Foot?"

The Indian nodded slowly.

"You do!"

"Yes, see little Raf wid Mexican soldiers."

"With the Mexican soldiers!" cried father and son, simultaneously. "You are certain?"

The Indian nodded again.

"When was this?"

As well as he could, with his limited knowledge of English, Big Foot told of the meeting with Captain Arguez, the Mexican private, and Ralph. "They all go into Bexar," he concluded.

"Then Ralph is a prisoner of the enemy," said Amos Radbury.

"But will they hold a mere boy like that?" snorted Poke Stover. "It seems to me thet ain't human nater, nohow."

"The Mexicans will do anything to harass the Texans," answered the lieutenant, quietly. "I don't know but what I would rather have Ralph a prisoner in Bexar than lost in the timber or in the hands of some treacherous Indians."

"If only we could get into Bexar after him," sighed Dan.

"We'll get in pretty soon," returned another member of the party. "I heard old Ben Milam say that if our troops didn't start pretty soon he'd form an attack on his own account."

Big Foot was anxious to learn what all the trouble was about, and Dan explained to the Indian. At the conclusion of the talk Big Foot stared stolidly at Dan for fully ten seconds.

"You say so, Big Foot go into Bexar an' hunt out little Raf," he said at last.

"Oh, will you?" cried Dan. "It will be very kind."

"Big Foot not so kind as Good Dan," returned the Indian. "Yes, will go right now. Where Big Foot find Good Dan if have news for him?"

"At the camp of the Texan army," answered Dan, before his father could speak. Then he turned to his parent. "Father, you must let me go with you. I am sure I am old enough to fight."

"Why, Dan, you are but a boy!"

"I think I can fight as well as some of the men," said the youth, boldly. "I am a pretty good shot, and I wouldn't be a coward and run," he added, earnestly. "I don't want to go back to the ranch alone."

"But life in the army is no easy thing, my son. We may have untold hardships before this struggle comes to an end."

"I am willing to take what comes. Please say I can go."

Amos Radbury could not resist his son's appeal, especially as he was glad to have the boy where he might have an eye on him. So it was settled that Dan should accompany his parent; and thus did the youth become a soldier to fight for the liberty of Texas.

A while later Big Foot left, stating that he would endeavour to get into San Antonio that night, and the party under the lieutenant rode off to the camp of the Texan army. Here Amos Radbury reported what he had done, and there, for the time being, matters rested.

In the meantime, the Texan army had moved slightly closer to San Antonio de Bexar, but, as yet, nothing had been done toward storming the town. Volunteers came and went, and the army lacked so much of complete organisation that the leaders hesitated upon opening an attack upon such a force as General Cos had under him.

"If we lose, the Texan cause is lost for ever," said one of the leaders. "We cannot afford to put up the stake at this time."

Bowie, Crockett, and other scouts were off doing duty of another kind, otherwise the attack might have opened without delay. But now the old veterans, especially those of the war of 1812, became impatient, and among these was old Ben Milam, previously mentioned. One day Milam could contain himself no longer, and, rushing out in front of the general headquarters, he swung his hat into the air, and shouted at the top of his lungs, "Who will follow old Ben Milam into Bexar?"

"I will!" "I will!" came from a score of throats, and soon over a hundred men were gathered around the old fighter. In the number were Amos Radbury, Poke Stover, and a party of scouts who had served under Crockett. Dan, of course, followed his father.

As soon as it was learned how enthusiastic the soldiers were, it was decided that Milam's party should meet on the following day at an old mill near the camp. At this mill the company of volunteers numbered exactly three hundred and one, and this force was divided into two divisions, the first under Milam and the second under Colonel Frank W. Johnson.

"We will move on the town about three o'clock in the morning," said Colonel Milam, and this was done, the first division going down Acequia Street and the second taking to Soledad Street. Both streets led directly to the main plaza of San Antonio, and each was heavily barricaded and swept by General Cos's artillery.

The two divisions moved with caution, but as they crept along between the low-lying stone houses a Mexican sentinel saw the body under Johnson, and gave the alarm.

"We are discovered!" came the cry, and the next instant the rifle of Deaf Smith spoke up, and the sentinel fell dead where he had stood.

Further attempts at concealment were now useless, and both divisions rushed into the town as far as possible. Johnson's command went as far as the house of the vice-governor, Veramendi, and here sought shelter from the Mexicans, who swarmed down upon them in great numbers.

"Dan, take care of yourself," cried Lieutenant Radbury, who with his son had joined Colonel Milam's division. "Don't run any risks if you can help it."

"I'll stick close to you, father," answered Dan.

They were going down Acequia Street on a dead run, every Texan firing as rapidly as he could reload.

"The plaza! The plaza!" was the cry; but that square was still a hundred yards off, when the Mexican garrison appeared, with their artillery, as if ready to sweep the Texans from the face of the earth. Then came the cry, "To shelter!" and Milam's men, about a hundred and forty strong, broke into the nearest mansion, which was that of De La Garcia.

"Drop!" The cry came from Poke Stover, and he called to Amos Radbury, as he saw a Mexican in the act of picking off the lieutenant from the garden of a residence opposite to that of De La Garcia. He raised his gun to fire on the man, but the weapon was empty.

Dan heard the cry and noted where Stover was looking. He, too, saw the Mexican about to fire on his father, and his heart leaped into his throat. Then, by instinct more than reason, he raised his own gun and blazed away. Both guns spoke up at once, and Dan saw the Mexican throw up his arms and fall backward. Then his father dropped like a lump of lead.

"Father!" cried the boy, hoarsely, and knelt beside his parent. "Are you hit?"

"I—I guess not," stammered Lieutenant Radbury. Then he passed his hand over his ear and withdrew it covered with blood. "But I reckon he nipped me."

"That's wot he did," put in Stover. "But Dan plugged him for it," he went on, with much satisfaction.

The Texans got into the house as soon as possible, much to the surprise and consternation of the family, who protested in vain at the intrusion. Once within, doors and windows were barricaded, and the residence turned into a veritable

fort.

It was now growing daylight, and without delay the Mexicans began a furious onslaught. The crack of musketry and the roaring of cannon was incessant, but the Texans were wise enough to keep out of sight, and but little damage to human life was done. The Texans stationed themselves at convenient loopholes and calmly picked off every Mexican soldier who showed himself within range.

"I wonder how the second division is making out," said Lieutenant Radbury, as the day wore away and the cracking of firearms continued. "They seem to be doing about as much firing as we are."

"They are at the vice-governor's house," announced one of the other officers. "We could join them were it not that the greasers are sweeping Soledad Street with their twelve-pounder."

Rations were scarce and water was more so, yet the men under Milam did not complain. They had come to take the city, and they meant to do it.

"I hope Ralph won't suffer through this," remarked Dan, while on guard at one of the loopholes, with his father not far away.

"We must trust for the best," answered Amos Radbury, and breathed a silent prayer that all might go well with his younger offspring.

As night came on it was resolved to dig a trench across Soledad Street, so that the two divisions might communicate with each other. This was dangerous work, for the Mexicans kept a strict guard and fired every time a head was exposed to view. The trench was started at each end and was completed long before daybreak. While this was going on the Mexicans also dug a trench, hoping thereby to catch the Texans in a cross-fire, but the scheme failed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SURRENDER OF THE CITY.

"If only I was at liberty once again!"

Ralph had said this to himself over and over, as he sat on the hard wooden bench which served him both for a seat and a couch in the little stone cell which he occupied in the San Antonio lockup.

Several days had gone by, and no one had come to see the youth but his jailer, who delivered food twice a day, morning and afternoon. The jailer spoke nothing but Spanish, so communications between the two were limited.

Ralph often wondered what had become of Dan and the white mustang. Was his brother lost in the timber, or had he fallen in with the Indians?

There was a tiny window in the cell, high up over the couch. From this Ralph could get a slight view of the river and of a patch of sky, and that was all.

But one afternoon, when all was quiet, Ralph noticed a shadow at the window, and, gazing up, made out part of an Indian face stationed there. Quickly he stood on the bench.

"Big Foot,——" he began, when the Indian let out a low hiss of warning.

"Soldier hear Raf," said the Indian, in a whisper. "Me come to find you,—tell fadder and Good Dan would do dat."

"Father and Dan!" returned the boy. "Then they are together?"

"Yes, both in big army outside of dis place. Big Foot say he find Raf. Must go now. Maybe save Raf soon. You watch!"

And then the Indian disappeared as quickly as he had come. By some means known only to himself, he had found out where Ralph was located, and had watched for thirty hours on a stretch for a chance to communicate with the lad. He had caught a sentinel off guard, and had mounted to the window by means of a lariat thrown around one of the bars of the opening. As he leaped down, the sentinel turned in time to catch him winding up his lariat.

"What are you doing there?" demanded the Mexican.

"Indian squaw in dare?" asked Big Foot, meekly.

"No, we do not keep squaws here," answered the Mexican. "Begone, or I'll shoot you;" and then, as the Comanche loped off, he resumed his cigarette smoking.

The coming of Big Foot comforted Ralph greatly, for he now knew that Dan was with their father, and that both were in the army, outside of San Antonio. That night he slept soundly.

He awoke to hear loud firing, showing that a battle of some kind had started. The firing continued, and, before long, the lockup was struck by a cannon-ball, although little damage was done. The attack created a great confusion, and Ralph was left largely to himself.

At night, while the sounds of firing still kept up, Big Foot appeared, with both his lariat and a short iron bar. Mounting to the window, in the gloom, he called Ralph, and passed him the bar.

"Break window and drop out," he whispered. "Big Foot wait for you close to river."

He fell back, and with the bar Ralph set to work to liberate himself. The masonry of the window was old and loosened, and he soon had two of the bars out, leaving a space just large enough to admit of the passage of his body.

As he leaped into the window-opening, he heard voices in the corridor, outside of the cell. Then his jailer and a Mexican officer appeared at the cell door.

"Ha! he is escaping!" roared the jailer, in Spanish. "Stop!" And he ran to Ralph, to detain him, but the boy dropped to the court outside, and scampered off as fast as his feet would carry him.

An alarm at once sounded, and the cry arose that the prisoners throughout the jail were rising. This, of course, was not so, yet the excitement was great within the walls, and, for the minute, Ralph was allowed to depart unmolested.

In the darkness Big Foot joined him, and thrust into his hands a stout club. "Club much good, sometime," said the Comanche. "Knock down Mexican, maybe, if in way."

He led the way down one street and another, until the vicinity of the plaza was gained.

Suddenly, as they turned an alleyway, a volley from the Mexican garrison was fired.

"Run! run! or get shot!" shouted the Comanche, and then, as Ralph turned in one direction, the Indian turned in another, and, in a trice, they became separated in the darkness.

Ralph kept on running, he knew not where, only that he might escape the bullets, which appeared to be flying in all directions.

He could not go around by the plaza nor by the church, and so cut into a gloomy courtyard. Still running, he reached the stone wall of a house. A window was close at hand, and he leaped through this, to pitch headlong on the floor beyond, too exhausted to go another step.

As related before, the firing kept up all this night, and was renewed with vigour in the morning. In the meantime, the trench across the street had been completed, so that the two divisions were in communication with one another. It was fighting at close quarters, and San Antonio looked as if in the throes of a big riot.

The Texans had been trying to bring a twelve-pounder into position, but, so far, they had failed. Now, however, it was mounted at a commanding point, and fired several times, with fair effect. In the meantime, Deaf Smith and a party began to do some sharpshooting from the top of the vice-governor's residence, but the Mexicans drove them off, and Smith was severely wounded.

When Ralph came to himself, he found that he was in a room that was pitch-dark. From a distance came a hum of voices, and the steady blows of some blunt

instruments, probably axes or picks. The firing continued steadily.

He felt his way along from the room in which he found himself to the one adjoining. From this a stairs led upward, and he went to the upper floor. Here, from a window, he saw part of the fighting, and as the morning came, he saw still more.

The noise below kept on steadily, and as daylight advanced, the firing on all sides became almost incessant. In the midst of this, there came a loud hurrah, and a detachment of Texans, under Lieutenant W. McDonald, ran out into the street, and battered down the door of the very house where Ralph was in hiding.

"Hullo, a boy!" shouted one of the Texans, as he caught sight of Ralph. And then he continued, quickly, "By George! ain't you Amos Radbury's youngster?"

"I am," answered Ralph. "And you are Mr. Martin, from the Pecan Grove Ranch."

"Right, my lad. How in the world did you come here?"

"I just escaped from the lockup, and was trying to reach the Texan lines. Do you know anything of my father?"

"Do I? Why, he's in the house just below here, along with your brother. We came—— Back, or you'll be shot!"

Ralph retreated, and none too soon, for a second later several bullets entered the window and buried themselves in the wall opposite. The Mexicans were firing from several roofs in the neighbourhood. This fire was returned with such good interest that soon the Mexicans were as glad to get out of sight as those who opposed them.

Ralph wished to join his father and Dan without delay, but Mr. Martin held him back.

"Wait until dark," said the settler. "You are fairly safe here, and it would be foolhardy to expose yourself."

"Do you think we will win out?" asked the lad, anxiously.

"I do,—but it is going to be a tougher struggle than any of us expected."

On the morning of the third day of the attack matters were at first quiet, but then came a fierce fire by the Mexicans on the Texans' trench. The sharpshooters were called again to the front, and in an hour the enemy had stopped almost entirely.

"Here goes for another dash!" came the cry at noon, and sure enough another dash was led to a house still closer to the plaza, and the building was soon in the possession of the Texans. They were gaining their victory slowly but surely.

At evening Colonel Milam attempted to leave his own position to consult with Colonel Johnson, still at the Veramendi house. "You must be careful, colonel," came the warning, as the gallant fighter stood in the courtyard. The words had scarcely been spoken when a bullet took Milam in the head, killing him instantly.

The loss at this critical moment was a severe one, and the officers were called into hasty consultation, the result of which was that Colonel Johnson was placed at the head of the expedition.

The battle was now growing fiercer and fiercer, and, angered over the loss of Colonel Milam, the Texans forced their way to another house, which fronted the Military Plaza and was but a block from the Main Plaza.

"Down with the Mexicans! Hurrah for the liberty of Texas!" were the cries, and the Texans grew more enthusiastic than ever. In the midst of this uproar Ralph discovered his father and Dan at the doorway to one of the houses, and ran to join them.

"Ralph, my son!" cried Amos Radbury, and caught the lad to his breast, and Dan hugged his brother with a bear-like grip. "You are quite well?"

"Yes, father. But what a fight this is!"

"Yes, and it will be worse before it is over."

"Did you see Big Foot?" questioned Dan.

"Yes, he helped me to get out of prison."

There was no time just then to say more, for the Texans were fighting hotly, holding several houses and endeavouring to keep the Mexicans out of such buildings where they might have an advantage.

On the fourth day of the attack the Texans fought their way to what was called the Zambrano Row, which line of stone buildings reached to one end of the Main Plaza. "Let us get to the Main Plaza, and Cos will be done for!" was the cry.

From one house the Texans cut their way through the thick stone walls to the next, until at last the whole row was theirs, and the Mexicans were driven in every direction.

The Main Plaza could now be covered in part, but during the coming night the Texans captured still another building, called the Priest's House, which fronted directly on the great square. As soon as this was captured, the Texans barricaded doors and windows, and made of the house a regular fort.

"We've got 'em on the run," said more than one Texan, after the Priest's House had been barricaded, and this proved to be true. With both the Military Plaza and the Main Plaza swept by the fire of the enemy, the Mexicans knew not what to do. The citizens of the town were in a panic, and men, women, and children ran the streets as if insane. Then the cry went up in Spanish: "To the Alamo! To the Alamo!" and away went the civilians, some with their household effects on their backs. Seeing this, the Mexicans also withdrew, meaning at first to protect the inhabitants (which was unnecessary, for the Texans did not wish to molest them), and then to reorganise at the Alamo for an attack on General Burleson's camp. But at the Alamo things were in the utmost confusion, and before General Cos could call his troops together, some of them fled, making straight for the Rio Grande River.

This wound up the fighting, and it was not long before the Mexican general sent out a flag of truce, asking upon what terms the Texans would receive his surrender. The Texans were very lenient, and the matter was quickly settled. The loss to the Texans had been about thirty killed and wounded; the loss to the Mexicans was six or eight times greater.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MIDNIGHT DISCOVERY.

In view of what was to follow at Goliad, it will be well for us to look for a moment at the terms which the Texans made with General Cos at the time of the latter's surrender.

The Texans, having things all their own way, might have been very dictatorial in their demands, yet they agreed to allow General Cos and his officers to retain their arms and all of their private property. The Mexican soldiers were to return home or remain in Texas as they preferred, the convicts which had been pressed into the service were to be conducted across the Rio Grande River under guard, and the sick and wounded were to be left to the care of the Texans. On his retreat General Cos took with him over eleven hundred men, many of whom were armed against a possible attack by the Indians.

"I think he is getting off easy," observed Dan, when it became known under what conditions the Mexican commander was leaving. "I don't believe he would be so considerate with us."

"Not by a long shot," put in Poke Stover. "He'd be for treating us wuss nor prairie-dogs."

"Well, it is always best to be considerate," said Amos Radbury. "It may be the means of bringing this contest to a happier conclusion."

"Well, we're going to keep the regular muskets and army stores, aren't we?" asked Ralph.

"Yes, all public property comes to Texas," said his father.

General Cos left San Antonio on the 14th of December, and on the following

day General Burleson resigned from the Texan army, and a good many of the volunteers went home, to learn how matters were progressing for the winter. On all sides it was felt that no other movement of importance would occur for some time to come, for, in those days in Texas, there were no railroads to carry an army wherever wanted, and the distance from San Antonio to the lower Rio Grande River was a distance of several hundred miles.

"We may as well go home, too, boys," said Lieutenant Radbury, two days after his commander had resigned. "I am anxious to know how Pompey is getting along."

"What of the white mustang?" questioned Dan.

"I reckon we will have to let the white mustang take care of himself,—at least for the present," smiled Amos Radbury.

It was decided that Poke Stover, who had become very much attached to the Radburys, should accompany them, and, a few days later, they set out for the ranch on the Guadalupe by way of Gonzales.

The stop at Gonzales was made to see what had been done with Hank Stiger.

"He must not be given his liberty until he confesses what he has done with my claim papers," said Amos Radbury.

The ride to Gonzales was made without special incident, but along the whole of the road it was seen that the people were aroused to the highest pitch. Everybody wondered what Mexico would do next.

It was a bitter cold day when Gonzales was reached, and it looked as if the first norther of the season was at hand.

"You're too late," said one of the citizens, to Amos Radbury, as they rode up to the lockup.

"Too late?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?" asked Dan.

"You're after that Hank Stiger, I take it?"

"We are."

"He skipped out, day before yesterday."

"Broke jail?"

"Well, not exactly that, Radbury. Louis Reemer was a-watching of him, and Louis got drunk and left the jail door unlocked, and——"

"And Stiger walked out, I suppose," finished Lieutenant Radbury, bitterly.

"We allow as how he run out—an' putty quick-like, too."

"Did anybody make a hunt for him?"

"To be sure. But he had two or three hours the start of us, and so we couldn't find his trail."

"Reemer ought to be locked up himself."

"We ducked him in the horse-trough. But he wasn't so much to blame, after all. We had a jollification because of the capture of Bexar, and a good many of the men weren't jest as straight as they might be."

With a heavy heart, Amos Radbury rode down to the jail. But Reemer was away, and a new man had taken his place,—a man who knew absolutely nothing concerning the half-breed who had gotten away thus easily.

"We may as well go home," said the lieutenant.

"I would like to see Henry Parker first," said Dan, and received permission to take a run to Henry's house, while his father did some necessary trading.

Dan found Henry Parker as well as ever, and hard at work preparing for the winter, for his father could do but little. Henry was deeply interested in the particulars of the attack on San Antonio.

"I wish I had been there," he cried. "But I am going when the army reorganises; mother and father have promised it."

"There wasn't much fun in it," said Dan, soberly. "It was real hard fighting from start to finish. The fellows who went in for a mere dust-up got left."

"Oh, I know war is no play, Dan. But I mean to do my duty by Texas, and that is all there is to it," concluded Henry Parker.

Early the next morning the party of four began the journey up the river to the ranch home. It was still cloudy, and Ralph declared that he saw a number of snowflakes come down, but the others were not so sure of this. Yet the weather was dismal enough.

"We are going to have a pretty heavy winter for this section," said Amos Radbury,—and the prediction proved a true one.

As they journeyed along, the wind swept mournfully through the pines and pecans, but not once did they catch sight of any wild animal, outside of a few squirrels and hares. Some of these Poke Stover brought down, "jest to keep his hand in," as he declared.

While yet they were a long distance off, Pompey saw them coming and ran forward to meet them.

"Bless de Lawd yo' is all safe!" he cried. "I dun fink one or de udder of yo' been shot suah!" And he shook hands with his master and fairly embraced the boys.

"And how have you been, Pompey?" asked Amos Radbury.

"I'se been all right, Mars' Radbury. Had quite a job 'tendin' to fings alone, but I'se dun gwine an' done it, neberdeless, sah. But las' night I'se dun got scared, mars'," and Pompey rolled his eyes mysteriously.

"Got scared? At what?"

"A man, sah, wot was a-creepin' around de ranch, sah, peepin' in de doah an' de winders, sah."

"A man?"

"Hank Stiger, I'll wager a dollar!" cried Dan.

"It must have been that fellow," added Ralph.

"What became of the man, Pompey?" went on Mr. Radbury.

"I can't say as to dat, sah. As soon as I dun spot him, sah, I got de gun, an' he run away like de Old Boy was after him, sah."

Asked to describe the stranger, Pompey gave a fairly good description of him, and this fitted Hank Stiger exactly.

"He is around for no good purpose," said Amos Radbury. "Are all of the mustangs safe?"

"Yes, sah. I'se dun watch dem de whole night, sah."

"We must keep a watch to-night, too, and to-morrow we can go on a hunt and see if he is hiding anywhere near."

In honour of the home-coming, Pompey, as tired as he was, spread a generous table, and all sat around this for several hours, eating, drinking, and discussing the situation. The Radburys were glad Poke Stover had accompanied them, for now the frontiersman could help keep guard against the half-breed, should the latter mean mischief.

The next day proved so stormy and cold that the boys were glad to remain indoors. It did not snow, but the rain was a half hail and the wind was of the kind that reaches one's marrow. Only Amos Radbury and Poke Stover went out, to the cattle shed and the nearest range, and they were glad enough to come in long before evening.

"Hank Stiger won't stir around much in this weather," observed Mr. Radbury, as he shook the water from his greatcoat. "He's too much afraid of himself."

"Yes, but he'll want shelter somewhere," said Ralph.

"Perhaps he has gone after the Comanches," said Dan. "He may have been just on a journey when Pompey saw him."

So the talk ran on, but nothing came of it. That night, completely tired out, all retired early. Just before he went to bed Dan looked out of the window and saw that it was clearing off, and that the stars were trying to break through the clouds.

Down in a corner of the cattle shed rested a small keg of powder which Amos Radbury had brought home from Gonzales, for his stock of this article had run low. As Dan lay in bed he could not get this keg of powder out of his head.

"I hope it didn't get wet," he thought. "But surely father must have covered it up with great care."

For thinking of the keg, Dan could not get to sleep, and at last he arose and walked out into the living-apartment of the cabin. Here, in the middle of the floor, he came to a sudden standstill, as a noise outside reached his ears.

What the noise came from he could not determine. First there was a slight bump, and then a rolling sound, and then he heard a scratching, as of steel upon flint.

"I'm going to investigate this," he said to himself, and, catching up his gun, he ran to the door and threw it open.

What he saw surprised him beyond measure. There, in the darkness, stood Hank Stiger. The half-breed had a bit of lighted tinder in his hand, and at his feet lay the keg of powder with a long fuse attached to the open bung-hole!

CHAPTER XXV.

MARCH OF SANTA ANNA INTO TEXAS.

"You rascal! Get back, or I'll shoot!"

'YOU RASCAL! GET BACK, OR I'LL SHOOT!'

""YOU RASCAL! GET BACK, OR I'LL SHOOT!""

Such were the words which burst from Dan's lips as soon as he recovered sufficiently from his surprise to speak.

But Hank Stiger was already retreating, carrying the lighted tinder in his hand. He could not make out who was there, but saw it was somebody with a gun, and the sight of the weapon was enough for him.

"What's up?" came from Poke Stover, who had been snoring in the corner, and the old frontiersman scrambled to his feet and joined Dan at the doorway.

"There goes Hank Stiger! He was going to blow up the cabin with our keg of gunpowder."

"Can it be possible! I'll stop him." Stover ran outside. "Stop, Hank Stiger, or you're a dead man!" he called out, loudly.

But the half-breed was now running like a deer and paid no attention to the words. Taking hasty but careful aim at Stiger's legs, Poke Stover pulled the trigger of his gun.

The report, which awakened all of the others, was followed by a scream of pain from the half-breed, who went a step or two more and then sank in a heap.

"What does this mean?" demanded Amos Radbury, as he, too, seized his gun. "Are we attacked by Indians?"

"No, we were attacked by Hank Stiger," answered Dan, and pointed to the keg of powder.

"My powder! What was he going to do with that?"

"Blow us all sky-high."

"And you saw him?"

"Yes, I caught him in the act of lighting the fuse lying there."

"But how came you to be up?"

"I was restless,—thinking about the keg and other things."

"It must have been an act of Providence," murmured Amos Radbury. "Who fired the shot?"

"Poke Stover. He has gone after Stiger," concluded Dan.

All ran out of the cabin, and found the frontiersman and the half-breed at the edge of the clearing. Hank Stiger had been struck in the knee and was evidently suffering great pain, for after screaming for awhile he fell back in a dead faint.

Stover and Pompey were for leaving him where he had fallen, but neither Amos Radbury nor his sons had the heart to do this, and in the end the half-breed was carried to the cattle shed and put in the corner from whence he had removed the powder. All were anxious to question him about his actions, but the wounded man was in no condition to talk.

"After this I'll put this powder in a safer place," said Mr. Radbury, and stored it in a corner of the dugout, under the living-room.

Hank Stiger's wound was dressed, and then Pompey was set to watch him for the remainder of the night. The negro was given a pistol and was instructed to discharge it at the first intimation of danger of any kind.

But the balance of the night passed quietly, and toward morning Dan got into a sound sleep, from which he did not awaken until long after the others were up.

After breakfast Amos Radbury started to question Hank Stiger. He found the half-breed resting easily, but in a sullen mood. At first he utterly refused to talk.

"Very well," said Mr. Radbury. "If you won't talk, neither shall you eat nor drink."

"Then take me back to the Gonzales lockup," muttered Stiger.

"We will,—when we have the time. At present we have other matters to attend to."

Left once more in charge of Pompey, the half-breed flew into a rage and muttered all sorts of imprecations against those who had outwitted him. Then, as the day wore on, he calmed down, and tried to bribe the coloured man into giving him something to eat and to drink.

Pompey was obdurate. "Can't do it, nohow," he said. "It's ag'in Mars' Radbury's ordahs, sah."

A wounded man always craves water, and by one o'clock in the afternoon the half-breed's tongue was fairly lolling out of his mouth. He stood it awhile longer, then summoned Pompey.

"Give me a drink,—I am dyin'."

"I dun tole you dat it was ag'in the massah's ordahs, sah."

"He said I could have water if I would talk," growled Stiger.

"Is yo' ready to talk?"

"Yes."

At once the negro called his master, who was busy, with the boys and Poke Stover, in putting down some hog-meat for the winter. Knowing how greatly Stiger must suffer, Amos Radbury went to him without delay.

"So you are willing to talk now, Stiger?"

"How can I help myself?"

"Then tell me why you tried to blow up my cabin?"

"I wanted to git squar' fer havin' me locked up."

"But you deserved to be locked up, after that attack on Dan and Henry Parker."

At this the half-breed shrugged his shoulders.

"And you must remember perfectly well what you did before that," continued Amos Radbury.

"I didn't get Bison Head to attack you,—he did that on his own account."

"But you came in afterward and robbed the place. It is useless for you to deny any longer that you took those papers relating to this grant of land."

For several minutes Stiger was silent. At last he lifted his eyes.

"Are you goin' to give me dat drink?" he asked, falling back into his Indian accent.

"Yes,—if you'll promise to tell me about the papers."

"I—I will."

Pompey was at once sent for a pitcher of fresh water, and when it arrived Hank Stiger grabbed it with both hands and drained it dry. Nectar could not have tasted sweeter to him.

"Now what did you do with the papers?" Amos Radbury asked, after Stiger had given a long sigh of satisfaction.

"I—I lost 'em."

Instantly Amos Radbury's face flushed, and he sprang to his feet.

"Stiger, you are falsifying! I do not believe you!" he exclaimed.

"It's de truf."

"It is not. You have either hidden the papers or else given them to somebody."

At this the half-breed shrugged his shoulders again.

"You cannot deceive me longer," went on the settler. "By and by you will want food and more water. You shall have neither."

"Goin' ter starve me to death?"

"It will be your own fault. I am now treating you with more kindness than you deserve. Many a man would have strung you up to the nearest tree for your misdeeds."

At this Hank Stiger winced, for he knew only too well that Mr. Radbury spoke the truth. He felt that he could not go too far or he might get into deeper trouble.

"I'll tell yer all," he said at last. "But give me somethin' to eat first."

"Not a mouthful until you have told your story. Then you can have all the food and water you wish, and we'll try to make you as comfortable as we can."

This was the straw which broke the camel's back, so far as Hank Stiger was concerned, and with much hesitation he told his story, which in substance was as follows:

About six months before, he had fallen in with a man of mixed American and Spanish blood named Carlos Martine, who was anxious to obtain possession of a large grant of land on the Guadalupe from the Radbury claim northward.

Carlos Martine was in league with a number of Mexican officials, and had obtained ownership of a large portion of the land without much difficulty. But the best of the land, that fronting the river, belonged to Amos Radbury, and this Martine could not obtain, although he tried to do so through a certain John Morgan. Morgan had asked Mr. Radbury to sell several times, but had been refused.

Carlos Martine had had a hold on Hank Stiger, and during the Indian raid had asked the half-breed to obtain possession of the papers relating to the land, if they could be found in the Radbury cabin. What Martine was going to do with the papers Stiger did not know.

Having obtained the papers, Hank Stiger had gone off to Gonzales with them. From there he had journeyed to Goliad, and there met Carlos Martine. The latter had promised him twenty dollars, Mexican money, for the documents, but at the time of the meeting the half-breed had been so intoxicated that he could not

remember whether he received the cash or not. Certainly, when he had sobered up, two days later, every cent of the money was missing.

"And have you seen Carlos Martine since?" questioned Amos Radbury.

"No."

"Then you do not know where he is?"

Once more Hank Stiger shrugged his shoulders. "I think he got afraid and went to Mexico. A good many people around Gonzales do not like him, and I think he was afraid I would expose him," he ventured.

Amos Radbury questioned the half-breed, and at last concluded that the story must be largely true. This being so, he ordered Pompey to fetch some more water and prepare such a meal as might be good for the sick man. The planter had had considerable experience at doctoring, and he attended to the wounded knee with almost as much skill as a surgeon.

As Carlos Martine was out of reach, nothing could at present be done toward getting back the missing documents.

"But I shall fortify myself as much as possible," said Amos Radbury; and on the following day he wrote down Hank Stiger's confession in full, made the half-breed sign it with his mark, and had Poke Stover witness the paper.

"Thet might not hold with the Mexican government," drawled the old frontiersman, "but I calkerlate 'twill hold with the government o' this free an' enlightened State o' Texas, hear me!" And at this the others had to laugh.

The holidays came and went, and nothing of more than ordinary interest happened at the ranch. It was at times bitter cold, the sweeping "northers," as they are called, hurling themselves over Texas with great fury. During those times everybody remained indoors hugging the fire. Hank Stiger still kept to his couch at the cattle shed, and was provided regularly with all that he needed to eat and drink. If the truth must be told, the half-breed was thankful that he had such a comfortable home for the time being, knowing it was much better than any the Indians could offer him, or better than he would get at the Gonzales lockup.

In the meantime, matters politically were in a very mixed-up state throughout Texas. The majority of the settlers were for liberty, but some, while wishing

State rights, still thought it best to remain in the Mexican Confederation, while others wanted annexation to the United States without delay.

Many meetings were held, but this only increased the confusion, and though a portion of the Texans set up a provisional government, others continued to act largely on their own responsibility. There were many wrangles and, to look back, it is a great wonder that anarchy did not reign supreme. But it is a satisfaction to know that, in the end, law and order conquered. With the political troubles our tale has nothing to do.

While the Texans were speculating upon what to do next, Santa Anna, in Mexico, was not idle. At the head of a party peculiarly his own, he had cut off many of the rights of the Mexican citizens, and made himself virtually a dictator, although still called simply the president. This accomplished, he set out to subdue Texas, the only spot where his authority was resisted.

Santa Anna had sent out a small command to relieve General Cos at San Antonio. The two forces met at the Rio Grande River, and there waited for further orders. Early in February, General Santa Anna came up to Monova with about four thousand troops. These soldiers were joined by those on the Rio Grande, thus increasing the Mexican army to about seven thousand.

The order now came for a direct advance upon San Antonio, and the army set off on its wearisome journey of about six hundred miles over a plain which was hardly protected by any timber from the cutting winter winds. Slow progress was made, and, food falling short, the whole army had to be put on short rations. Some of the soldiers tried to desert, but these were promptly shot by Santa Anna's orders. Whenever a settlement was passed, the inhabitants were made to give the hungry Mexicans all the provisions they could possibly spare. Once the whole army came close to open rebellion, but Santa Anna's orders were supreme, and on the 22d day of February, 1836, the first of his troops appeared within sight of San Antonio; and the war, which had hung fire since the December before, was again begun.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WILD TURKEYS AND ANOTHER TRAIL.

One day, early in February, Amos Radbury came riding back from a trip to Gonzales with news that he had heard from Carlos Martine.

"The man has been at San Felipe," he declared, "and I have it on good authority that he intends to claim my land."

"Well, what are ye going to do?" queried Poke Stover, who was still at the ranch.

"I hardly know. But I wish I could have a talk with Martine. It might be the means of saving a good deal of trouble."

"Is Martine still at San Felipe?"

"No, Gusher told me that he had gone to San Antonio."

"Then why not take a trip to San Antonio and find him?" suggested the old frontiersman. "I reckon that is what I would do."

"I think you are right, Poke, and I'll start tomorrow," answered the planter.

He went in to talk the matter over with his sons, and the land claim was the chief topic of conversation for the balance of the evening.

"I now wish I had kept Hank Stiger here," said Mr. Radbury. The half-breed had left the ranch but three days before, apparently very grateful for the manner in which he had been treated.

"Well, one thing is certain," declared Dan, "I don't stand for giving up the claim. I'll fight first. Those Mexican officials can do as they please, but they

can't budge me."

"Good fer Dan!" shouted Stover. "He's the kind the State o' Texas will want in days to come."

On the next day Mr. Radbury was too busy to think of leaving the ranch. There was much work at the cattle shed, part of which had been blown down by a norther which had proved little less than a hurricane.

In working upon the shed the planter had a mishap. The rung of a short ladder broke beneath his weight, and he came down flat on his back. No bones were broken, but he was hurt otherwise, and decided that it would be best for him to keep off his horse for a week or ten days.

He was apparently much worried to think he could not see Carlos Martine, and, noticing this, Dan went to him, and asked if he could not do the errand.

"You, Dan!"

"Yes, father. I know you think I am but a boy, yet——"

"No, my son," interposed Mr. Radbury. "I used to think you were but a boy, but, since you showed your fighting qualities at Bexar, I have changed my mind. You are but a boy in years."

"Then let me go and see if I can hunt up this Carlos Martine. I can at least have a talk with him, and learn how matters stand."

Amos Radbury shook his head, but in the end he consented to let Dan go, providing Poke Stover would accompany him on the trip. The old frontiersman was willing, and early on the following morning the pair set off on their mustangs, each carrying his gun, which was now a custom with all of the settlers.

In those days there were two main trails, or wagon roads, crossing the Guadalupe River. The lower trail was the one running through San Felipe, Gonzales, and San Antonio, and this could very properly be termed the main highway of Texas. From fifty to a hundred miles north of this was the trail running through Nacogdoches, and across a hilly and uncultivated territory to San Antonio and the Rio Grande. At San Antonio the two trails came together in the form of the letter V, and in the notch thus formed stood the Franciscan

Mission, commonly called the Alamo, which means the cottonwood-tree. Of this mission, which was to be so bravely defended, we will soon learn many interesting details.

The Radburys usually rode to San Antonio by way of Gonzales, but Dan and Poke Stover decided to ride through the timber lands to the northwest until the upper trail was gained. This way might be a trifle rougher, but it was no longer, and the trees along the upper trail would serve to break the force of the northers which were continually sweeping the face of the country.

The two set off in high spirits, each with his saddle-bags well stocked with provisions, and each well armed.

"Who knows but what we may meet some Indians on the way?" said Dan.

"I doubt if the Indians are active now," replied the old frontiersman. "They have had some pretty good lessons lately, and, besides, they know that all of the settlers are arming against the Mexicans, and are, consequently, ready for them."

"Do you know why I came this way?" went on Dan, after a pause.

"I didn't calkerlate you had any perticklar reason, Dan."

"I have an idea we can run across that white mustang father lost."

"Humph! That nag may be miles an' miles away from this deestrick."

"That is true. But yesterday, when I rode up to the edge of this timber, I caught sight of something that looked very much like the white mustang."

"You did! Then why didn't you say so afore?"

"I didn't want to worry father. I thought I would tell you,—when we got out,—and I've done it," added Dan.

"Where did ye spot the critter?"

"Right over to the left, near that fallen pine. But I'm not sure it was the white mustang. But it was some creature in white."

"If it wasn't the mustang, it couldn't be anything else. There are no other white critters here,—'ceptin' it might be a silver deer, and they are as scarce as

snowstorms in July."

They were now in the timber, and moving along at a steady gait. On all sides the ground was as hard as a rock, and the keen air was bracing to the last degree. A stiff breeze was blowing, swaying the branches overhead, and occasionally bringing down a belated nut on their heads.

By noon they calculated that they had covered eighteen miles, which was not bad, considering the nature of the ground they had traversed. With the rising of the sun it grew warmer, and, seeking a sheltered spot, they dismounted and partook of their midday meal. They had still twenty-six miles to go, but hoped to cover that distance before nightfall.

"I wonder how the garrison at San Antonio is making out," said Dan, as they sat eating.

"Like as not a good many of the soldiers went home for Christmas," returned Stover. "To my mind, it's a great pity that Sam Houston ain't succeeded in organising the army as he intended. He seems to be the only leader who thinks that Santa Anna will come over here with a big force to knock the spots out of us. All the others are quarrelling over politics and places."

"I don't think it's quite as bad as that," laughed Dan. "But it seems to me they ought to get an army together."

"The leaders ought to act in concert, Dan. If they don't, their soldiers are licked afore they go into battle," remarked the old frontiersman, sagely. "What Texas needs most of all is one first-class leader, whom all obey." And in this speech Stover came very near to telling the exact truth.

The meal finished, they were soon in the saddle again, and less than an hour later they came upon the trail leading directly into San Antonio. There was a hill of rocks on one side and a belt of timber on the other, with here and there a water-course to be crossed.

So far, nothing had been seen of any game but a deer that was too far away to be brought down, and a few hares, which neither took the trouble to shoot. But now Poke Stover called attention to a flock of wild turkeys resting along the rocks not a hundred yards distant.

"A fine shot, Dan!" he whispered. "We can make a good trade with 'em, down in Bexar."

"That's so," answered the boy. "I'm ready to shoot when you are."

"Let us go into the timber, and come up in front of 'em," suggested the old frontiersman. "The rocks kind o' hide 'em from this p'int."

They dismounted and tied their mustangs to a tree. Then, with guns ready for use, they crept off in a semicircle, coming up to within sixty yards of the turkeys before they were discovered.

"Fire!" cried Stover, and bang! bang! went the two guns, one directly after the other. They had loaded with large shot, and five turkeys fell, two killed outright and the others badly wounded. Rushing in, Stover quickly caught the wounded ones and wrung their necks.

**'THAT'S WHAT I CALL A PRETTY GOOD HAUL!' CRIED DAN,
ENTHUSIASTICALLY.**

**""THAT'S WHAT I CALL A PRETTY GOOD HAUL!' CRIED DAN,
ENTHUSIASTICALLY."**

"That's what I call a pretty good haul," cried Dan, enthusiastically.

"It's not bad, lad, although I've seen better. I wish I could have gotten a second shot at 'em. We might have——" The old frontiersman broke off short. "What's that?"

"It's a horse's hoofs on the trail," answered Dan. "Somebody is coming this way."

He ran out of the bushes into which the wild turkeys had fallen, and gazed along the road. Just above was a curve, and around this came sweeping something which caused his heart to bound with delight.

It was the white mustang.

"By hookey!" came from Poke Stover. "It's him, eh, Dan?"

"Yes. Oh, if only I had my lasso!" For that article was attached to the saddle of the mustang in the timber. Dan was on the point of crossing the trail when Stover caught him by the arm.

"Don't scare the pony——" began the frontiersman, but he was too late. The white mustang had caught sight of Dan and he came to a halt instantly. Then he reared and plunged and swept by, and the last they saw of him, he was running toward San Antonio at the top of his speed.

"We've seen him,—and that's all the good it will do us," remarked Poke Stover, as Dan gazed blankly up the road, and then at his companion.

"Can't we catch him, Poke? Oh, we must!"

"Might as well try to catch a streak o' greased lightning, lad."

"I don't know about that. He looked tired, as if he had been running a long while."

"You are sure on that? I didn't git no fair view of the critter."

"Yes, he was covered with sweat. Perhaps somebody else has been following him."

"Well, it won't do no harm to go after him,—seein' as how he is steerin' in our direction," said the old frontiersman, and, picking up the dead turkeys, they ran for their mustangs and leaped into the saddles.

Several miles were covered, and they were on the point of giving up the chase when they encountered a settler with his prairie schooner, or big covered wagon, on his way to Guadalupe.

"Ye-as, I seen thet air white critter jest below yere," the settler drawled. "He war goin' 'bout fifteen miles an hour, I reckoned. Looked tired. I wanted to go arfter him, but Susy, she wouldn't allow it."

"No, Sam Dickson, ye sha'n't go arfter no game or sech," came from the interior of the schooner. "Ye'll settle down an' go ter farmin', an' the sooner the better 'twill be fer yer hide, mind me!" And the dark, forbidding face of a woman, some years older than the man, appeared from behind the dirty flaps of the wagon-covering. At once the settler cracked his whip and drove on.

Poke Stover chuckled to himself. "Thar's married life fer ye, Dan," he remarked. "Do ye wonder I'm a single man?"

"My mother wasn't of that kind," answered the youth, and then Stover abruptly changed the subject, and away they galloped again after the white mustang, little dreaming of the trouble into which that chase was to lead them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MEXICAN ARMY AT SAN ANTONIO.

The day was almost spent when, from a slight hill, they came in sight of San Antonio, the setting sun gilding the tops of the church steeples, and making the sluggish river appear like a stream of gold.

"No white mustang yet," said Dan. "I reckon we might as well give up the chase and go right into the city."

"Not yet!" cried Poke Stover, pointing with his hand to the northwestward. "Thar ye are, Dan!"

Dan looked in the direction, and in a patch of cottonwoods made out a white object, moving slowly along. It was the mustang they were after, so tired out that he could scarcely move from one spot to the next.

"We've got him now!" ejaculated the youth, enthusiastically. "And just as I was ready to give up, too! Come on!"

Away he swept, with all the quickness of which his own wearied steed was capable, and Poke Stover followed him. The white mustang saw them coming, and set off into the timber on a feeble run.

The course of the pursued creature was around the northern approach to San Antonio and then toward the Medina River. Many times they thought to give up the chase, but then the white mustang seemed so near and so ready to drop that they kept on until the river bank was gained. Here the mustang disappeared into a pine brake; and it may be as well to add, right here, that neither the Radburys nor Poke Stover ever saw him again.

"Where is he?" asked Dan, a few minutes after the animal had disappeared.

"Do you think he leaped into the water?"

"I heard a splash," answered the old frontiersman. "There it goes again." He tried to pierce the darkness with his eyes. "There is something over yonder, that — Whoopee, Dan, look!"

There was no need for Poke Stover to call the boy's attention to what was on the other side of the Medina, for Dan was already looking, "with all eyes," as the saying is. He had made out a number of Mexican cavalymen, moving up and down along the west bank, and now he noted two pieces of artillery, which the cannoneers were trying to run out on two rafts moored close at hand.

"The Mexican army, as sure as you are born!" cried Stover, in an excited whisper. "Lad, we have made an important discovery. They must be bound for Bexar!"

"Yes, and there are thousands of them," answered Dan. His heart was beating so rapidly that he could scarcely speak. "Poke, what had we best do?"

"Find out what their game is, first, and then ride back to Bexar as fast as our mustangs can make it. If the garrison isn't warned, there will surely be a great slaughter."

There was a stiff norther blowing, making the swollen stream rough and dangerous to cross, and the Mexicans were consulting among themselves as to how they should proceed. With bated breath, the boy and the old frontiersman watched every movement, and, at the same time, tried to figure up mentally how many Mexicans there were.

"At least a thousand," said Poke Stover, but, as we know, he was mistaken; the force of the enemy numbered nearly seven times that many, although, to be sure, they were not all in that immediate vicinity.

"We will cross the river and investigate," said one of the officers, presently, and a large flat-bottomed boat was brought around and a dozen soldiers leaped into it.

"We had better get out now," whispered Poke Stover, and turned his pony to ride away from the river bank.

"Halt! Who goes?" came the cry, in Spanish, from one of the Mexican guards.

"We are discovered," whispered Dan. "Come on!"

He turned away from the river bank and dove straight into the pine brake. Then came a shot of warning, but the Mexican fired high, not daring to take aim for fear of hitting a friend.

The shot caused a commotion, and soon Dan and Stover felt that they were being followed. They tried to make their mustangs move on a run, but the animals could not be urged farther.

"They will catch us, sure," gasped the boy, as the steps of the enemy sounded nearer and nearer. "What shall we do?"

"Move to the right, and we'll see if we can't throw them off the trail," answered Poke Stover.

To the right there was a slight hollow, filled with mesquite-trees and bushes, and beyond this was a sandy plain covered with cacti. But of the latter both were ignorant.

Down into the hollow they dove, their horses glad enough of the chance to get a drink at the pool among the bushes. Under the mesquite-trees they halted, and Stover went back to reconnoitre.

The scout was gone for fully quarter of an hour, and came back chuckling softly to himself.

"We threw 'em nicely," he said. "We are safe now, providin' we don't make too much noise."

"Then let us go on, Poke. We must carry the news to Bexar."

"It's funny there are no scouts around," was the old frontiersman's comment. "They ought to be on the watch." But none of the Texan soldiers were on guard, the greater portion of them being in attendance at a Mexican fandango in the town, never suspecting the attack so close at hand. Santa Anna heard of this fandango, and would have pushed forward to capture San Antonio at once, but could not get his army across the Medina River.

Leaving the pool, Dan and the frontiersman ascended to the plain, and presently found themselves among the cacti. This was anything but pleasant, and

they had to pick their way with great care in the darkness, and even then their steeds often refused to budge, so prickly were the plants. It was almost morning when they arrived in sight of the *jacals*, or huts, which dotted the outskirts of the city.

The pair at once sought out the commander of the garrison, Lieutenant-Colonel William B. Travis, who was still sleeping. Travis was a dashing young soldier of twenty-eight, a lawyer by profession, and a native of North Carolina. The commander was "red-hot" for independence, and one who never gave up, as we shall soon see.

"So you wish to see me," he said to Stover, whom he had met before. "It's rather an early visit."

"I have to report that a large body of Mexicans are approaching the town," answered the old frontiersman, saluting in true military style. "Young Radbury here and myself were down along the Medina, when we spotted them trying to bring a couple of cannon over on a raft."

"Mexican soldiers?" exclaimed the lieutenant-colonel. "You are certain of this?"

"We are."

"How many of them do you think?"

"At least a thousand."

The commander knit his brows in perplexity. "It is odd none of my scouts have brought me word. But a fandango——" He broke off short, as another officer came in. "What is it, Chester?"

"It is reported that some Mexican dragoons are in the vicinity, colonel."

"These people here tell me a whole army is coming. Where did your report come from?"

"The church steeple. The dragoons are in the vicinity of Prospect Hill," went on the officer, mentioning a hill to the west of San Antonio.

"I must have the particulars of this without delay," said the commander, hurriedly; and while he questioned Stover and Dan he sent for several scouts,

who were hurried off to verify the reports. When the scouts came back, they reported that Santa Anna's army was coming straight for San Antonio, several thousand strong.

The whole city was at once thrown into a commotion, and it was felt that the garrison could do little or nothing toward defending the place.

"We are but a hundred and forty odd strong," said Lieutenant A. M. Dickenson, one of the attachees of the garrison. "We cannot hold the plaza, no matter how hard we try. Let us retreat to the Alamo, until we can summon reinforcements."

The matter was hastily discussed, and it was decided to retreat to the Alamo without delay. Later on, express riders were sent off for help,—but help never came for those who fought so nobly and bitterly to the very last.

The retreat from the town to the mission was necessarily a rapid one, for Santa Anna was advancing with all possible speed. Few stores could be taken along, but as the garrison swept across the plain lying between the city and the mission, they came upon a herd of cattle, numbering thirty-six heads, and drove these before them into the mission's courtyard.

"Let us go with the soldiers!" cried Dan, who was as excited as anybody. "If there is a battle ahead it will be all foolishness to attempt to look for Carlos Martine."

"Well, lad, I'm willing," replied Stover. "But I don't want to get you into trouble."

"I'll risk the trouble, Poke; come on," and on they went after the garrison. It was not long before they reached the soldiers, who were just rounding up the cattle mentioned, and in this operation the two assisted.

It was felt that the soldiers might be besieged in the Alamo for quite some time, so as soon as the cattle were rounded up some of the men visited the near-by houses, and collected all the stores at hand, including a number of bushels of wheat and some dried fruits.

In the meantime Santa Anna's army had marched into San Antonio, and taken possession. This done, the general held a consultation with his leading officers, and sent out a flag of truce toward the mission.

"Flag of truce," announced one of the guards.

"Very well, we'll see what they demand," said Lieutenant-Colonel Travis, and despatched Major Morris and Captain Marten to hold the interview.

"General Santa Anna demands the immediate surrender of the mission," said the official sent out by the Mexican president.

"We will convey your message to our commander," replied the major of the Texans, and withdrew.

Travis received the message with all the quiet dignity for which he was noted.

"I will send him his answer at once," he replied, and ordered a cannon-shot to be fired over the heads of the Mexican army.

This threw the Mexicans into a rage, and they quickly hung a blood-red flag from the tower of the San Fernando Church in San Antonio. This flag meant "no quarter," and, as it went up, several cannon-shots were aimed at the Alamo; and thus was the battle begun.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITHIN THE WALLS OF THE MISSION.

The Alamo church, the principal building of the mission, was built in the form of a cross, of rough stone, with walls several feet thick. At the time of the battle which was to witness its downfall the centre of the structure was roofless, but the ends were well covered. The sides of the church were over twenty feet high, and the windows were exceedingly narrow, for the building had been built to resist attacks by the Indians. It faced both the river and San Antonio proper.

Attached to the left wing of the church was a large square called the convent yard, with walls of heavy stone sixteen feet high. Spread out in front of this yard, and beyond it, was the convent, two stories high, and nearly two hundred feet long. In front of the convent was a long and broad plaza, covering over two acres, and surrounded by walls at either end and by the convent in the rear, and a house and wall in the front. On the right of the plaza was a small prison and a gateway, and from the corner of the prison there was a stockade of cedar logs extending to the nearest corner of the church.

For this extensive fortress, if such we may call it, Lieutenant Travis had less than twenty cannon, and the construction of the place was such that but few of the pieces could be placed to advantage, and even then hardly any of the soldiers knew how to do any effective firing.

Next in command to Travis was Colonel James Bowie, already mentioned in these pages, and among the best of the fighters was Davy Crockett, celebrated as a hunter and trapper, who had come down to Texas, with twelve other Tennesseans, about three weeks before the arrival of Santa Anna. Crockett carried with him his favourite rifle, "Betsy," and as a fighter on this memorable occasion proved a whole host in himself.

"We'll whip 'em," said Crockett, confidently. "They can't stand up against real Americans."

"You're right, Davy," answered Bowie. "An American who isn't equal to a dozen greasers isn't fit to live." And so the talk ran on from one to another of the garrison. Once Crockett came to Dan, and eyed him curiously.

"You're rather a young soldier boy," he observed.

"Yes, sir, but I can shoot."

"Can you bring down a bird on the wing?"

"Yes, he can, and he has done it lots of times," put in Poke Stover.

"If that's so, he's all right," said Crockett.

Santa Anna did not make an immediate attack on the Alamo, for the reason that all of his troops had not yet arrived, and because he wished to give his soldiers a little rest after the long journey northward. He ordered General Castrillon to knock down some of the old houses near the river, and construct a bridge with the timbers.

"They are going to build a bridge!" was the cry that went through the Alamo.

"A bridge? Where?" asked Crockett, and, when told, he smiled, and patted his rifle. "Let 'em try it!"

The Mexicans did try, and soon a detachment of at least a hundred were at work. About forty of the garrison, led by Bowie and Crockett, opened fire upon the workers, and at least a dozen were killed.

"Down they go!" was the cry. "Give 'em another round!" And again the rifles cracked at a lively rate. With thirty killed outright, and a number badly wounded, the Mexicans left the river in a great hurry, and hid in the neighbouring houses.

On February 24th, Travis sent out a strong appeal for assistance. "I am besieged by a thousand or more of Mexicans, under Santa Anna," he wrote. "I have sustained a continual bombardment for twenty-four hours, and have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion; otherwise the garrison is to be put to the sword if the place is taken. I have answered the summons with a cannon-shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. *I*

shall never surrender, or retreat!" Could anything be more unflinchingly patriotic than that?

This appeal was followed by another, and a despatch was sent to Colonel Fannin, at Goliad, asking him to bring reinforcements without delay.

"They are drawing in closer to us," said Poke to Dan, on the morning of the 25th, as the two mounted one of the walls for a survey of the situation. Far off, a portion of the Mexican army could be distinctly seen.

"A division of the soldiers is approaching with some cannon," answered the youth. He was right, and presently Santa Anna attempted to plant a battery three hundred yards south of the gateway to the plaza of the mission.

"Shall we allow that?" asked the Texan commander, while the Mexican soldiers were coming up.

"No! No!" came back the cry. "Down with the Mexicans!" And in less than five minutes the garrison was pouring through the gateway and out on the plain beyond. The sharpshooters were in front, and so deadly were their aims that the enemy was speedily forced to retreat, dragging their cannon with them.

"Hurrah! They are running!" shouted the Texans, joyfully. This second repulse made them more determined to resist than ever.

But when the following morning came, it was seen that Santa Anna had taken advantage of the darkness and planted the battery, anyway, and so well was it protected that none of the guns from the Alamo could reach it. But the sharpshooters under Crockett watched the gunners, and one Mexican was shot dead while in the very act of discharging a shot at the plaza gate.

"It looks as if we might hold this place for an indefinite period," said Dan, on the day following. "That is, if we don't fall short of provisions."

"The meat we drove in will last us for some time, lad," answered Stover. "And they have found a lot of grain in one of the friar's houses. But about holding the place, that's a question. We are only about a hundred and fifty strong. What if Santa Anna storms the place some night, with several thousand men? We'll all be put to the bay'net afore sunrise."

"Do you really think he'll do such a barbarous thing, Poke?"

"Think it? I know it. He's one of the most bloodthirsty Mexicans a man ever met. To surrender to him would be foolish. We've got to do as Travis says, fight or die."

"Then I'll fight,—and to the bitter end," answered the boy, earnestly. The enthusiasm of those around him had entered his soul, and he had forgotten the meaning of the word fear.

As one day and another passed, Santa Anna's army increased in size, and he succeeded in planting many other batteries around the Alamo. The bombarding was continual, yet but few of the Texans suffered from this, being well protected by the heavy stone walls of the mission.

On the first of March, when the garrison was much worn by constant guard duty, there was a commotion during the night. At first it was thought that the Mexicans had begun an attack, but soon it was discovered that the newcomers were Texans. They numbered thirty-two men from Gonzales, who had stolen through the Mexican lines with scarcely any difficulty.

"Henry Parker!" cried Dan, as he recognized his friend in the crowd. "I never dreamed of seeing you here."

"I couldn't stay behind, after I read Travis's appeal for help," answered Henry Parker. "I guess a lot more of our men are coming, too." But in this Parker was mistaken; none others arrived at the ill-fated place. Colonel Fannin started from Goliad with three hundred men and a few pieces of artillery, but his ammunition wagon broke down, he had no rations but a little rice and dried beef, and at the river his cannon got stuck and could not be gotten across. So the party returned whence it had come.

Henry Parker and the others had come in on Monday night, and by Tuesday the last of Santa Anna's troops arrived at San Antonio. Following this came three days in which but little was done upon either side.

"This looks as if the Mexicans were going to give up trying to take the place," remarked Dan to Stover, as both rested in one of the side rooms of the convent on a litter of straw.

"Don't worry, lad; it may be the calm afore the storm," was the answer. "Sumthin' is bound for to happen soon, hear me!"

"If it doesn't, I'll be for going home," went on Dan. "I believe I can get through the Mexican lines just as well as Henry Parker and those others."

"It would be risky, Dan, mighty risky." Poke Stover puffed away thoughtfully at the corncob pipe he was smoking. "We missed it altogether on the white mustang and on Carlos Martine, didn't we?"

"Yes. I would like to know if Martine is still in San Antonio."

"Like as not—and hobnobbing with some of them Mexican officers, too. Well, he sha'n't have your pap's land, and that's all there is about it."

So the talk ran on, man and boy hardly knowing how to put in their time when not on guard duty. At first the mission had proved of much interest, with its quaint carvings and curious decorations, but now even this was beginning to pall.

On Saturday Santa Anna called a counsel of war, and at this it was decided that a general assault should be made upon the Alamo at daybreak on Sunday. The assaulting troops numbered twenty-five hundred against a pitiful one hundred and eighty-two Texans!—and were divided into four columns, the first of which was under the command of General Cos, the same Mexican who had surrendered to the Texans but a short time before.

Each column of the attacking party was furnished with ropes, scaling-ladders, crowbars, and axes, as well as with their ordinary military weapons. As the soldiers advanced, the cavalry were drawn up in a grand circle around the Alamo, so that no Texans might escape. In the meantime the blood-red flag of "no quarter" was still flying high from the Mexican camp, and now the band struck up the Spanish quickstep, "Deguelo," or "Cut-throat," as an inspiration to the soldiers to have no mercy on the rebels!

CHAPTER .

THE FALL OF THE ALAMO.

"The enemy are upon us!"

This cry, ringing clearly throughout the Alamo, aroused everybody to action, and hither and thither ran the soldiers to their various points of duty,—some in uniform, and others just as they had leaped up from their couches.

"Are they really coming?" demanded Henry Parker, who had been sleeping beside Dan, in one of the rooms of the convent.

"I reckon they are, Henry," was the quick response, and up leaped the youth, and ran, gun in hand, to where Poke Stover was doing guard duty.

"Are they coming, Poke?"

"Yes, Dan, and plenty of 'em, too. They are divided into several divisions."

There was no time to say more, for already one of the divisions, commanded by Colonel Duque, was attacking the northern wall. Here Lieutenant-Colonel Travis commanded in person. The commander was bareheaded, and carried a sword in one hand and a pistol in the other.

"Now, boys, give it to them hot!" he shouted. "Don't let them get over the wall. Fire to kill! Fire to save your own lives!" And then the cannon belched forth, followed by a crack-cracking of the smaller firearms. The aim of the Texans was so deadly that the column was repulsed for the moment, and Colonel Duque was seriously wounded.

By this time the divisions to attack the other sides of the mission had come up. As one column tried to raise their scaling-ladders, Davy Crockett threw his coonskin cap at them in defiance, and laid one of the officers low with a shot

from his trusty "Betsy." Fifty other shots rang out, and the morning air became heavy with the smoke of rifles and cannon.

"We must beat 'em back!" cried Stover, who was close to Crockett, and as the old hunter blazed away so did the frontiersman and Dan, and the youth had the satisfaction of seeing the Mexican he had aimed at go down, rope and gun in hand, shot through the ankle.

The fighting was now incessant on all sides, but gradually the Mexicans concentrated on the northern wall. They were yelling like so many demons, and their officers urged them forward by threats and sword blows, until the first rank was fairly wedged against the stone wall of the mission. A cannon belched forth, doing fearful havoc, but those in front could not retreat because of those pushing behind them, and in a twinkling one Mexican soldier was piled above another, until the top of the wall was gained, and, as one authority states, they came "tumbling over it like sheep," falling, in some cases, directly on the bodies of the Texans below.

"The convent yard is taken!" was the cry. "To the convent! To the hospital!" And as quickly as it could be done the Texans left the yard.

In the crowd were Dan, Stover, and Henry Parker. As the latter turned, a Mexican under-officer aimed his pistol at the young man.

"Down, Henry!" yelled Dan, but, before Parker could drop, the pistol was discharged and Henry Parker fell like a lump of lead, shot through the brain.

The sudden death of his friend made Dan spellbound, and he gazed at the corpse in horror. Then he felt his arm seized by Stover, and in a minute more found himself being hurried toward the church.

"We can't do anything more," exclaimed the old frontiersman. "They number ten to one, and more. We are doomed, unless we can manage to escape!"

"Poor Henry!" murmured Dan, when he could speak. "What will his mother _____"

"Yes, yes, lad, I know; but we can't talk about it now. Come on."

"To where?"

"Anywhere, away from that howling, raging mob of greasers. They'll show us no quarter."

"Travis is dead!" said somebody who was passing them. "They fairly hacked him to pieces!"

As Stover and Dan ran into the church building, there was a loud report in the courtyard. The Mexicans had captured one of the cannon, and turned it upon the long ward of the hospital building, and the grape-shot laid fifteen Texans low. The Texans were now fighting from room to room of the convent, and the whole place looked like a slaughter-pen.

"To the church!" came the cry. "To the church! Let the last stand be in the church!" The cry was taken up on all sides, and every Texan who could do so ran for the church with all possible speed. In the meantime, the stockade had been carried, and fresh Mexican soldiers were pouring over this in droves.

At the entrance to the church stood Davy Crockett, clubbed rifle in hand, and with the blood pouring from a wound in the head.

"Rally around me, boys!" he shouted. "Don't give up! We are bound to whip 'em yet!" And as the first of the Mexicans came on, he laid two of them low with one mighty blow of his favourite "Betsy," that cracked the rifle in half. And, as the rifle fell, so did lion-hearted Davy Crockett, to rise no more.

With the fall of Crockett, the other Texans, especially those who had emigrated from Tennessee, fought like demons, and soon the whole church was so thick with smoke that scarcely one man could be told from another. In a side apartment lay Bowie, suffering from a fall from a platform, where he had been directing operations. As the Mexicans swarmed into the room, Bowie raised himself up and fired his pistols. Seeing this, the Mexicans retreated, and fired on him from behind the door, killing him almost instantly.

It had been decided that, should the worst come to the worst, the Texans must fire the powder-magazine located in one part of the church. It was now seen that further resistance would be useless.

"The magazine!" came from half a dozen. "Blow the Mexicans up!"

"I will!" shouted back Major T. C. Evans, commander of the artillery, and

started forward with a firebrand for the purpose. The Mexicans, however, saw the movement, and before Evans could go a dozen paces, a score of guns were aimed at him, and he went down fairly riddled with bullets.

"I'm shot!" cried Poke Stover, in the midst of the din and confusion, and clapped his hand to his left shoulder. He had been leading Dan to a rear apartment of the church, between overturned benches and sacks of wheat and rice.

"Shot?" gasped the boy. "Where? Oh, I hope it isn't serious!"

"It's in the shoulder," and the old frontiersman gave a suppressed groan.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"No! no! not now, Dan. Come, before it is too late."

"Where to?"

"Let us see if we can't hide from these bloodthirsty greasers. It is worse than useless to stand up ag'in 'em longer!"

Again Stover caught hold of Dan, and the two pushed on through the smoke and dust. Rifleshots still cracked out, and yells, screams, and curses filled the air. The Alamo had fallen and now the Mexicans were bent upon butchering every Texan who still remained alive. Out of the whole gallant garrison not one man was spared!

Presently Dan and his companion entered a small room but a short distance away from the powder-magazine. Here all was pitch-dark, as the room contained no window. There were boxes and barrels stored here, but for what purpose neither knew. Behind several of the boxes was a niche about three feet square, and almost as deep.

"It's not much of a hidin'-place," said Stover, "but I reckon as how it's better nor nothin'. Anyway, we can't do no more than try it. If they root us out, we'll die game."

They squeezed themselves into the opening, Stover with many a suppressed groan over his wounded shoulder, which pained him not a little. Dan had been struck in the side with a flying bit of masonry, and had an ugly scratch under his

arm in consequence, but just now he counted this as little or nothing. The one thing was to escape with their lives. To fight further would indeed have been sheer foolishness.

The din was gradually subsiding, and only the occasional yell of a Texan being massacred in cold blood reached their ears. Dan could not keep himself from shuddering. What a terrible Sunday morning! He thought of the ranch home, and of his father and Ralph. Would he ever see those loved ones again?

"Hush!" The warning came from Stover, and he placed his hand over Ralph's mouth. Footsteps were approaching the little room.

"Hunt the rats out!" came in a rough Spanish voice. "Hunt them out! Don't let one of them escape your bayonets!" And then several Mexican soldiers entered the room and began to rummage among the boxes and barrels.

CHAPTER .

ESCAPING TO THE RIVER.

When the soldiers entered the little room, Dan felt inclined to give himself and his companion up as lost. He felt that the enemy would surely look into the niche, for the officer meant that not a hole or corner should be missed.

When first coming in he had loaded a pistol he carried,—his gun had been lost in the fight in the courtyard,—and he had done the same for the old frontiersman. Boy and man held the pistols ready for use. They did not mean to give up without a final struggle at close quarters.

But just as one of the soldiers took hold of a big packing-case that hid the pair from view, there was a commotion in the church proper, followed by the discharge of several rifles. Three Texans had made a last stand, and were fighting back to back.

"Come, let us see what that means," cried the Mexican officer, and ran from the little room, followed by his companions.

Dan felt relieved for the moment, yet he knew only too well that those Mexicans, or others, would soon be coming to give the place a thorough overhauling.

"They will kill us——" he began, when, on turning, his foot struck an iron ring in the flooring of the niche. He felt of the ring and soon became convinced that it was attached to a trap-door of some kind.

"If it's a trap-door it must lead to a cellar!" said Stover, hurriedly. "I hope to heaven it does. Try it, lad, an' be quick!"

Both crawled from the narrow opening, and Dan pulled upon the ring with all

of his strength. Up came a trap-door about two feet square. Beneath this was a space of inky darkness.

"Don't mind the dark," went on the old frontiersman. "Let me go fust, and be sure an' shet the trap after ye!"

HE BEGAN TO LOWER HIMSELF INTO THE HOLE.

"HE BEGAN TO LOWER HIMSELF INTO THE HOLE."

He began to lower himself into the hole, and his feet struck a flight of stone steps. Down this he sped and soon reached a narrow passageway lined with rough stone, from which the moisture oozed into pools at his feet.

"I'll try to put them off the scent," said Dan, and drew up one of the boxes in such a fashion that, when the trap fell into place, the box came down on top of it. Then he hastened to join Stover.

"I don't believe any of our soldiers knew of this secret passage," said Stover. "I wonder where it runs to?"

"Perhaps it doesn't run to anywhere," replied Dan. "Go slow, or you may dash your brains out on the rough wall."

They moved along cautiously. The passageway was not over six feet in height and from three to four feet wide. It was uneven, but soon they found themselves going downward and away from the church and convent, as they learned by the muffled noises overhead.

"This is some secret passage put in by the friars, years ago," was Stover's comment, after several hundred feet had been passed. "Like as not they built it to escape in case the Injuns attacked 'em."

"Well, if they did, it must lead to some place of safety," answered Dan. "I sincerely hope it does."

Stover was still suffering great pain, and he had lost so much blood that he

could scarcely walk.

"I must rest and try to bind up that wound," he panted, and sank in a dead faint at Dan's feet.

Dan could do nothing in the darkness, and now he resolved to risk a light, and lit the stump of a candle which he usually carried with him when on a hunting expedition. By these feeble rays he bound up the wound as well as he was able and also attended to his own hurt. Then, as Stover gave a long sigh and opened his eyes, he blew out the light.

"Don't make a light ag'in," were the frontiersman's first words. "It may cost us our lives. We will keep still and lay low," and then he became partly unconscious again.

The hours which followed were like some horrible nightmare to Dan, whose nerves had been wrought up to the top notch of excitement by the scenes in the courtyard and the church. From a distance he heard calls and groans and an occasional shot. The Alamo had fallen and now Santa Anna was himself upon the scene, to make certain that not one of the Texans should escape. "I told them what to expect," he is reported to have said, and then, when five men were brought before him, and his own officer, General Castrillon, interceded for the Texans, he gave Castrillon a lecture for his soft-heartedness, and the prisoners were speedily put to the bayonet. Such was Santa Anna, now high in power, but who was destined in time to be shorn of all rank and to die in bitter obscurity. His last act of atrocity at the Alamo was to have the bodies of his victims piled up with layers of brushwood and burned.

The hours passed, how slowly or swiftly neither Dan nor Poke Stover knew. No one came to disturb them, and at length the boy sank into a doze due to his exhausted condition.

When he awoke he found the frontiersman also aroused. "I hope the sleep did ye good, Dan," he said.

"Was I asleep? I did not know it. How long have we been here?"

"I can't say."

"Have you heard anything more of the Mexicans?"

"Only a faint sound or two, comin' from behind. I reckon we had best push on and see whar this passage leads to."

They arose, to find their legs stiff from the dampness of the passageway. At least three hundred yards were passed, and still there seemed to be no end.

"One satisfaction, we are gittin' farther away from the church," observed Stover. "I can't hear nuthin' now."

"Nor I, Poke. But did you notice how wet the passageway is getting?"

"I did, lad. We must be nigh to a spring or else the river."

They went on again, but not for long. A hundred feet further and they walked into water up to their ankles.

"We are blocked," groaned Dan. "What if we can't get out this way?"

"I reckon ye had best strike another light."

This was no easy matter with their clothing and everything else so damp. But finally the light was struck, and they pushed on into the passageway until the water was up to their waists.

"We can't go much farther," said Dan soberly. "Do you think this leads to the river?"

"I do; but I can't say how far off the stream is. Let us go a little farther."

A couple of rods were covered, and they sank down until the water was up to Dan's neck.

"If I go any further I'll have to swim," he observed, and just then the candle slipped from his hand and fell into the water, leaving them in total darkness.

As there seemed nothing else to do, they moved back to the nearest dry spot and sank down to rest and to consider the matter.

"We can stay here for several days, if we wish," said Stover. "We have got enough to drink."

"Yes, but I've had nothing to eat since last night."

"Neither have I. But I'd rather go hungry nor fall into them greasers' hands."

"If the river is ahead we ought to see some light, Poke."

"That's true,—if it's daylight outside. But it may be night."

"Well, we can watch."

And they did, first one going down into the water, and then the other. It was indeed night, and it yet lacked several hours to daylight.

At last Dan came back with a smile on his face.

"I swam a short distance down the passageway," he exclaimed, "and I saw a faint light. I am sure it leads to the river."

"Then let us try our luck."

"Can you swim with that wounded shoulder?"

"I can swim with one hand, lad, although I allow it will be slower work than with two hands."

"Then come on. If we can get away, the sooner the better," returned the boy, and led the way into the water once more. They walked as far as they could and then began to swim. Stover insisted on taking the lead.

"I'm used to scoutin'," he said. "We don't want to run in no hornet's nest."

The water now reached almost to the top of the passageway, and they had to move with caution for fear of striking their heads. The light grew clearer and clearer as they advanced, until Stover announced that he could see the river bank ahead, with some roots of trees and bushes hanging down in the passageway.

"Keep back, and I'll take a look out," he whispered, and drew slowly to the end of the opening. He was gone several minutes, during which time Dan supported himself by clinging to a jagged rock sticking out from overhead.

"Come on back; we can't escape jest yet," whispered Poke Stover, on his return. "Come," and he led the way up the passageway again.

"But why can't we escape?" asked Dan, impatiently.

"Because there is a whole company of Mexican soldiers encamped at the very spot where this passageway leads into the stream," was the answer that filled the youth with dismay.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOMETHING ABOUT GENERAL SAM HOUSTON.

The Alamo had fallen, and now it was necessary to figure up results. As said before, all of the Texans, about one hundred and eighty in number, had been slaughtered, while the loss to the Mexicans was variously estimated at from three to five hundred. The sights about the mission were truly horrible, and never forgotten by those who witnessed them.

It must be said, in all frankness, that the defence of the Alamo was a mistake, for those gallant men must have known that they could not hold out against the overwhelming forces of Santa Anna. And they did not remain there because all escape was cut off, for they could have gotten away just as easily as the reinforcements from Gonzales got in. It was not until the final days of the siege that the Mexicans drew around them closely.

Why, then, did they remain?

The answer is one that every American boy and man ought to remember with pride. They remained because of the *principle* involved. They had staked their lives for liberty or death, and they waged the contest to the bitter end.

The slaughter of the Alamo garrison thrilled the hearts of the Texans as they had never been thrilled before. Those who had been doubtful before were now doubtful no longer. "We must be independent," they said, "absolutely independent. We must raise a regular army. We must not be divided into factions, but must fight as one man, and under one leader." And then they prepared to strike one grand blow from which Santa Anna should never be able to recover.

But of none of these things did Dan or Poke Stover think as they rested in the dark passageway just beyond the reach of the water from the river. Both were cold and hungry and almost exhausted, yet there was nothing at hand to eat, and

rest seemed out of the question.

"We must try to escape, as soon as it grows dark," said the old frontiersman, and all through that long, weary day they waited and watched for the light to disappear up the passageway. At last it was gone, and they swam again to the river, making as little noise as possible.

At the opening were a number of bushes, and, as they emerged among these, they heard the footsteps of a Mexican sentinel not a dozen feet off. At a distance was the camp, with several fires burning brightly.

Suddenly Stover caught Dan by the arm, and pointed to a tree overhanging the stream. Under the tree was a long canoe with the paddle lying at the bottom.

"We'll set the canoe adrift, and float down the stream with it," whispered Stover, so softly that Dan could scarcely hear him. "It's our one chance."

They waited until the sentinel had turned to walk to the other end of his station, then slipped down and swam over to the canoe. It was drawn partly up over some marsh-grass, and they easily dislodged it. Then they turned it down the stream and kept along with it as it floated, their heads up, on the side opposite to the Mexican camp.

They expected that the Mexican sentinel would discover the floating canoe, but such was not the fact until they were twenty yards from the mouth of the passageway. Then the Mexican turned and stared stupidly.

"The canoe has drifted off," he murmured to himself, in Spanish. "Well, it is not mine, so why should I care? Let the owner take care of his property." And he resumed his walk.

As soon as they were out of the range of the light from the camp-fires, Poke Stover crawled into the canoe and took up the paddle.

"Stay where you are, Dan," he said. "They needn't have but one of us to shoot at," and while Dan clung fast to the rear of the craft, Stover paddled with all the vigour at his command, which was considerable, considering his condition.

In ten minutes they were out of rifle-range, and safe, and then the frontiersman sent the craft ashore, and he and Dan climbed to the river bank. "Thank God, we are out of that!" exclaimed Stover, fervidly, and Dan uttered a hearty Amen.

"I think the fust thing we want to do is to git sumthin' to eat," remarked Stover, after they had rested for a bit. "I'm that hungry I could eat most anything."

"I don't know this location at all, Poke. Where are we?"

"Not many miles from the Gonzales road, lad. About a mile back is Nat Woodver's cabin. I reckon as how we'll git a warm welcome there, if Nat is able to give it to us."

They set out in the darkness, and reached the cabin half an hour later. They found that the settler was away, to join the army; but his wife and daughters were home, and they speedily did all they could for our friends, giving them a hot supper, and dressing the wounds as skilfully as trained nurses. They had heard of the fall of the Alamo, but had not imagined that all of the garrison were slaughtered.

His awful experience had driven Carlos Martine entirely out of Dan's head, and all the youth thought of now was to rejoin his father and his brother.

"They will worry about us, Poke," he said. "More than likely they will think us dead, for they must know that all of the Texans in and about San Antonio went to the Alamo when Santa Anna appeared."

"You are right, lad; we'll steer for the ranch the first thing in the morning," answered Stover, and this they did, riding two ponies that Mrs. Woodver loaned them.

When the pair reached Gonzales they found the town wild with excitement. The news of the disaster of the Alamo had just come in, and by the deaths of the thirty-two men from Gonzales who had entered the mission shortly before it fell, twenty women were left widows and twice as many children fatherless. One woman went crazy, and rushed about the streets crying for the Mexicans to come and kill her, too. It is needless to add that the Parkers were deeply affected over the loss of Henry.

As Dan and Stover were about to start for the trail leading up the Guadalupe, they met Amos Radbury riding post-haste into Gonzales.

"My son!" cried the father, joyfully. "And Poke, too! I was afraid you were dead!"

"We came close enough to it, father," answered Dan. And then he and the frontiersman told their stories in detail.

"I would have gone with the men from Gonzales," said Lieutenant Radbury, "but I hated to leave Ralph home with nobody but Pompey. These are certainly terrible times. I wonder what Santa Anna will do next?"

"Perhaps he'll march on Gonzales," said the youth. "It looks as if he meant to wipe out everybody in Texas."

"The whole State is aroused now. It must and will be a fight to the finish. If the Texans are whipped, every ranch will go up in flames, and every man will be butchered."

The party returned to Gonzales, for Amos Radbury did not want to return to the ranch, now he knew that Dan was safe.

While the siege of the Alamo was in progress, the General Convention of Texas, which had been called, met at Washington, and a declaration of independence was adopted, and General Sam Houston was unanimously reëlected commander-in-chief, with absolute authority over all army forces, regular and volunteer. Heretofore, Houston had been little more than commander in name; now it was felt upon all sides that he must be given the absolute authority that the situation demanded. All other appointments which had been made in a haphazard, irregular way were abolished.

For the work that was ahead no better selection of a leader than that of General Sam Houston could have been made. Houston was born in Virginia, in 1793, and at the age of nineteen he enlisted for the war of 1812, becoming an ensign, and fought with such courage that he and General Jackson became warm friends. At thirty years of age he became a member of Congress, and five years later he was made governor of Tennessee, and was one of the most popular men in the West. He was up for reëlection, when some unfortunate domestic difficulties overtook him, and he resigned his position and plunged into the wilderness, taking up his abode, later on, with some friendly Indians with whom he had hunted years before. These Indians elected him one of their great chiefs, and in return for this, Houston went to Washington for them and exposed a number of Indian agents who had been defrauding the red men out of the allowances made to them by the government. For this these Indians swore undying friendship, and they called

Houston their best-beloved brother to the day of his death. Because of his life among the red men Houston frequently attired himself in an Indian blanket and stuck in his hair the feathers of a chief, a custom that was often followed by other mighty hunters of this portion of our country.

Besides being governor of Tennessee, Houston had been a lawyer of well-known reputation, and as such had closely studied legal affairs relating to the United States, Texas, and Mexico. He saw, long before war was declared, that Texas must one day strike for freedom, and he resolved, after leaving the Indians, to throw in his fortunes with the Texans, or Texians, as some have called them. As soon as he arrived he took hold, in his own peculiar way, of certain public affairs, and at a meeting at Nacogdoches he was elected commander of the forces of eastern Texas. This was directly after the opening of hostilities at Gonzales.

Had Houston been allowed to act as he wished from the start, it is possible that the slaughter at the Alamo might have been avoided, but, as mentioned before, matters, politically, were very much mixed, and there were frequent clashes of authority. Some secondary leaders took the liberty to do about as they saw fit, and at one time it looked as if Houston's command would fall to pieces. In the midst of this came trouble with the Indians, but this was patched up by the man who had lived so long among them and who understood them thoroughly.

As the Convention which had reëlected Houston commander-in-chief of the army was in session, the President was handed a letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Travis, making a last appeal for help. As the letter was read there was wild excitement, and then it was moved that the meeting adjourn and the members march in a body to the relief of the Alamo.

But Houston would not have this. "Your place is here, gentlemen," he said. "Here, to pass laws and make our State an assured fact. I will take the field and organise a relief force, and I give you my word that no enemy shall come near you." The Convention settled down, and inside of an hour Houston, accompanied by several of his staff, was riding like the wind for Gonzales.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH THE TEXAN ARMY FALLS BACK.

As the excitement in Gonzales continued, and there was no telling what would happen next, Amos Radbury resolved to remain in the town for at least several days.

"If I am needed I shall reënter the army," he said.

"Then I shall go with you," said Dan.

"But your side, my son——"

"My side is all right again. It was a mere scratch."

"I wish I could call my wound a scratch," put in Poke Stover. "But instead of getting better my shoulder seems to get wuss, hang the luck."

"I think it would be a good plan for you to go up to the ranch, and take it easy," said Amos Radbury. "Pompey can wait on you, and at the same time you can keep an eye on Ralph and the place. I do not like to leave my boy and the negro all alone."

"Then I'll go up to once," answered the frontiersman. "I'm no good at fighting in the saddle, but perhaps I can mind things about the ranch, as you say." And he departed up the Guadalupe before night. His going was a great relief to the planter, for he was afraid Ralph might get into trouble if left to his own devices. And in this he was not far wrong, for when Stover reached the ranch he found that the youngest Radbury had just heard of the fall of the Alamo, and was going to ride off in the direction of San Antonio, thinking to find his father and brother there.

In the meantime, General Houston, having heard of the fall of the Alamo, at

once sent word to Colonel Fannin to blow up the powder-magazine at Goliad, and abandon the place. "You must hurry all you can," added the commander-in-chief, "for the enemy is reported to be advancing upon you." Fannin was to intrench at Victoria, on the Guadalupe, and await further orders.

Colonel Fannin was in command of between four hundred and five hundred men, the majority of whom were volunteers from the United States, including the New Orleans Grays, the Georgias, the Alabama Red Rovers, and the Kentucky Mustangs. On receiving Houston's order he sent out one of his captains to bring in the settlers and their families at Refugio. Before the settlers could be assisted, the Texans were attacked by an advance guard of Mexican cavalry, and then Fannin sent out another body of men to help the first. There were several fierce skirmishes, and the Texans tried to get away, but in the end they were either shot down or taken prisoners.

Having tried in vain to give succour to those sent to Refugio, Colonel Fannin started, several days later, for Victoria, after dismantling his fort and burying his cannon. Not a Mexican was in sight as the troop, numbering about three hundred, crossed the San Antonio River and marched across the prairie, and coming to a fine bit of grazing ground the colonel halted to give his horses a chance to feed and to rest.

"We ought not to halt here,—we ought to push on to the timber," said one under-officer, and several others agreed with him, but the halt was made, and time lost that proved fatal to the entire expedition.

The soldiers had just resumed their march when some Mexican cavalry were seen at a distance, in front. Hardly had they spread out before the Texans when a large force of Mexican infantry appeared to the rear. This was at two o'clock in the afternoon, and a little later the Texans were entirely surrounded, and the Mexicans began a furious attack.

The Texans formed into something of a square, with the wagons in the centre, and the artillery at the corners, and so withering was their fire that the Mexicans were repulsed again and again, and retreated, leaving the prairie crimson with the blood of the dead and wounded. With the Mexicans were a number of Indians, but they quickly retreated when their leaders were shot down by the Texan sharpshooters.

As night came on, Colonel Fannin called his men together, and asked them if they wished to remain and fight it out, or try to escape to the timber. "You can escape if you wish," he said, "for the Mexicans are demoralised by the large numbers that they have lost."

"We can't leave the wounded to be butchered," was the reply. "We will stand by them to the end," and so they remained.

In the morning it was seen that the enemy had been reinforced, and once again the battle was renewed, the Mexicans opening with their howitzers loaded with grape and canister, and doing fearful damage. At last the Texans could stand it no longer, and sent out a flag of truce, although against Colonel Fannin's desire.

The flag was received, and it was arranged that the Texans should surrender as prisoners of war, to be treated according to the usages of civilised nations. Their arms were then taken from them, and they were marched back to Goliad, and placed in an old church in that town. The wounded were also brought in, but only a few received medical aid.

It had been stipulated that the prisoners' lives be spared, yet when the capture of the Goliad garrison was reported to General Santa Anna he instantly sent word that all of the prisoners should be taken out and shot! The command was an infamous one, yet it was obeyed almost to the letter, only a handful of the Texans escaping out of about three hundred. Small wonder was it that Santa Anna was often termed the Mexican butcher.

Houston's arrival at Gonzales did something toward allaying the excitement, and in a short time he gathered together some three hundred men. But as report after report came in of the advance of Santa Anna with a large force, he felt that it would be useless to give battle, and began to fall back toward the Colorado River, hoping there to be joined by Fannin and others. He took with him most of the inhabitants of Gonzales, and the town was left behind in flames.

With the army went Amos Radbury and Dan, both well mounted and well armed. The first stop was at Peach Creek, fifteen miles distant; and here, on the day following, over a hundred additional volunteers joined Houston's command. From Peach Creek the little army moved to Nevada Creek, and here Houston delayed his march in order that some of his men might bring in a blind widow, who had been left at her home some distance back with her six children. When

the Colorado was gained, the army went into camp at Burnham's Crossing, and then across the river at Beason's Crossing.

Here the general received news of the surrender of Fannin's force, brought by a settler from Goliad. This was a great blow to Houston, and he felt that he must fall back still farther, and wait for reinforcements from other sources before risking a battle with the powerful Mexican general who was bent upon crushing him. He began to fall back to the Brazos River.

The retreat toward the Brazos caused much murmuring. "Houston is a coward, —he won't fight the greasers," said some, but others who understood their commander more thoroughly said nothing and did as ordered. Once an under-officer tried to start an open rebellion, but Houston threatened to "lick him out of his boots," if he didn't mind his own business. Then he made a little speech, and told the men that he would soon give them all the fighting they wanted, and "on the top side," as he expressed it. Many of the volunteers were of lawless character, and it needed just such a man as the dashing and daring, yet cautious, Houston to keep them in check and make them do their best when the proper moment arrived.

"What do you make of this, father?" asked Dan of his parent, when the retreat toward the Brazos was ordered.

"I don't know what to make of it," answered Amos Radbury. "I suppose General Houston knows what he is doing."

"But see how the settlers are leaving their homes. There is a regular panic among them."

"That is true, Dan. I wish I knew how Ralph and Stover are faring at home."

"Can we get back to them?"

"Hardly now, for we would most likely have to pass right through Santa Anna's lines. I do not believe it will be long before we have a big fight."

"Do you believe it is true that Colonel Fannin has been defeated?"

"It may be so, for, judging by what took place at the Alamo, Santa Anna must have a large army concentrating here."

It was raining at the time; indeed, it rained now nearly every day, and the march was anything but a pleasant one. Often the wagons and cannon got stuck, and the men had to put their shoulders to the wheels to help things along. Volunteers came and went, and so did the settlers, and sometimes the commander could not calculate how many men he had to rely upon in case of emergency. Yet on struggled the body until, on March 28th, the army reached San Felipe. From here they went up the Brazos and encamped near Groce's Ferry.

In the meantime, Santa Anna's army was pressing forward, but in several different ways. The Mexican general had thought that the slaughter at the Alamo and the massacre at Goliad would make the Texans submit without further difficulty. He had yet to learn that it was indeed liberty or death with these stern people, who were so soon to risk their all in one final contest.

One portion of the Mexican army, having gained the Colorado, crossed in rafts, while another portion moved upon San Felipe; and then a portion of the concentrated forces went to Fort Bend. From here Santa Anna pushed on, through the rain and mud, to Harrisburg, hoping to surprise the town; but, when he arrived, the place was practically abandoned.

He wished most of all to capture the heads of the government the Texans had set up, and, learning they were off for Galveston Island, he set out on the march for New Washington, which is located just north of Galveston Bay.

Houston, hearing that Santa Anna had at last crossed the Brazos, began to march south to meet him. The Texans encamped at Buffalo Bayou, opposite to what was left of the smoking ruins of Harrisburg. Every soldier was now more than eager to fight.

"Very well; fight you shall," said General Houston.

"We will! We will!" shouted the soldiers.

Then Houston continued: "Some of us may be killed, and some must be killed. But, boys, remember the Alamo!"

"Yes, we will remember the Alamo!" came back in a deep chorus. "Down with every Mexican in the State of Texas!"

Buffalo Bayou was crossed with great difficulty, on rafts and by swimming, and the soaked and weary army took its way to Lynch's Ferry, where the Buffalo Bayou and the San Jacinto River join. Here were found some rafts belonging to the Mexicans, piled high with army stores, and these were confiscated. Falling back to a shelter of live-oaks, General Houston planted his cannon, and then prepared to fight the enemy on sight.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE VICTORY OF SAN JACINTO.

"I reckon we are in for it now, father."

"Yes, Dan, we shall soon see some heavy fighting, I am afraid. I trust you come out of it unharmed."

"And I hope you come out unharmed, too, father," added Dan, earnestly.

The two sat under a live-oak, overlooking a wide expanse of prairie, dotted here and there with patches of timber. Behind them flowed the broad and muddy stream, with a stretch of treacherous marsh-land separating them from the water. The soldiers had been formed into something resembling companies, and Mr. Radbury had been assigned to his old position of lieutenant, with Dan as one of the privates under him.

The Texans had gathered around in little knots to discuss the situation in low tones. Under one of the trees stood General Houston, clad in nothing more striking than an old slouch hat, a shiny black coat, and a light-coloured pair of trousers which had long since seen their best days. His sword, also an old affair, was tied to his belt with bits of a lariat. Altogether he looked anything but a general bent upon leading a raw and undisciplined army to victory.

"We will win!" he was saying. "We cannot afford to lose. The whole fate of Texas hangs upon our courage!"

Amos Radbury looked at Dan, and something of a smile crossed his face. "Did you hear that, lad?" he asked. "I believe our general speaks the truth. He is not a man to fail."

The day wore along until two in the afternoon, when several cannon-shots

were heard in the distance, and incoming scouts announced that Santa Anna was coming, but not with his entire army. The Mexican general had divided his forces again, much to his disadvantage, as we shall see.

A light skirmish occurred late in the afternoon, but Houston could not draw on a general engagement, and while Santa Anna pitched his camp and fortified it, the Texans remained on strict guard all night, fearing a surprise.

In the morning General Cos arrived with five hundred men, to reinforce Santa Anna, but the soldiers were so tired out by a forced march they could scarcely stand, and so for the time being the Mexican general did nothing. In the meantime, the Texans called a council of war. Some were for attacking the Mexicans, and others wanted to wait to be attacked. Houston said but little, yet by his face he showed that some plan of action was forming in his brain.

The council over, the commander called two trusty scouts to him, and sent them off with axes on a secret mission, which was to cut away the bridge by which both armies had reached their present encampments. This done, neither could retreat, so the fight would have to be "to a finish."

"To arms!" came the call in the middle of the afternoon, and the solitary drum the Texans possessed began to roll. Then, as the men formed to march, the single fifer struck up the popular tune of the day, "Will You Come to the Bower?"

"Dan, be careful of yourself!" cried Amos Radbury, as he pressed his son's hand. "Be careful for my sake!" And then he rushed off to lead his men forward. Dan's face was pale, but his clear eyes shone with a determination that could not be mistaken. He would do his duty, come what might.

"Vance's bridge has been cut down!" came the cry. "You must fight now to a finish! Remember the Alamo!"

"Remember the Alamo!" came back wildly. "*Remember the Alamo!* Down with Santa Anna!" And then the long lines rushed on, straight for the barricades which the Mexicans had erected.

The Mexicans were taken completely by surprise, for it had grown so late that they had come to the conclusion that hostilities would be put off until the next day. Santa Anna was taking a nap in his tent, while his officers lay around smoking and playing cards. The soldiers were partaking of such food as their

scanty means afforded.

"Forward!" came from the Texan officers. "Forward! Don't give them time to form!" And on swept the line, and crack! crack! went the rifles and pistols. Some of the Mexicans tried to return the fire, while others fell flat to avoid the bullets.

"The cannon!" shouted the Mexican general, Castrillon, when a bullet killed him instantly. Some of the cannoneers were already at the field-pieces, but they could do little, for the Texans were already upon them. The smoke was thick, and the yelling upon both sides incessant. In the midst of all was General Houston, firing his pistol and using his sword to every possible advantage, and calling to his men to remember the Alamo and not let one Mexican get away.

Side by side Amos Radbury and Dan gained the barricade. A Mexican loomed up before them and the lieutenant despatched him with a pistol-shot. Then over the barricade went father and son, Dan using his empty gun as a club, and the lieutenant drawing his bowie-knife, a weapon with which nearly every Texan was provided. The Texans came over at leaps and bounds, and charged straight into the heart of the enemy's camp, striking down every Mexican that opposed them.

Coming out of his tent, Santa Anna yelled to his men to arm themselves and form into battle-line. But the confusion was so great that none of his followers paid attention to him. The Texans were aroused as never before, and struck at the Mexicans with such lightning-like rapidity that the enemy was dazed, and scores of them fell upon their knees begging for mercy. The shooting still continued, and now Dan was horrified to see his father go down, stabbed in the leg by a Mexican bayonet.

"Father!" he yelled, hoarsely, and then turned to the Mexican who had done the deed. The fellow tried to pierce Dan with his steel, but more by instinct than reason the youth leaped to one side. Then Dan's gun came crashing down, and the Mexican with it, his skull cracked by the force of the blow.

A crowd was now rushing that way, a score of Mexicans pursued by fully as many Texans, and Dan had his hands full to keep his parent from being trampled upon. There was a strange humming in the boy's ears, and he seemed to be lifted up as though walking on air, while he panted for breath.

"Keep off,—he is my father!" he screamed, and hurled one of the Mexicans to

one side. Then another came to take his place, and man and boy rolled over on the prairie—grass close to the wounded lieutenant. The Mexican had Dan by the throat when a Texan, rushing forward, kicked the enemy in the head, rendering him partly unconscious.

Leaping up, Dan tried to collect his confused senses. Texans and Mexicans were running in every direction, but at a glance he saw that his own side had the best of the battle, and a prayer of thankfulness burst from his lips. Then he saw General Houston go down, struck in the ankle by a bullet. Yet the staunch commander kept to his post. His horse was also shot several times.

At last the Mexicans were in full retreat. Paralysed with fear, some of them sought the open prairie, where they were shot down by the Texan sharpshooters, while others ran frantically for where the Vance bridge had been located. Here the banks of the river were high and rocky, and but few escaped to the opposite side.

The battle had been fought and won, but the end was not yet. On the prairie, one of the Mexican commanders tried to make a stand, but the Texans shot down the line almost as quickly as it was formed. Then the Mexicans began to throw down their firearms, and the officers held up their swords, handles to the front, as a token of surrender.

"It's too late to surrender!" cried a number of Texans. "Remember the Alamo!" Meaning, "Remember how you butchered our soldiers!"

"Me no Alamo! Me no Alamo!" shrieked many of the Mexicans. "Good Americano! Me no Alamo!" They wished the Texans to understand that they were not responsible for the cold-blooded slaughter at the mission. At last Colonel Almonte gathered together nearly four hundred of the defeated and made a formal surrender, and to the everlasting honour of Texas be it said that these prisoners were not maltreated.

The night that followed was one never to be forgotten. Santa Anna had escaped, and while some ran around crying, "Santa Anna! Hunt down Santa Anna!" others procured from the Mexicans' store a number of candles, which they lit, and then formed a grand procession through the live-oak grove and across the prairie, dancing and yelling like a lot of Indians. The victory had been so long delayed that now, when it was really theirs, they were intoxicated with joy.

The contest had been a remarkable one in many ways. The Texan army numbered exactly 743, of whom eight were killed and thirty wounded. Santa Anna's force numbered over sixteen hundred, and of these, 630 were killed, two hundred wounded, and 730 made prisoners. The enemy had lost, in killed and wounded, more men than the Texan army contained, and at the end of the battle the Texans had more prisoners than they had men in the ranks! Besides prisoners, the Texans took over a thousand firearms, two hundred sabres, four hundred horses and mules, and about \$12,000 in silver. Part of the money was divided among the soldiers, each man receiving \$7.50, and that was his entire pay for the campaign.

The Texans were bound to find Santa Anna, and scouts went out in all directions in search of him. On the following day he was discovered in the long grass near the edge of a ravine, on the other side of the river. He tried to hide in

the grass, but was compelled to crawl out and surrender. At first he claimed to be a private, but his jewels betrayed him, and then he said he was one of Santa Anna's aides-de-camp. But no one believed him, and he was taken into the Texan camp without delay. Here there was a most dramatic scene between General Houston and his noted prisoner. Houston, exhausted and covered with the dirt of battle, lay at the foot of a tree, where he had just taken a nap after having his ankle dressed.

"I am General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, President of the Mexican Republic," said that individual, as he bowed low and flashed his jewels and military decorations before Houston. "I claim to be a prisoner of war at your disposal."

General Houston regarded him in utter silence for several seconds, a silence in which each man measured the other thoroughly. Plainly Santa Anna was disconcerted, and he looked around nervously, as if expecting that at any moment he might be shot in the back. Then Houston waved him to a seat on a near-by box of ammunition.

An interpreter was called up, and Santa Anna asked for a piece of opium, saying he was suffering much pain. The opium was given him and this quieted his nerves.

"That man may consider himself born to no common destiny who has conquered the Napoleon of the West," went on the Mexican general, bombastically. "It now remains for him to be generous to the vanquished."

Again Houston looked at him, a look that made Santa Anna quail.

"You should have remembered that at the Alamo," said the Texan commander.

"I am not to blame—I acted under the orders of the government of Mexico," cried Santa Anna, hastily, and tried to explain that there was a law which held that prisoners taken with arms must be treated as pirates. But Houston cut the interpreter short when translating the words.

"Who is the government of Mexico?" he exclaimed. "You, and you alone, and you are responsible for the law that made the slaughter at the Alamo possible. And you are likewise responsible for the massacre at Goliad!" went on Houston, with great intensity of feeling.

"No, no, you are mistaken," answered Santa Anna, and then tried to excuse the massacre of Fannin and his men in various ways. He wanted to treat for peace and for his release, but Houston told him that only the government of Texas had jurisdiction in the matter. Then Santa Anna was placed in a tent, given his private baggage, and a strong guard was set, that some of the more headstrong of the Texans might not kill him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BACK TO THE RANCH—CONCLUSION.

Immediately after the battle, Dan sought out medical aid and had his father attended to. Mr. Radbury was still unconscious, and for several days it was not known whether he would live or die. During all that time, his son remained at his side, hoping and praying for the best. At last the planter was pronounced out of danger, but the wound had been a deep one and it was doubtful if Mr. Radbury would ever be as strong again as he had been.

While father and son were at the temporary hospital which the Texans had opened, Dan made a discovery which filled him with interest. Among the Mexican prisoners that had been taken, the youth found a man from San Antonio whom he knew well,—a person who had joined Santa Anna's army after the fall of the Alamo. During a talk with this individual, he learned that Carlos Martine was also in the army, having joined at the same time.

"I must find that man and have a talk with him," said Dan to himself, and as soon as his father was a little better he set out on his hunt.

He had not made many inquiries, when he learned that Carlos Martine was dead, having been shot down while trying to escape across the open prairie, and the body had already been put away.

"But what of the dead—were the things in their pockets buried with them?" asked Dan of one of the Texan guards.

"No, their pockets were emptied, and everything found was turned over to the quartermaster," was the reply, and then the youth went to the officer named and told him of Martine and of the missing papers.

"Here is a lot of stuff, Radbury. You can look it over and see if there is

anything there belonging to your father."

Dan examined the pile with care, and presently came upon the papers, safe and sound, just as they had been stolen by Hank Stiger.

"They are here!" he cried, and passed them over for examination. "Won't father be glad of this!" And off he ran a little later to tell his parent. Amos Radbury could scarcely speak, but his satisfaction shone in his eyes.

"It is a great relief," he murmured. "They cannot disturb my home now." And then he added with a sigh, "I wish I were there now!"

"All in good time, father," said Dan, affectionately. "We have truly nothing more to fear. Santa Anna is whipped and has already sent word that his other troops must withdraw. The independence of Texas is assured beyond a doubt."

Dan was right in what he said. Not long after Santa Anna's defeat the remainder of his army was in full retreat. As they fell back they were closely watched by the Texans, but no further fighting took place.

The government of Texas had retired to Galveston, but as soon as the victory of San Jacinto became known, President Burnett and his cabinet hurried to the Texan camp and opened negotiations with Santa Anna. The Mexican general was ready to promise almost anything in return for his liberty, and Houston suggested that he be made to recognise the independence of Texas, that the Rio Grande River should become the boundary between the independent State and Mexico, that all Texan prisoners should be released, that all private property should be restored, and numerous other things, all of which were afterward embodied in a treaty signed at Velasco.

Yet even then Santa Anna was not given his liberty. The people were aroused to the depths of their very souls and they feared that the "Mexican Butcher" could not be trusted. Against the advice of many he was put into prison, and it was not until nearly a year later that he was allowed to return to Mexico. Here he found himself "out in the cold" in more ways than one, and highly disgusted he retired to his estate at Mango del Clavo, not to be heard of again for some time to come.

With the closing of the war matters waxed hot in Texas politically, but with politics Amos Radbury had little to do. As soon as he was able, he returned to

his ranch on the Guadalupe, where both he and Dan were received in a warm manner by Ralph and the ever faithful Poke Stover and Pompey.

"You are both heroes," cried the youngest Radbury. And then he added, with all the ardor of youth: "How I wish I had been along!"

"Never mind, lad, your time may come some day," said Poke Stover.

"If it dun cum dat boy will prove as brave as any of dem," said Pompey. "Yo' see, it's in de Radbury blood, wot fit in de Rebolution, de wah ob 1812 and de Injun wahs. Da can't help it no moah dan da kin help eatin', he! he!" And he slapped his thigh enthusiastically. That evening Pompey served the "spread of his life," as Dan designated it, and never were a party happier than the Radburys and Poke Stover as they sat and ate and drank, and talked over the many things which had happened since the first trouble with the Indians.

"But I am glad it is over," said Amos Radbury. "Glad it is over, and equally glad that we are all home once more."



Here let us bring to a close this tale of the war, "For the Liberty of Texas." Summer was now at hand, and as soon as Dan felt rested he and Ralph, assisted by Pompey, set to work to put the ranch in order and attend to the stock, which had suffered more or less from neglect. Later on, both Mr. Radbury and Poke Stover joined in the labour, and before fall everything was running as smoothly as it had the spring previous.

The liberty of Texas had been assured, but the people were not satisfied, and clamoured to be admitted to the United States. In a few years this was accomplished, and Texas became as she is to-day, the largest State in our glorious Union. Then followed trouble about the boundary line between the United States and Mexico, and soon war was declared between the two principal republics of North America. The further adventures of the Radburys before this war and through a portion of it will be told in the next volume of this series, to be entitled, "With Taylor on the Rio Grande," in which we shall meet all of our old friends once more, and learn what they did to defeat both their personal enemies and also the enemies of their country.

Yet for the time being all went well, and here we will say good-bye, echoing the shout Ralph gives as he dashes over the range on his pet mustang:

"Hurrah for the liberty of Texas! Hurrah for the heroes of San Jacinto!"

THE END.

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