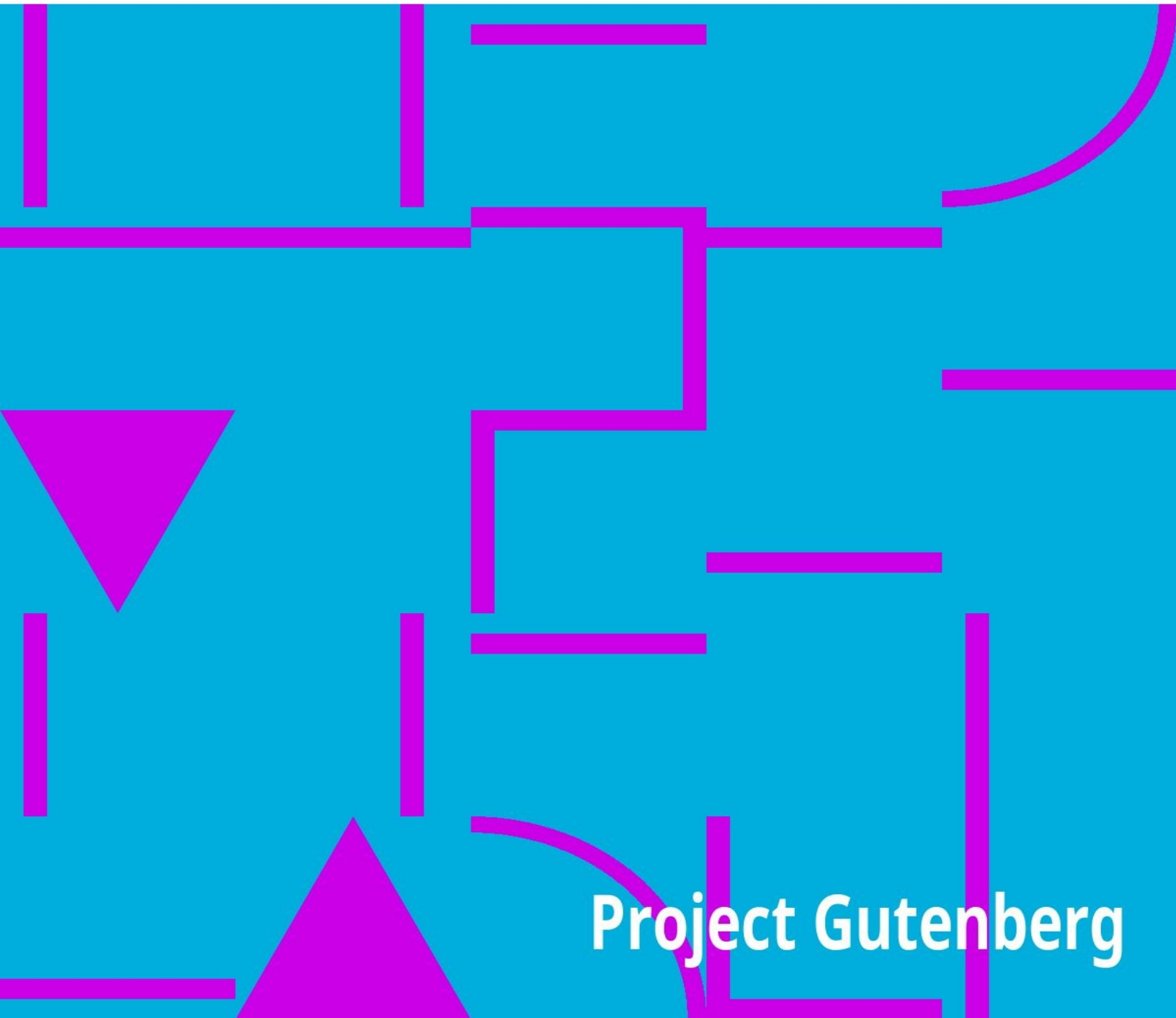
The Keepers of the Trail

A Story of the Great Woods

Joseph A. Altsheler



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The KEEPERS OF THE TRAIL

A STORY OF THE GREAT WOODS

BY

JOSEPH A. ALTSHELER

AUTHOR OF "THE YOUNG TRAILERS," "THE FOREST RUNNERS," ETC.

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FOREWORD

"The Keepers of The Trail" deals with an episode, hitherto unrelated, in the lives of Henry Ware, Paul Cotter, Shif'less Sol Hyde, Long Jim Hart, and Silent Tom Ross. In point of time it follows "The Forest Runners," and, so, is the third volume of the "Young Trailer" series.

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THE KEEPERS OF THE TRAIL

CHAPTER I

HENRY IN HIS KINGDOM

A light wind blew over the great, primeval wilderness of Kentucky, the dense, green foliage rippling under it like the waves of the sea. In every direction forest and canebrake stretched in countless miles, the trees, infinite in variety, and great in size, showing that Nature had worked here with the hand of a master. Little streams flashing in silver or gold in the sunlight, flowed down to the greater rivers, and on a bush a scarlet tanager fluttered like a flash of flame.

A youth, uncommon in size and bearing, stepped into a little opening, and looked about with the easy, natural caution belonging to the native of the forest who knows that danger is always near. His eyes pierced the foliage, and would have noticed anything unusual there, his ear was so keen that he would have heard at once any sound not a part of the woods.

Eye and ear and the indefinable powers of primitive man told him no enemy was at hand, and he stood on the green hill, breathing the fresh, crisp air, with a delight that only such as he could feel. Mighty was the wilderness, majestic in its sweep, and depth of color, and the lone human figure fitted into it perfectly, adding to it the last and finishing touch.

He blended, too, with the forest. His dress, wholly of fine, tanned deerskin, was dyed green, the hunting shirt fringed, hunting shirt, leggings and moccasins alike adorned with rows of little beads. Fitting thus so completely into his environment, the ordinary eye would not have observed him, and his footsteps were so light that the rabbits in the bush did not stir, and the flaming bird on the bough was not frightened.

Henry Ware let the stock of his rifle rest upon the ground and held it by the barrel, while he gazed over the green billows of the forest, rolling away and away to every horizon. He was a fortunate human being who had come into his own kingdom, one in which he was fitted supremely to reign, and he would not have exchanged his place for that of any titular sovereign on his throne.

His eyes gleamed with pleasure as he looked upon his world. None knew better than he its immense variety and richness. He noted the different shades of the

leaves and he knew by contrast the kind of tree that bore them. His eye fell upon the tanager, and the deep, intense scarlet of its plumage gave him pleasure. It seemed fairly to blaze against the background of woodland green, but it still took no alarm from the presence of the tall youth who neither stirred nor made any sound.

Another bird, hidden behind an immense leaf, began to pour forth the full notes of a chattering, mocking song, almost like the voice of a human being. Henry liked it, too, although he knew the bird was flinging him a pretty defiance. It belonged in his world. It was fitting that one singer, many singers, should live in his wilderness and sing for him.

A gray squirrel, its saucy tail curved over its back, ran lightly up an oak, perched on a bough and gazed at him with a challenging, red eye. Henry gave back his look, and laughed in the silent manner of the border. He had no wish to hurt the swaggering little fellow. His heart was bare of ill will against anything.

A deep, clear creek flowed at the base of the hill, and a fish, snapping at a fly, leaped clear of the water, making a silver streak in the air, gone in an instant as he fell back into the stream. The glimpse pleased Henry. It, too, was a part of his kingdom, stocked with fur, fin and feather, beyond that of any other king, and far more vast.

The brilliant sunlight over his head began to dim and darken. He looked up. The van of a host, the wild pigeons flying northward appeared, and then came the great wide column, millions and millions of birds, returning from their winter in the south. He had seen the huge flights before, but the freshness and zest of the sight never wore away. No matter how far they came nor how far they went they would still be flying over his forest empire. And then would come the great flocks of wild ducks and wild geese, winging swiftly like an arrow toward the north. They, too, were his, and again he took long, deep breaths of a delight so keen that it made his pulses leap.

From the wood at the base of the hill came a crackling sound as of something breaking, and then the long crash of a tree falling. He went a little way down the slope and his moccasins made no sound in the grass. Gently pulling aside the bough of a sheltering bush he saw the beavers at work. Already they were measuring for lengths the tree they had cut through at the base with their long, sharp teeth.

The creek here received a tributary brook of considerable volume, and the dam

erected by the beavers had sent the waters far back in a tiny sheet like a little lake. But as Henry saw, they were going to raise the dam higher, and they were working with the intelligence and energy that belong so peculiarly to the beaver. Four powerful fellows were floating a log in the water, ready to put it into place, and others on the bank were launching another.

It was one of the largest beaver colonies he had ever seen, and he watched it with peculiar enjoyment. He killed the beaver now and then—the cap upon his head was made of its skin—but only when it was needful. The industrious animals were safe from his rifle now, and he felt that his wilderness had no more useful people.

He looked at them a long time, merely for the pleasure of looking. They showed so much skill, so much quickness and judgment that he was willing to see and learn from them. He felt, in a sense, that they were comrades. He wished them well in their work, and he knew that they would have snug houses, when the next winter came.

He left them in their peace, returned to the brow of the hill, and then walked slowly down the other side. He heard a woof, a sound of scrambling, and a black bear, big in frame, but yet lean from the winter, ran from its lair in the bushes, stopped a moment at fifty or sixty yards to look hard at him, and then, wheeling again in frightened flight disappeared among the trees. Henry once more laughed silently. He would not have harmed the bear either.

A puffing, panting sound attracted his attention, and, walking farther on, he looked into a glade, in which the grass grew high and thick. He had known from the character of the noise that he would find buffaloes there, and they numbered about a dozen, grazing a while, and then breathing heavily in content. He had seen them in countless herds on the western plains, when he was with Black Cloud and his tribe, but south of the Ohio, owing to the heavy forest, they were found only in small groups, although they were plentiful.

The wind was blowing toward him, and standing partially behind a huge oak he watched them. They were the finest and largest inhabitants of his wilderness, splendid creatures, with their leonine manes and huge shoulders, beasts of which any monarch might be proud. He could easily bring down any one of them that he wanted with his rifle, but they were safe from all bullets of his.

He looked at them a while, as a man would gaze at a favorite horse. There was a calf among them, and whenever it wandered from the middle of the glade toward

the edge of the forest the mother would push it back. Henry, studying the woods there, saw just within their shadow the long slinking figures of two gray wolves. He knew their purpose, but he knew also that it would not be fulfilled.

He watched the little forest drama with an interest none the less because it was not new to him. He saw the gray shadows creeping nearer and nearer, while the calf persistently sought the woods, probably for shade. Presently the leader of the herd, an immense bull, almost black, caught an odor, wheeled like lightning and rushed upon the wolves. There was a single yelp, as one was trampled to death, and the other fled through the forest to seek easier prey.

The buffaloes returned to their grazing and the foolish calf, warned by the danger from which he had been saved, stayed in the middle of the glade, with his elders as a wall around him. Henry smiled. He had foreseen the result, and it was wholly to his liking. He passed around the opening, not wishing to disturb the animals, and went northward, always on soundless feet.

A stag, catching the human odor on the wind, sprang from a thicket, and crashed away in wild alarm. Henry laughed again and waved his hand at the fleeting figure. The stag did not know that he had no cause to dread him, but Henry admired his speed. A flock of wild turkeys rose from a bough above his head, and uttering preliminary gobbles, sailed away in a low flight among the trees. He waved his hand at them also, and noticed before they disappeared how the sunlight glowed on their bronze feathers.

It was a fine morning in his kingdom, and he was seeing many forms of its life. He remarked a bee tree, and thought it probable that the runaway bear would make a try there some day for honey. Then he stopped and looked at a tiny blue flower, just blooming in the shelter of a bush. He examined it with appreciation and touched the delicate leaf very gently, lest he break it away. Little and fragile, it had its place nevertheless in his realm.

His course led him back to the creek, here very deep and clear and running over a gravelly bottom. After looking and listening for a little while, he undressed, laid his rifle and other weapons on the very edge of the bank, where he could reach them in an instant, and dropped silently into the water. It was cool and he shivered at first, but as he swam the warmth returned to his veins.

He was a splendid swimmer, and he was careful not to splash or make any other sound that could be heard far. It was glorious there in the water, and he was loath to leave it. He lay on his back, floated a little with the current, and then with

strokes strong, swift and silent, swam back again.

His eyes looked up into a blue sky, sprinkled with many little white clouds golden at the edge. The huge flight of pigeons had passed and no longer dimmed the sun. He could just see the last of the myriads on the edge of the northern horizon. But there was a sudden flash of black across the blue, and a hawk shot down into the forest. A bald eagle sailed in slow majesty above the trees, and, well within the shelter of the foliage near him, many small birds were twittering. The air over his realm as well as the forests and waters was full of life.

He came out, allowed himself to dry in the sun, while he flexed and tensed his powerful muscles. Then he dressed. The swim had been good, and he was glad that he had taken the risk. He was aware that the forest contained inhabitants much more dangerous than those he had looked upon that morning, but he had not yet seen any sign of them, and he was one who had learned to use his opportunities.

After luxuriating for a little while on the grass, Henry, rifle on shoulder, walked swiftly forward. He had a definite purpose and it was to rejoin his four comrades, Paul Cotter, Shif'less Sol Hyde, Long Jim Hart and Tom Ross, who were not far away in the greenwood, the five, since the repulse of the great attack upon the wagon train, continuing their chosen duties as keepers of the trail, that is, they were continually on guard in the vast forest and canebrake against the Northwestern Indians who were making such a bitter war upon the young Kentucky settlements.

Henry had known that they would come again. Kentucky had been a huge hunting ground, without any Indian villages, but for that reason it had been prized most highly by the savage. The same reason made the ground all the more dangerous for the white people, because the Indians, unhampered by their women and children, came only with chosen bands of warriors, selected for supreme skill in battle and forest lore. No seekers of new homes ever faced greater dangers than the little white vanguard that crossed the Alleghanies into the splendid new land beyond. Hidden death always lurked in the bush, and no man went beyond the palisade even on the commonest errand without his rifle.

It was a noble task that Henry and his comrades had undertaken, to act as watchers, and it appealed to them all, to him most because he was continually in the wilderness that he loved so well, and he felt that he was doing a much greater work than when he was felling trees, and helping to clear a place for crops. As

for himself he would never have cut down a single tree, although there were millions and millions of them. Nature held nothing that he admired more. He knew no greater delight than to stand on a high hill and look on the forest, deep green, waving in the wind, and stretching to the complete circle of the horizon and beyond.

He was now in one of the loneliest stretches of the wilderness, far north of Wareville, and no great distance from the Ohio. A day's march would take him to a favorite crossing of the savages, and that was why he and his comrades were in this region. He increased his speed, settling into the long swinging gait which the scouts of the border always used, when they would hasten, but, in a half-hour, he stopped suddenly and his figure seemed to vanish utterly in a dense mass of green bushes.

Henry, now hidden himself, had seen. It was only a trace that scarcely any eye save his would have noticed, but in a place where the earth was soft he had observed the faint imprint of a moccasin, the toes turning inward and hence made by an Indian. Other imprints must be near, but, for a little while, he would not look, remaining crouched in the thicket. He wished to be sure before he moved that no wearer of a moccasin was in the bush. It might be that Yellow Panther, redoubtable chief of the Miamis, and Red Eagle, equally redoubtable chief of the Shawnees, were at hand with great war bands, burning to avenge their defeats.

He did not move for fully ten minutes. He had acquired all the qualities of those who live in constant danger in vast forests, and, like the animal that hides, his figure and dress blended completely with the green thicket. The air brought no menace to either eye or ear, and then he stepped forth.

He found the imprints of five or six pairs of moccasins farther on, and then they became so faint that the best trailer in the West could not follow them, although he believed that they had been made by a hunting party. It was customary for the Indians on their great raids to detach a number of men who would roam the forests for food, but he decided that he would not try to follow them any longer. He would not be deflected from his purpose to join his comrades.

Leaving the broken trail he sped north by west, the forests and thickets growing thicker as he advanced. At one point he came to a vast canebrake that seemed impassable, yet he made his way through it almost without slackening speed, and came to a grove of oaks, so large and so dense that the sunlight never entered

there. He stopped at its edge and imitated the long, haunting cry of the owl. In a moment or two a note like it, but distant and faint, came. He uttered the cry a second time, and heard the reply.

Hesitating no longer he entered the oak grove. These trees with their great mossy trunks were the finest that he had ever seen. Some peculiar quality of the soil, some fertilizing agency beneath had given them an unparalleled growth. The leafy roof was complete, and he advanced as one who walks down a limitless hall, studded with a myriad of columns.

Two miles and turning around a hill he came to a cup in its far side, hidden so well that the unknowing would have passed it unseen. But he called and his four comrades answered from the cup. Parting the bushes Henry entered and they gave him a low but joyous welcome.

The cup, almost circular, was not more than ten feet across, but the sun shone in it and the ground was warm and dry. Just beyond the far edge a little spring gushed from under a stone and trickled away, whispering gently through the bushes.

Paul was the only one of the four who had risen. He stood now erect, the stock of his rifle resting on the ground, the customary attitude of the waiting borderer, his fine, intellectual face bright with interest.

"Did you see anything, Henry?" he asked.

"O' course he saw somethin'," drawled Shif'less Sol. "Did you ever know the time when Henry went anywhar without seein' anythin'?"

"Paul meant did he see anythin' wuth tellin'," said Long Jim. "You're always talkin' too much, Sol. Why did you want to bust in on a boy that was askin' a decent question?"

"I never talk too much, Long Jim Hart," said the shiftless one indignantly. "Now an' then I hev to talk a long time, 'cause I know so much that I can't git it all out between sunrise an' sunset, an' the hours then are mighty crowded, too. I reckon that you'd never need more'n five minutes to empty your head."

"Mine's a good head an' it never has any swellin' either."

"Give Henry a chance," said Paul smiling. "How can he ever tell us anything, when you two are filling all the woods with the roar of argument?"

The debaters subsided. Silent Tom Ross said nothing. His chariness of speech often saved him much breath. Besides, Tom was contented. He knew that if Henry had found anything worth telling and thought fit to tell it he would do so at the right time.

"Give me some venison," said Henry. "I've walked a long way, and I'm hungry."

Paul produced a piece from a deerskin knapsack that he carried and Henry, sitting down in the circular opening, ate. Paul lay down again and all of them waited.

"Indians," said Henry at length, waving his hands toward the east.

"How many?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"I could not tell, but I think it's a large band, either Miamis or Shawnees. Perhaps Yellow Panther and Red Eagle have come back."

"Like as not," said the shiftless one. "They're the kind to come."

"Huntin' scalps," said Tom Ross, speaking for the first time.

"And it's our business," said Paul, "to see that they don't get 'em."

"So it is," said Long Jim. "A man hates to lose his hair, 'specially when he's got such thick, beautiful hair as mine. I've heard that a big prize fur my scalp has been offered to all the Injun nations across the Ohio. Still, danger heats up my courage, an' I'm right proud uv bein' a marked man."

"We must find out all about that band," said Tom Ross. "Which way wuz they goin'?"

"The trail so far as it showed led to the east," replied Henry, "but you couldn't tell anything by that. I'm quite sure it was made by hunters sent out for buffalo or deer to feed the main band. There's lots of game around here, which shows that the Indians haven't been roving over this region much."

"I've seen all kinds," said Long Jim. "It jest walks or flies right up to our rifle barrels, an' ef it wuzn't fur the danger I'd like to show you fellers the grand way in which I could cook a lot uv it."

"Right thar, old hoss, I stand up fur you ag'in' the world," said Shif'less Sol, "but I reckon we ain't lightin' any fires jest now."

"No," said Henry. "I think we'd better stay here the rest of the day, and keep ourselves in hiding. The main band, whatever its size or wherever it is, seems to have plenty of flankers and hunters, and if we ran into them, as we surely would, we wouldn't have any chance to watch 'em later on."

"Right, o' course," said Shif'less Sol, and the others agreed in silence.

The five lay back upon the dry leaves, depending upon hearing chiefly, to warn them of the possible coming of an enemy. The undergrowth was so dense about the cup that no one fifteen yards away could see them, and they were able to hear even a creeping warrior, before he could come that near. Hence they reposed without alarm, and, bold forest runners that they were, eternally on guard, they took their ease with a certain sense of luxury.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and the sun was at its brightest, the rays being vertical. From their woodland cup they looked up at a circle of shining blue sky, continually crossed by tiny white clouds, following one another in a regular procession from south to north. The majesty of the wilderness and the illimitable covering of forest green appealed to Paul but little less than to Henry. He, too, felt the great lift of the spirit, danger or no danger.

The five enjoyed the wilderness, every one in his own way, Henry and Paul because their souls were stirred by it, Shif'less Sol because it was always unfolding to him some new wonder, Tom Ross because it was a hunting ground without limit, and Long Jim because nearly every kind of game found in it could be eaten, after it had been cooked by his master hand.

But they did not speak now. The people of the border, save in their homes, never talked much. The caution bred by the necessity of the woods became a habit. They acquired an extraordinary power over voice and nerves. Like a Hindu, a man could lie silent and motionless for hours. In this respect they had the quality of the Indian and the five at least could match his native cunning and training, and, in addition, bring to their own aid a superior intellectual power. That was why they were kings of the woods.

The sun passed the zenith and the rays were no longer vertical, but it was almost as bright in the cup as ever, while the sky itself had lost nothing of its shining blue tint. Paul presently said:

"I notice a shred of brown or gray against that brilliant blue. Now all the little clouds are white, and this sadder color has no business there. Besides, it's a blur.

Would you say it's smoke, Henry?"

Henry, who had been listening rather than watching, opened his eyes and stared intently at the faint smudge on the sky.

"Yes, it's smoke," he said, "and as the wind now comes from the south it, too, is traveling that way. Don't you think so, Sol?"

"O' course, Henry. Now you see thar's a little bigger patch o' gray followin' the first, an' it ain't so mighty high above us, either."

"Yes, I see it. Read the book for us, Sol."

"Lookin' at them thar two bits o' gray which Natur' didn't put up in the sky, but which somehow came from the hand o' man, I kin spin the tale jest ez it is. That's smoke up thar. It can't come from any kind o' a forest fire, 'cause it's early spring an' the woods are too green to burn. Thar ain't no white people in these parts 'cept ourselves an' ef thar wuz they wouldn't be so foolish ez to build a fire that sends up smoke. So it's bound to be Injuns. They're a big band, so big that they ain't afeard o' bein' attacked. That's the reason why they're so keerless 'bout thar smoke. An' 'cause the band is so big it ain't jest hunters. It's a war band bound south ag'in the settlements to git scalps in revenge for all the braves they've lost. Do I tell the truth, Henry?"

"To the last detail."

"Thoroughly good logic," said Paul.

"What's logic?" asked Long Jim.

"I'll illustrate," replied Paul. "When you see a deer, take aim at him with your rifle and shoot him through the heart, you feel quite sure when he drops dead that it was you who killed him. Logic tells you that, and so that is logic."

"I reckon I know now," said Long Jim, rubbing his chin.

"Tom," said Henry, "about how far from us is the fire that makes that smoke?"

"Smoke, 'less there's a terrible lot uv it, don't hang together long," replied Ross, looking up thoughtfully at the little gray clouds. "But I reckon them two thar wuz broke off from a much bigger piece at the start, an' are gittin' smaller ez they come. But thar main camp ain't more'n two miles from here, Henry."

"Just about that, I should say. We'd better look 'em over tonight, hadn't we?"

"Jest ez you say. You're the leader, Henry."

"We'll do it, if we can, but I'm thinking we'll have to be mighty careful. I've an idea that the woods are full of warriors. I don't want to be burned at the stake."

"But Jim Hart here would make a most bee-yu-ti-ful torch," said Shif'less Sol. "Slim an' nigh on to six feet and a half tall he'd light up the whole woods, ef he wuz set on fire on top fust."

"Ef you wuz set on fire on top," said Long Jim, "thar wouldn't be much burnin', 'cause a blaze can't feed on emptiness."

"Thar goes another o' them little gray patches," said Silent Tom. "That means they're still feedin' the fire—fur cookin' too, 'cause they don't need it to warm by. The hunters must hev brought in a power o' game, 'cause when the warriors do eat, an' they hev plenty o' it to last, they eat in a way no white man can match."

"I suppose that was the way of the primitive man," said Paul, who was wont to think about origins and causes. "He was never sure of his food, and when he had it he ate all he could."

Henry uttered a slight warning hiss, a sibilant breath, scarcely more, and the five shifting a little, grasped their rifles in such a manner that they could be pushed forward at once, and listened with all their ears. Henry had heard a light footfall, and then the faint sound of voices. He drew himself to the edge of the covert and he did it with so much skill that not a leaf or a blade of grass rustled.

Lying flat on the ground, and, looking underneath the boughs of the trees and bushes, where only the trunks and stems were in the way, he saw the legs of four men, the upper parts of their bodies being completely hidden by the foliage. Henry knew, nevertheless, that they were three Indians and one white man. The white man was disclosed by his thicker legs and his toes which turned out. All were clothed much alike in deerskin leggings, but Henry could make no mistake.

It was equally evident to him that the white man was not a prisoner, because he walked quite freely. Once he passed ahead of the three Indians, and then he dropped behind. If a captive, he would have walked just behind one warrior and the other two, in Indian file, would have walked close behind him.

Henry saw also that they were carrying heavy weights, because they stepped

slowly and with a certain stiffness. There was a rigidity and tension that strong men walking easily would not have shown. Unquestionably they were successful hunters, carrying game to a great gluttonous band feasting with energy two miles away.

"Three Shawnees and Braxton Wyatt," whispered Shif'less Sol, who had crept to his side. "Don't you remember that he had jest the faintest bit o' bow in his legs? An' thar's that bow. Why, I'd know them legs anywhar in the world."

"That's so," said Henry. "Now I wonder what his wicked mind is devising. There's no hater like a renegade."

"You may be shore he's thinkin' o' harm to our people down below," said the shiftless one. "I'm glad we're here to see 'em."

Henry nodded in agreement, and they whispered to the others that Wyatt and three Shawnees were passing. Henry and Sol knew that they were Shawnees, because they had red beads in a row on their leggings, where the Miamis wore blue ones.

"Ef I wuz to steal down a bit through the bushes an' shoot that traitor right squar' through his black heart, ez I could do easy, I'd be savin' the lives o' innocent men, women an' children," said Shif'less Sol.

"It is likely," said Henry, "but you mustn't do it. Somehow I can't see a man shot from ambush. Besides, it would give the alarm, an' we mightn't be able to carry on our work."

"I didn't say I wanted to do it, but it's pow'ful temptin'."

"Yes, I know, but it's silence and waiting for us."

The four pairs of legs, three Indian and one white, passed on. Ten minutes later they heard a long whoop from one point, and a long whoop from another point answered. They were not war cries, merely signals, and the five appreciated more than ever the invisibility of their little retreat. There was not more than one chance in a hundred that a wandering warrior would stumble upon it.

Other calls were heard through the forest, and then the faint sound of a chant dying swiftly.

"They're merry," said Paul, with swift intuition. "Maybe they have some scalps

already to rejoice over."

It was a bitter reminder to Henry, and yet it might be true. A small band, traveling fast, might have struck an unguarded settlement, and, returning, might be here now with the great band, bearing their sanguinary trophies. Five only, no matter how brave and skillful, could not watch the whole border.

"There's nothing to do," he said, "but wait for darkness."

Not one of them had risen to his feet, and they merely sank back on their elbows, again relying more upon ear than eye. They relaxed, but they were ready for instant action, should the need come.

They would not have very long to wait now. The sun was so far over in the west that it cast slanting rays and shadows were gathering at the base of the cup. It was growing colder and the rising wind sang among the green young leaves. A vast red sun hanging low over the western wilderness tinged the forest, as if with fire. To an ordinary human being it would have been an awful sun in its flaming majesty, frightening him, lost in the forest, by its mysterious immensity, but the five, either separately or alone were too familiar with the great spectacle to feel fear.

"It's an uncommonly red sun," said Tom Ross.

"And they say that means battle," said Paul, who had read much for a lad of the frontier.

"I s'pose so," said the shiftless one, "an' it may mean a storm, but I reckon in this case it's more likely to p'int to rifles an' tomahawks."

The splendor of the west in its crimson and gold deepened. Higher up in the heavens were glorious terraces of blue and pink. The boughs of the distant trees stood out as if they were wrapped in living fire.

"Magnificent!" said Paul, for whom its magic never palled.

"And now it's fading," said Henry.

"The shoulder of the world is coming up between," said Paul.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Long Jim, "when with your own eyes you kin see the sun movin' 'roun' behind the earth."

"The sun doesn't move, Jim, that is, so far as we're concerned, but we do. We roll around ourselves every day and night. At the end of the day the earth is between us and the sun, and in the night when we roll back around we face the sun again."

"You've read a lot of books, Paul, forty or fifty, I s'pose, an' I believe most that you say, but you can't make me believe a thing like that. Don't I see the sun set, an' don't I see it rise? What's print to a fellow's eyes? Print can lie, but your eyes don't."

Paul did not deem it worth while to argue. In a few more minutes the sun was hidden behind the turning earth, leaving great bands of gold and blue and pink, which, in their turn, faded fast, giving place to the gray of coming twilight.

The five ate venison, and drank from the tiny brook at the edge of the cup. Meanwhile, full night came, and they prepared to go forth and see what they might see.

CHAPTER II

THE BIG GUNS

Despite the brilliant sunset, the night was dark, drifting clouds veiling the moon at times, while the stars lay hidden behind mists and vapors, making the conditions suitable for those who wished to scout and spy upon an enemy, as fierce and implacable as the Indian.

"All that color when the sun went down means rain," said Tom Ross, who was weatherwise.

"But not tonight," said Henry.

"No, not tonight, but tomorrow, sometime, it'll come, shore. Them warriors hev built up their fires mighty big. Can't you smell the smoke?"

The wind was blowing toward them and upon it came the faint odor of burning wood.

"They're indulging in what we would call a festival," said Paul. "They must have an immense bonfire, and it must be a huge camp."

"Beyond a doubt," said Henry.

Examining their weapons carefully they left the cup, dropping into their usual order, as they made their silent way through the forest, Henry leading, the shiftless one next, then Paul, followed by Long Jim while Silent Tom covered the rear. There was no noise as they passed. They slipped by the boughs and every moccasined foot instinctively avoided the rotten stick that would break beneath its weight.

As they advanced the odor of burning wood grew stronger. It might not have been noticed by the dwellers in peaceful lands, but it was obvious at once to senses trained like theirs in the hardest of all schools, that of continuous danger. Henry twice heard the swish of a heavy night bird over their heads, but he knew the sound and paid no attention to it. Faint sliding noises in the thickets were made by the little animals, scuttling away in fright at the odor of man.

They crossed a shallow valley, in which the forest was extremely dense, and emerged upon a low hill, covered with oak, maple and elm, without much undergrowth. Here Henry was the first to see a low, barely discernible light upon the eastern horizon, and he called the attention of the others to it. All of them knew that it was the glow of the Indian campfire, and apparently nothing but heavy forest lay between them and the flames.

They held a consultation, and agreed that Henry and Shif'less Sol, the best two trailers, should go forward, while the other three should remain in reserve to cover their retreat, if it were forced, or to go forward to possible rescue, if they did not return before morning. The decision was reached quickly. The superiority was accorded at once and without jealousy to Henry and the shiftless one.

But they moved forward in a group, until the glow rose higher and grew brighter. Then the three who were to stay lay close in a clump of bushes growing near the base of a great elm that Henry and Shif'less Sol marked well. Faint whoops or their echo came to them, and they knew that the warriors were rejoicing.

"A mighty big camp, bigger even than we thought," said Silent Tom.

"We'll soon see," said Henry, as he and his comrade in the daring venture slid away among the bushes. Then the two went forward with unbelievable skill. Not even the ear of a warrior could have heard them fifteen feet away, and they never relaxed their caution, although they did not believe that the Indians were keeping very close watch.

They had seen at first a glow more pink than red. Now it was a deep scarlet, showing many leaping tongues against the forest. The odor of burning wood became strong, and they saw sparks and wisps of smoke flying among the leaves. Long fierce whoops like the cry of animals came at times, but beneath them was an incessant muttering chant and the low, steady beat of some instrument like a drum.

"The war dance," whispered Henry.

The shiftless one nodded.

They redoubled their caution, creeping very slowly, lying almost flat upon the ground and dragging their bodies forward, like crawling animals. They were coming to one of the openings, like a tiny prairie, frequent in early Kentucky, sheltered on the side they were approaching by a dense canebrake, through

which they were making their way.

The open space was several acres in extent, and at the far end were tepees, which the two knew were intended for chiefs of high degree. In the center burned an immense bonfire, or rather a group of bonfires, merged into one, fed incessantly by warriors who dragged wood from the adjoining forest, and threw it into the flames.

But it was not the sight of the fire or the tepees that stirred Henry. It was that of hundreds of Indian warriors gathered and indulging in one of those savage festivals upon which nobody could look at night without a thrill of wonder and awe. Here primeval man was in his glory.

The Indians of North America were a strange compound of cruelty and cunning, leavened at times by nobility and self-sacrifice. Most of the tribes were perfect little political organizations, and the league of the Iroquois was worthy of a highly civilized race. They were creatures of circumstances, and, while loyal to friends, they were merciless to enemies, devising incredible methods of torture.

It was this knowledge that made Henry shudder as he looked upon the great camp. He knew the Indian and liked him in many respects—his captivity in the northwest had been no pain—but he was white and he must fight for the white man, and hence against the red.

The warriors were intoxicated not with liquor, but with the red fury of the brain. Vast quantities of game, freshly dressed, were heaped upon the earth. Every man would seize a piece to suit himself, broil it hastily on coals and then eat. He ate like the savage he was, and the amounts they devoured were astonishing, just as they could fast an amazing number of days, if need be.

Whenever one had eaten enough for the time he would rush into a mass of dancers near the eastern edge of the opening. Then he would begin to leap back and forth and chant with unnatural energy. They could keep up this manner of dancing and singing for many hours, and they quit it only to obtain more food or to fall down exhausted.

"It's the war dance," whispered Henry.

Shif'less Sol nodded. It was, in truth, just approaching its height as the two crept near. Four powerful warriors, naked except for the breech clout, were beating incessantly and monotonously upon the Indian drums. These drums (Ga-no-jo)

were about a foot in height and the drummer used a single stick. The dance itself was called by the Shawnees, Sa-ma-no-o-no, which was the name bestowed upon this nation by the Senecas, although the Iroquois themselves called the dance Wa-ta-seh.

Few white men have looked upon such a spectacle at such a time, in the very deeps of the wilderness, under a night sky, heavy with drifting clouds. The whole civilized world had vanished, gone utterly like a wisp of vapor before a wind, and it was peopled only by these savage figures that danced in the dusk.

Near the trees stood a group of chiefs, among whom Henry recognized Yellow Panther, the Miami, and Red Eagle, the Shawnee, imposing men both, but not the equals of an extremely tall and powerful young chief, who was destined later to be an important figure in the life of Henry Ware. They stood silent, dignified, the presiding figures of the dance.

The war drums beat on, insistent and steady, like the rolling of water down a fall. The very monotony of the sound, the eternal harping upon one theme, contained power. Henry, susceptible to the impressions of the wilderness, began to feel that his own brain was being heated by it, and he saw as through a dim red mist. The silent and impassive figures of the chiefs seemed to grow in height and size. The bonfires blazed higher, and the monotonous wailing chant of the warriors was penetrated by a ferocious under note like the whine of some great beast. He glanced at the shiftless one and saw in his eyes the same intense awed look which he knew was in his own.

The mass of men who had been dancing stopped suddenly, and the chant stopped with them. The warriors gathered into two great masses, a lane between them. Save the chiefs, all were naked to the breech clout, and from perspiring bodies the odor of the wild arose.

The fires were blazing tremendously, sending off smoke, ashes and sparks that floated over the trees and were borne far by the wind. At intervals, prolonged war whoops were uttered, and, heavy with menace, they rang far through the woods, startling and distinct.

Then from the edge of the forest emerged about forty warriors painted and decorated in a wildly fantastic manner and wearing headdresses of feathers. The drums beat again, furiously now, and the men began to dance, swinging to and fro and writhing. At the same time they sang a war song of fierce, choppy words, and those who were not dancing sang with them.

The lane wound around and around, and, as the singers and dancers went forward they increased in vehemence. They were transported, like men who have taken some powerful drug, and their emotions were quickly communicated to all the rest of the band. Fierce howls rose above the chant of the war songs. Warriors leaping high in the air made the imaginary motions of killing and scalping an enemy. Then their long yells of triumph would swell above the universal chant.

All the while it was growing darker in the forest. The heavy drifting clouds completely hid the moon and stars. The sky was black and menacing, and the circular ring of woods looked solid like a wall. But within this ring the heat and fury grew. The violence and endurance of the dancers were incredible, and the shouting chant of the multitude urged them on.

Henry caught sight of a white figure near the chiefs, and he recognized the young renegade, Braxton Wyatt. Just behind him was another and older renegade named Blackstaffe, famed along the whole border for his cunning and cruelty. Then he saw men, a half-dozen of them, in the red uniforms of British officers, and behind them two monstrous dark shapes on wheels.

"Can those be cannon?" he whispered to Shif'less Sol.

"They kin be an' they are. I reckon the British allies o' the Injuns hev brought 'em from Detroit to batter down the palisades o' our little settlements."

Henry felt a thrill of horror. He knew that they were cannon, but he had hoped that the shiftless one would persuade him they were not. They were probably the first cannon ever seen in that wilderness, the sisters of those used later with success by the Indians under English leadership and with English cannoneers from Detroit against two little settlements in Kentucky.

But startled as Henry was, his attention turned back to the dancers. Old customs, the habits of far-off ancestors, slumbered in him, and despite himself something wild and fierce in his blood again responded to the primeval appeal the warriors were making. A red haze floated before his eyes. The tide of battle surged through his blood, and, then, with a fierce warning to himself, he stilled his quivering body and crouched low again.

A long time they watched. When a dancer fell exhausted another leaped gladly into his place. The unconscious man was dragged to one side, and left until he might recover.

"I think we've seen enough, don't you?" whispered Henry. "I'd feel better if I were further away."

"Stirs me like that too," said Shif'less Sol. "It ain't healthy fur us to stay here any longer. 'Sides, we know all we want to know. This is a big war party, mostly Miamis and Shawnees, with some Wyandots an' a few Iroquois and Delawares."

"And the English and the cannon."

"Yes, Henry, an' I don't like the looks o' them cannon, the first, I reckon, that ever come across the Ohio. Our palisades can turn the bullets easy 'nuff, but they'd fly like splinters before twelve pound round shot."

"Then," said Henry with sudden emphasis, "it's the business of us five to see that those two big guns never appear before Wareville or Marlowe, where I imagine they intend to take them!"

"Henry, you hit the nail squar' on the head the fust time. Ef we kin stop them two cannon it'll be ez much ez winnin' a campaign. I think we'd better go back now, an' j'in the others, don't you?"

"Yes, I don't see that we can do anything at present. But Sol, we must stop those cannon some way or other. We beat off a great attack at Wareville once, but we couldn't stand half a day before the big guns. How are we to do it? Tell me, Sol, how are we to do it?"

"I don't know, Henry, but we kin hang on. You know we've always hung on, an' by hangin' on we gen'rally win. It's a long way to Wareville, an' while red warriors kin travel fast cannon can't get through a country covered ez thick with woods an' bushes ez this is. They'll hev to cut a road fur 'em nigh all the way."

"That's so," said Henry more hopefully. "They'll have to go mighty slow with those big guns through the forests and thickets and canebrake, and across so many rivers and creeks. We'll hang on, as you say, and it may give us a chance to act. I feel better already."

"They ain't likely to move fur a day or two, Henry. After the dances an' the big eatin' they'll lay 'roun' 'till they've slep' it all off, an' nobody kin move 'em 'till they git ready, even if them British officers talk 'till their heads ache. They're goin' on with the dancin' too. Hear them whoops."

The long shrill cries uttered by the warriors still reached them, as they stole

away. Henry passed his hand across his forehead. All that strange influence was gone now. He no longer saw the red mist, and his heart ceased to beat like a hammer. The healthy normal forest was around him, full of dangers, it was true, but of dangers that he could meet with decision and judgment.

They returned rapidly, but occasionally they looked back at the red glare showing above the trees, and for most of the way the faint echoes of the whoops came to them. When they approached the bushes in which they had left the others Henry uttered a low whistle which was promptly answered in like fashion by Silent Tom.

"What did you see?" asked Paul, as they emerged from their hiding place.

"Nigh on to a thousand warriors," replied Shif'less Sol, "an' it was a mighty fine comp'ny too. We saw two chiefs, Yellow Panther, the Miami, an' Red Eagle, the Shawnee, that we've had dealin's with before, an' our old friend Braxton Wyatt, an' the big renegade Blackstaffe, an' British officers."

"British officers!" exclaimed Paul. "What are they doing there?"

"You know that our people in the East are at war with Britain," said Henry, "and I suppose these officers and some men too have come from Detroit to help the warriors wipe us out in Kentucky. They've brought with them also two very formidable allies, the like of which were never seen in these woods before."

"Two new and strange allies, Henry?" said Paul. "What do you mean?"

"Something that rolls along on wheels, and that speaks with a voice like thunder."

"I don't understand yet."

"And when it speaks it hurls forth a missile that can smash through a palisade like a stone through glass."

"It must be cannon. You surely don't mean cannon, Henry?"

"I do. The big guns have crossed the Ohio. The Indians or rather the English with 'em, mean to use 'em against us. It's our business to destroy 'em. Sol and I have agreed on that, and you are with us, are you not?"

"O' course!" said Tom Ross.

"Uv course!" said Long Jim.

"Through everything," said Paul.

"What do you think we'd better do right now?" asked Ross.

"Go back to the cup and sleep," replied Henry. "It'll be safe. The Indians will be so gorged from their orgie, and will feel so secure from attack that they'll hardly have a scout in the forest tomorrow."

"Good plan," said the shiftless one. "I expect to be in that shady little place in a half-hour. Long Jim here, havin' nothin' else to do, will watch over me all through the rest of the night, an' tomorrow when the sun comes out bright, he'll be settin' by my side keepin' the flies off me, an' me still sleepin' ez innercent ez a baby."

"That won't happen in the next thousand years," said Long Jim. "Ef thar's anything fannin' you tomorrow, when you wake up, a Shawnee or a Miami warrior will be doin' it with a tomahawk."

They quickly retraced their course to the cup, being extremely careful to leave no trail, and were about to make ready for the night. Every one of them carried a light blanket, but very closely woven and warm, upon which he usually slept, drawing a fold over him. The dry leaves and the blankets would make a bed good enough for any forest rover at that time of the year, but Henry noticed a stone outcrop in a hill above them and concluded to look farther.

"Wait till I come back," he said, and he pushed his way through the bushes.

The outcrop was of the crumbling limestone that imparts inexhaustible fertility to the soil of a great region in Kentucky. It is this decaying stone or a stone closely akin which makes it the most wonderful cave region in the world.

Higher up the slope Henry found deep alcoves in the stone, most of them containing leaves, and also a strong animal odor, which showed that in the winter they had been occupied as lairs by wild animals, probably bears.

Looking a little farther he found one that penetrated deeper than the rest. It might almost have been called a cave. It was so placed that at that time of night the opening faced a bit of the moon that had made a way through the clouds, and, Henry peering into the dusky interior, judged that it ran back about twenty feet. There was no odor to suggest that it had been used as a lair, perhaps because the

animals liked the alcoves better.

He threw in some twigs, but, no growl coming forth, he entered boldly through an aperture about three feet across and perhaps five feet high. He stepped on smooth stone, but as soon as he was inside he stopped and listened intently. He heard a faint trickling sound, evidently from the far side of the cave, which appeared to be both deeper and wider than he had thought.

Henry surmised that the sound was made by running water, and standing a long time, until his eyes could grow used, in some degree, to the dusky interior, he, at length, made out the opposite wall which was of white stone. Stepping carefully he found that a tiny stream flowed in a groove made by itself, coming out of one side of the wall and disappearing in the other.

It was such a thin little stream that it created no dampness in the cave and Henry, drinking some of the water from the palm of his hand, found it fresh and cold. He experienced a singular pleasure in discovering the water, one that he did not understand. Perhaps it was a prevision.

He explored fully this room in stone, and found it dry and clean throughout. His ancestors, hundreds of thousands of years ago, would have rejoiced to find such a place, and Henry rejoiced now for reasons which were akin to theirs. He returned quickly to the cup.

"We won't sleep here," he said.

"Why not?" asked Paul.

"Because I've found a better place."

"But this is fine."

"I know, but I have a finer."

"What is it?"

"A beautiful stone mansion, built generations ago. It has no furniture in it now, but we don't need any. It's built very solidly and it's been waiting for us a long time."

"A hole in the limestone," hazarded Shif'less Sol.

"Partly right. It's more than a hole. It's a room, and we've had great luck to find

it, I tell you, this stone room specially made a million years ago for our use."

"Well, it's been waitin' a good while, but we're here."

"Come along, I'll lead you," said Henry, "and be sure not to leave any trace of a trail. This house is intended for us only, and we don't want any wandering warriors, no matter what their nation, knocking at our doors."

"Hurry," said Shif'less Sol. "I'm gittin' pow'ful sleepy."

Henry led the way, and, as he did so, taking a comprehensive look at the heavens, he was glad for other reasons as well as safety that they had found their stone house in the hill. The bit of a moon was gone and the clouds hung lower and darker. He felt the damp in the air.

The mouth of the cave was almost hidden by a heavy growth of bushes, but Henry, pulling them aside a little, pointed to the opening.

"In there with you," he said to Long Jim, who was nearest.

"Who? Me?" said Long Jim, "an' run squar' into a b'ar's mouth? Let Sol go. He's the fattest, an' the b'ar would like him best."

"No bear is inside," said Henry. "I've seen to that. A herd of about fifty was in there, the first bear herd I ever saw, but I killed them all with my knife and threw them down the cliff before I saw you."

"Then ez you've cleared out the place, Henry," said Long Jim, "I guess it's all safe, an' here goes."

He bent down from his mighty height and entered, the others following silently in single file, swallowed up by the dusk. Then they stood in a group, until they could see one another, the faint light from the door helping.

"Well," said Henry, proudly, "haven't I done well by you? Isn't our new house equal to my announcement of it?"

"Equal, and more than equal!" exclaimed Paul with enthusiasm. "Why, we haven't had such a place since that time we lived on the island in the lake, and this is a greater protection from danger."

"An' we hev plenty o' water, too, I see," said Shif'less Sol. "Look at the river over thar, runnin' along ag'in the wall. 'Tain't more'n three inches wide, an' an inch

deep, but it runs fast."

"I've no doubt that a cave family lived here two or three hundred thousand years ago," said Paul, his vivid fancy blossoming forth at once.

"What are you talkin' about, Paul?" said Long Jim. "People livin' here two or three hundred thousand years ago! Why, the world is only six thousand years old! The Bible says so!"

"In the Biblical sense a year did not mean what a year does now, Jim. It may have been a thousand times as long. Men did live in caves several hundred thousand years ago. A book that Mr. Pennypacker has says so."

"If the book says it, I reckon it's so," said Long Jim, with the borderer's sublime faith in the printed word.

"The man of that time was a big, hairy fellow. He didn't have even bows and arrows. He fought with a stone club or ax of stone."

"An' do you mean to tell me, Paul, that a man with jest a club could go out an' meet the arrers of the Injuns? Why, all uv them warriors kin shoot arrers pow'ful hard an' straight. What chance would the man with the club hev had?"

"There were no Indians then, Jim."

"No Injuns then!" exclaimed Long Jim indignantly. "Why the fust white man that ever come through these parts found the woods full uv 'em. I take a heap from you, Paul, 'cause you're an eddicated boy, but I can't swaller this."

"I'll prove it to you some day," said Paul laughing, "but whether you believe me or not this place suits us."

"How much venison have we got, Tom?" asked Henry.

"'Nough in a pinch to last three days."

"Now you fellers kin keep on talkin' ef you want to," said the shiftless one, "but ez fur me I'm a man o' sense, a lazy man who don't work when he don't hev to, an' I'm goin' to sleep."

He spread his blanket on the stone floor, lay down and kept his word.

"We might as well follow," said Henry. "Sol's a man of intelligence, and, as he says, when there's nothing to do, rest."

"I ain't sleepy," said Tom Ross. "Guess there's no need uv a watch, but I'll keep it awhile, anyhow."

He sat down on his blanket and leaned against the wall, near the mouth of the room. The others stretched out, even as Shif'less Sol had done, and breathing a sigh or two of satisfaction followed him into a land without dreams.

Although Henry's sleep was dreamless, it did not last very long. He awoke in three or four hours. It was quite dark, but, as he lay on his back and gazed steadily, he was able to make out the figure of Silent Tom, crouched on his blanket beside the door, his rifle across his knees. Although saying nothing Henry had paid attention to what Paul had said about the ancient cave man, and now it was easy for his fancy to transform Ross into such a being. The rifle on his knees was his stone club, and he watched by the opening all through the night lest an enemy should come. For the present, at least, it was as much reality as fancy, because here was the cave, and here they were, guarding against a possible foe.

"Tom," he called softly.

Ross looked around.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I'm restless. I can't sleep any more, and, as I'm going to stay by the opening, you'd better persuade yourself to go to sleep."

"Are you bent on watchin', Henry?"

"Yes, I intend to sit up."

"Then I'll go to sleep."

He lay down on his blanket, and Henry took his place by the wall.

CHAPTER III

THE INDIAN CAMP

The position of the great youth was comfortable, as he sat upon his blanket, the curve of the wall fitting into the curve of his back, his rifle resting across his knee, and his figure motionless. He carried in his belt a pistol, the keen hatchet of the border and also a long hunting knife, but it was the rifle upon which he depended mainly, a beautiful piece, with its carved stock and long blue barrel, and in the hands of its owner the deadliest weapon on the border.

Henry, like Tom, did not stir. He was a match for any Indian in impassivity, and every nerve rested while he thus retained complete command over his body. He could see from his position the bushes beyond the opening, and, above them, a broad belt of black sky. He rejoiced again that they had found this cave or rather stone room as they called it.

The dark heavens were full of threat, the air heavy with damp, and low thunder was just beginning to mutter. Tom Ross had read the gorgeous sunset aright. It betokened a storm, and the most hardened hunters and scouts were glad of shelter when the great winds and rains came. The dryness and safety of the room made Henry feel all the more snug and content, in contrast with what was about to happen outside. It seemed to him that Providence had watched over them. Truly they had never known a finer or better place.

His mind traveled again to those old, bygone people of whom Paul had talked, how they lived in caves, and had fought the great animals with stone clubs. But he had a better room in the stone than most of theirs, and the rifle on his knees was far superior to any club that was ever made. His nerves quivered beneath a thrill of pleasure that was both mental and physical. His eyes had learned to cope with the dusk in the room, and he could see his four comrades stretched upon their blankets. All were sleeping soundly and he would let them sleep on of their own accord, because there was no need now to move.

The mutter of the thunder grew a little louder, as if the electricity were coming up on the horizon. And he saw lightning, dim at first and very distant, then growing brighter until it came, keen, hard and brilliant, in flashing strokes.

Henry was not awed at all. Within his safe shelter his spirit leaped up to meet it.

The thunder now broke near in a series of fierce crashes, and the lightning was so burning bright that it dazzled his eyes. One bolt struck near with a tremendous shock and the air was driven in violent waves into the very mouth of the cave. Shif'less Sol awoke and sat up.

"A storm!" he said.

"Yes," replied Henry, "but it can't reach us here. You might as well go back to sleep, Sol."

"Bein' a lazy man who knows how an' when to be lazy," said the shiftless one, "I'll do it."

In a few minutes he was as sound asleep as ever, while Henry continued to watch the storm. The sky was perfectly black, save when the lightning blazed across it, and the thunder rolled and crashed with extraordinary violence. But he now heard an under note, one that he knew, the swish of the wind. It, too, grew fast and he dimly saw leaves and the branches of trees flying past. It was certainly good to be in the snug stone covert that he had found for himself and his friends!

The lightning became less bright and the thunder began to die. Then the wind came with a mighty sweep and roar and Henry heard the drops of rain, striking on leaf and bough like bullets. He also heard the crash of falling trees, and one was blown down directly in front of the opening, hiding it almost completely. He was not sorry. Some instinct warned him that this too was a lucky chance. The rain came in driven torrents, but it passed the mouth of the cave and they were as dry and comfortable as ever.

The thunder and lightning ceased entirely, by and by, and Henry sat in the dark listening to the rush of the rain, which came now in a strong and steady sweep like the waves of the sea. He listened to it a long time, never moving, and at last he saw a thin shade of gray appear in the eastern sky. Day was near, although it would be dark with the storm. But that need not trouble them. On the other hand it would be to their advantage. The great camp of the Indians would be broken up for a while, and they must long since have sought what shelter they could find. They could not advance for two or three days at least, while the five lay in a splendid covert only two miles from them.

Laggard day came, with a dusky sky, obscured by heavy clouds and the rain still

pouring. It was several hours after sunrise before it ceased and the sky began to clear. Then the others awoke and looked out.

"A big storm and I never heard a thing," said Paul.

"No, Paul," said the shiftless one, "you didn't hear it but it came off anyway. You're a mighty good sleeper, you are, Paul. Put you atween fine white sheets, with a feather bed under your body an' a silk piller under your head, an' I reckon you'd sleep a week an' be happy all the time."

"I suppose I would. It's a sound conscience, Sol."

"I heard somethin' once," said Long Jim, "but knowin' I wuz in the best place in the world I didn't open my eyes. I jest went to sleep ag'in an' now, ef thar wuz anythin' to cook an' any place to cook it I'd git the finest breakfast any uv you fellers ever et."

"We know that, Jim," said Henry, "but we'll have to stick to the dried venison for the present. You'll find plenty of drinking water over there by the wall. Do you notice that our river has risen a full inch?"

"So it has," said Paul. "The rain, of course. Since we've had this noble inn I'm not sorry about the storm. It will stop the march of that Indian army."

"And also hide any trail that we may have left yesterday or last night," said Henry with satisfaction.

"What do you think we ought to do now, Henry?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"Eat our breakfasts, that is, chew our venison. I don't believe we can do anything today, and there is no need, since the Indians can't move. We'll stay here in hiding, and at night we'll go out again to explore."

"A whole day's rest," said the shiftless one, with deep approval. "Nothin' to do but eat an' sleep, an' lay back here an' think. I'm not eddicated like you an' Henry, Paul, but I kin do a power o' hard thinkin'. Now, ef Jim tries to think it makes his head ache so bad that he has to quit, but I guess he's lucky anyway, 'cause we're always doin' his thinkin' fur him, while he's takin' his ease an' bein' happy."

"Ef I had been dependin' on your thinking', Shif'less Sol," said Long Jim, "my scalp would hev been hangin' from an' Injun lodge pole long ago."

"Well, it would look well hangin' thar. You hev got good thick hair, Long Jim."

They finished their breakfast, and all of them sat down near the opening. The fallen tree, while it hid the aperture, did not cut off their own view. They were so close to it that they could see well between the boughs and leaves. The rising sun, brilliant and powerful, had now driven away all the clouds. The sky was once more a shining blue, all the brighter because it had been washed and scoured anew by wind and rain. The green of the forest, dripping everywhere with water, looked deeper and more vigorous. Down in the valley they heard the foaming of a brook that had suddenly become a torrent, and which with equal suddenness would return to its usual size.

They remained all day in their retreat, seeing thin threads of smoke three or four times against the blue sky, an indication that the warriors had built their campfires anew, and were trying to dry themselves out. Indians as well as white men suffer from rain and cold and Henry knew that they would be sluggish and careless that night. There was a bare chance that the five might get at the cannon and ruin them in some manner, although they had not yet thought of a way.

It was decided that Henry and Shif'less Sol should make the second expedition, Paul, Tom Ross and Long Jim remaining as a reserve within their stone walls. The two did not disturb the fallen tree at the entrance, but slipped out between the boughs, and walking on dead leaves and fallen brushwood, in order to leave as little trace as possible, reached the valley below. This low area of land was studded for a long distance with new pools of water, which would disappear the next day, and the ground was so soft that they took to the bordering forest in order to escape the mud.

"'Pears likely to me," said the shiftless one, "that them Britishers had tents. They wouldn't go on so long an expedition as this without 'em. It's probable then that we'll find the renegades in or about 'em."

"Sounds as if it might be that way," said Henry. "The site of their camp is not more than a mile distant now, and the tents may be pitched somewhere in the woods."

"Reckon we're near, Henry, I smell smoke, and it's the smoke that comes out of a pipe."

"I smell it too. It's straight ahead. It must be one of the officers. We'll have to be slow and mighty particular. There's a big moon and all the stars are out."

The night, as if to atone for the one that had gone before, was particularly

brilliant. The dripping woods were luminous with silvery moonlight and the three used every tree and bush as they approached the point from which the tobacco smoke came. The woods were so dense there that they heard the men before they saw them. It was first a hum of voices and then articulated words.

"It seems that these forest expeditions are not to be taken lightly, Wyatt," said a heavy growling voice.

"No, Colonel Alloway," Braxton Wyatt replied in smooth tones. "There are no roads in the wilderness. If we want one we'll have to make it. It's the cannon that hold us back."

"The Indians could move fast without them."

"Yes, sir, but we must have 'em. We can't break through the palisades without 'em."

"Why, young sir, these red warriors can annihilate anything to be found in Kentucky!"

"They did not do it, sir, when we attacked Wareville last year."

"Lack of leadership! Lack of leadership!"

"If you'll pardon me, sir, I don't think it was. The Indians have to fight in their own way, and the Kentucky riflemen are the best in the world. Why, sir, the things they can do with their rifles are amazing. A musket is like an old-fashioned arquebus compared with their long-barreled weapons. I know one of them—and I must say it, though I hate him—who could kill running deer at two hundred yards, as fast as you could hand him the rifles, never missing a shot."

"A William Tell of the woods, so to speak!" said the heavy, gruff voice, sounding an incredulous note.

"You'll believe me, sir, if you meet 'em," said Wyatt earnestly. "I don't love 'em any more'n you do, much less perhaps, but I've learned enough to dread their rifles. I was telling you about the one who is such a terrible marksman, though the others are nearly as good. Last night before the rain one of the Wyandots found the trace of a footstep in the forest. It was a trace, nothing more, and not even an Indian could follow it, but I've an idea that it's the very sharpshooter I was telling you about."

"And what of it? Why should we care anything for a stray backwoodsman."

"He's very dangerous, very dangerous, sir, I repeat, and he's sure to have four others with him."

"And who are the dreadful five?" There was a note of irony in the voice.

"The one of whom I spoke is named Henry Ware. There is another, a youth of about his own age, named Paul Cotter. The third is Solomon Hyde, a man of amazing skill and judgment. The other two are Tom Ross, a wonderful scout and hunter, and Long Jim Hart, the fastest runner in the West. It was he who brought relief, when we had the emigrant train trapped. I think that all the five are somewhere near and that we should beware."

The heavy, gruff voice was lifted again in an ironic laugh, and Henry, creeping a yard or two more, saw through the leaves the whole group. The English officer whom Wyatt had called Alloway, was a man of middle years, heavily built. His confident face and aggressive manner indicated that he was some such man as Braddock, who in spite of every warning by the colonials, walked with blinded eyes into the Indian trap at Fort Duquesne, to have his army and himself slaughtered. But now the English were allied with the scalp-takers.

A half-dozen English officers, younger men, surrounded Colonel Alloway, silent and attentive, while their chief talked with Wyatt. The older renegade, Blackstaffe, was leaning against a tree, his arms folded across his chest, a sneering look upon his face. Henry knew that he thought little of European officers there in the woods, and out of their element.

But the most striking figures in the scene were Yellow Panther, head chief of the Miamis, and Red Eagle, head chief of the Shawnees. They stood erect with arms folded, and they had not spoken either while Alloway and Wyatt talked. They were imposing men, not as tall as the young chief whom Henry had seen distantly, and who was destined to have a great part in his life later on, but they were uncommonly broad of shoulders and chest, and, though elderly they were at the very height of their mental and physical powers.

They were in full war paint, their scalp locks were braided and each had flung about him somewhat in the manner of a Roman toga a magnificent blanket of the finest weave, blue for Yellow Panther, red for Red Eagle.

Wyatt translated to them Alloway's words, and Red Eagle at length raising his

hand said to Wyatt in Shawnee, which all three of the hidden scouts understood perfectly:

"Tell our white ally that his words are not those of wisdom. The Indian when he goes upon the war path does not laugh at his enemy. He knows that he is not fighting with children and he heeds the warnings of those who understand."

His tones were full of dignity, but Wyatt, when he translated, softened the rebuke. Nevertheless enough of it was left to make the arrogant Colonel start a little, and gaze with some apprehension at the two massive and silent figures, regarding him so steadily. It was likely too that the grim forest, the overwhelming character of the wilderness in which he stood, affected him. Without the Indians he and his men would be lost in that mighty sweep of country.

"Tell the officers of the King, across the great salt water," continued Red Eagle to Wyatt, "that the word has come to us that if we go and destroy the settlements of the Yengees, lest they grow powerful and help their brethren in the East who are fighting against the King called George, we are to receive great rewards. We use the tomahawk for him as well as for ourselves, and while we listen to Alloway here, Alloway must listen also to us."

Wyatt veiled his look of satisfaction. He had not fancied the haughty and patronizing manner of Alloway, and he was sure that the Colonel was making too little of the five and their possible proximity. Despite himself, and the young renegade was bold, he felt a shiver of apprehension lest the formidable group were somewhere near in the woods. But he added, speaking in a more persuasive tone to Alloway:

"You'll pardon me, sir, but the Indian chiefs are in their own country. They're proud and resolute men, trusting in their own methods, and they must be humored. If you don't defer somewhat to them it's quite possible that they'll take all their warriors and go back to their villages."

Alloway's face grew red with anger, but he had enough wisdom and resolution to suppress it. He looked around at the vast and somber forest, in which one could be lost so easily, and knew that he must do so.

"Very well," he said, "the chiefs and I lead jointly. Ask them what they want."

Wyatt talked with the two chiefs and then translated:

"They wish to stop here a day or two, until they can obtain new supplies of food. They wish to send out all of their best trailers in search of the scout called Ware and his comrades. They are dangerous, and also Yellow Panther and Red Eagle have bitter cause to hate them, as have I."

"Very well, then," said Alloway, making the best of it. "We'll halt while the warriors brush away these wasps, whom you seem to fear so much."

He walked away, followed by his men, and Henry and Shif'less Sol drew back in the thicket. They were flattered by Braxton Wyatt's frank admission of their power, but they were annoyed that the footprint had been seen. Henry had felt that they could work much better, if the warriors were unaware of their presence.

"Those two chiefs will act quickly," he whispered to his comrade. "Maybe they had already sent out the trailers, before they had the talk with the officer. It's possible that they're now between us and our new home in the cliff. It's always best to have a plan, and if they pick up our trail I'll run toward the east, and draw them off, while you make your way back to Paul and Jim and our room in the cliff."

"You let me make the chase," said Shif'less Sol, protestingly. "They can't ketch me."

"No! We've pretty well agreed upon our different tasks, and this, you know, is mine."

The shiftless one was well aware that Henry was the most fitting, yet he was more than anxious to take the chief danger upon himself. But he said nothing more, as they withdrew slowly, and with the utmost caution, through the woods. Twice, the red trailers passed near them, and they flattened themselves against the ground to escape observation. Henry did not believe now that they could regain the stone room without a flight or a fight, as he was confirmed in his belief that Red Eagle and Yellow Panther had sent out numerous trailers, before their talk with the English colonel.

A quarter of a mile away, and they were forced to lie down in a gully among sodden leaves and hold their breath while two Shawnees passed. Henry saw them through the screening bushes on the bank of the gully, their questing eyes eager and fierce. At the first trace of a trail, they would utter the war whoop and call the horde upon the fugitives. But they saw nothing and flitted away among the bushes.

"Comin' purty close," whispered Shif'less Sol, as they rose and resumed their progress. "Warm, purty warm, mighty warm, hot! The next time they'll jest burn their hands on us."

"Maybe there'll be no next time," said Henry as they approached the edge of a brook. But the bank, softened by the rain, crumbled beneath them, and the "next time" had come almost at once.

Although they did not fall, their feet went into the stream with a splash that could be heard many yards away. From three points came fierce triumphant shouts, and then they heard the low swish of moccasined feet running fast.

"Remember," said Henry, rapidly, "hide your trail and curve about until you reach the hidden home. Wait there for me!"

He was gone in an instant, turning off at a sharp angle into the bushes, leading directly away from the cliff. Now the young superman of the forest summoned all his faculties. He called to his service his immense strength and agility, his extreme acuteness of sight and hearing, and his almost supernatural power of divination, the outgrowth of a body and mind so perfectly attuned for forest work.

No fear that he would be caught entered his mind. Alone in the forest he could double and turn as he chose, and there was no Indian so fleet of foot that he could overtake him. A wild and exultant spirit flowed up in him. He was the hunted. Nevertheless it was sport to him to be followed thus. He laughed low and under his breath, and then, swelling the cords in his throat, he gave utterance to a cry so tremendous in volume that it rang like the echo of a cannon shot through the wilderness. But, after the Indian fashion, he permitted it to die in a long, fierce note like the whine of a wolf.

It was an extraordinary cry, full of challenge and mockery. It said to those who should hear, that they might come on, if they would, but they would come on a vain errand. It taunted them, and aroused every kind of anger in their breasts. No Indian could remain calm under that cry and every one of them knew what it meant. Their ferocious shouts replied, and then Henry swung forward in the long easy gait of the woodsman.

Mind and muscle were under perfect control. While he ran he saw everything in the bright moonlight and heard everything. He made no effort to conceal his trail, because he wanted it to be seen and he knew that the entire pursuit was

strung out behind him. Probably Shif'less Sol was already safe within the stone walls.

Lest the trail itself should not be enough he again uttered the defiant cry that thrilled through the forest, returning in many echoes. He listened for the answering shouts of the warriors, and felt relieved when they came. The spirit that was shooting through his veins became wilder and wilder. His blood danced and he laughed once more under his breath, as wild as any of the wild men of the forest.

He was racing along a low ridge from which the rain had run rapidly, leaving fairly firm ground. Once more he disturbed the thickets. Startled wild animals sprang up as the giant young figure sped past. A rabbit leaped from under his raised foot. A huge owl looked down with red, distended eyes at the flying youth, and, in the face of the unknown, using the wisdom that is the owl's own, flew heavily away from the forest. Some pigeons, probably a part of the same flock that he had seen, rose with a whirr from a bough and streamed off in a black line among the trees. The undergrowth was filled with whimperings, and little rustlings, and Henry, who felt so closely akin to wild life, would have told them now if he could that they were in no danger. It was he, not they, who was being pursued.

He caught a glimpse of a dusky figure aiming a rifle. Quickly he bent low and the bullet whistled over his head. Catching his own rifle by the barrel he swung the stock heavily and the red trailer lay still in the undergrowth. A little farther on a second fired at him, and now he sent his own bullet in reply. The warrior fell back with a cry of pain to which his pursuing comrades answered, and Henry for a third time sent forth his fierce, defiant shout. Those whom he had met must have been hunters coming in.

He reloaded his rifle, running, and kept a wary eye as he passed into the canebrake. But he believed now that he had left behind the outermost fringe of the scouts and trailers. He would encounter nobody lying in ambush, and, after making his way for a long time through the dense thickets, he sat down on a little mound to rest and observe.

He knew that the nearest of the warriors was at least four or five hundred yards away, and that none could come within rifle shot without his knowledge. So, he sat quite still, taking deep breaths, and was without apprehension. He was not really weary, the long swinging run had not been much more than exercise, but

he wanted to look about and see the nature of the land.

The canebrake extended a great distance, but he saw far beyond it the black shadow of forest, in the interminable depths of which he might easily lose himself if the pursuit continued. Whether it continued or not was a matter of sheer indifference to him. He had drawn them far enough, but if they wished to go farther he would be the hunted again, although it might be dangerous for the hunters.

He saw the crests of the cane waving a little, and, rising, he resumed the race on easy foot, passing through the canebrake, and entering the forest, in which there was much rough, rocky ground. Here he leaped lightly from stone to stone, until he knew the trail was broken beyond the possibility of finding, when he sat down between two great upthrust roots of an oak and leaned back against turf and trunk together. He knew that the green of his deerskins blended perfectly with the grass, and he felt so thoroughly convinced that the pursuit had stopped that he decided to remain there for the night.

He unrolled the blanket from his back, put it about his shoulders, and then he laughed again at the successful trick that he had played upon these fierce red warriors. It had been an easy task, too. Save the two hasty shots from the trailers he had never been in serious danger, and now, as he rested comfortably, he ate a little more of the dried venison from his knapsack. Then he fell asleep.

The hours of the night passed peacefully. The soft turf supported his back, and only his head was against the trunk of the tree. It was a comfortable position for a seasoned forest runner. Toward morning the wind rose and began to sing through the spring foliage. Its song grew louder, and before it was yet dawn Henry awoke and listened to it. Like the Indian he heard the voice of the Great Spirit in the wind, and now it came to him with a warning note.

He stretched his limbs a little and stood up, his hand on the hammer of his rifle. The darkness that precedes the dawn covered the woods, but he could see some distance into it, and he saw nothing. He listened a long time, and as the dusk began to thin away before the sun he heard a low chant. He knew that it was an Indian song, a song of triumph, coming from the south, and for a while he was puzzled.

Clearly, this was no part of the great war band, which lay to the north of him, and he concluded that it must be a small expedition which had already gone into the South and which was now returning. But he did not like the character of the

song. It indicated victory and he thrilled with horror and repulsion. The triumph must be over people of his own race.

The blood in every vein grew hot with anger, and the pulses in his temples beat so hard that for a while it made a little singing in his head. The great figure stiffened and a menacing look came into his eyes.

The chant was fast growing louder and the singers would pass within a few feet of his tree. He slipped aside, turning away a hundred yards or so, and crouched behind dense bushes. The singers came on, about twenty warriors in single file, Shawnees by their paint, and the first three brandished aloft three hideous trophies. Henry had more than suspected, but the reality made him shudder.

The three scalps were obviously those of white people, and the first, long, thick, blonde and fine, was that of a woman. The warrior who waved it aloft, as he chanted, wore only the breech cloth, his naked body painted in many colors, and he exulted as he displayed his trophy, so fine to his savage heart.

A mighty rage seized Henry. For a moment his eyes were clouded by the red mist that danced before them. The song of the wind before the dawn had aroused him to his coming danger, but there was nothing to tell the triumphant savage that his hour was at hand.

The red mist cleared away from the great youth's eyes. The blood lately so hot in his veins became as cold as ice, and the pulses in his temples sank to their normal beat. Mind and nerves were completely attuned and he was a perfect instrument of vengeance. The rifle rose to his shoulder and he looked down the sights at a tiny bear painted in blue directly over the warrior's heart. Then he pulled the trigger and so deadly was his aim that the savage sank down without a cry, and the scalp fell and lay upon his own body, the long hair reddening fast with the blood that flowed from the warrior's heart.

Henry turned instantly and darted into the depths of the forest, reloading as usual as he ran. A single backward glance had shown him that the warriors, confused and puzzled at first, were standing in an excited group, looking down at their dead comrade. He knew they would recover quickly and to hasten the moment he uttered that long, thrilling cry of defiance.

He was willing for them to pursue, in truth he was anxious that they should. He had marked the other two warriors who waved the scalps, and he now had a cold and settled purpose. He intentionally made noise as he ran, letting the boughs of

bushes fly back with a swish and soon he heard the Indians, two or three hundred yards away.

He knew that their muskets or smooth bores could not reach him at the range and that his rifle had over them, an advantage of at least fifty yards. He let them come a little nearer, and, as the country was now more open they saw him and uttered cries of mingled rage and triumph. They were gaining perceptibly and they felt certain of capture.

The fugitive permitted them to come a little nearer, and he watched them out of the corner of one eye. The second man in the pursuing group, a tall thin warrior, had been waving a scalp. Even now it was swinging at his belt, and as they gained, yard by yard, Henry wheeled for a second or two and shot the scalp-bearer through the head.

Then he increased his speed, reloaded his rifle once more, and sent back that taunting cry which he knew inflamed the savage heart with ferocity and the desire for vengeance. The Indians had hesitated, but now they uttered the war whoop all together, and came on at their utmost speed. Henry noted the third scalp-bearer. He was a short, powerful fellow, but he did not have speed enough to keep himself in front. But Henry was resolved that he too should suffer.

They were running now through forest comparatively free from undergrowth. The fugitive stumbled suddenly and then limped for a step or two. The simultaneous yell of the Indians was fierce and exultant, but the rifle of the great youth flashed, and the short, broad warrior was gone to join his two comrades.

Then the speed of the fugitive increased at a great rate, and, as the warriors were no longer anxious to pursue, he soon disappeared in the forest.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEED IN THE WATER

Henry's pace sank into a long walk, but he did not stop for two hours. Then he drank at one of the innumerable brooks and lay down in the forest. His adventure with the returning war party made him think much. It was likely that other small bands had gone on the great adventure in the south. The young warriors, in particular, were likely to take to the scalp trail. It furnished them with excitement and at the same time destroyed the intruders upon their great hunting grounds.

He was tempted to rejoin his comrades and go south at once with a warning, but second thought told him that the chief danger lay in the great war band under Yellow Panther and Red Eagle. He would adhere to his original plan and seek to destroy the cannon.

He resolved to return at night, and since he had plenty of time he shot a small deer, taking all chances, and cooked tender steaks over a fire that he lit with his flint and steel. It refreshed him greatly, and putting other choice portions in his knapsack he started back on a wide curve, leaving the smoldering coals to arouse the curiosity of any one who might see them.

It was now the second day after the great storm, and earth and the forest had dried completely. Henry, stepping lightly on the firm earth, and always using every stone or log or brook to hide any possible trace, had little fear of leaving a trail that even the keenest Indian could follow. But he picked up several trails himself. One was that of a small party coming from the east, and he thought they might be Wyandots bound for the great camp. Another had the imprints of two pairs of boots, mingled with the light traces of moccasins, and he knew that they were made by English soldiers, doubtless gunners, coming also with their Indian comrades to join the great camp.

Nothing escaped his notice. He knew that not far to the eastward ran one of the great rivers that emptied into the Ohio, flowing northward, and he began to wonder why the band did not use it for the transport of the cannon, at least part of the way. Indians were usually well provided with canoes, and by lashing some of the stoutest together they could make a support strong enough for the twelve

pounders. It was an idea worth considering, and he and his comrades would watch the stream. Then it occurred to him that he might go there now, and see if any movement in that direction had been begun by the warriors. The other four undoubtedly would remain in their little stone fortress, until he returned, or even if they should venture forth they knew all the ways of the forest, and could take care of themselves.

To think of it was to act at once, and he began a great curve toward the east, slackening speed and awaiting the night, under cover of which he could work to far better effect and with much greater safety.

Toward sunset he came upon a trail made by moccasins and two pairs of boots, and he surmised that it was Alloway and one of his young officers who had passed that way with the Indians. As they were going toward the river it confirmed him in his conjecture that they intended to use it, at least in part, for their advance into Kentucky.

There had been no effort to hide the trail. What need had they to do so? Even with the belief that the five were in the vicinity they were in too large numbers to fear attack, and Henry, following in their footsteps, read all their actions plainly.

They were not walking very fast. The shortness between one footprint and the next proved it, and their slowness was almost a sure indication that the party included Yellow Panther and Red Eagle, or at least one of them. They did not go faster, because they were talking, and Alloway would have discussed measures only with the chiefs.

At one point four pairs of footsteps turned aside a little, and stopped in front of a large fallen log. Two of the traces were made by moccasins and two by boots. So, the two pairs of moccasins indicated that both chiefs were present. The four had sat on the log and talked some time. In the crevices of the bank he found traces of thin ash. The British officer therefore had lighted his pipe and smoked there, further proof that it had been a conference of length.

The warriors had remained in a group on the right, thirty or forty yards away, and several of them had lain down, the crushed grass showing faint traces of their figures. Two small bones of the deer, recently covered with cooked flesh, indicated that several of them had used the opportunity to eat their supper.

Unquestionably the movement intended by the white leader and the red chiefs was important, or they would not stop to talk about it so long. Hence it must

mean the transportation of the cannon by water. He could not think of anything else that would divert them from the main route.

About two miles farther on another trail joined the one that he was following. It was made wholly by moccasins, but it was easy enough for him to discern among them two pairs, the toes of which turned outward. These moccasins, of course, were worn by Blackstaffe and Wyatt, who, whatever the British colonel may have thought of them, were nevertheless of the greatest importance, as intermediaries between him and the Indian chiefs.

A few yards beyond the junction they had stopped and talked a little, but they had not sat down. Nevertheless they had consulted earnestly as the footsteps were in an irregular group, showing that they had moved about nervously as they talked. Then they walked on, but the moccasins moved forward in a much straighter and more precise manner than the boots, which were now veering a little from side to side. The two British officers, not trained to it like the others, were growing weary from the long walk through the woods. But they persevered. Although they sagged more the trail led on, and, after a while, Henry saw a light, which he knew to be a campfire, and which he surmised was on the bank of the river.

The night was fairly dark and under cover of bushes he approached until he could see. Then all his surmises were confirmed. The campfire was large and around it sat Alloway, the younger officer, Red Eagle and Yellow Panther, and at a little distance about twenty warriors. The two Englishmen seemed utterly exhausted, while the others showed no signs of weariness.

"I admit, Wyatt, that walking seven or eight miles through the primeval wilderness is no light task," said Alloway, wiping his red, perspiring face.

His tone was not haughty and patronizing. He felt just then, in this particular work, that he was not the equal of the renegades and the warriors. Henry saw a faint ironic smile upon the face of each of the renegades, and he understood and appreciated their little triumph.

"You would do better, Colonel," said Blackstaffe suavely, "to wear moccasins in place of those heavy boots. They carry you over the ground much more lightly, and we have to follow the ways of the wilderness."

The irritable red of Alloway's face turned to a deeper tint, but he controlled himself.

"Doubtless you are right, Blackstaffe," he said, "but we are here at last."

Wyatt had been speaking in a low tone to the chiefs, and it inflamed a choleric man like Alloway to hear anyone saying words that he could not understand. He was not able to restrain himself wholly a second time.

"What is it, man? What is it that you're saying to the chiefs?" he exclaimed.

"I was merely telling them," replied Wyatt, "that you and your aide, Lieutenant Cartwright, had been made weary by the long walk through the woods, and that we'd better let you rest a little before going down to inspect the canoes."

A blaze of anger appeared in Alloway's eyes, but the younger officer who had been watching his chief with some apprehension, said deferentially:

"Suppose, sir, that we do as they suggest. Campaigning in this wilderness is not like fighting on the open fields of Europe."

They all sat down about the fire, and venison, jerked buffalo meat and roasted grain were served to them. The two chiefs were silent, and, holding themselves with dignity, were impressive. Presently one of them took from under his deerskin tunic a pipe, with a long stem, and a bowl, carved beautifully. He crowded some tobacco into it, put a live coal on top and took two or three long puffs. Then he passed it to the other chief who after doing the same handed it to Colonel Alloway.

The officer hesitated, not seeming to understand the meaning of the pipe at that particular time, and Wyatt said, maliciously:

"The pipe of peace, sir!"

"Why should we smoke a pipe of peace when we're already allies?"

"A little feeling has been shown on our march through the woods to the river. Indians, sir, are very sensitive. These two chiefs, Yellow Panther and Red Eagle, are the heads of powerful tribes, and if their feelings are hurt in any manner they will resent it, even to the point of withdrawing all their warriors and returning north of the Ohio. I suggest, sir, that you smoke the pipe at once, and return it to them."

Colonel Alloway did so, Cartwright took it readily, after them the two renegades smoked, and thus it was passed around the circle. It came back to Red Eagle,

who knocked the coals out of the pipe and then gravely returned it to its resting place.

Henry had watched it all with eager attention, and when the little ceremony was finished he made another short circle through the bushes that brought him close to the river, where he saw about twenty canoes and two boats much larger, built stoutly and apparently able to sustain a great weight. He knew at once that they were intended for the cannon and that they had been brought down the Ohio and then up the tributary stream. Both had oars and he surmised that the white gun crews would use them, since the Indians were familiar only with the paddle. These boats, scows he would have called them, were tied to the bank and were empty. Some of the canoes were empty also, but in seven or eight, Indian warriors were lying asleep.

He was quite certain that the cannon would be brought up the next day, and be loaded on the scows, and he wished now for the presence of his comrades. The five together might accomplish something real before the dawn, and then he resolved that since he was alone he would attempt it alone. He withdrew to a considerable distance, and lay down in the bushes, very close.

It was hard to think of a plan that seemed feasible, and he concentrated his mind upon it until his brain began to feel inflamed, as if with a fever. But the idea came at last. It was full of danger, and it called for almost supernatural skill, but he believed that he could do it. Then the fever went out of his brain and the tension of his nerves relaxed. He felt himself imbued with new strength and courage, and his soul rose to its task.

He saw the two officers, the renegades and the chiefs come down to the edge of the river, and talk with the warriors there. No very strict watch was kept, because none seemed to be needed. Then blankets were spread for them under the trees, and they went to sleep. Most of the warriors followed their example, and not more than three or four sentinels were left on watch. These three or four, however, would have eyes to see in the darkness and ears to hear when a leaf fell.

But Henry did not sleep. He was never more wide-awake. He made his way carefully through the bushes farther up the stream to a point where he noticed the last canoe lying empty near the shore, almost hidden in the shadows cast on the water by the overhanging boughs.

He came to a point parallel with it and not more than ten feet away, and critically

examining the river saw that the water was quite deep there, which suited his purpose. The light craft was held merely by a slender piece of bark rope. Then he began the most perilous part of his task. He returned toward the sleeping officers and chiefs, and, lying flat upon the ground in the deep grass and heavy shadows, began slowly to worm himself forward. It was a thing that no one could have accomplished without great natural aptitude, long training and infinite patience. He knew that risk of detection existed, but he calculated that, if seen, he might be up and away before any one of his enemies could find time for a good shot.

The Englishmen in particular were the mark at which he aimed. He had noticed that the younger one carried a large horn of powder and he was likely to be careless about it, a belief that was verified as he drew near. The Englishman had taken off his belt, bullet pouch and powder horn, all of which now lay on the ground near him.

A long arm was suddenly thrust from the grass and a hand closing on the powder horn took it away. Henry felt that it was well filled and heavy and he glowed with triumph. The first link in his chain had been forged. He crept back into the bushes, and stopped there twice, lying very still. He saw the Indian sentinels moving about a little, but evidently they suspected nothing. They were merely changing positions and quickly relapsed into silence and stillness.

It was fully half an hour before Henry was back at his place opposite the swinging little canoe. Then he shook the powder horn triumphantly, put it down at the foot of a tree and covered it up with some leaves. As he did so he noticed that many of last year's leaves were quite dry and he remembered it.

Then he went back to forge the second link, which was not so difficult. The fire around which the white men and the chiefs had eaten their supper was a little distance back of the present camp, where he was quite sure that it was still smoldering, although deserted. He found a stick the end of which was yet a live coal, and circling a little wider on his return he came back to the powder horn.

Henry held the live point of the stick close to the ground where it could not cast a glow that the sentinels might see, and then waited a minute or so before taking any further action. Two links of the chain had been forged and he felt now that he would carry it to its full length and success. He had never been more skillful, never more in command of all his faculties, and they had never worked in more perfect coördination. There had never been a more perfect type of the human

physical machine. Nature, in one of her happy moods, had lavished upon him all her gifts and now he was using them to the utmost, turning his ten talents into twenty.

The third link would be one of great difficulty, much harder than the bringing of the fire, and that was the reason why he was considering so well. He could discern the figures of three of the sentinels on land. Two of them were brawny warriors naked to the waist, and painted heavily. The third was quite young, younger than himself, a mere boy, perhaps on his first war path. Henry understood the feelings of hope and ambition that probably animated the Indian boy and he trusted that they would not come into conflict.

The sentinels were walking about, and when the one nearest him turned and moved away he gathered up quickly fallen brushwood which lay kiln-dry at the river's brink. Then he hid his rifle, other weapons and ammunition in the grass. For a brief space he must go unarmed, because he could not be cumbered in an effort to keep them dry.

Carrying the powder horn, the dry sticks and the one lighted at the end, he dropped silently into the water and managed with one arm to swim the few feet that separated him from the canoe. Then he passed around it, putting it between him and the land, and carefully lifted everything inside. He knew that the dry wood would burn fast when he placed the torch against it, and he put the horn full of powder very near.

Then he sank low in the water behind the canoe, and listened until he heard the faint sputter of the fire in the dry wood. Now new difficulties arose. He must time everything exactly, and for the sake of his enterprise and his own life he must keep the Indian alarm from coming too soon.

The sputtering was not yet loud enough for the warriors on the bank to hear it, and he ventured to rise high enough for another look over the edge of the canoe. In two minutes, he calculated, the fire would reach the powder horn. Then he drew from his belt his hunting knife, the only weapon that he had not discarded, and cut the withe that held the canoe.

Burying himself in the water to the nose he sent his fire ship down the stream toward the two scows intending for it to enter just between them. Now he needed all his skill and complete command over his will. The sputtering of the fire increased, and he knew that it was rapidly approaching the horn of powder. The flesh had an almost irresistible desire to draw away at once and swim for life, but

an immense resolution held his body to its yet uncompleted task.

The canoe was moving with such a slight ripple that not an Indian sentinel had yet heard, but when it was within ten yards of its destination one happened to look over the river and see it moving. There would have been nothing curious in a canoe breaking its slender thong and floating with the current, but this one was floating against it. The Indian uttered a surprised exclamation and instantly called the attention of his comrades.

Henry knew that the supreme moment was at hand. The Indian warning had come, and the sputtering told him that the fire was almost at the powder horn. Giving his fire ship a mighty shove he sent it directly between the scows and then he made a great dive down and away. He swam under water as long as he could, and just as he was coming to the surface he heard and saw the explosion.

The two scows and the canoe seemed to leap into the air in the center of a volcano of light, and then all three came down in a rain of hissing and steaming fragments. The crash was stunning, and the light for a moment or two was intense. Then it sank almost as suddenly and again came the darkness, in which Henry heard the steaming of burning wood, the turmoil of riven waters and the shouts of warriors filled with surprise and alarm.

It was easy in all the confusion for him to reach the bank, recover his arms and speed into the forest. He had forged with complete success every link in his chain of destruction. The scows intended for the transportation of the cannon were blown to splinters, and while they might lash enough canoes together to sustain their weight, they must move slowly and at much risk.

Although he was dripping with water, Henry was supremely happy. When he undertook this feat he had believed that he would succeed, but looking back at it now it seemed almost incredible. But here he was, and the deed was done. He laughed to himself in silent pleasure. Wyatt, Blackstaffe and the others would undoubtedly trace it to him and his comrades, and he hoped they would. He was willing for them to know that the five were not only on watch but could act with terrific effect.

A half-mile away from the river and he heard a long fierce yell, uttered by many voices in unison. He knew they had picked up at the edge of the stream the tale that he had not sought to hide, and were hoping now for revenge upon the one who had cost them so much. But he laughed once more back of his teeth. In the darkness they might as well try to follow a bird of the air. He curved away,

reached one of the numerous brooks intersecting the stream, and ran for a long time in its bed. Then he emerged, passed into a dense canebrake and stopped, where he took off his wet clothing and spread it out in the dark to dry. The blanket which he had left on the bank with his arms was warm and dry and he wrapped it around his body. Then he lay down with his weapons by his side.

The satisfied blood ran swiftly and proudly in the veins of the great forest runner. He had done other deeds as bold, but perhaps none as delicate as this. It had demanded a complete combination of courage and dexterity and perfect timing. A second more or less might have ruined everything. He could imagine the chagrin of the choleric colonel. Unless Wyatt and Blackstaffe restrained him he might break forth into complaints and abuse and charge the Indians with negligence, a charge that the haughty chiefs would repudiate at once and with anger. Then a break might follow.

Whether the break came or not he had insured a delay, and since the cannon could not yet be put upon the river he might find a way to get at them. He rolled on one side, made himself comfortable on the dead leaves and then heard the wind blowing a song of triumph through the cane. He fell asleep to the musical note, but awoke at dawn.

His clothing was dry, and, unwrapping himself from the tight folds of the blanket, he dressed. Then, stretching his muscles a little, to remove all stiffness or soreness he emerged from the canebrake. After examining a circle of the forest with both eye and ear to see that no warrior was near, he climbed a tree and looked over a sea of forest.

To the north where the great camp lay he saw spires of smoke rising, and to the east, where a detachment guarded the boats in the river, another column of smoke floated off into the blue dawn. So he inferred that they were yet uncertain about their campaign and that their forces would remain stationary for a little while. But he was sure that warriors were ranging the forest in search of him. Red Eagle and Yellow Panther would not let such an insult and loss pass without many attempts at revenge.

He descended and ate the last of his venison. He would have returned at once to his comrades, but he believed that many warriors were in between and he did not wish to draw danger either upon them or himself. He began another of his great curves and it took him away from the refuge in the cliff, coming back in two or three hours to the stream that bore the little Indian fleet. His triumph of the night

before increased his boldness, and he resolved to return the following night and annoy further the detachment by the river. It would serve his cause, and it would be a pleasure to vex the dogmatic European colonel.

Weather was a great factor in the operation he was carrying on, and the coming night, fortunately for his purpose, promised to be dark. Spring is fickle in the valley of the Ohio, and toward evening clouds gathered, although there was not a sufficient closeness of the air to indicate rain. But the moon was feeble and by and by went away altogether. Then the stars followed, leaving only a black sky which hid Henry well, but which did not hide the smaller camp by the river from him.

Watchers had been spread out in a wider circle, but he had no difficulty in approaching the fire, built on the bank of the river, around which sat the two chiefs, the renegades and the British officers. Henry saw that the faces of all of them expressed deep discontent, and he enjoyed the joke, because joke it was to him. He understood the depths of their chagrin.

"We'll have to carry the cannon on the canoes, and maybe they'll fall into the river," said Alloway querulously. "How in thunder the blowing up of those scows was managed I don't understand!"

"Several of the warriors saw a canoe floating down, sir, just before the explosion," said Cartwright, "and it must have been no illusion, as a canoe is gone."

Cartwright had missed his horn of powder after the excitement from the explosion was over, but he supposed some Indian had used the opportunity to steal it, and he said nothing about his loss from fear of creating a breach.

"In my opinion, sir," said Braxton Wyatt, smoothly but with just a trace of irony, "it was done by Ware and his comrades."

"Impossible! Impossible!" said Alloway, testily. "The careless Indians left powder in the scows and in some manner equally careless it's been exploded. The tale of the canoe that floated upstream of its own accord was an invention to cover up their neglect."

"Do you wish us to translate for you and to state that opinion to the chiefs?" asked Blackstaffe.

Alloway gave him an angry glance, but he had prudence enough to say:

"No, of course not. After all, there may have been a canoe. But whatever it was it was most unfortunate. It delays us greatly, and it preys upon the superstitions of the warriors."

"They are very susceptible, sir, to such things," said Wyatt. "They dread the unknown, and this event has affected them unpleasantly. But I'm quite sure it was done by Ware, although I don't know how."

"Ware! Ware!" exclaimed Alloway, impatiently. "Why should a force like ours dread a single person?"

"Because, sir, he does things that are to be dreaded."

Yellow Panther, who had been sitting in silence, his arms folded across his great bare chest, arose and raised his hand. Braxton Wyatt turned toward him respectfully and then said to Colonel Alloway:

"The head chief of the Miamis wishes to speak, sir, and if you will pardon me for saying so, it will be wise for us to listen."

"Very well," said Alloway. "Tell us what he says."

Thus spoke Yellow Panther, head chief of the Miamis, veteran of many wars, through the medium of Braxton Wyatt:

"We and our brethren, the Shawnees, have come with many warriors upon a long war path. Our friends, the white men whom the mighty King George has sent across the seas to help us, have brought with them the great cannon which will batter down the forts of the Long Knives in Kaintuckee. But the signs are bad. The boats which were to carry the cannon on the river have been blown up. An enemy stands across our path and before we go farther we must hunt him down. If we cannot do it then Manitou has turned his face away from us."

Wyatt translated and Alloway sourly gave adhesion. It was hard for him to think that a single little group of borderers could hold up a great force like theirs, armed with cannon too. But he was acute enough to see that the menace of a rupture would become a reality if he insisted upon having his own way.

Henry had watched them while they talked, and then he turned aside to a point nearer the river's brink, from which he could see two pairs of their strongest canoes lashed together in the stream, ready for the reception of the cannon when they should come. How was he to get at them? He knew that he could not use a

fire boat again, but these rafts, for such they were, must be destroyed in some manner.

Lying deep in the thickets he considered his problem. One of the reasons why he excelled nearly all the scouts of the border was because he thought so much harder and longer, and now he concentrated all his faculties for success.

It did not take him long to mature his plan, and when he had done so he moved down the stream, where the chance of an Indian sentinel discovering him was much smaller. There he waited a space, while the night darkened still more, the moon and stars being shut out entirely. A wind arose and little crumbling waves pursued one another on the surface of the river, which was flooded and yellow from spring rains.

He saw only one or two sentinels and they showed but dimly. Farther down the Englishmen, the chiefs and the renegades were sitting about the low fire, and he felt sure that the white men, at least, would sleep there by the coals. From his covert in the bushes he saw them presently spreading their blankets, and then they lay down with their feet to the smoldering fire. The chiefs soon followed them and elsewhere the warriors also rolled themselves in their blankets. They seemed to think that he would not come back, reasoning like the white men that the lightning would not strike in the same place twice.

So he waited long and patiently. This quality of patience was one in which the Caucasian was usually inferior to the Indian, but in the incessant struggle on the border it was always needed. Henry, through the power of his will and his original training among the Northwestern Indians, had acquired it in the highest degree. He could sit or lie an almost incredible length of time, so still that he would seem to blend into the foliage, and now as he lay in the bushes some of the little animals crept near and watched him. A squirrel, not afraid of the fire in the distance, came down the trunk of a tree, and hanging to the bark not five feet away regarded him with small red eyes.

Henry caught a glimpse of the little gray fellow and turning his head ever so slightly regarded him. The red eyes looked back at him half bold and half afraid, but Henry had lived in the wild so much that the two felt almost akin. The squirrel saw that the gigantic figure on the ground did not move, and that the light in the eyes was friendly. He crept a little nearer, devoured by curiosity. He had never seen a human being before, and instinct told him that he could escape up the tree before this great beast could rise and seize him. He edged cautiously

an inch nearer, and the blue eyes of the human being smiled into the little red eyes of the animal.

The two gazed at each other for a half minute or so. It was a look of the utmost friendliness, and then the squirrel went noiselessly back up the tree. It was a good omen, thought Henry, but he still waited with the illimitable patience which is a necessity of the wild. He saw the fire, before which the white men and the chiefs lay sleeping, sink lower and lower. The night remained dark. The heavy drifting clouds which nevertheless were not ready to open for rain, moved overhead in solemn columns. The surface of the river grew dim, but now and then there was a light splash as a strong fish leaped up and fell back into the current. The Indian guards knowing well what made them, paid no attention to these sounds.

The wind increased and Henry saw all the canoes, including those lashed together, rocking in the current. The blast made a whistling sound among the bushes and boughs and he concluded that the time for him to act had come. He took off all his clothing, made it, his weapons and ammunition in a bundle which he fastened on his head, and then swam across the river. He went some distance down the bank, deposited everything except his heavy hunting knife securely in the bush, and then, with the knife in his teeth, dropped silently into the river.

The lashing of the wind and the perceptible rise of the stream from flooded tributaries farther up, made a considerable current, and Henry floated with it. But the bank on the camp side of the river was considerably higher than the other and first he swam across to its shelter.

It was so dark now that not even the keen eye of an Indian could have seen his dark head on the dark surface of the stream, and he was so powerful in the water that he swam like a fish without noise. Once or twice he caught the gleam of the fire on the bank, but he knew that he was not seen.

In a few minutes he dropped in behind the lashed canoes, and with the heavy hunting knife cut holes in their bark bottoms. He was skillful and strong, but it took him a half-hour to finish the task, and he stopped at intervals to see if the sentinels had noticed anything unusual. Evidently they dreamed as little of this venture as of that of the fire boat.

He cut a small hole in every one at first, and then enlarged them in turn, and when he saw the water rising in the boats he swam rapidly away, still keeping in the shelter of the near shore. Then he dived, rose just behind a curve and walked

out on the opposite bank, his figure gleaming white for a moment before he crept into the woods where his clothes and weapons lay. He dressed with rapidity and still lying hidden he heard the first Indian cry.

The sentinels, hearing the gurgling of the water, had looked over and seen the sinking canoes. Even as they looked, and as the alarm brought others, the canoes filled with water and sank fifteen feet to the bottom of the stream.

A few rays of moonlight forced their way through the clouds just at that moment, and Henry saw the amazement on the faces of the warriors, and the anger on the faces of the white men, because Alloway and the others, awakened by the alarm, had hurried to the banks of the river.

He laughed low to himself but with deep and intense satisfaction. He was enough a son of the wild to understand the emotions of the Indians. He knew that the second destruction of the boats, but in a different way, would fill them with awe. They could attach no blame to the sentinels who watched as only Indians could watch.

Henry saw them lift the remaining canoes upon the bank for safety, and then send out scouts and runners in search of the dangerous foe who had visited them twice. None had yet come to his side of the river, but he knew that they would do so in time, and feeling that the deed was sufficient for the night, he fled away in the darkness.

CHAPTER V

THE FOREST JOKER

It was Henry's first thought to return to his comrades, but the way was long and he must pass by the greater Indian camp, which surely had out many sentinels. So he changed his mind and resolved to spend the night in the woods. Shif'less Sol and the others would not be alarmed about his absence. They too had acquired the gift of infinite patience and would remain under cover, until he returned, content with their stone walls and roof, having plenty of venison, and fresh water running forever in their home itself.

It was his idea to seek some thicket at a distance and lie hidden there until the next night, when he might achieve a fresh irruption upon the enemy. He had succeeded so far that he was encouraged to new attempts, and all the wilderness spirit in him came to the front. The civilization of the house and the city sank quite away. He was for the time being wholly a creature of the primeval forest, and while his breath was the very breath of the wild he felt with it a frolic fancy that demanded some outlet. He must sleep, but he would like to play a new trick upon his enemies before he slept.

The spirit of the Faun, in which the old Greeks believed, was re-created within him, and where could a better place for its re-creation have been found than in this vast green wilderness stretching from east to west a thousand miles, and from north to south fifteen hundred miles, a region almost untouched by the white man, the like of which was not to be found elsewhere on the globe.

He laughed a little in his triumph, though silently. As he strode along a stray ray of moonlight fell upon him now and then, and disclosed the tall, splendid figure, the incarnation of magnificent youth, the forest superman, one upon whom Nature had lavished every gift for the life that he was intended to live. Although his step was light and soundless, his figure expressed strength in every movement. It was shown in the swing of the mighty shoulders, and the long stride which without effort dropped the miles behind him.

It was destined, too, that he should have his wish for another achievement that night, one that would please the sportive fancy now so strong in him. After

recrossing the river he saw on his left an opening of considerable size, and he heard grunts and groans coming from it. He knew that a buffalo troop was resting there. The foolish beasts had wandered into the Indian vicinity, but they would learn the proximity of the warriors the next day and wander away. Meanwhile Henry needed them and would use them. Now and then he reverted to the religious imagery which he had learned when he was with Red Cloud and his Northwestern tribe. Manitou had really sent this buffalo herd there for his particular benefit. It was the largest that he had ever seen in Kentucky. Fully five hundred of the great brutes rested in the opening and he needed numbers.

He passed into the thick forest near them, and then with infinite patience lighted a fire with his flint and steel. Securing long sticks of dead wood he ignited them both until they burned with a steady and strong flame. Strapping his rifle upon his back and holding aloft a flaming torch in either hand, and uttering fierce and wild shouts he charged directly upon the buffaloes.

He showed prodigious activity. All the extraordinary life that was in him leaped and sang in his veins. He rushed back and forth, uttering continuous shouts, whirling each torch until it made a perfect circle of fire. Doubtless to the heavy eyes of the buffaloes the single human being seemed twenty, every one enveloped in bursts of flame which they dreaded most of all things.

A big bull buffalo, the leader of the herd, crouched at the very edge of the opening, decided first that it was time to move. The whirling circles of fire with living beings inside of them filled him with terror. His ton of flesh quivered and quaked. He rose with a mighty heave to his feet and then with a bellow of fright took flight from the flashing devils of fire.

The whole herd was in a panic in an instant and followed the leader. They might have scattered in their fright, but they were shepherded by a human mind, which had allied with it a body without an equal in all that million and a half square miles of forest. As he leaped to and fro, shouting and whirling his torches, he drove the herd straight toward the camp on the river where the English officers and chiefs were even now asleep.

A few animals broke off from the herd and were lost in the bushes, but the rest ran, packed close, a long column, tapering at the front like an arrow head, with the big bull as its point. They bellowed with fright and made a tremendous crashing as they raced over the mile that divided them from the Indian camp. Warriors heard the uproar, like the bursting of a storm in the night, and leaped to

their feet.

Now Henry fairly surpassed every effort that he had made hitherto. He leaped more wildly than ever, and redoubled his fierce shouting. He was so close upon the flank of the last buffaloes that they felt the torches singeing their hair, and, mad with fear lest they go to their buffalo heaven sooner than they wished they charged directly upon the Indian camp.

The wild yells of the warriors joined with Henry's shouts. Alloway, Cartwright and the others leaped up to see the red eyes, the short crooked horns and the huge, humped shoulders of the buffaloes bearing down upon them. Nothing could withstand that rush of mighty bodies and white men and Indians alike ran for their lives.

The buffaloes came up against the river, and blocked by its deep flood, turned, and, running over the camp again, crashed away toward the west. Henry, stopping at a convenient distance, tossed his torches into the river, and taking the rifle from his back sank into the bushes. Here he laughed once more, under his breath, but with the most intense delight. It was the hugest joke of all.

Without any great danger to himself he had made the buffaloes serve him, and he could still hear them bellowing and crashing in their frantic flight. Although no lives had been lost, everything in the camp had been trodden flat. All of their cooking utensils had been smashed, many of their rifles had been broken, and, the canoes drawn upon the bank, had been ground under the hoofs of the buffaloes. A hurricane could not have made a wreck more complete.

Henry saw Alloway emerge from the forest and come back to the scene of ruin. He had taken off his coat before he lay down, but only fragments of it remained now. He was red with anger and he swore violently. Yellow Panther and Red Eagle had lost their blankets, but, whatever they felt, they kept it to themselves. They looked upon the trodden camp, but they did not lose their dignity.

"What is this? What is this? What is this?" stuttered Alloway in his wrath.

"We seem, sir, to have been run over by a herd of buffaloes," said Wyatt, smoothly.

"And does this sort of thing happen often in these woods?"

"I can't say that I've heard of such a case before, but even if it's a single instance we're the victims of it."

Alloway glared at Wyatt, but he knew that he could not afford to quarrel with the young renegade, who had great influence with the tribes. He picked up the fragments of his red coat and looked at them ruefully.

"I didn't know that the herds were ever so large in this forest country," he said to Blackstaffe.

"It's seldom so," said the older renegade.

"Is it their habit to rise up at midnight and gallop over men's camps?"

"It is not."

"Then how do you account for such behavior?"

Blackstaffe shrugged his shoulders and spoke a few words in their own tongue to the chiefs. Then he turned back to Colonel Alloway.

"The chiefs tell me," he said, "that the buffaloes were driven by a demon, an immense figure, preceded by whirling circles of fire. The evil spirit, they say, is upon them."

"And do you believe such nonsense?"

"A continuous life in the deep woods gives one new beliefs. I thought I caught a glimpse of such a figure, but when I tried for a second look it was gone. But whether right or wrong you can see what has happened. Our camp has been destroyed and with it most of the canoes. We have lost much, and the Indians are greatly alarmed. It is superstition, not fear, that has affected them."

"In my opinion," said Braxton Wyatt, "it was a trick of Henry Ware's. He drove those buffaloes down upon us."

"Very likely," said Blackstaffe, "but you can't persuade the Indians so."

"Nor me either," said Alloway gruffly. "You can't tell me that a backwoods youth can do so much."

"But," said Blackstaffe, "our scows were blown up, our lashed canoes were sunk, and now the buffaloes have been driven over us. It couldn't be chance. I think with Wyatt that it was Ware, but the chiefs are not willing to stay here longer. They demand that we return to the great camp in the morning, and that we abandon the attempt to take the cannon up the river."

"Which means an infinite amount of work with the ax," growled Alloway. "Well, let it be so, if it must, but I will not move tonight for anything. At least grass and trees are left, and I can sleep on one and under the other."

The chiefs, Yellow Panther and Red Eagle, thought they ought to march at once, but they yielded to Alloway who was master of the great guns with which they hoped to smash the palisades around the settlements. Complete coöperation between white man and red man was necessary for the success of the expedition, and sometimes it was necessary for one to placate the other.

They chose places anew upon ground that looked like a lost field of battle. The buffaloes had practically trampled the camp into the earth. The Indians had lost most of their blankets and in taking the canoes from the river and putting them upon the bank to escape one form of destruction they had merely met another. But they did the best they could, seeking the most comfortable places for sleep, and resolved to secure rest for the remainder of the night.

But Red Eagle and Yellow Panther, great chiefs though they were, were troubled by bad dreams which came straight from Ha-nis-ja-o-no-geh, the dwelling place of the Evil Minded. An enemy whom they could not see or hear, but whose presence they felt, was near. He had brought misfortune upon them and he would bring more. They awoke from their dreams and sat up. The white men were sleeping heavily, but then white men were often foolish in the forest.

Everything that stirred in the wilderness had a voice for the Indian. North wind or south wind, east wind or west wind all said something to him. The flowing of the river, and the sounds made by animals in the darkness had their meaning. Yellow Panther and Red Eagle were great chiefs, mighty on the war path, filled with the lore of their tribes, and they knew that Manitou expressed himself in many ways. They spoke together and when they compared their bad dreams straight from Ha-nis-ja-o-no-geh they felt apprehension. The wind was blowing from the northwest, and its voice was a threat. Then came the weird cry of an owl from a point north of them, and they did not know whether it was a real owl or the same evil spirit that had sent the bad dreams.

The two chiefs, wary and brave, were troubled. They could fight the seen, but the unseen was a foe whom no warrior knew how to meet. Then they heard the owl again, but from another point, farther to the west, and after a while the cry came from a point almost due west.

They sent the boldest and most skillful warrior to scout the forest in that

direction and they waited long for his return, but he never came back. When the second hour after his departure had been completed the chiefs awakened all the others and announced that they would start at once for the great camp.

Alloway growled and cursed under his breath.

"What is it?" he said to Braxton Wyatt, who had been talking with Red Eagle and Yellow Panther. "Can't we finish in peace what's left of the night?"

"We must yield to the chiefs, sir," said Wyatt. "If we don't there will be trouble, and the whole expedition will fail before it's fairly started. While we were asleep they heard an owl hoot from several different points of the compass, and they think it an omen of evil. They may be right, because a scout, a man of uncommon skill, whom they sent out two hours ago with instructions to return in an hour or less, has not come back. If you consider the misfortunes that have befallen us tonight, you can't blame 'em."

The hoot of the owl, much nearer, came suddenly through the forest. To the chiefs and to the white men as well it had a long menacing note. It was an omen of ill and it came from the Place of Evil Dreams. Yellow Panther and Red Eagle, great chiefs, victors in many a forest foray, shuddered. Fear struck like daggers at their hearts.

"Gray Beaver, our scout, will never come back," said Yellow Panther, and Red Eagle nodded.

The surcharged air affected Alloway and the other white men also. The obvious fears of the chiefs and the black wilderness about him created an atmosphere that the colonel could not resist. He glanced at the dark files of the trees and listened to the low moaning of the river as it flowed past. Then from a point in the south came that warning, plangent cry of the evil bird. Perspiration stood out on the brows of the chiefs and Alloway himself was shaken. Superstition and fears bred of the wilderness and its darkness entered into his own soul. The place suddenly became hateful to him.

"Let us go," he said. "Perhaps it is better that we rejoin the main force."

Braxton Wyatt had his own opinion, but he was as willing as the others to depart. He felt that on this expedition he would be safer with the warriors all about him. He had saved his own rifle from the rush of the herd, and putting it on his shoulder he fell in behind the chiefs.

The whole party started, but they found that although they had left an evil place they had also begun an evil march. The owl, which the Indians were quite sure contained the soul of some great dead warrior, followed and continually menaced them. Its cry was heard from one side and then from the other. Colonel Alloway, a brave man, though choleric and cruel, was exasperated beyond endurance. He raged and swore as they marched through the dark thickets, the Indians moving lightly and surely, while he often stumbled. He insisted at last that they stop and take action.

"Do you think this is a real owl following us?" he said to Wyatt, whom he invariably used as an interpreter.

"I think it is Ware, of whom I told you."

"You're as bad in your way as the Indians are in theirs. Why, the fellow would be superhuman!"

"That would not keep it from being true."

Alloway knew from Wyatt's tone that he meant what he said.

"We must hunt down this forest rover!" he exclaimed. "I can see that he is striking a heavy blow at the Indians through their superstitions."

"No doubt of that, sir."

"Tell the chiefs for me that we must send out a half dozen trailers while the rest of us remain here. I'm not as used as you are to midnight marches in the forest, and every bone in me aches."

Wyatt translated and Yellow Panther and Red Eagle consented. A half-dozen of the best trailers slipped away in different directions in the forest, and the rest sat down in a group. They waited a long time and heard nothing. The owl did not cry, nor did any human shout come from the haunted depths of the wilderness.

"At least they've driven him away," said Alloway to Cartwright.

"I think so, sir."

Out of the forest, low at first, but swelling on a long triumphant note, came the solemn voice of the owl. Alloway, despite himself, shuddered. The sinister cry expressed victory. His own mind, like those of the Indians, had become attuned to the superstitions and fears bred of ignorance and the dark. His heart paused,

and when it began its work again the beat was heavy.

A darker blot appeared on the darkness and two warriors, bearing a third, came through the bushes. The man whom they bore was a dark-browed, cruel savage who had carried the scalp of a white woman at his belt. But he would hunt or scalp no more. He had been cloven from brow to chin with the blow of a tomahawk wielded by an arm mighty like that of Hercules. Colonel Alloway looked upon the slain savage and shuddered again.

"Ask them how it happened," he said to Wyatt.

The young renegade, after speaking with the Indians, replied:

"Black Fox, the dead warrior, turned aside to look into a willow thicket. The others heard the beginning of a cry, that is one that was checked suddenly, and the sound of a blow. Then they found Black Fox as you see him there."

"And the one who struck him down?"

"There was no trace of him, but I, at least, have no doubt about him. Colonel Alloway, sir, I tell you he is the greatest forester that ever lived. He has all the different kinds of strength of the red man and the white man united, and something more, a power which I once heard a learned man say must have belonged to people when they had no weapons but clubs, and beasts far bigger than any of our time roamed the woods. It must have been a sort of feeling or sense that we can't understand, like the nose of a hound, and this Ware has it."

"Pshaw! Pshaw! Pshaw!" exclaimed Alloway violently. But Wyatt saw that his violence of speech was assumed to hide his own growing belief. The two chiefs beckoned to him, and he talked with them briefly. Then he turned to Alloway.

"Red Eagle and Yellow Panther ask me to say to you, sir, that they'll send no more warriors into the forest. The Evil Spirit is there and while they're ready to fight men they will not fight devils."

"I don't blame 'em," said Alloway reluctantly. "We've been outwitted and made fools of, and the best thing we can do is to get back to the great camp as soon as we can. Tell the chiefs we're ready to march."

But the way was long and the night was still black. The cry of the owl came several times, first on the right and then on the left. Every time he heard it the heart of the colonel beat with anger, tinged with awe. It was a strange world into

which he had come, and while he would not have acknowledged it to another, he knew that he was afraid. And afraid of what? Of a single figure, lurking somewhere in the dusk, that seemed able to strike at any moment wherever and whenever it wished.

The band, with its chiefs, its white men and its renegades marched on, the two English officers panting from such unusual exertion, and tripping often as they grew weaker. It hurt Alloway to ask them to stop and let him rest, and he put off the evil moment as long as he could, but at last, as his breath became shorter and shorter, he was compelled to do so.

The chiefs acquiesced silently and the whole band stopped. Alloway sat down on one of those fallen logs to be found everywhere in the primeval forest, and his breath came in long painful sobs. He was just a little too stout for wilderness work, that is for the marching part of it, and he was hurt cruelly in both body and spirit. As his general weakness grew, the cry of the owl directly in their path and not far away was like fire touched to an open wound.

"Can't some of the warriors go forward, ambush and shoot that fiend?" he exclaimed in desperation to Blackstaffe.

"You saw what happened when we tried it an hour ago," replied the renegade. "In the darkness one man has an opportunity over many. He knows that all are his enemies, and he can shoot the moment he hears a sound or sees a rustle in the bush. Besides, sir, we are confronted, as Wyatt has told you, by the one foe who is the most dangerous in all the world to us. There is something about him that passes almost beyond belief. I'm not a coward, as these Indians will tell you, but nothing could induce me to go into the forest in search of him."

Alloway made no reply, but he took off a cocked hat that he wore even in the wilderness, and began to fan his heated face. A rifle cracked suddenly, and the hat flew from his hand into the air. The Indians uttered a long wailing cry like the Seneca "Oonah," but did not move from their places or show any sign that they wished to pursue.

The colonel's empty hand remained poised in the air, and he gazed with mingled anger and wonder at his hat, lying upon the ground, and perforated neatly by a bullet. Wyatt, Blackstaffe and Cartwright looked at him but said nothing. Even Wyatt felt a thrill of awe.

"That, sir, was a warning," he said at last. "He could have shot you as easily."

"But why don't the warriors pursue? He could not have been much more than a hundred yards away!"

"They're afraid, sir, and I don't blame 'em."

Wyatt himself showed apprehension. He knew the bitter hatred the borderers felt toward all renegades. The name of Girty was already one of loathing. Blackstaffe was another who could expect little mercy, if he ever fell into their hands, and Wyatt himself knew that he had fully earned the Kentucky bullet. He did not feel the superstition of the warrior, but he regarded the gloomy depths of the forest with just as much terror. There was no reason why the silent marksman who hung upon them should not pick him out for a target.

They came to a creek running three feet deep, but they waded it and then stood for a minute or two on the bank, wringing the water out of their clothing. Colonel Alloway still cursed under his breath, and bemoaned the fate that had befallen him. It seemed a cruel jest that he, who had served in Flanders and Germany, in open country that had been civilized many centuries, should be sent from Detroit to march as an ally of savages in that enormous and unknown wilderness.

The cry of the owl came from a point straight ahead, and not more than four hundred yards away. Not a savage moved. But Alloway's whole frame shook with furious anger. It was preposterous that they should be harried so on their march by a single enemy. Once more he turned to Wyatt and said:

"Can't we spread out in some manner and catch this impudent fellow? Are thirty men to be driven all night through the woods by a single border rover?"

"I can put your question to the chiefs," Wyatt replied, "but I doubt whether anything will come of it."

He talked a little with Yellow Panther and Red Eagle and found that they were willing to try again. They were pursued by a devil, but, mysterious as he was, they would send forth the warriors, and perhaps they might trap him. They gave the signal and a dozen savages plunged at once into the bush, spreading out like a fan, and advancing toward the point from which the owl had sent his haunting cry.

The others waited a long time by the creek, and Alloway's rage still burned. It was past endurance that a gentleman and an officer should be hunted through the

woods in such a manner, insulted even by a bullet through his fine cocked hat, and hope being the father of belief, he was sure that the warriors would finish him this time.

He heard a sudden sharp report in the woods behind them, on the other side of the creek that they had crossed, and a bullet buried itself in the tree against which he was leaning, not very far from his face. He uttered a deep oath, but Yellow Panther and Red Eagle signaled to their forces to take the trail once more. The one in whom the Evil Spirit dwelled and who had come to mock them could not be caught. They would waste no more time, but would march as fast as they could to the main camp. They sent out cries that called in the warriors and then they set off at a great pace.

But all through the remainder of the night the Evil Spirit hung upon them, sometimes beside them, and sometimes behind them, and the terror of the warriors grew. Upon more than one face the war paint was damp with perspiration, and Colonel Alloway, his red face dripping, was forced to keep up with them, stride for stride.

Their terror did not diminish at all until the daylight came. Red Eagle and Yellow Panther, great chiefs, were glad to see the glow over the eastern forest that told of the rising sun. Even then they did not stop, but kept on at high speed, until the morning was flooded with light, when they stopped for fresh breath.

The English officers threw themselves upon the ground and gasped. They were not ashamed to show now to the Indians that they were weary almost to death.

"I think I left at least twenty pounds in that cursed forest," said Alloway.

"I'm not anxious for another such march," said Cartwright with sympathy. "But, sir, you can see a big smoke rising not more than a mile ahead. That must be the main camp."

"It is," said Braxton Wyatt, "and there are some of the scouts coming to meet us."

Far behind them rose the long hoot of the owl, but Wyatt knew that they would hear it no more that day. He regarded the English officers grimly. They had patronized him and Blackstaffe, and now they made the poorest showing of all. In the woods they were lost.

Alloway and Cartwright rose after a long rest and limped into the camp. The

colonel reflected that he had lost prestige but there were the cannon. The warriors could not afford to march against Kentucky without them, and only he and his men knew how to use them. In a huge camp, with a brilliant sun driving away many of the fancies that night and the forest brought, his full sense of importance returned. He began to talk now of pushing forward at once with the guns, in order that they might strike before the settlers were aware.

CHAPTER VI

THE KING WOLF

When the two chiefs, Alloway and the smaller force, were driven into the great camp, Henry turned aside into the forest and felt that he had done well. All the fanciful spirit of the younger world created by the Greeks had been alive in him that night. He had been a young Hercules at play and he had enjoyed his grim jokes. He was not only a young Hercules, he was a primeval son of the forest to whom the wilderness was a book in which he read.

He went back a little on their path, and he marked where the European leader had fallen twice through sheer weariness or because he could not see well enough in the dusk to evade trailing vines. A red thread or two on a bush showed that he had torn his uniform in falling, and the young woods rover laughed. He could not recall another such gratifying night, one in which he had served his own people and also had annoyed the enemy beyond endurance.

He went deep into the forest, hiding his trail as usual, and lay down in a covert to rest, while he ate some of the venison that he had left. Here he saw again his friends of the little trails, with which he was so familiar. The shy rabbits were creeping through the bushes and instinctively they seemed to have no fear of him. Two little birds not ten feet over his head were singing in intense rivalry. Their tiny throats swelled out as they poured forth a brilliant volume of song, and Henry, lying perfectly still, looked up at them and admired them. It would have required keen eyes like his to have picked them out, each of whom a green leaf would have covered, but he saw them and recognized them as friends of his. He did not know them personally, but since all their tribe were his comrades they must be so too.

Although he was one of mighty prowess with the rifle, and a taker of game, Henry always felt his kinship with the little people of the forest. No one of them ever fell wantonly at his hands. The gay birds in their red or blue plumage and all the soberer garbs between, were safe from him. It seemed that they too at times recognized him as a friend since he would hear the flutter of tiny wings over his head or by his ear, and see them pass in a flash of flame, or of blue or of brown.

Those old tales of Paul floated once more through his mind. He had no doubt that Paul was right. The Biblical six thousand years might be six million years as men thought of them now. And he knew himself, from his own eye, that huge monsters, larger than any that lived now, did roam the earth once. He had seen their bones in hundreds at the Big Bone Lick, where they had come to get the salty water scores of thousands of years ago. It seemed to him then that in those days men and the little animals and the little birds must have been allies against the monsters. Here, in the woods so far from civilization, this friendship must be continued. The light wind which so often sang to him through the leaves sprang up and joined its note to that of the birds. The fierce, wild spirit that had made him haunt the flying trail the night before, and that had sent the tomahawk so deep, departed. He felt singularly friendly to all created beings.

Lying on his back and looking upward into the green roof, Henry listened to the forest concert. The two over his head were still singing with utmost vigor, but others had joined. From all the trees and bushes about him came a volume of song, and the shadow of no swooping hawk or eagle fell across the sky to disturb them.

He had a little bread in his pouch, and he threw some crumbs on the grass a few feet away. The hand and arm that had cast them sank by his side, remained absolutely still and he waited. The wonder that he was wishing so intensely came to pass. A bird, brown and tiny, alighted on the grass and pecked one of the crumbs. Beyond a doubt, this was a bold bird, a leader among his kind, an explorer and discoverer. He had never seen a crumb before, but he picked up one in his tiny bill and found it good. Then he announced the news to all the world that could hear his voice, and there was much fluttering of small wings in the air.

More birds, red, green, yellow and brown, settled upon the grass and began to pick the crumbs eagerly. It was new food, but they found it good. Nor did they pay any attention to the great figure in buckskin dyed green lying so near and so still. The instinct given to them in place of reason, which warned them of the presence of an enemy, gave them no such warning now, because there was none against which they could be warned.

Henry always believed that the birds felt his kinship that morning, or perhaps it was the crumbs that drew them to a friend and gave them hearts without fear. One of them, perhaps the original bold explorer, seeking vainly for another crumb, hopped upon his bare hand as it lay in the grass, but feeling its warmth flew away a foot, hung hovering a moment or two, then came back and took a

peck.

It was not sufficient to hurt Henry's toughened hand, and exerting the great strength of his will over his body he continued to lie perfectly motionless. The bird, satisfied that this food was beyond his powers, stood motionless for a few moments, then flapped his wings two or three times to indicate that he was a prince and an ornament of the forest, and began to pour forth the fullest and deepest song that Henry had yet heard.

It gave him a curious thrill as the bird, perched on his hand, and extended to his utmost, sang his song. The other birds having finished all the crumbs stood chirping and twittering in the grass. Then, as if by a given signal, all of them, including the one on Henry's hand, united in a single volume of song and flew up into the crevices of the green roof. He felt that a serenade had been given to him, one that few human kings ever enjoyed. The little flying people of the forest had united to do him honor, and he was pleased, hugely pleased.

They were hidden from him now in the green leaves, but where the sky was clear he saw a sudden, dark shadow against the blue. He sprang up in an instant and raised his rifle. But it was too late for the eagle to stop. The heavy figure with the tearing beak and claws swooped downward, and there was silence and terror among the green leaves. But before the eagle could clutch or rend, Henry's rifle spoke with unerring aim, and the body fell to the ground dead.

He was sorry. He did not like his morning party to be broken up in such a manner, and for his guests to be disturbed and frightened. Nor was it wise to fire his rifle in that neighborhood. But he had acted on an impulse that he did not regret. He looked at the beak and claws of the dead eagle and he was glad that he had shot him. The fierce bird had broken up his forest idyl, and knowing that he could stay no longer he set off at a great pace, again curving about in a course that led him somewhat toward the house in the cliff.

He crossed several trails and he became rather anxious. Doubtless they were made by hunters, because the Indians while they remained at the great camp would eat prodigiously, and bands would be continually searching the forest for buffalo and deer. It was from these that the chief danger came. He suspected also that their proximity had compelled Shif'less Sol and the others to keep close within their little shelter. He doubted whether he could reach them that day.

The need of rest made itself felt at last, and, hiding his trail, he crept into another small but very dense thicket. He felt that he was within a lair and his kinship

with bird and beast was renewed. No wolf or bear could lie snugger in its den than he.

He put his rifle by his side, where he could reach it in a second, and was soon asleep. A prowling bear came into the far edge of the thicket, sniffed the man-smell and went away, not greatly alarmed, but feeling that it was better, in case of doubt, to avoid the cause of the doubt. Two Indians, carrying the cloven body of a deer, passed within three hundred yards of the sleeping youth, but they saw no trail and went on to the camp with the spoils of the hunt.

Henry slept lightly, but a long time. The forest quality was still strong within him. Although his sleep had all its restoring power, the lightest noise in the undergrowth near him would have awakened him. But he slept on through the morning, and into the afternoon.

A second party of savage hunters passed, five men carrying wild turkeys, and they too did not dream that the enemy whom they dreaded so much lay near. They had left the camp only that morning, and, the warriors arriving from the river, had told before they left how they had been pursued all through the night by one upon whom the Evil Spirit had descended. Even in the day they would have avoided this being, and the old medicine men who were in the camp were making charms to drive him away.

It was the most brilliant part of the afternoon now. Nevertheless they looked with a tinge of superstitious terror at the forests. The highly imaginative mind of the Indian, clothes nearly all things with personality, and for them an evil wind was blowing. The events of the preceding night had been colored and enlarged by those who told them. One or two had seen the form, gigantic and flaming-eyed, that had hung upon their trail, and these warriors, fearing that they too might see it, and in the open day, hung close as they bore their load of turkeys back to the camp.

Henry did not awake until the west was growing dim, and then after the fashion of the borderers he awoke all at once, that is, every nerve and faculty was alive at the same time. Nothing had invaded his haunt in the brushwood. His keen eyes showed him at once that no bush had been displaced, and, with his rifle ready, he walked out into the opening.

He must get back into the little fortress that night. He had been gone so long that Shif'less Sol and the others, although having the utmost confidence in his powers, would begin to worry about him. Yet he knew that it was unwise to

approach the place until night came. Delay was all the more necessary, because while he saw on the northern horizon the smoke from the great camp, he saw also a smaller smoke rising from another camp nearer their fortress. It was so near, in truth, that the four must find it necessary to hide close within the walls.

The second smoke aroused Henry's apprehension. Perhaps a portion of the camp had been moved forward merely to be nearer water or for some kindred reason, but that did not keep it from being nearer the stone fortress, nor from impeding his entrance into it. Yet he believed that he could slip past. His skill had triumphed over greater tests.

After dark he began his journey, buoyant and strong from his long sleep, and continued his wide circuit intending to approach his destination from the west. Distance did not amount to much to the borderer, and his long, easy gait carried him on, mile after mile.

It was another night, brilliant with moon and stars, and Henry was able to see the larger trail of smoke still traced on the northern horizon. His sense of direction was perfect, but he looked up now and then at the smoky bar, always keeping it on his right, and three or four hours after sunset he began to curve in towards his friends. The country into which he had come was similar in character to that which he had left, heavy forest, rolling hills and many creeks and brooks. He had never been in that immediate region before, and he judged by the amount of game springing up before him that it had not been visited by anybody in a long time. It was always a cause of wonder to him that a region as large as Kentucky, four fifths the size of all England, should be totally without Indian inhabitants.

The fact that Indians from the North and Indians from the South were said to fight there when on their hunting expeditions, and that hence they preferred to leave it as a barrier or neutral ground, did not wholly account for the fact to him. Farther north and farther south the Indians occupied all the country and fought with one another, but in this beautiful and fertile land there was no village, and not even a stray lodge.

He had often asked himself the reason, and while he was asking it he came to a long low mound, covered with trees of smaller growth than those in the surrounding forest. At first he took it for a hill just like the others, but its shape did not seem natural, and, despite the importance of time he looked again, and once more. Then he walked a little way up the mound and his moccasined foot struck lightly against something hard. He stooped, and catching hold of the

impediment pulled from the earth a broken piece of pottery.

It seemed old, very old, and wishing to rest a little, Henry sat down and gazed at it. The Indians of the present day could not possibly have made it, and it was impossible also that any white settler or hunter could have left it there. He dropped the fragment and rising, looked farther, finding two more pieces buried almost to the edge, but which his strong hands pulled out. They seemed to him of the same general workmanship as the others, and he surmised that the long mound upon which he was standing had been thrown up by the hand of man.

What was inside the mound? Perhaps the skeletons of men dead a thousand years or more, men more civilized than the Indians, but gone forever, and leaving no trace, save some broken pieces of pottery. Possibly the Indians themselves had destroyed these people, and they did not come here to live because they feared the ghosts of the slain. But it was no question that he could solve. He would talk about it later with Paul and meanwhile he must find some way to reach the others.

He threw down the pottery and left the hill, but, as he swung swiftly onward, the hill and its contents did not disappear from his mind. He had a strange sense of mystery. The new land about him might be an old, old land. He had never thought of it, except as forest and canebrake, in which the Indians had always roamed, but evidently it was not so. It was strange that races could disappear completely.

But as he raced on, the feeling for these things fell from him. He was not so much for the past as Paul was. He was essentially of the present, and, dealing with wild men in a wild country, he was again a wild man himself. Among the Indians at the great camp or about it there was not one in such close kinship with the forest as he. Despite danger and his anxiety to reach his comrades, he felt all its beauty and majesty, in truth fairly reveled in it.

He noticed the different trees, the oaks, the elms, the maples, the walnuts, the hickories, the sycamores, the willows at the edges of the stream, the dogwoods, and all the other kinds which made up the immeasurable forest. They were in the early but full foliage of spring, and the light wind brought odors that were like a perfumed breath.

It was past midnight, when he stopped to enjoy again the fine flavor of his kingdom. Then he suddenly lay flat among the dead leaves of the year before, and thrust forward the barrel of his rifle. He had heard a footfall, the footfall of a

moccasin, not much heavier than the fall of a leaf, and every nerve and faculty within him was concentrated to meet the new danger.

The sound had come from his right, and raising his head just a little he looked, but saw nothing, that is nothing new in the waving forest. Yet Henry was sure that a man was there. His ear would not deceive him. Doubtless it was a stray hunter or scout from the bands, and, while he did not fear him, he was annoyed by the delay. It might keep him from reaching his comrades that night.

He waited a long time, using all the patience that he had learned, and he began to believe that his ear after all might have deceived him. Perhaps it had been merely a rabbit in the undergrowth, but while he was debating with himself he heard a faint stir in the bush, and he knew that it was made by a man seeking a new position.

Then his intuition, the power that came from an extreme development of the five senses, reinforced by will, gave him an idea. Still lying on his back he uttered the lonesome howl of the wolf, but very low. He waited a moment or two, eager to know if his intuition had told him truly, and back came the wolf's low but lone cry. He gave the second call and the cry of the wolf came in like answer.

Then he stood up with rifle at trail and walked boldly forward. A tall figure, rifle also at trail, emerged from the bush and advanced to meet him. Two hands met in the strong clasp of those who had shared a thousand dangers and who had never failed each other.

"I thought when I made the call that it would be you, Sol," said Henry.

"An' I knowed it must be you, Henry," said the shiftless one, showing his double row of shining white teeth, "'cause you're the only one in the woods who kin understan' our signals."

"And that means that Paul, Long Jim and Tom are safe in the cave."

"When I left two nights ago, hevin' gone back thar after we separated, they wuz safe, but whether they are now I can't tell. Decidin' that they wuz foulin' the water too much, part o' the band has moved up to a place mighty close to our own snug house. They don't know yet that the hole in the wall is thar, but ef they stay long they're boun' to run acrost it. That's why I've come out lookin' fur you, an' mighty glad I am that I've found you. I'd a notion you'd take this circuit, after doin' all the deviltry you've done."

The shiftless one's mouth parted in a wide grin of admiration. The two rows of white teeth shone brightly.

"Henry," he said, "you're shorely the wild catamount o' the mountains."

"Why?"

"Well, I'm somethin' o' a scout an' trailer, ez you know, an' that ain't no boastin'. I've been hangin' 'roun' the Injun camp, an' they're terrible stirred up. An evil sperrit has been doin' 'em a power o' harm an' I know that evil sperrit is you. Ef it wuzn't fur them cannon on which they build such big hopes the chiefs would take all their warriors and go home. But the white men are urgin' 'em on. Henry, you're shorely the king o' these woods. How'd you stir 'em up so?"

Henry modestly told him all that he had done, and the shiftless one chuckled again and again, as proud of his comrade's deeds as if he had done them himself.

"But the Indians will march against Kentucky?" said Henry. "You don't doubt that, do you?"

"Yes, they'll go. Hevin' brought the cannon so fur they won't turn back, but mebbe we kin hold 'em a while longer. There are tricks an' tricks, an' we kin work some o' 'em."

"And it's our object to stop those cannon. Unless they have 'em we can beat the Indians off as we did last year, even if they are led by the English."

"So we kin, Henry, an' we'll git them guns yet. Scoutin' 'roun' thar camp I learned enough to know that you've broke up thar plan o' tryin' to carry 'em part o' the way by the river. You must hev done mighty slick work thar, Henry. The warriors are plum' shore now that river is ha'nted. It's all the way through the woods now fur them cannon, an' the English will hev to use the axes most o' the time."

"Then we'll be going back as fast as we can. I want to tell you again, Sol, that your face was mighty welcome."

"I ain't no beauty," grinned the shiftless one, "but them that's bringin' help do be welcome when they come. That's the reason you looked so pow'ful well to me, Henry, 'cause I wuz gettin' mighty lonesome, prowlin' 'roun' in these woods all by myself, an' no comp'ny to call, 'cept them that would roast me alive when they'd j'in me."

"The cliff is straight north, isn't it?"

"Jest about. But thar's an Injun band in the way. They're jerkin' a lot o' venison fur the main camp, but bein' ez you've stirred 'em up so they're keepin' a mighty good watch too. You know we don't want no fights, we jest want to travel on ez peaceful ez runnin' water."

"That's so, Sol, but it means a much farther curve to the west."

"Then we've got to take it. It ain't hard for you an' me. We've got steel wire for muscles in our legs, and the night is clear, cool an' life-givin'. Paul hez talked 'bout parks in the Old World, but we've got here a bigger an' finer park than any in Europe or Asyer, or fur that matter than Afriker or that new continent, Australyer. An' thar ain't any other park that hez got so many trees in it ez ourn, or ez much big game all fur the takin'. Now lead on, Henry, an' we'll go to our new home."

"No, you lead, Sol. I've been on a big strain, an' I'd like to follow for a while."

"O' course you would, you poor little peaked thing. I ought to hev thought o' that when I spoke. Never out in the woods afore by hisself an' nigh scared to death by the trees an' the dark. But jest you come on. I'll lead you an' I won't let no squirrel or rabbit hurt you neither."

Henry laughed. The humor and unction of the shiftless one always amused him.

"Go ahead, Sol," he said, "and I'll promise to keep close behind you, where nothing will harm me."

Thus they set off, Sol in front and Henry five feet away, treading in his footsteps.

"There wuz a time when I'd hev been afraid o' the dark," said Shif'less Sol, whose conversational powers were great. "You've been to the Big Bone Lick, an' so hev I, an' we've seen the bones o' the monsters that roamed the earth afore the flood, a long time afore. I wouldn't hev believed that such critters ever tramped around our globe ef I hadn't seen their bones. I come acrost a little salt lick last night—we may see it in passin' afore mornin'—but thar wuz big bones 'roun' it too. I measured myself by 'em an' geewhillikins, Henry, what critters them wuz! Ef I'd been caught out o' my cave after night an' one o' them things got after me I'd hev been so skeered that I'd hev dropped my stone club 'cause my hands trembled so, my teeth would hev rattled together in reg'lar tunes, an' I'd hev run so fast that I'd only hev touched the tops o' the hills, skippin' all the low ones too,

an' by the time I reached the mouth o' my cave, I'd be goin' so swift that I'd run clear out o' my clothes, leavin' 'em fur the monster to trample on an' then chaw up, me all the while settin' inside the cave safe, but tremblin' all over, an' with no appetite. Them shore wuz lively times fur our race, Henry, an' I guess we did a pow'ful lot o' runnin' an' hidin'."

"It was certainly time to run, Sol, when a tiger eight feet high and fifteen feet long got after you, or a mammoth or a mastodon twenty feet high and fifty feet long was feeling around in the bushes for you with a trunk that could pick you up and throw you a mile."

"Henry, ef we wuzn't in a hurry I'd stop here an' give thanks."

"What for?"

"'Cause I didn't live in them times, when the beast wuz bigger an' mightier than the man. I guess stone caves that run back into mountains 'bout a mile wuz the most pop'lar an' high-priced. Guess those boys an' gals didn't go out much an' dance on the green, ez they do back East. I'd a heap ruther hunt the buff'ler than that fifteen foot tiger o' yours, Henry."

"So had I, Sol. If those beasts were living nowadays we wouldn't be roaming through the forest as we are now. We have only the Indians to fear."

"An' thar's a lot about them to be afeard of at times, ez you an' me know, Henry."

"If we keep on this curve, Sol, about what time do you think we ought to reach the boys?"

"Afore moonrise, jest about when the night is darkest, 'less somethin' gits in the way. Here's another branch, Henry. Guess we'd better wade in it a right smart distance. You can't ever be too keerful about your trail."

The branch, or brook, as it would have been called in older communities, was rather wide, about six inches deep and flowing over a smooth, gravelly bed. It was flowing in the general direction in which they wished to go, and they walked in the stream a full half mile. Then they emerged upon the bank, careless of wet feet and wet ankles, which they knew would soon dry under severe exercise, and continued their swift journey.

The curiosity of the shiftless one about the primeval world had passed for the time, and like Henry he was concentrating all his energy and attention upon the

present, which was full enough of work and danger. He and the young Hercules together made a matchless pair. He was second only to Henry in the skill and lore of the wilderness. He was a true son of the forest, and, though uneducated in the bookish sense, he was so full of wiles and cunning that he was the Ulysses of the five, and as such his fame had spread along the whole border, and among the Indian tribes. Hidden perhaps by his lazy manner, but underneath that yellow thatch of his the shiftless one was a thinker, a deep thinker, and a nobler thinker than the one who sat before Troy town, because his thoughts were to save the defenseless.

"Henry," he said, "we're followed."

Henry glanced back, and in the moonlit dusk he saw a score of forms, enlarged in the shadows, their eyes red and their teeth bare.

"A wolf pack!" he exclaimed.

"Shore ez you live," replied the shiftless one. "Reckon they've been follerin' us ever since we left the branch. Mebbe they never saw men afore an' don't know nothin' 'bout guns that kill at a distance, an' ag'in mebbe they've been driv off thar huntin' grounds by the warriors, an' think we kin take the place o' their reg'lar game."

"Anyway I don't like it."

"Neither do I. Look at that old fellow in the lead. Guess he's called a giant among 'em. I kin see the slaver fallin' from his mouth. He's thinkin' o' you, Henry, 'cause there's more meat on you than there is on me."

"I don't know about that. You'd make a fine dish for the table of the wolf king. Roasted and served up whole they'd save you for the juicy finish, the last gorgeous touch to the feast."

"Don't talk that way, Henry. You make me shiver all over. I ain't afeard o' a wolf, but ef I didn't hev a rifle, an' you wuzn't with me, I'd be plum' skeered at them twenty back thar, follerin' us lookin' at us an' slaverin'."

The shiftless one shook his fist at the king wolf, an enormous beast, the largest that they had ever seen in Kentucky. The whole troop was following them, their light feet making no noise in the grass and leaves, but their red eyes and white teeth always gleaming in the moonlight. They were showing an uncommon daring. Lone hunters had been killed and eaten in the winter by starving wolves,

but it was seldom that two men in the spring were followed in such a manner. It became weird, uncanny and ominous.

"I know what's happened," said the shiftless one suddenly. "I kin tell you why they follow us so bold."

"What's the reason, Sol?"

"You know all them 'normous tigers and hijeous monsters we've been talkin' 'bout, that's been dead a hundred thousan' years. Thar souls comin' down through other animals hev gone straight into our pack o' wolves thar. They ain't wolves really. They're big tigers an' mammoths an' sech like."

"I'm not disputing what you say, Sol, because I don't know anything about it, but if it wasn't for raising an alarm I'd shoot that king wolf there, who is following us so close. I can tell by his eyes that he expects to eat us both."

"What kind o' tigers wuz it that Paul said lived long ago, an' growed so monstrous big?"

"Saber-toothed."

"Then that king wolf back thar wuz the king o' the saber-toothed tigers in his time. He wuz twelve feet high and twenty-five feet long an' he could carry off on his shoulder the biggest bull buffaler that ever wuz, an' eat him at a meal."

"That would have been a good deal of a dinner, even for an emperor among saber-toothed tigers."

"But I'm right about that wolf, Henry. I kin see it in his eye, an' them behind him are nigh ez bad. They wuz all saber-toothed tigers in thar time. I reckon that in thar wolf souls or tiger souls, whichever they be, they expect to eat us afore day. I'd like pow'ful well to put a bullet atween the eyes o' thar king—jest ez you said you would, Henry."

"But it's not to be thought of. Sound would travel far on a still night like this, and the warriors might be within hearing. It's hard on the nerves, but we've got to stand it."

They hoped that the wolves would drop the trail soon, but their wish did not come true. However they twisted and turned, whether they went slow or fast, the sinister pack was always there, the king wolf a foot or so in advance, like the

point to the head of an arrow. Often the flickering shadows exaggerated him to twice his usual size, and then in truth he suggested his saber-toothed predecessor of long, long ago.

"This is becomin' pow'ful w'arin' to the nerves, Henry," said the shiftless one. "I'd ruther hev a clean fight with a half-dozen warriors than be follered this way. It teches my pride. I've got a mighty lot o' pride, an' it hurts me awful to hev my pride hurt."

"Because we don't shoot or do anything I think they've assumed that we're powerless to fight. Still, there is something about the human odor that deters 'em."

"S'pose you're right, but I'm goin' to try a trick. When you see me stumble, Henry, you go right on, till I'm eight or ten feet behind you."

"All right, Sol, but don't stumble too much."

"I ain't likely to do it at sech a time. Look out, now! Here I stumble!"

He caught his foot in a root, plunged forward, almost fell, recovered his balance slowly and with apparent difficulty. Henry ran on, but in a half minute he turned quickly. With a horrible snarl and yelp the king wolf sprang, and the others behind him sprang also. Henry's rifle leaped to his shoulder, and then the king wolf jumped away, the others following him.

The shiftless one rejoined Henry and they ran a little faster. His face was pale and one or two drops of perspiration fell from it. His breath was longer than mere flight would make it.

"I ain't goin' to try that ag'in, Henry," he said. "No more foolin' with sudden death. He's shorely the big tiger, the biggest o' them all that wuz. Why, when I stumbled he leaped like lightnin'. I didn't think anythin', not even a wolf, could be so quick."

"The rifle frightened them off. They didn't know what it was, but they were afraid it had something to do with wounds and death. Still, they're running a little closer to us than they were. That's about all that's come of your experiment, Sol."

"I ain't goin' to try it over ag'in, Henry, but it shorely begins to look ez ef we'd hev to use the bullets on 'em. I don't think anythin' else will stop 'em."

"A little while longer, Sol, and they may abandon the chase. We must hold our fire just as long as possible. A shot may bring a cloud of the red hornets about us."

The shiftless one was silent. He knew as well as Henry that a shot was unwise. They were bearing back now toward the stone fortress and the Indian camps, and the forests near might be full of warriors. Yet it was a tremendous strain upon one's nerves to be followed in such a manner. The wolves had come so close now that they could hear the light pad of their feet. Once Shif'less Sol picked up a stone and hurled it at the king wolf. The great shaggy beast leaped aside, but it struck a wolf behind him, drawing an angry snarl, in which all the wolves joined.

Henry felt relief when they gave tongue, although the snarl was not loud. Hitherto they had pursued in total silence, which he had deemed unnatural and that angry yelp made them real wolves of the forest again.

"About how far would you say it is now to the cave?" he asked the shiftless one.

"Three or four miles, but with our lope it won't take us long to cover it. What hev you got in mind, Henry?"

"I think we've got to kill the king wolf. I didn't think so a little while ago, but they follow us hoping that some accident, a fall perhaps, will make us their prey."

"Do it then, Henry, an' take all the chances. I'm growin' mighty tired o' bein' follered by wolves that are re'ly tigers. After you shoot, we'll turn to the left an' run ez hard ez we kin."

Henry whirled suddenly about and raised his rifle. The king wolf, as if divining his purpose, sheered to one side, but he was confronting the deadliest marksman in the woods. The muzzle of Henry's rifle followed him, and when he pulled the trigger the bullet crashed through the great beast's skull.

When the king wolf fell dead the others stopped, stricken with terror, but from a point to the east came the long thrilling note of the war whoop. The warriors had heard the shot, and, knowing they would come swiftly to its sound, Henry and the shiftless one, turning due west, ran with amazing speed through the forest.

CHAPTER VII

THE FOREST POETS

Henry and the shiftless one knew that they had drawn danger upon themselves, but they had nothing to regret. The pursuit by the wolves had become intolerable. In time it was bound to unsettle their nerves, and it was better to take the risk from the warriors.

"How far away would you say that war whoop was?" asked Henry.

"'Bout a quarter o' a mile but it'll take 'em some little time to find our trail. An' ef you an' me, Henry, can't leave 'em, ez ef they wuz standin', then we ain't what we used to be."

Presently they heard the war cry a second time, although its note was fainter.

"Hit our trail!" said the shiftless one.

"But they can never overtake us in the night," said Henry. "We've come to stony ground now, and the best trailers in the world couldn't follow you and me over it."

"No," said the shiftless one, with some pride in his voice. "We're not to be took that way, but that band an' mebbe more are in atween us an' our fine house in the cliff, an' we won't get to crawl in our little beds tonight. It ain't to be risked, Henry."

"That's so. We seem to be driven in a circle around the place to which we want to go, but we can afford to wait as well as the Indian army can, and better. Here's another branch and we'd better use it to throw that band off the trail."

They waded in the pebbly bed of the brook for a long distance. Then they walked on stones, leaping lightly from one to another, and, when they came to the forest, thick with grapevines they would often swing from vine to vine over long spaces. Both found an odd pleasure in their flight. They were matching the Indian at his tricks, and when pushed they could do even better. They knew that the trail was broken beyond the hope of recovery, and, late in the night, after passing through hilly country, they sat down to rest.

They were on the slope of the last hill, sitting under the foliage of an oak, and before them lay a wide valley, in which the trees, mostly oaks, were scattered as if they grew in a great park. But the grass everywhere was thick and tall, and down the center flowed a swift creek which in the moonlight looked like molten silver. The uncommon brightness of the night, with its gorgeous clusters of stars, disclosed the full beauty of the valley, and the two fugitives who were fugitives no longer felt it intensely. Henry was an educated youth of an educated stock, and Shif'less Sol, the forest runner, was born with a love and admiration in his soul of Nature in all its aspects.

"Don't it look fine, Henry?" said the shiftless one. "Ef I hed to sleep in a house all the time, which, thanks be, I don't hev to do, I'd build me a cabin right here in this little valley. Ain't it jest the nicest place you ever saw? Unless I've mistook my guess, that's a lot o' buff'ler lyin' down in the grass in front o' us."

"Eight of 'em. I can count 'em," said Henry, "but they're safe from us."

"I wouldn't fire on 'em, not even ef thar wuzn't a warrior within a hundred miles o' us. I don't feel like shootin' at anythin' jest now, Henry."

"It's the valley that makes you feel so peaceful. It has the same effect on me."

"I think I kin see wild flowers down thar bloomin' among the bushes, an' ain't that grass an' them trees fine? an' that is shorely the best creek I've seen. Its water is so pure it looks like silver. I've a notion, Henry, that this wuz the Garden o' Eden."

"That's an odd idea of yours, Sol. How can you prove it's so?"

"An' how can you prove it ain't so? An' so we're back whar we started. Besides, I kin pile up evidence. All along the edge o' the valley are briers an' vines, on which the berries growed. Then too thar are lots o' grapevines on the trees ez you kin see, an' thar are your grapes. An' up toward the end are lots o' hick'ry an' walnut trees an' thar are your nuts, an' ef Adam an' Eve wuz hard-pushed, they could ketch plenty o' fine fish in that creek which I kin see is deep. In the winter they could hev made themselves a cabin easy, up thar whar the trees are thick. An' the whole place in the spring is full o' wild flowers, which Eve must hev stuck her hair full of to please Adam. The more I think o' it, Henry, the shorer I am that this wuz the Garden."

The shiftless one's face was rapt and serious. In the burnished silver of the

moonlight the little valley had a beauty, dreamlike in its quality. In that land so truly named the Dark and Bloody Ground it seemed the abode of unbroken peace.

"I reckon," said Shif'less Sol, "that after the fall Adam an' Eve left by that rift between the hills, an' thar the Angel stood with the Flamin' Sword to keep 'em out. O' course they might hev crawled back down the hillside here, an' in other places, but I guess they wuz afeard. It's hard to hev had a fine thing an' then to hev lost it, harder than never to hev had it or to hev knowed what it wuz. I guess, Henry, that Adam an' Eve came often to the hills here an' looked down at their old home, till they wuz skeered away by the flamin' o' the Angel's sword."

"But there's nothing now to keep us out of it. We'll go down there, Sol, because it is a garden after all, a wilderness garden, and nothing but Indians can drive us from it until we want to go."

"All right, Henry. You lead on now, but remember that since Adam an' Eve hev gone away this is my Garden o' Eden. It's shore a purty sight, now that it's beginnin' to whiten with the day."

Dawn in truth was silvering the valley, and in the clear pure light it stood forth in all its beauty and peace. It was filled, too, with life. Besides the buffaloes they saw deer, elk, swarming small game, and an immense number of singing birds. The morning was alive with their song and when they came to the deep creek, and saw a fish leap up now and then, the shiftless one no longer had the slightest doubt.

"It's shorely the Garden," he said. "Listen to them birds, Henry. Did you ever hear so many at one time afore, all singin' together ez ef every one wuz tryin' to beat every other one?"

"No, Sol, I haven't. It is certainly a beautiful place. Look at the beds of wild flowers in bloom."

"An' the game is so tame it ain't skeered at us a bit. I reckon, Henry, that 'till we came no human foot hez ever trod this valley, since Adam an' Eve had to go."

"Maybe not, Sol! Maybe not," said Henry, trying to smile at the shiftless one's fancy, but failing.

"An' thar's one thing I want to ask o' you, Henry. Thar's millions an' millions an' billions an' billions o' acres in this country that belong to nobody, but I want to

put in a sort o' claim o' my own on the Garden o' Eden here. Thar are times when every man likes to be all by hisself, fur a while. You know how it is yourself, Henry. Jest rec'lect then that the Garden is mine. When I'm feelin' bad, which ain't often, I'll come here an' set down 'mong the flowers, an' hear all them birds sing, same ez Adam an' Eve heard 'em, an' d'rectly I'll feel glad an' strong ag'in."

"Where there's so much unused country you ask but little, Sol. It's your Garden of Eden. But you'll let the rest of us come into it sometimes, won't you?"

"Shorely! Shorely! I didn't mean to be selfish about it. I've got some venison in my knapsack, Henry, an' I reckon you hev some too. I'd like to hev it warm, but it's too dangerous to build a fire. S'pose we set, an' eat."

The soil of the valley was so fertile that the grass was already high enough to hide them, when they lay down near the edge of the creek. There they ate their venison and listened to the musical tinkle of the rushing water, while the sun rose higher, and turned the luminous silver of the valley into luminous gold. They heard light footfalls of the deer moving, and the birds sang on, but there was no human sound in the valley. Their great adventure, the Indian camp, and the manifold dangers seemed to float away for the time. If it was not the Garden of Eden it was another garden of the same kind, and it looked very beautiful to these two who had spent most of the night running for their lives. They were happy, as they ate venison and the last crumbs of their bread.

"If the others wuz here," said Shif'less Sol, "nothin' would be lackin'. I'm in love with the wilderness more an' more every year, Henry. One reason is 'cause I'm always comin' on somethin' new. I ain't no tied-down man. Here I've dropped into the Garden o' Eden that's been lost fur thousands o' years, an' tomorrow I may be findin' some other wonder. I rec'lect my feelin' the first time I saw the Ohio, an' I've looked too upon the big river that the warriors call the Father o' Waters. I'm always findin' some new river or creek or lake. Nothin's old, or all trod up or worn out. Some day I'm goin' way out on them plains that you've seed, Henry, where the buff'ler are passin' millions strong. I tell you I love to go with the wind, an' at night, when I ain't quite asleep, to hear it blowin' an' blowin', an' tellin' me that the things I've found already may be fine, but thar's finer yet farther on. I hear Paul talkin' 'bout the Old World, but thar can't be anythin' in it half ez fine ez all these woods in the fall, jest blazin' with red an' yellow, an' gold an' brown, an' the air sparklin' enough to make an old man young."

The face of the shiftless one glowed as he spoke. Every word he said came straight from his heart and Henry shared in his fervor. The wild men who slew and scalped could not spoil his world. He had finished his venison, and, drinking cold water at the edge of the creek, he came back and lay down again in the long grass.

"Perhaps we'd better stay here the most of the day," said Henry. "The valley seems to be out of the Indian line of march. The buffaloes are over there grazing peacefully, and I can see does at the edge of the woods. If warriors were near they wouldn't be so peaceful."

"And there are the wild turkeys gobblin' in the trees," said Shif'less Sol. "I like wild turkey mighty well, but even ef thar wuz no fear o' alarm I wouldn't shoot any one in my Garden o' Eden."

"Nor I either, Sol. I'm beginning to like this valley as well as you do. Your claim to it stands good, but when we're on our hunting expeditions up this way again the five of us will come here and camp."

"But we'll kill our game outside. I've a notion that I don't want to shoot anythin' in here."

"I understand you. It's too fine a place to have blood flowing in it."

"That's jest the way I feel about it, Henry. You may laugh at me fur bein' a fool, but the notion sticks to me hard an' fast."

"I'm not laughing at you. If you'll raise up a little, Sol, you can see the smoke of the main Indian campfire off there toward the northeast. It looks like a thread from here, and it's at least five miles away."

"It's a big smoke, then, or we wouldn't see it at all, 'cause we can't make out that o' the smaller one nearer to the cave, though I reckon it's still thar."

"Perhaps so, and the warriors may come this way, but we'll see 'em and hear 'em first. Look, Sol, those buffaloes, in their grazing, are coming straight toward us. The wind has certainly carried to them our odor, but they don't seem to be alarmed by it."

"Jest another proof, Henry, that it's the real Garden o' Eden. Them buff'ler haven't seen or smelt a human bein' since Adam an' Eve left, an' ez that wuz a

long time ago they've got over any feelin' o' fear o' people, ef they ever had it. Look at them deer, too, over thar, loafin' 'long through the high grass, an' not skeered o' anythin'. An' the wolves that follered us last night don't come here. Thar ain't a sign o' a wolf ever hevin' been in the valley."

Henry laughed, but there was no trace of irony in the laugh. The shiftless one's vivid fancy or belief pleased him. It was possible, too, that Indians would not come there. It might be some sacred place of the old forgotten people who had built the mounds and who had been exterminated by the Indians. But the Indians were full of superstition, and often they feared and respected the sacred places of those whom they had slain. For the boldest of the warriors, avenging spirits might be hovering there, and they would fear them more than they would fear the white men with rifles.

"Let's go up to the head of the valley," he said to Shif'less Sol. "If we keep back among the bushes we won't be seen."

"All right," said his comrade. "I want to see that gate between the hills, that the creek comes from, an' I want to take a look, too, at that grove o' big trees growin' thar."

Henry reckoned the length of the valley at two miles and its width at a half mile on the average, with the creek flowing down almost its exact center. At the head it narrowed fast, until it came to the gash between the hills, where grew the largest oaks and elms that he had ever seen. It was in truth a magnificent grove and it gave the shiftless one extreme delight which he expressed vocally. He surveyed the trees and the hills behind them with a measuring and comprehensive eye.

"Them hills ain't so high," he said, "but they're high enough to shut out the winds o' winter, bein' ez they face the north an' west, an' here curves the creek atween 'em, through a gap not more'n ten feet wide. An' look how them big trees grow so close together, an' in a sort o' curve. Why, that's shorely whar Adam an' Eve spent thar winters. It wouldn't take much work, thatching with poles an' bark to rig up the snuggest kind o' a bower. These big trees here ag'inst the cliff almost make a cabin themselves."

"And one that we'll occupy the rest of the day. It would be impossible for a warrior ten yards away to see us in here, while we can see almost the whole length of the valley. I think we'd better stay here, Sol, and make ourselves comfortable for the rest of the day. You need sleep, and so will I later. It's easy to

make beds. The dead leaves must lie a foot thick on the ground."

"It's a wonder they ain't thicker, gatherin' here ever since Adam an' Eve moved."

"They rot beneath and the wind blows away a lot on top, but there's plenty left. Now, I'm not sleepy at all. You take a nap and I'll watch, although I'm sure no enemy will come."

"Reckon I will, Henry. It's peaceful an' soothin' here in the Garden o' Eden, an' ef I dream I'll dream good dreams."

He heaped up the leaves in the shape of a bed, giving himself a pillow, and, sinking down upon it luxuriously, soon slept. Henry also piled the leaves high enough against the trunk of one of the largest trees to form a cushion for his back, and settled himself into a comfortable position, with his rifle across his knees.

Although he had been up all the night he was not sleepy. The shiftless one's striking fancy had exerted a great effect upon him. This was the Garden of Eden. It must be, and some ancient influence, something that he would probably never know, protected it from invasion. He marked once more the fearless nature of its inhabitants. He could see now three small groups of buffaloes and all of them grazed in perfect peace and content. Nowhere was there a sign of the wolves that usually hung about to cut out the calves or the very old. He saw deer in the grass along the creek, and they were oblivious of danger.

But what impressed him most of all was the profusion of singing birds and their zeal and energy. The chorus of singing and chattering rose and fell now and then, but it never ceased. The valley itself fairly sang with it, and in the opening before him there were incessant flashes of red and blue, as the most gaily dressed of the little birds shot past.

His eyes turned toward the gap, where the shiftless one had placed the Angel with the Flaming Sword. It was only a few hundred yards away, and he was able to see that it was but a narrow cleft between the hills. While he looked he saw a human figure appear upon the crest of the hill, outlined perfectly against the sun which was a blazing shield of gold behind him.

It was a savage warrior, tall, naked, save for the breech cloth, his face and body thick with war paint, the single scalp lock standing up defiantly. The luminous glow overcoming the effect of distance, enlarged him. He seemed twice his real

height.

The warrior was gazing down into the valley, but Henry saw that he did not move. His figure was rigid. He merely looked and nothing more. Presently two more figures of warriors appeared, one on either side, and they too were raised by the golden glow to twice their stature. All three stared intently into the valley. Henry put his hand on the shoulder of his comrade and shook him.

"What? What? What is it?" exclaimed the shiftless one sleepily.

"Three Indian warriors on the highest hill that overlooks the valley, but they're not coming in. I think that the Angel with the Flaming Sword is in the way."

Shif'less Sol was all awake now, and he stared long at the motionless warriors.

"No, they ain't comin' down in the valley," he said at last. "I don't know how I know it, but I do."

"Perhaps it's because they don't see the remotest sign of an enemy here."

"Partly that I reckon, an' fur other reasons too. Thar, they're goin' away! I expect, Henry, that them warriors are a part o' the band that wuz lookin' fur us. They don't keer to come into the valley, but they might hev been tempted hard to come, ef they'd a' saw us. Mebbe it's a good thing that we came here into Adam's an' Eve's home."

"It was certainly not the wrong thing. Those warriors are gone now, and I predict that none will come in their place."

"That's a shore thing. Now, ez I've had my nap, Henry, you take yourn. Rec'lect that it's always watch an' watch with us."

Henry knew that the shiftless one would not like it, if he did not take his turn, and, making his leafy bed, he was soothed to quick sleep by the singing of the birds.

Then the shiftless one propped his back against a bank of leaves between him and the trunk of a tree, and, with the rifle across his knees, watched. The great peace that he had felt continued. The fact that the Indians had merely come to the crest of the hill and looked into the valley, then going away, confirmed him in his beliefs. As long as Henry and he stayed there, they would be safe. But safety beyond that day was not what they were seeking. That night they must

surely reach the other three, although they would enjoy the present to the full.

Shif'less Sol's plastic and sensitive mind had been affected by his meeting with Henry. Despite his great confidence in the skill and strength of the young leader, he had been worried by his long absence and his meeting with him had been an immense relief. This and their coming into the happy valley had put him in an exalted state. The poetical side of nature always met with an immediate response in him, and like the Indian he personified the winds, and the moon and stars and sun, and all the objects and forces that were factors in wild life.

Lying closely among his leaves he watched the buffaloes and the deer. Some of the bigger animals as the day grew and the sun increased, lay down in the grass near him, showing no sign of fear, although they must have been aware of his presence. A flight of wild geese descended from the sky, drank at the stream, swam a little, then rose again and were gone, their forms blending into a single great arrow shooting northward through the blue.

Shif'less Sol did not wonder that they had dropped down into the valley for a moment or two, breaking their immeasurable flight into the far north. They had known that they would be safe in this little way station, and it was yet another confirmation of his beliefs. He watched the arrow so sharply outlined against the blue until it was gone in the vast sky, and a great wonder and awe filled the soul of the shiftless one. He had seen such flights countless times before, but now he began to think about the instinct that sent them on such vast journeys through the ether from south to north and back again, in an endless repetition as long as they lived. What journeys and what rivers and lakes and forests and plains they must see! Man was but a crawler on the earth, compared with them. Then wild ducks came, did as the geese had done, and then they too were gone in the same flight into the illimitable north that swallowed up everything.

It was in the mind of the shiftless one that he too would like to go into that vast unknown North some day, if the fighting in Kentucky ever came to an end. He had been in the land of the Shawnees and Miamis, and Wyandots and he knew of the Great Lakes beyond, but north of them the wilderness still stretched to the edge of the world, where the polar ice reigned, eternal. There was no limit to the imagination of Shif'less Sol, and in all these gigantic wanderings the faithful four, his friends, were with him.

Henry did not awaken until well after noon, but as usual his awakening was instantaneous, that is, all his faculties were keenly alert at once. He glanced

down the valley and saw the buffalo and deer feeding, and the great chorus of birds was going on. The shiftless one, leaning against his bank of leaves, his rifle on his knee, was regarding the valley with an air of proprietorship.

"What's happened while I slept?" asked Henry.

"Nothing. You don't expect anything to happen here. It's got to happen when we leave tonight."

"I think you're right about it, and as it's watch and watch, you must go to sleep again now."

His comrade without any protest stretched himself in the leaves and soon slept soundly. Meanwhile Henry maintained vigilant watch. In order to keep his muscles elastic he rose and walked about a little at times, but he did not leave the shelter of the thick little grove that the shiftless one had called a bower. It well deserved the name, because the trees were so close and large, and the foliage was so dense that the sunlight could not enter. Indians on the hills could not possibly see the two resting there.

The afternoon drew on, long and warm. Save within their shelter the sunlight blazed brilliantly. The buffaloes suddenly charged about for a little while and Henry at first thought they had been alarmed by the coming of man, but on second thought he put it down as mere playing. They were well fed, full of life, and they were venting their spirits. They ceased soon and lay down in the shade.

Later in the afternoon another Indian appeared on the summit and looked for a little while into the valley, but like the others he went away. Henry had felt sure that he would.

Toward night the shiftless one awoke, and they ate the last of their food. But the failure of the supply did not alarm them. This army was very small and if hunger pressed them hard there was the forest, or they might filch from the Indian camp. Such as they could dare anything, and achieve it, too.

The sun set, the shadows gathered, and it would soon be time to go. The waters of the creek sang pleasantly in the ears of the shiftless one, and drawing a long breath of regret he said good-bye to the happy valley.

"Nuthin' happened while we wuz here, Henry," he said, "and I knowed it wouldn't happen. Our troubles are comin' when we cross that line o' hills over thar."

He pointed toward the crests. Beyond them, even in the twilight, the column of smoke from the great Indian camp was still visible, although it disappeared a few moments later, as the dusk turned into the dark.

"The place in the cliff lays to the right o' that smoke," said the shiftless one, "an' jest about ez fur from here."

"We ought to reach it in two hours."

"Ef nothin' comes in the way."

"If nothing comes in the way."

They crossed the valley speedily and soon stood on one of the crests that hemmed it in.

"We've had one fine day when we wuzn't thinkin' about fightin'," said the shiftless one, looking back.

"A restful day," said Henry.

Then the two plunged into the deep forests that lined the far slopes, and started on their journey.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PATH OF DANGER

Both Henry and Shif'less Sol had a clear idea of direction, and they could lay a line, like a chain bearer, toward the rock fortress, where they felt sure their comrades were lying in comfortable and hidden security. But back now in the deep forest the atmosphere of peace and content that they had breathed in the happy valley was gone, instead it was surcharged with war and danger.

"I miss our Garden o' Eden," whispered Shif'less Sol regretfully. "We're already back where men are fightin' an' tryin' to kill."

"I thought perhaps most of the army had already gone south, but there's the column of smoke as big as ever, and also the second column nearer to our home."

"An' here's a creek that we'll hev to cross. Looks deep too. Strike a feller 'bout the middle."

"Maybe we can find a shallower place or a tree that has fallen all the way across it."

They ran along its bank for some distance, but finding no place where the water looked shallow plunged in, holding their weapons and ammunition clear of the surface. As they emerged on the other shore, a warrior standing in the bushes about forty yards away uttered a shout and fired at them. But the Indian is never a good marksman and in the dusk his bullet cut the leaves at least three feet over their heads.

His warning shout and shot was followed by a yell from at least twenty others who lay about a small fire in a glade a hundred yards beyond. Thick bushes had hid the coals from the sight of Henry and the shiftless one and now, taking no time to reply to the bullet of the warrior, who stood, empty gun in hand, they turned and ran swiftly toward the north, while after them came the whole yelling pack.

"We've shorely left the Garden o' Eden, Henry," said the shiftless one. "They

didn't do sech things ez these thar in Adam or Eve's times, nor in ourn. We come purty nigh walkin' plum' into a trap."

"And we've got to shake 'em off. We mustn't run toward the stone hollow, because that would merely draw 'em down on all of us. We must lead away to the west again, Sol."

"You're right, Henry, but that confounded creek's in the way. I kin see it off on the left an' I notice that it's growin' wider an' deeper, ez it flows on to the Ohio. They've got us hemmed in ag'inst it."

"But Sol, they'll have to do a lot before they catch such as you and me."

"That's so, Henry. I guess we're right hard to ketch. I'm proud to be a fugitive 'long o' you."

Henry glanced back and saw the long line of dusky figures following them through woods over hills and across valleys with all the tenacity of a pack of wolves pursuing a deer. He knew that they would hang on to the last, and while he was sure that he and Shif'less Sol could distance them, if they used their utmost speed, he was in continuous apprehension lest they stir up some other band or at least stray warriors, as the forest was full of them. The creek was a bar holding them to an almost straight line. It was wide and too deep except for swimming, rising almost to the proportions of a river. Henry calculated too that the creek did not flow far west of their hollow in the rock, and thus they were forced, despite their wishes, to run toward the very place they wished to avoid.

"We've certainly had bad luck," he said to Sol, "and I think we've stirred up a regular hornet's nest. Hark to that!"

From their right came a swelling war whoop with the ferocious whining note at the end, and the eyes of the two fugitives met. Each, despite the dark, could read the alarm in the face of the other. They had not run out of the trap. Instead the trap was about to be sprung upon them. With the unfordable stream on one side of them, an Indian band on the other, and an Indian band behind them their case was indeed serious. The transition from the Garden of Eden to a world of danger was sudden and complete.

The band in the rear gave answer to the cry of their comrades in the west, and Henry and the shiftless one had never before heard a whoop so full of exultation and ferocity. Henry understood it as truly as if it had been spoken in words. It

said that the fugitives were surely theirs, that they would be caught very soon, that they would be given to the torture and that all the warriors should see the flames lick around their bare bodies.

A red mist appeared before the eyes of Henry. The wonderful peace, and the kindness toward all things that had enwrapped him, as he lay all day long in the happy valley, were gone. Instead his veins were flushed with anger. The warriors would exult over the torture and death of his comrades and himself. Well, he would show them that a man could not be burnt at the stake, until he was caught, and it was easy to exult too soon.

He whirled for an instant, raised his rifle, fired, whirled back again and then ran on. The whole motion, the brief curve about, and then the half circle back, seemed one, and yet, as the two ran on, they heard a warrior utter a death shout, as he fell in the forest.

"I reckon they'll keep back a little when they learn how we kin shoot," said Shif'less Sol. "Yes, they're not so close, by at least thirty yards. Now, how foolish that is!"

The Indians fired a dozen shots, but all their bullets flew wild. Then a pattering upon leaves and bark, but neither of the flying two was touched.

"Foolish, so it was," said Henry, "but it was anger too. Now, hark to that, will you!"

The shots were succeeded by a war cry, again on their right, but much nearer than before. Henry took a longing to look at the creek, but if they attempted to ford it the warriors would almost certainly shoot them while swimming. He and his comrade must make a great spurt to escape being cut off by the second force.

"Now, Sol," he said, "you're a good runner. So am I, and we need to fly like deer. You know why."

"I reckon I do."

The speed of the two suddenly increased. They went forward now, as if they were shot from a bow. Fortunately there were no pitfalls. The ground was not strewn with vines and brush to entrap them, and seeing that the two fugitives would be well ahead before the junction of the two bands could be formed, the band behind them sent forth its war whoop. But to Henry with his sensitive ear attuned to every shade of feeling that night the cry was not so full of exultation

and triumph as the one before.

"Afraid the trap will fail to shut down on us," he said to the shiftless one.

"I read it that way."

"A little faster, Sol! A little faster! We must make sure!"

Fortunately the creek now curved to the left, which enabled them to draw away from the second band, and both feeling that the crisis was at hand put forth their utmost powers. Under a burst of magnificent speed the ground spun behind them. Trees and bushes flitted past. Then they heard the disappointed yell, as the two bands joined, and the firing of shots that fell short.

"One danger escaped," breathed Henry as they slackened speed.

"But thar's more to come. Still, I'm glad I don't hev to run so fast fur a time. It's fine to be a race horse, but you can't be a racin' all the days an' nights o' your life."

"We must cross the creek some way or other, Sol. I don't think our rock fortress can now be more than ten miles away and we can't afford to bring the warriors down on it."

Shif'less Sol nodded. They kept very near to the creek and he noticed suddenly that the current was shallowing, and had grown much swifter. He inferred that rapids were ahead, but this was surely the place to cross, and he called Henry's attention to it. The bank was about six feet above the water and Henry said instantly:

"Jump, Sol, jump! But be sure that you land squarely on your feet!"

The shiftless one nodded. Certainly a man could not choose a poorer time to turn an ankle. Without stopping speed but balancing himself perfectly he sprang far out, and Henry sprang with him. There were two splashes, as they sank almost to the waists in the water, but they were able to keep their powder and weapons dry, and in an instant they were at the far bank climbing up with all the haste of those who know they are about to become targets for bullets.

They heard the yell of disappointment anew, and then the scattering fire of bullets. Two or three pattered on the stream, but they did not hear the whizz of the others, and in an instant they were safely up the bank and into the forest.

"Hit, Sol?" said Henry.

"Nary a hit. An' you?"

"Untouched."

"Come down straight on your feet in the creek?"

"Straight as straight can be. And you?"

"Split the water like a fish. Wet to the middle, but happy. I reckon we kin slow down a little now, can't we? I'm a good runner, but I wuzn't made up to go forever."

"We'll stop a little while in these bushes until we can get the fresh breath that we need so badly. But you know, Sol, they'll cross the creek, hunt for our trail and follow us."

"Let 'em come. We ain't hemmed in now, an' with a thousand miles o' space to run in I reckon they won't git us."

They lay panting in the bushes a full ten minutes. Then their hearts sank to a normal beat, strength flowed back into their veins, and, rising they stole away, keeping a general course toward the west. They went at a rather easy gait for an hour or more, but when they rested fifteen minutes they heard at the end of that time sounds of pursuit. The warriors were showing their usual tenacity on the trail, and knowing that it was not wise to delay longer they fled again toward the west, though they took careful note of the country as they went, because they intended to come back there again.

Twice the Indian horde behind them gave tongue, sign that the pursuit would be followed to the bitter end, but Henry and the shiftless one now had little fear for themselves. Their chief apprehension was lest they be driven so far to the west they might not return in time to allay the doubts and fears of their comrades.

They soon passed from hills into marshy regions which to their skilled eyes betokened another creek, flowing like its parallel sister into the Ohio. All these creeks overflowed widely in the heavy spring rains, and they judged that the swampy territory had been left by the retreating waters.

"Ez I think I told you before," said Shif'less Sol, "I'm a mighty good runner. But thar are some things I kin do besides runnin'. Runnin' all night, even when you

slow up a bit, gits stale. Your mind grows mighty tired o' it even if your feet do plant themselves one after another jest like a machine. Now, my mind is sayin' enough, so I think, Henry, we might git through this swamp, leavin' no trail, o' course, an' rest on some good solid little bit o' land surrounded by a sea o' mud."

"That's right, Sol. It's what we must do, but we must cross to the other side of the creek before we find our oasis."

"Oasis! What's an oasis?"

"It's something, surrounded by something else," Henry explained. "Come on now, Sol. Watch your footing. Don't get yourself any muddier than you can help."

"I'm follerin', steppin' right in your tracks, over which the soft mud draws the minute my foot has left 'em. I'm glad thar are lots o' bushes here, 'cause they'll hide us from any warriors who may be in advance o' the main band."

The creek was not as deep and wide as the other, and they crossed it without trouble. Two hundred yards further on they found a tiny island of firm ground set thick with saplings and bushes, among which they crawled and lay down, until regular breathing came back. Then they scraped the mud off their moccasins and leggings and sat up on the hard earth.

"An' so this is an oasis?" said Shif'less Sol.

"Yes, solid ground, surrounded for a long distance by mud."

"An' with saplin's an' bushes so thick that the sharpest eyed warrior ever born couldn't see into it. Henry, I'm thinkin' that we've found another little home."

"One that hides us from people passing by, but that does not put a roof over our heads or give us food to eat."

"Do you care to rec'lect, Henry, that all our venison is gone?"

"Don't talk to me about it now. I know we'll be hungry soon, but we'll just have to be hungry, and that's all."

"I wish it *wuz* all. I'm hungry right now, an' I know that the longer I lay here the hungrier I'll git. I'm lookin' ahead, Henry, an' I see the time when we'll hev to shoot a deer, even ef thar are ten thousand warriors in a close ring about us."

"Peep between those vines, Sol, and you can see them now among the bushes on the far side of the creek."

The shiftless one raised himself up a little, and looked in the direction that Henry had indicated. There was sufficient moonlight to disclose four or five warriors who had come to the edge of the swamp and stopped. They seemed at a loss, as the mud had long since sunk back and covered up the trail, and perhaps, also, they hesitated because of the dreaded rifles of the two white men, which might be fired at them from some unsuspected place. As they hesitated another figure emerged from the background and joined them.

"Braxton Wyatt!" said Shif'less Sol. "He must hev been in the second band that come up. Do you think I could reach him with a long shot, Henry?"

"No, and even if you could you mustn't try. We are well hidden now, but a shot would bring them down upon us. Let Braxton Wyatt wait. His time will come."

"Here's hopin' that it'll come soon. I'm beginnin' to feel a sight better, Henry. Lookin' over all that mud they don't dream that the fellers they're lookin' fur are layin' here in this little clump o' bushes, like two rabbits in their nests."

"They won't find us because there is no trail leading here. They'll be searching the forests on the other side, and we can stay here until they go away."

"Which would leave us happy ef I wuzn't so hungry. It's comin' on me strong, Henry, that hungry feelin'. You know that I'm gen'ally a pow'ful feeder."

"I know it, but this is a time when you'll have to resist."

"I ain't so shore. I notice that them that want things pow'ful bad an' go after 'em pow'ful hard are most always them that gits 'em, an' that's me tonight."

"Well, lie close, and we'll see what happens, there's Wyatt within reach of my rifle right now, and it's a strong temptation to put a bullet into him. The temptation is just as strong in me, Sol, as it has been in you."

"Then why don't you do it an' take the chances? We kin git away anyhow."

"For several reasons, Sol. I doubt whether we could get away, and escape is important not only to ourselves—I like my life and you like yours—but to others as well. Besides, I can't draw trigger on Braxton Wyatt from cover. Cruel as he is, and he's worse than the savages, because he's a renegade, I can't forget that we

were boys at Wareville together."

"Still your bullet, most likely, would save the life o' many a man an' o' women an' children too. But it's too late anyhow. He's gone, an' them warriors hev gone with him. By the great horn spoon, what wuz that!"

They had now gone to the extreme eastern edge of their little covert and a sudden floundering and gasping there startled them. A large black figure rose up from a dense thicket of alders, pawpaws and small willows and gazed at them a moment or two with frightened red eyes.

"A bear," exclaimed Shif'less Sol. "Oh, Henry, let me shoot! I kin see his steaks fryin' over the coals now. Thar's our supper, settin' on its hind legs not ten feet from us."

"Don't you dare do such a thing!" exclaimed Henry, laughing. "Why, your shot would bring a whole tribe of Indians down upon us!"

"I know it, but I do want that bear, an' I want to put the responsibility o' not gittin' him on you."

"All right. I take it. There he goes and your chance, too, is lost."

The bear threshed out of his den, clattered across the mud flats and entered the forest, whence came in a minute the sound of a shot.

"Thar, the warriors hev got him!" exclaimed Shif'less Sol, deep disappointment showing in his tone, "and in two or three hours they'll be cookin' him. An' he was our bear, too. We saw him first. I could see that he was nice an' fat, even ef it wuz early in the year, an' them steaks belong to us."

"Maybe they did, but we've lost 'em. Now, I think we'd better keep quiet. The Indians are probably far ahead of us, thinking that we've gone that way."

The shiftless one subsided into an indignant silence. The oasis was an ideal place for two situated as they were, and having the wisdom of the woods they remained still and quiet in its cover. But after three or four hours the shiftless one became restless. He was a man of great strength, and despite his lazy manner, of wonderful bodily activity. It took much food to satisfy the demands of that powerful frame, and he was growing hungrier and hungrier. Moreover a light wind began to blow from the west, bringing upon its edge a faint aroma that caused him to sit up and sniff inquiringly. The odor grew stronger, and he no

longer had need to ask questions with his nose. He knew, and he knew too well.

"Henry," he said, "thar's our bear jest as I expected. They're cookin' him, an' it's not so fur away either!"

"I think you're right, but we can't help it. We have to be resigned."

"Mebbe we can't help it, an' then ag'in mebbe we kin, but anyway I ain't goin' to be resigned. I'm protestin' all the time, 'cause it's my bear. I saw him first."

The savory odor grew stronger, and the anger and indignation of the shiftless one increased. And with these two emotions came a third which hardened into a resolution.

"Henry," he said, "you're our leader, an' we most always do what you say, but this time I reckon I've decided fur myself what I'm goin' to do. I'm growin' hungrier an' hungrier. Sometimes I put that hunger down but in a minute it bounces back up ag'in stronger than ever. It's my master, gittin' control over ev'ry inch o' me, an' I've got to listen to what it says. I know I'm makin' a long speech, talkin' like an Injun chief at a council, but I've got to explain an' make clear ez day why I'm goin' to do the thing I'm goin' to do."

"Go on, Sol. Talk as much as you please. We've all night before us."

"Which is good. Ez I said, hunger has laid hold o' ev'ry inch o' me, an' is workin' mighty fast. When I git into that state I'm plum' distracted on the question o' food, though it makes me smarter an' more keerful than ever on the ways to git it. I jest wanted to tell you, Henry, that I'm goin' to leave this oasis an' come back with a load o' them bear steaks that rightfully belong to me."

"Have you lost your mind, Sol? You'd be killed and scalped in an hour!"

"I knowed you'd say that. That's the reason I come around to it gradual like, an' in a circle, but Henry, it ain't no use talkin'. I'm goin'. My mind is clean made up. Besides, I won't be scalped an' I won't be killed. Jest you lay down an' afore long I'll be back here with my property."

Henry saw that it was no use to argue. The mind of the shiftless one was made up, and occasionally he could be as resolute as Henry himself.

"If you're bound to go I can't help it," Henry said. "I don't know your plan of action, and I won't ask it, but if you don't come back I'll feel pretty bad, Sol."

"But I'll come back. That's shore. The night has jest this minute turned darker, which is a sign. Darkness is what I need, an' it tells me that I'm goin' to git through."

Henry saw his comrade depart with keen regret. He did not look upon him as lost, because his skill was great. But so was the danger, and he thought the risk was out of proportion to the purpose. But there was nothing more for him to say and he watched the shiftless one as he left the oasis, glided over the mud flat and disappeared in the forest to the west.

Then came a long and painful wait. Twice he heard the warriors, through the medium of the wolf's howl, calling to one another, but he did not believe the cries had any bearing upon the adventure of Shif'less Sol. Then he heard a faint chorus of yells in the western forest, whence his comrade had gone, and he knew that something had happened. He was filled with apprehension, but he could do nothing, except to lie still in the covert.

The yell was not repeated, but he intently watched the edge of the forest on all sides except the west. After a while he saw the faint figure of a man, scarcely a tracery, appear in the north, and then come skipping like a swift shadow across the flat. His heart did not rise merely, but took a sudden jump upward. It was the shiftless one returning to their lair, and doubtless in triumph.

He had not time to think much about it before Shif'less Sol was on the oasis, crouched among the bushes, laughing low, but in a tone that was fairly redolent of triumph.

"I done done it, Henry!" he exulted. "I done done it!"

He held up the hind quarter of a bear that had been cooked to a turn over a bed of coals.

"I haven't tasted it yet," he said, "but jest smell it! Did sech an odor ever afore tickle your nose? Did your mouth ever afore water so much? Here, Henry, fall on!"

He took out his knife, cut off a big piece and handed it to Henry, who began to eat eagerly. Then the shiftless one fell to in like fashion.

"How did you manage it?" he asked.

The shiftless one grinned.

"Didn't I tell you that the sudden darkness wuz a sign favorin' me?" he said. "Paul is always tellin' about them old Greeks an' Romans not goin' into battle till they had talked with the omens, mostly the insides o' cows an' sheep. I believe in signs too. Mine wuz a lot better, an' it worked. I found that they hed jest finished roastin' the bear on the coals, after hevin' dressed him an' cut him into four quarters. 'Pears that most o' 'em hed gone deeper into the woods to look fur somethin'. I come close up in the bushes, an' began a terrible snarlin' an' yelpin' like a hull pack o' wolves. The three that wuz left, the cooks, took torches from the fire, an' run in after me. But I hed flew like lightnin' 'roun' to the other side, jumped in, grabbed up one o' the quarters by the leg, an' wuz away afore they could fairly see what had happened, an' who had made it happen. Then they set up one yell, which I guess you heard, but I kept on flyin' through the woods to the north, curved about, came over the mud flats whar no trail kin last a minute, an' here I am with our bear, or ez much of it ez we want o' him."

"You've done a great deed, Sol. I didn't think you could go through with it, but you have, and this bear is mighty fine."

"He wuz ourn, an' I wuz bound to hev a part o' him."

"We'll put the rest in our knapsacks and there ought to be enough for two days more. It relieves us of a great anxiety, because we couldn't go without food, and we really needed it badly."

"I'm feelin' like two men already. I wonder what the boys are doin' up thar in the holler? A-layin' 'roun' on the stone floor, I s'pose, eatin', drinkin' cold water, an' hevin' a good time."

"But remember their anxiety about us."

"I do. They shorely must hev worried a lot, seein' that we've been gone so long a time. Them are three fine fellers, Henry, Paul with all his learnin' an' his quiet ways, an' Long Jim, with whom I like so pow'ful well to argy an' who likes so pow'ful well to argy with me, ez good a feller ez ever breathed, an' Tom Ross, who don't talk none, givin' all his time to me, but who knows such a tremenjeous lot. We've got to git back to 'em soon, Henry."

Henry agreed with him, and then, having eaten heartily they took turn and turn in sleeping. Their clothing had dried on them, but their blankets had escaped a wetting entirely, and they were able to make themselves comfortable.

In the morning Henry saw that the larger column of smoke was gone, but that the smaller remained, and the fact aroused his curiosity.

"What do you make of it?" he asked Shif'less Sol.

"I draws from it the opinion that the main band with the cannon hez started off into the south, but that part o' the warriors hev stayed behind fur some purpose or other."

"My opinion, too. But why has the big force gone and the small one remained?"

"I can't say. It's too much fur me."

Henry had an idea, but hoping that he was mistaken he did not utter it just then.

"If the big band has started south again," he said, "and the absence of the column of smoke indicates it, then all the Indians in this part of the forest have been drawn off. They've long since lost us, and they wouldn't linger here in the hope of running across us by chance, when the great expedition was already on its way."

"That's sound argument, an' so we'll leave our islan' an' make fur the boys."

They picked a path across the mud flats, recrossed the creek and entered the deep forest, where the two felt as if they had come back to their true home. The wonderful breeze, fresh with a thousand odors of spring in the wilderness, was blowing. It did not come across mud flats, but it came through a thousand miles of dark green foliage, the leaves rippling like the waters of the sea.

"The woods fur me," said Shif'less Sol, speaking in a whisper, with instinctive caution. "I like 'em, even when they're full o' warriors lookin' fur my scalp."

The forest here was very dense, and also was heavy with undergrowth which suited their purpose, as they would be able to approach the hollow, unseen and unheard. Henry still did not like the presence of the smaller column of smoke, and when he reached the crest of their first hill he saw that it was yet rising.

"You had a sign last night, and it was a good one," he said to Shif'less Sol, "but I see one now, and I think it is a bad one."

"We'll go on an' find it."

They approached the hollow rapidly, the forest everywhere being extremely

dense, but when they were within less than a mile of it both stopped short and looked at each other.

"You heard it?" said Henry.

"Yes, I heard it."

"It wasn't much louder than the dropping of an acorn, but it was a rifle shot."

"O' course it wuz a rifle shot. Neither you nor I could be mistook about that."

"And you noticed where it came from?"

"Straight from the place where Paul and Tom and Long Jim Hart are."

"Which may mean that their presence has been discovered and that they are besieged."

"That's the way I look at it."

"And we must make a rescue."

"That's true, an' we've got to be so mighty keerful about it that we ain't took an' scalped and burned by the savages, afore we've had a single chance at makin' a rescue."

The thought in the minds of the two was the same. They were sure now from the absence of the larger smoke column that the main force had gone south, but that the smaller had remained to take their comrades, whose presence, by some chance, they had discovered. They lay closely hidden for a while, and they heard the report of a second shot, followed by a mere shred of sound which they took to be an Indian yell, although they were not sure.

"Ef the boys are besieged, an' we think they are," said the shiftless one, "they kin hold out quite a while even without our help. So I think, Henry, we'd better go an' see whether the main camp has broke up an' the cannon gone south. It won't be so hard to find out that, an' then we kin tell better what we want to do."

"You're right, of course," replied Henry. "We'll have to leave our comrades for the time and go to the big camp."

They curved again toward the south and west, keeping to the thickest part of the forest and using every possible device to hide their trail, knowing its full necessity, as the day was brilliant and one, unless under cover, could be seen

from afar. Game started up in their path and Henry took it as new proof that the main body of the Indians had gone. Deer, scared away by the hunters, were so plentiful that they would return soon after the danger for them departed. Nevertheless both he and the shiftless one were apprehensive of wandering warriors who might see them from some covert, and their progress, of necessity, was slow.

They came to several grassy openings, in one of which the buffalo were feeding, but Henry and his comrade always passed around such exposed places, even at the cost of greatly lengthening their journey. At one point they heard a slight sound in the forest, and being uncertain whether it was made by an enemy they remained crouched in the thicket at least a half-hour. Then they heard another faint report in the north and their keen ears told them it came from a point near the rocky hollow.

"I can't make anything of it," whispered Henry, "except that the boys are besieged as we feared. I've tried to believe that the shots were fired by Indians at game, but I can't force my belief. The reports all come from the same place, and they mean exactly what we wish they didn't mean."

"But they mean too," said the shiftless one, courageously, "that so long as we hear 'em the boys are holdin' out. The warriors wouldn't be shootin' off their guns fur nothin'."

"That's true. Now, we haven't heard that sound again. It must have been made by a wildcat or a wolf or something of the kind. So let's press on."

The great curve through the forest took them late in the afternoon to the site of the big camp. They were sure, long before they reached it that it had been abandoned. They approached very carefully through the dense woods, and they heard no sound whatever. It was true that a little smoke floated about among the dense leaves, but both were certain that it came from dying fires, abandoned many hours ago.

"You don't hear anything, do you?" asked Henry.

"Not a sound."

"Then they're gone."

Rising from the undergrowth they boldly entered the camp, where perhaps a thousand warriors had danced and sung and feasted and slept for days. Now the

last man was gone, but they had left ample trace of their presence. In the wide open space lay the charred coals of many fires, and everywhere were heaps of bones of buffalo, bear, dear and wild turkey. Feathers and an occasional paint box were scattered about.

"The feast before the fight," said the shiftless one. "I've a good appetite myself, but it won't hold a candle to that of a hungry warrior."

A low snarling and a pattering of many feet came from the surrounding forest.

"The wolves," said Henry. "They've been here to glean, and they ran away at our approach."

"An' they'll be back the moment we leave."

"Like as not, but we don't care. Here are the wheel tracks, Sol, and there is the road they've cut through the forest. A blind boy could follow the trail of the cannon, and do you know, Sol, I'm bothered terribly."

"Yes, I know, Henry. We've got to turn back, an' save the boys while them warriors, with the English an' the cannon, are goin' on into the south to attack our people."

"And time is often the most precious of all things."

"So it is, Henry."

Henry sat down on one of the logs and cupped his chin in his hands. The problem presented to him was a terrible one, and he was thinking with all his powers of concentration. Should he and Shif'less Sol follow and continue his efforts to destroy the cannon, or return and help their comrades who might be besieged for a week, or even longer? But it was likely that Paul, Long Jim and Silent Tom, with all their resources of skill and courage, would hold out. In the face of a defence such as they could make it would be almost impossible to force the cleft in the cliff, and they had some food and of course unlimited water.

They could be left to themselves, while Shif'less Sol and he hurried on the trail of the Indian army and made their great attempt. Shif'less Sol watched him, as he sat, his chin sunk in his hand, the deep eyes very thoughtful. Presently both looked at the column of smoke not more than a mile away that marked the presence of the smaller camp, the one that had remained and which was undoubtedly conducting the siege. As they looked they heard once more the faint

report of a shot, or its echo coming down the wind. Henry stood up, and there was no longer a look of doubt in his eyes.

"Sol," he said, "those three have been with us in a thousand dangers, haven't they?"

"Nigher ten thousand, Henry."

"And they never left us to look out for ourselves?"

"Never, Henry."

"And they never would do it, either."

"Never. Warriors, an' fires, an' floods, an' earthquakes all together couldn't make 'em do it."

"Nor can they make us. We've got to go back and rescue our comrades, Sol, and then we'll try to overtake their army and destroy the cannon."

"I thought you'd decide that way, Henry. No, I knowed you'd do it."

"Now, we've got to bear back toward the left, and then approach the cliff."

"An' on our way find out jest what the warriors attackin' it are up to."

They began a new trail, and with the utmost exercise of skill and caution undertook to reach their comrades.

CHAPTER IX

THE KEEPERS OF THE CLEFT

Henry and the shiftless one had not gone far, before they were deeply grateful that the undergrowth was so dense. They distinctly heard three shots and twice the war whoop. A small gully, so thickly covered with vines and bushes, that it was almost like a subterranean channel, allowed them to go much nearer. There lying hidden until twilight, they distinctly heard scattered firing, war whoops and then a long piercing shout which had in it the quality of the white man's voice. Shif'less Sol laughed low, but with intense pleasure.

"I can't hear his words," he said, "but I'd know that yell in a million. It's Long Jim's ez shore ez shootin'. It's so pow'ful loud 'cause it's drawed up from a long distance, an' when it does come free it comes a-poppin'. It's Jim tellin' them warriors what he thinks of 'em. He's tellin' 'em what scalawags they are, an' how their fathers an' mothers an' grandfathers an' grandmothers afore 'em wuz ez bad or wuss. He's tellin' 'em they're squaws painted up to look like men, an' ez he talks Shawnee an' Miami they're hoppin' mad."

Henry even could not refrain from laughing. It was Long Jim's voice beyond a doubt, and his note of triumph showed that he and his comrades were safe—so far. Evidently he was in great fettle. His words shot forth in a stream and Henry knew that the savages were writhing in anger at his taunts. The report of a rifle came suddenly and echoed through the darkening forest. When the last echo died there was a moment of silence, and then to their welcome ears came the voice of Long Jim again, pouring forth a stream of taunt and invective with undiminished speed and power.

"Ain't he the great one?" whispered Shif'less Sol, admiringly. "Didn't I tell you that voice o' his was so strong 'cause it come up so fur. An' did you ever hear him do better? Thar ain't a word in the hull Shawnee an' Miami languages that he hasn't used on 'em an' a sprinkling o' Wyandot an' Delaware too. They're so mad I kin see 'em bitin' their lips an' t'arin' at thar scalp locks. Good old Jim, give it to 'em!"

The voice went on a quarter of an hour with amazing force and speed. Then it

ceased abruptly and silence and darkness together came over the woods. Henry and his comrade debated as they lay in the little gully. Should they try to get in to their comrades? Or should they try to get their comrades out? Either would be a most difficult task, but as the night deepened, and they talked they came to a decision.

"It has to be me," said Henry.

"I s'pose so," said Sol, regretfully. "You're the likeliest hand at it, but you always take the most dangerous part. It's nothin' fur me to lay 'roun' here in the night till you fellers come."

Henry's smile was invisible in the dusk.

"Of course, Sol," he said, "you run no risk. I read once in a book, that our teacher had at Wareville, about an outdoor amusement they called a lawn festival. That's what you're going to have, a lawn festival. While I'm gone you'll walk about here and pick flowers for bouquets. If any savage warrior wanting your scalp should come along he'd change his mind at once, and help you make your bouquet."

"Stop your foolishness, Henry. You know it ain't no hard job fur me to hang 'bout in the woods an' keep out o' danger."

"Yes, but you may have a lot to do when you hear the signals. Keep as close as you reasonably can, Sol, and if we come out and give the howl of the wolf you answer, according to our custom, and we'll know which way to run."

"All right, Henry. I won't be sleepin'. Thar they are shootin' ag'in, but not doin' any yellin'. So they haven't hit anythin'. Good-bye, an' rec'lect that I'll be waitin' here."

Strong hands clasped in the darkness and Henry slipped away on his perilous mission, reaching without event the valley that the cliff overlooked. Then he used all the caution and skill that the superman of the forest possessed, creeping closer and closer and ever closer, until he could see, despite the darkness, the painted forms of Miami and Shawnee warriors in the thickets, all looking up at the point where the crevice in the cliff was practically hidden by the foliage. It was an average night, quiet and dark up there, but Henry knew that three pairs of good eyes in the coign of the crevice were watching everything that went on below.

He crouched lower and lower, until he blended with earth and thicket and still

watched. He saw one of the warriors raise his rifle and fire at the hidden mark. Then he heard two impacts of the bullet, first as it struck upon stone, and then as glancing, it fell among the leaves. Out of the mouth of the fissure came a great booming voice, speaking Shawnee and ridiculing their lack of skill with the rifle.

The voice said that if they did not improve in their firing he would come outside, sit in the best moonlight he could find, and let them take turns at him as a target. He would even mark off spots on his chest and offer prizes to any one who might hit them, but he knew very well that none of them would ever succeed. If he had a six-year-old boy who should do as badly as they were doing he would take him away and whip him with willow switches.

Henry, lying close in his covert, laughed inwardly. Long Jim was in good form. Upon occasion he had a wonderful command of language, and the present occasion was better than any other that Henry could remember. Events, chief of which was a successful defense, had inspired in him a wonderful flow of language. His great sonorous voice again pealed out wrath, defiance and contempt.

"Oh, you dogs! sons uv dogs! an' grandsons uv dogs!" he shouted. "Why don't you come an' take us? Here we are, only a few, jest settin' an' waitin' fur you! An' thar are twenty or more uv you! Oh, you Shawnees an' Miamis, an' Wyandots, why are you waitin' down thar when jest a few uv us are up here, ready to give you welcome? I don't think you're re'lly warriors. You're jest old squaws painted up to look like 'em, an' the real fightin' men uv your tribe are at home, asleep in the lodges, afraid to face the bullets uv the white men, while they send thar old women here to make a noise!"

Henry laughed again that soundless laugh behind his teeth. He read everything as plainly as if it had been written in a book before him. Nobody in the stony hollow had been hurt, else Long Jim's voice would not have been so exultant. They were confident, too, that they could hold the narrow opening indefinitely, else he would not have sent forth such intolerable taunts. He made his position a little easier and again laughed deep in his throat and with unction. He had never known Long Jim to be in finer form. Shif'less Sol was the acknowledged orator of the five, but tonight the cloak of inspiration was spread over the shoulders of Long Jim Hart.

"Why don't you come into our little house?" he shouted. "It's a nice place, a warm place, an' the rain can't git at you here. Won't you walk into our parlor, ez

the spider said to the fly! It's a good place, better than any wigwam you've got, nice an' warm, with a roof that the rain can't get through, an' plenty of cool runnin' water! An' ef you want our scalps you'd never find grander heads uv ha'r. They're the finest an' longest an' thickest that ever grew on the head uv man. They're jest waitin' to be took. Any warrior who took one uv 'em would be made a chief right away. Why don't you come on an' git 'em? It can't be that you're afraid, you Shawnees and Miamis an' Delawares an' Wyandots. Here's our gyarden, jest waitin' fur you, the door open an' full uv good things. Why don't you come on? Ef I had a dog an' told him to run after a b'ar cub an' he wouldn't run I'd kill him fur a coward!"

Henry heard a roar of rage from the thickets, and once more he laughed behind his teeth. Long Jim Hart was still in his grandest form, and although many Indian chiefs were great orators, masters of taunt and satire, Long Jim, inspired that night, was the equal of their best. The gift of tongues had come to him.

"I heard a noise down thar in the holler!" he shouted. "Wuz it made by warriors, men? No! it wuz dogs barkin' an' crows cawin' an' wolves whinin' an' rabbits squeakin'. Sech ez them would never come up ag'in a white man's rifle. I hear the wind blowin' too, but it don't bring me no sound 'cept that uv dogs barkin', low-down curs that would run away from a chipmunk with their tails atween their legs. I'm gittin' mighty tired now uv waitin' fur them that called theirselves warriors, but are nothin' but old squaws in war paint. Ef I don't hear from 'em ag'in soon I'll go to sleep an' leave here my little boy, ten years old, to meet 'em with a switch ez they come up."

There was another roar of rage from the brush, and Henry said under his breath:

"Well done, Long Jim! Well done, twice and again!"

Long Jim now softened his voice and began to beg.

"Why don't you come up here, you red Indian fellers?" he cried. "All my friends, knowin' thar is no danger, hev gone to sleep, leavin' me to welcome the guests, when they stan' afore our door. I'm waitin'! I've been waitin' a long time, an' ef you don't come soon I'll hev to go to sleep leavin' you outside our door."

The Indians were always susceptible to oratory and now another shout of rage came from them. The taunts of Long Jim were too much, and a dozen dusky forms sprang from the undergrowth and rushed up the slope. There was a puff of smoke from the cleft in the cliff and the foremost warrior fell, shot squarely

through the forehead. A second puff and a second warrior was gone to a land where the hunting is always good. Before such accurate shooting with only the moonlight to aid, the other warriors shrank back appalled, and quickly hid themselves in the undergrowth.

"Good boys! Good boys!" exclaimed Henry under his breath. "Splendid shooting! They're bold warriors who will now face the Keepers of the Pass."

All the warriors save the two who had been slain were hidden in the dense thicket or behind stony outcroppings, and again the tremendous voice of Long Jim floated on waves of air above them.

"Why don't you keep comin'?" he shouted. "I invited you to come an' you started, but you've stopped! Everythin' is waitin' fur you, all the gaudy Roman couches that my friend Paul has told me about, an' the gushin' fountains, an' the wreaths uv rose leaves to wrap aroun' your necks, an' the roses droppin' from the ceilin' on the table loaded with ven'son, an' turkey, an' wild pigeons, an' rabbits an' more other kinds uv game than I kin tell you about in a night. Why don't you come on an' take the big places you're invited to at our banquet, you miserable, low-down, sneakin', wrinkled old squaws!"

A wild yell of rage came once more from the bushes, and again Henry laughed deep in his throat. He knew how the taunt stung the Indians, and Long Jim's eloquence, the dam now having been taken down, flooded on.

"Here, you red-skinned barbarians!" he shouted. "Come into our house an' we'll teach you how to live! The tables are all set an' the couches are beside 'em. The hummin' birds' tongues are done to a turn an' the best singers an' dancers are all on hand to entertain you!"

Henry knew that Jim's patter had come from Paul's stories of the old Romans, and now he was applying it with gusto to the wild scene lost in the vast green wilderness. But he was sure that the Indians would not return to a headlong charge. The little fortress in stone was practically impregnable to frontal attack and they would resort instead to cunning and subterfuge.

"Ain't you comin'!" thundered the voice of Long Jim. "I hev done give you an invite to the banquet an' you stop an' hang 'roun' thar in the woods, whar I can't see you. Five minutes more an' the invites are all withdrawed. Then the eatin' an' the singin' an' the playin' will all go on without you, an' ef you are found hangin' 'roun' our door I'll hev the dogs to chase you away."

No answer came from the woods, but Henry knew how the hearts of the warriors were consumed with rage. Those whom they wished to take were so near and so few and yet they held an almost invincible fortress. Rage stabbed at the Indian heart.

Long Jim continued his taunts for some time, speaking both Shawnee and Miami, and also a little Wyandot and Delaware. His vocabulary acquired a sudden richness and depth. He called them names that implied every manner of cowardice and meanness. Their ancestors had been buzzards feeding on offal, they themselves were mangy, crippled and deformed, and, when the few that were left alive by the white men returned home, they would be set to work cooking, and caring for the lodges. When they died they would return to the base forms of their ancestors. They would be snakes and toads and turtles, and the animals that walked on four legs and looked straight before them would laugh at them whenever they saw them.

Long Jim had never before been so eloquent, and never before had his voice been so unctuous. He thundered forth challenges and insults after the Indian fashion. He told them that he and his comrades found it a poor amusement to fight with such men, but when they finished with their eating and drinking and sleeping they might go north to the Indian villages and whip the warriors in the presence of their squaws with willow switches. Meanwhile they intended to sleep and rest, but if any of the old women out there came into their cavern and annoyed their slumbers he would chase every one of them out with a switch.

Henry laughed long in his throat. Long Jim was proving himself a forest warrior of the first quality. It was the way of the woods, and these taunts stung the red men to the quick. He knew that they were lying in the bushes, their hearts beating heavily with anger and the hot breath burning their lips. Two, unable to restrain themselves, fired, but their bullets merely rebounded from the stone walls of the grotto, and the defenders did not deign to answer.

Then came a long period of silence and Henry made himself as small and obscure as possible, lest the warriors, moving about, might see him. But, fortunately the night had now turned quite dark, and where eyes might fail his acute sense of hearing would reveal the approach of any enemy. But as he lay close he again laughed inwardly more than once. The three were certainly holding the grotto in most gallant fashion, and Long Jim was fast becoming one of the greatest orators of the woods. He did not believe that the Indians could carry the fortress, but to get them out and away was another and much harder

problem.

Absolute silence save for the whispering of a light wind through the leaves came over the forest. The night, to Henry's great joy, grew much darker. No sound came from the room in the cliff, nor did any come from the Indians in the thickets. Apparently the whole place was a wilderness, as lone and desolate as it was when it first emerged from the sea. Nowhere was the sign of a human being visible, but Henry knew that vigilant eyes watched at the mouth of the stone cleft and that eyes equally as keen peered continually from the thickets.

But he meant to join his comrades before dawn. He did not know yet just how he would do it, but such was his confidence that he felt quite sure he would be with his comrades before the rising of the sun.

Luckily the forest and thickets in the valley were extremely dense, enabling him to lie within a couple of hundred yards of the besieging force, and not fear detection. His figure in its green clothing blended perfectly with the green bushes.

The night turned colder, and after a while a chilly drizzle began to fall. Henry, hardened to all kinds of weather, and intent upon his task, took no note of it, except to be glad that it had come, because it would further his aims. Night and storm might enable him to slip past the besiegers and join his friends.

But the Indians, who do not despise comfort when there is no danger in it, gathered in a cup in the side of the hill, beyond rifle shot from the hollow, and built a fire. Henry, from his lair in the bushes, saw them distinctly, about thirty warriors, mostly of the Shawnee tribe, with their head chief, Red Eagle himself, present as a leader, and the two renegades Braxton Wyatt and Blackstaffe. Henry noted Blackstaffe and Wyatt closely and his heart thrilled with anger that they should turn against their own people and use the tomahawk and scalping knife, and even stand beside the stake to witness their slow death by the torture of fire.

Blackstaffe[A] was one of the worst of all the renegades, second only to Girty in cruelty and cunning, a scourge of the border destined to meet his fate from an avenging bullet years later, just after the Fallen Timbers, where Wayne crushed the allied tribes. Now he was a young man, tall, heavily built and tanned almost as dark as an Indian by weather. He and Braxton Wyatt had become close friends, and both stood high in the councils of the Indians. Henry saw them clearly now, outlined against the firelight, engaged in close talk with the middle-aged Shawnee chief, Red Eagle.

Henry had much more respect for Red Eagle than for the renegades. The Indian might be cruel, he might delight in the terrible sufferings he inflicted upon a captured enemy, but it was the immemorial custom of his race and, in fighting the white people, he was fighting those who would some day, far distant though it might be, turn the great hunting grounds into farms. Henry, so much a son of the wild himself, could understand him, but for the renegades he had no sympathy whatever. In all lands and in all the history of the world renegades have been hated and detested.

He judged by the fact that the head chief of the Shawnees and the two renegades had remained that they considered the taking of the little fort in the cliff of great importance. Doubtless they imagined that all of the five were now inside, and it would rejoice the heart of Shawnee and Miami alike if they could slay them all, or better still, take them alive, and put them to the torture. There were some old defeats that yet galled and stung, and for which revenge would be sweet. Henry recalled these things and he knew that the siege would be close and bitter.

The Indians, feeling secure from any enemy, presently sat in a circle about the fire, drawing their blankets over their shoulders to protect themselves from the drizzling rain. Henry surmised that several warriors were on watch near the mouth of the cave, and that those in the main body would take their ease before the coals. His surmise proved to be correct, as they appeared to relax and to be talking freely. They also took venison from deerskin pouches and ate. It reminded Henry that he was hungry and he too took out and ate a portion of Shif'less Sol's stolen bear steak that he had saved.

He did not move for another hour. Meanwhile the wind rose, driving the drizzling rain like sleet, and moaning down the gorge. Save for the Indians crouched around the fire no more desolate scene might have been witnessed on the continent. The old, primeval world had come back, and forgotten monsters ranged the woods while man, weaponless save for his club, crouched in his cave and listened with terror to the snarls of the great animals, so much more powerful than himself.

It seemed to him then, when the influence of the wilderness and its immensity and desolation were so strong, that he might have lived in some such time himself, ages and ages ago. It might have been the stories of Paul or it might have been some dim heritage from a dimmer past that made him, as he lay there under the soaking bushes, call up visions of the great beasts that once stalked the earth, the mammoth and the mastodon, the cave bear, the saber-toothed tiger, gigantic leopards and hyenas, and back of them the terrific stegosaurus in his armor-like hide and all his awful kin. Henry was glad that he had not lived in such a time.

The fire, even though it was that of men who would gladly scalp him and torture him to death, brought back the present and the living and throbbing realities of life. With his rifle he was more than a match for any beast that roamed the North American wilderness, and in cunning and craft he could meet the savages at their own game.

Apparently the Indians around the fire had now ceased to talk. They sat in a circle, bent a little forward, and some had drawn their blankets over their heads. The fire was a great mass of coals and Henry knew that it threw out an abundant heat. He envied them a little. He was just beginning to feel the effects of the cold rain, but their bodies glowed with warmth.

Meantime the roaring of the wind in the valley was growing and in the confined

space there were many tones in its voice, now a shriek, and now a howl. In spite of himself the ancient monsters of the primeval world came back again and these were the sounds they uttered in their rage. He shuddered a little, then shook himself and by the mere power of will forced the return of the present.

He reckoned that the time had come for him to make his attempt. Doubtless the sentinels were on the slope near the mouth of the cleft, but they must be chilled to some extent by the cold rain, and, after such a long silence, would naturally relax their vigilance. He had protected his weapons from the rain with his buckskin hunting shirt, and he flexed his arms and muscles to see that they had not grown stiff from such a long stay in one position.

He began to creep through the bushes to the bottom of the valley and then up the slope toward the little fortress, and in the task he called into play all his natural and acquired powers. An eye looking down would have taken him for a large animal stalking his prey with infinite cunning and cleverness. The bushes scarcely moved as he passed, and he made no sound but the faintest sliding motion, audible only four or five feet away.

The strain upon his body was very great. He did not really crawl, but edged himself forward with a series of muscular efforts. It was painfully slow, but it was necessary, because the Indian ears were acute, and the rustling of a bush or the breaking of a twig would draw their instant attention.

As he drew himself slowly on, like a great serpent, he watched for the Indian sentinels, and at last he saw one, a Shawnee warrior crouched in the lee of a huge tree trunk to shelter himself from the driving rain, but always looking toward the mouth of the hollow in the cliff.

Henry, inch by inch, bore away and curved about him. Twice he thought the sentinel had heard something unusual, but in each case he lay flat and silent, while the wind continued to shriek down the valley, driving the chill rain before it. Each time the suspicions of the watcher passed and Henry moved slowly on, infinite patience allied with infinite skill. If there was anything in heredity and reincarnation he was the greatest tracker and hunter in that old primeval world, where such skill ranked first among human qualities. As always with him, his will and courage rose with the danger. Crouched in the bush fifteen feet away he looked at the warrior, a powerful fellow, brawny in the chest but thin in the legs, as was usual among them. The Indian's eyes swept continuously in a half circle, but they did not see the great figure lying so near, and holding his life on the

touch of a trigger.

Henry laughed deep in his throat. All the wild blood in him was alive and leaping. He even felt a certain exultation in the situation, one that would have appalled an ordinary scout and stalker, but which drew from him only supreme courage and utmost mastery in woodcraft. He felt within him the supreme certainty that he would succeed, and bending away from the sentinel he resumed that slow, sliding motion.

He was sure that he would find on his right another warrior on watch, and, as he was moving in that direction, he looked closely. He saw him presently, a tall fellow, standing erect among some bushes, his rifle in the crook of his arm. He seemed discontented with his situation—even the savage can get too much of cold and wet—and presently he moved a little further to the right, as if he would seek some sort of shelter from the rain. Then Henry crept straight forward toward the fortress of his friends, a scant fifty yards away.

But he did not assume that he had yet succeeded. He knew how thoroughly the Indians kept watch upon a foe, whom they expected to take, and there must be other sentinels, or at least one, and bearing that fact in mind his progress became still slower. He merely went forward inch by inch, and he was so careful that the bushes above him did not shake. All the while his eyes roved about in search of that lone last sentinel whom he was sure the Indians had posted near the entrance, in order to check any attempt at an escape.

Although it was very dark his eyes had grown used to it and he could see some distance. Yet his range of vision was not broken by the figure of any warrior, and he began to wonder. Could the vigilance of the savages have relaxed? Was it possible that they were keeping no guard near the entrance? While he was wondering he crept directly upon the sentinel.

He was a huge savage, inured to cold and wet and he had lain almost flat in the grass. Hearing a slight sound scarce a yard away he turned and the eyes of red forest runner and white forest runner looked into one another. Henry was the first to recover from his surprise and the single second of time was worth diamonds and rubies to him. Dropping his rifle he reached out both powerful hands and seized the warrior. The loud cry of alarm that had started from the chest never got past the barrier of those fingers, and the compressing grasp was so deadly that the Indian's hands did not reach for tomahawk or knife. Instead they flew up instinctively and tried to tear away those fingers of iron. But the man of old

might as well have tried to escape from the jaws of the saber-toothed tiger.

The great forest runner was exerting all his immense strength, and he was nerved, too, by the imminent danger to his friends and himself. No slightest sound must escape from the red throat. A single cry would reach the warriors below, and then the whole yelling pack would be upon him. The warrior's hands grasped his wrists and pulled at them frantically. He was a powerful savage with muscles like knotted ropes, but there was no man in all the wilderness who could break that grasp. His breath came fitfully, his face became swollen and then Henry, turning him over on his back, took his fingers away.

The warrior was not dead, but he would revive slowly and painfully and for days there would be ten red and sore spots on his throat, where the fingers had sunk in. An ordinary scout would have thrust his knife at once into the heart of the warrior. It would have been the safest way, but Henry could not do it. He saw the great chest of the savage trembling as the breath sought a way to his lungs. He took his rifle, powder horn, bullet pouch, tomahawk and knife, and, bending low in the foliage, ran swiftly for the mouth of the cave.

He was quite confident that the fallen warrior was the last sentinel, and as he approached the entrance he called again and again in a loud whisper:

"Don't fire! Don't fire! It's me, Henry!"

At last came the whisper in reply:

"All right, Henry, we're waitin'."

He recognized the voice of Silent Tom, and the next instant he was inside, his hand and that of Tom Ross meeting in a powerful grasp, while Paul and Long Jim, aroused from sleep, expressed their delight in low words and strong handshakes.

"How in thunder did you git in, Henry?" asked Long Jim.

"I was brought in a sedan chair by four strong Indians, Wyatt walking on one side and Blackstaffe on the other as an escort. I told them that of all places in the world this was the one to which I wished most to come, and they put me down at the door, their modesty compelling them to withdraw."

"It's mighty good to see you again, Henry, no matter how you got here," said Paul. "Where is Sol?"

"Safe outside, just as I'm safe inside. I think I'll let him know that I've been successful."

Standing just within the entrance he emitted the long-drawn howl of the wolf, piercing and carrying singularly far. They waited a moment or two in breathless silence, and then on the edge of the shrieking wind came a similar reply, fierce, long and snarling. Henry gave the howl again and as before came the answer in like fashion. It was the wilderness signal, made complete.

"It's Sol," Henry said. "I know now that he's there, and he knows that I'm here. The first part of our task is done."

A yell of rage and disappointment came from the valley below. It was so fierce that the air seemed to pulse with angry waves.

"What's the matter down there, I wonder," exclaimed Paul.

"Before I could get in here," replied Henry, "I had to choke the breath out of one of their best warriors. I fancy he has just come to and has told the others."

Then the war cry died away and there was nothing but the shriek of the wind that drove drops of rain into the opening.

"How long have you been besieged here?" asked Henry.

"Today and tonight," replied Paul. "Either they struck our trail or some one of them may have been in this grotto once. At any rate a band started up here and we were compelled to fire into 'em. That's our history, since. What have you seen?"

"The main army has gone south with the cannon, but Red Eagle, Braxton Wyatt and Blackstaffe are here. If they can't rush us they'll at least hold us three or four days, or try mighty hard. But I want a drink of water I hear trickling over there. I'm thirsty from all the crawling and creeping I've done."

He knelt and drank deep at the pure little stream.

"Now, Henry," said Silent Tom, "sence you've come I reckon you're mighty tired. You've been trampin' about in the woods a heap. So jest stretch out an' go to sleep while we watch."

"I don't mind if I do," replied Henry, who at last was beginning to feel the effects of his immense exertions. "How are you fellows fixed for food?"

"This ain't no banquet hall an' we ain't settin' dinners fur kings," replied Long Jim, "but we've got enough to last a good while. Afore they found out we wuz here Tom went out one night an' killed a deer an' brought him in. While he wuz gone I took the trouble to gather some wood, which is in the back part uv the place, but 'cause o' smoke an' sech we ain't lighted any fire, an' no part of the deer hez been cooked."

"I brought a big piece of bear myself," said Henry, unhooking it from his back, "and it was cooked by an Indian, the best cook in all these woods except you, Jim. He wasn't willing for me to take it, but here it is."

Long Jim deposited it carefully in a corner and covered it with leaves.

"Ef people always brought somethin' when they come visitin'," he said, "they'd shorely be welcome ez you are, Henry."

But before he lay down Henry listened a while at the fortress mouth, and the others listened with him. If they heard shots it would indicate that the Indians in some manner had caught sight of Shif'less Sol and were pursuing him. But no sound came out of the vast dark void, save the shriek of the wind and the beat of the rain. Henry had no doubt that the warrior whom he had choked nearly to death was now with his comrades, raging for vengeance, and yet he had been spared when few in like case would have shown him mercy.

The wilderness, black, cold and soaking, looked unutterably gloomy, but he felt no worry about those whom he had left behind. The shiftless one like himself was a true son of the wilderness and he would be as clever as a fox in finding a warm, dry hole. They had forged the first link in their intended chain, and Henry felt the glow of success.

"I think I'll go to sleep now," he said. "I'm pretty well soaked with the rain, but I managed to keep my blanket dry. If the warriors attack, Jim, wake me up in time to put on my clothes. I wouldn't like to go into a battle without 'em."

He removed his wet buckskins and spread them out on the stone floor to dry. Then he wrapped himself in his blanket, raked up some of the dry leaves as a couch, and lay down, feeling a double glow, that of warmth and that of success. What a glorious place it was! All things are measured by contrast. After the black and cold wilderness, swarming with dangers, this was the other extreme. The Cæsar in his palace hall and the Persian under his vaulted dome could not feel so much comfort, nor yet so much luxury, as Henry in this snug and warm

room in the stone with his brave and faithful friends around him.

Truly it was a noble place! He heard the trickle of the little stream, like a jet of water flowing over marble, and into a marble fountain. Above him was a stone ceiling, carved by the ages, and beneath him was a stone floor made by the same master hand. The leaves were very soft to one so thoroughly hardened of body as he, and the blanket was warm. The roaring of the wind outside was turned to music here, and it mingled pleasantly with the trickle of the little stream.

While the forest runner was capable of tremendous and long exertions, he also had acquired the power of complete relaxation when the time came. Now all of Henry's nerves were quiet, a deep peace came over him quickly, and he slept.

FOOTNOTES:

[A] The fate of Blackstaffe is told in the author's novel, "The Wilderness Road."

CHAPTER X

BESIEGED

Henry did not awake the next day after his usual fashion, that is with all his faculties and senses alert, for the strain on him had been so great that the process required a minute or two. Then he looked around the little fortress which so aptly could be called a hole in the wall. Many dried leaves had been brought in and placed in five heaps, the fifth for Shif'less Sol when he should come. The dressed deer, rolled in leaves, lay at the far end. The little stream was trickling away, singing its eternal pleasant song, and a bright shaft of sunlight, entering, illuminated one part of the cave but left the other in cool dusk.

Silent Tom sat by the side of the door watching, his rifle on his knees. Nothing that moved in the foliage in front of them could escape his eyes. Long Jim was slicing the cooked venison with his hunting knife, and Paul, sitting on his own particular collection of leaves with his back against the wall, was polishing his hatchet. It looked more like a friendly group of hunters than a band fighting to escape death by torture. And despite the real fact the sense of comfort was strong.

Henry knew by the sunlight that the rain had passed and that a warm clear day was at hand. He inferred, too, that nothing had happened while he slept, and rising he drank at the stream, after which he bathed his face, and resumed his buckskin clothing which had dried.

"Good sleep," said Paul.

"Fine," said Henry.

"You showed great judgment in choosing your inn."

"I knew that I would find here friends, a bed, water, food and a roof."

"Everything, in fact, except fire."

"Which we can do without for a while."

"But I would say that the special pride of the inn is the roof. Certainly no rain

seems to have got through it last night."

"It's fifteen or twenty feet thick, and you will notice that the ceiling has been sculptured by a great artist."

Henry had seen it before, but he observed it more closely now, with all its molded ridges and convolutions.

"Nature does work well, sometimes," he said.

Long Jim handed him strips of venison.

"Eat your breakfast," he said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Visitor, that I kin offer you only one thing to eat, but as you came late an' we haven't much chance to git anythin' else you'll hev to put up with it. But thar's plenty uv water. You kin drink all day long, ef you like."

Henry accepted the venison, ate heartily, drank again, and went to the door where Silent Tom was watching.

"Look through the little crack thar," said Tom, "an' you kin see everythin' that's to be seen without bein' seen."

Henry took a long and comprehensive look. He saw the thick foliage down the slope, and the equally thick foliage on the other side. It looked beautiful in its deep green, still heavy with the rain drops of the night before, despite a brilliant sun that was rising. The wind had died down to a gentle murmur.

"Anything stirring, Tom?" he asked.

"Nothin' fur some time. 'Bout an hour ago I caught the shine o' a red blanket 'mong them trees over thar, four hundred yards or so from us an' too fur fur a shot."

"Do you think they'll try to rush us?"

Silent Tom shook his head.

"Not 'less they're pushed," he replied. "'Pears to me they'll settle down to a long siege. They know we're after thar cannon an' they mean to see that we don't git near 'em. Ef they could keep us holed up here fur two or three weeks they'd willin' enough spare twenty warriors or so fur the job."

"But why are such important men as Red Eagle and Blackstaffe left here?"

"Mebbe, they thought they'd git at us an' finish us in a day or two. Look at that, Henry. What do you make it out to be?"

"It's a spot of white in the foliage, and it's coming nearer. They want to talk with us. Somebody has hoisted a piece of old cloth on a gun barrel and is approaching. It's Braxton Wyatt."

"Yes, I see him, an' he's within range now. May I send a bullet squar'ly through his head, Henry?"

"No, no! You mustn't do that! We'll observe all the rules of war, whether they do or not. There's Blackstaffe behind Wyatt, and two more Indians. Let them come within a hundred yards, Tom, then hail 'em. Paul, you do the talking, but say I'm not here."

The two renegades and the two Indians came on with confidence, until they were halted by Tom's loud command.

The four stopped and Wyatt called out:

"We want to talk with you and it's better for you to do it."

"It may or may not be better for us," said Paul. "We're the best judges of that. But what do you want?"

"You know me, Paul Cotter," said Wyatt, who recognized the voice, "and you know I keep my word. Now, we have you fellows shut up there. All we've got to do is to wait until your food gives out, which'll be very soon, and then you'll drop into our hands like an apple from a tree."

"Oh, no," said Paul airily. "We've always had this place in mind for some such use as the present, and from time to time we've been stocking it up with food. We could live here a year in comfort. Long Jim is cooking deer steaks now, and the smoke is going out through a hole, which leads clear through the hill. If you'll go around to the other side, about a mile from here, you'll see the smoke."

Paul merely followed the Indian fashion of taunting one's enemies. He believed that in the forest it was best to follow its ways.

"Aren't you going, Braxton?" he called. "Long Jim is letting the fire die down and if you don't hurry around there you won't see the smoke."

"You think you're smart, Paul Cotter," Braxton Wyatt called back in anger. "You've read too many books. Drop your high and mighty ways and come down to facts."

"Well, what do you want? You're in our front yard and we have the right to shoot you, but we won't do it until you tell what you're doing there."

"As I said, we've got you shut up. We're sure that you haven't food for more than two or three days. Surrender and we'll spare your lives and take you as prisoners to the British at Detroit—that is, all except Henry Ware."

"And why except Henry?"

"He has done so much against the warriors that I don't think we could induce them to spare him."

"But what makes you think he's here?"

Wyatt hesitated and he and Blackstaffe spoke together a few moments in a low voice. Then he replied:

"One of our largest and strongest warriors was strangled nearly to death last night. Nobody could have done it but Ware."

Paul laughed loud.

"And so that's your evidence!" he cried. "Well, you're mistaken. I did that myself. I was needing a little exercise and so I went out, found this warrior in the grass and manhandled him. Then I came back feeling a lot better."

Wyatt's face blazed.

"You lie, Paul Cotter," he exclaimed. "You couldn't do such a thing!"

"Oh, yes, I could," said Paul merrily, "but you're losing your temper again, Braxton. You should never call anybody a liar when you're within range of his gun. No, we're not going to shoot. We always respect a flag of truce, though we doubt whether you would. Now, I want to ask you what have we ever done to make you think we'd betray a comrade like Henry? Are you judging us by yourself? You might have a thousand warriors out there and our answer would be the same. Try to take us and see what will happen. We give you just two minutes to get out of range."

Wyatt, Blackstaffe and the two Indians retired hurriedly. Long Jim uttered an indignant exclamation.

"What's the matter with you, Jim?" asked Henry.

"I've been insulted."

"Insulted? What do you mean?"

"To think anybody could have reckoned that me an' the others would be mean enough to give you up jest to save our own hides!"

Henry's eyes twinkled.

"I know you wouldn't give me up, Jim, but how do you know, if our places had been changed, that I wouldn't have given you up?"

"You're talkin' like Shif'less Sol," said Long Jim in the utmost good humor. "Now I wonder whar that ornery, long-legged cuss is."

"Not so far away, it's safe to say. He'll be hanging around, ready to help whenever help is needed most."

"That's shore. Thar's a heap o' good in Shif'less Sol, though it don't always 'pear on the surface. Wish he wuz here. Now, what's next, Henry?"

"Waiting, waiting, and then more waiting."

"You don't think they'll give it up an' go away?"

"Not for two or three days anyhow, and I think it likely also that they'll make another general attack."

"An' you think, too, that they've all gone some distance out of rifle shot?"

"Not a doubt of it, but why do you ask, Jim?"

"You see a lot uv dead wood layin' in the bushes not twenty feet from the door uv our manshun. I'd like to drag it in an' cook that thar deer afore it sp'ils. We've some wood already, but we need more. I think we could manage so most uv the smoke would go out in front an' we wouldn't choke. Ef we're held here fur a long time we'll need that thar deer."

"Go ahead, Jim, and get it. We three will cover you with our rifles."

Jim stole forth, and making a number of trips under the muzzles of his comrades, brought in a plentiful supply of wood. It was not until he was returning with his last load that the Indians noticed him. Then they sent up a war cry, and fired several distant shots. But it was too late. Long Jim was safely inside the next moment, and the warriors, knowing how deadly were the rifles that guarded him, were afraid to return to the attack.

"Him that does at once what he oughter do don't have to do it when it's too late," said Long Jim. "I'm goin' to build a fire close to the door, where most uv the smoke will go out. Ef it gits too strong fur us we'll jest hev to put it out. But ef things work smooth I mean to cook that deer."

They cut up the deer in slices with their big hunting knives. Then they heaped the dry wood near the door and cut off many shavings and splinters, building up the heap at least part of the way outside, in such a position that they were sure the wind would take the smoke and most of the heat down the valley. Then Long Jim, feeling that the rest of the task was his, and having a certain pride, lighted the heap with his flint and steel. It blazed up rapidly, and, as they had hoped, the wind carried nearly all the smoke out of the mouth of the cave.

The dry wood burned rapidly and a great mass of coals soon gathered. It was very hot in the cave, but liberal applications of the cold water enabled them to stand it. Meanwhile all except the one on guard were busy broiling big steaks on the ends of sticks and laying them away on the leaves. The whole place was filled with the pleasant aroma.

"Warriors!" said Tom Ross, who happened to be on guard at that particular moment. "They've seen our smoke, an' mebbe our fire, an' they don't understan' it."

"You see that they keep on failing to understand it," said Henry, "and if curiosity makes any of them too curious just give him a hint."

The three went on with their cooking, "storing up like Noah against the flood," Paul said, knowing that Silent Tom would keep a watch beyond which no warrior could pass.

"Our beautiful stone house will need a good airing after all this is over," said Paul. "Smoke will gather and ashes too are flying about. But it's a grand cooking."

"So it is," said Long Jim, who was in his element. "That wuz shorely a fine fat deer. You kin pile more on that shelf in the rock, thar, Paul. Wrap the dry leaves 'roun' 'em, too. They're clean an' good. I guess that old-timer uv yourn that you've told us about often—'Lysses, wuzn't it?"

"Yes, Ulysses."

"That's right. Well, old 'Lysses in them roamings uv his, lastin' a thousand years or some sech time, would hev been glad to come upon a place like this to rest his wanderin' an' sleepy head. I've a notion uv my own too, Paul."

"What is it?"

"That Greece ain't the land it's cracked up to be. I've never heard you tell uv any rivers thar like the Ohio or Missip. I ain't heard you say anythin' about the grand forests like ourn, an' all the hundreds an' thousands uv branches an' creeks an' springs."

"No, Jim, it's a dry country, mostly bare."

"Then the wilderness here fur me. I like a big woods, a thousand miles every way, an' the leaves so thick you kin hardly see the sky above in spring. I don't see what the herds of buff'ler found thar to live on."

"They didn't have our kind of buffalo."

"Ef they didn't hev our kind they didn't hev any kind."

Paul did not argue the question with him, because it was useless to talk to Long Jim about ancient glories, when modern glories that he considered so much greater were before his eyes. Moreover, Paul himself had a love of the greenwood, and the deep streams, so numerous.

"Maybe you're right, Jim," he said.

"I guess I am," returned Long Jim emphatically. "An' I don't think so much uv them old Greek fighters 'long side the fellers that fight the warriors nowadays in these woods. You rec'lect we talked that over once before. Now, how would A-killus, all in his brass armor with his shinin' sword an' long spear come out try in' to stalk an' Injun camp. Why, they'd hear his armor rattlin' a quarter uv a mile away, an', even ef they didn't, he'd git his long spear so tangled up in the bushes an' vines that he couldn't move 'less he left it behind him. An' s'pos'n' he had to

run fur it an' come to a creek or a river, which he would shorely soon do, ez thar are so many in this country, an' then he'd have to jump in with 'bout a hundred pounds uv brass armor on. Why, he'd go right to the bottom an' stick down so deep in the mud that the Injuns would hev to dive fur his scalp."

"There's no doubt of the fact that this country would not have suited Achilles."

"Not by a long shot, nor would it hev suited any other uv them fellers, be they Greek or be they Trojan. S'pose the Injuns didn't git after 'em, then think uv huntin' the buff'ler with your long spear, an' your hundred pounds uv brass clothes on. Why, the Shawnees an' Miamis are a heap more sensible than them old Greeks wuz. An', think what it would be on a real hot day to hev to wear our metal suits! Paul, I'm givin' thanks ev'ry few minutes that I wuzn't born in them times."

"A movement in the woods opposite!" announced Henry, who was on watch now.

"Tell us about it," said Long Jim. "I'm too busy to stop my work and look."

"I can see warriors stirring among the trees and bushes. They can't understand our smoke, and they're all looking at it."

"Maybe they take it for a signal," said Paul. "Almost anyone would do so."

"That's true," said Henry. "It looks natural. Well, let 'em wonder. Meanwhile we'll go on with the provisioning of our army."

"'Tain't such a terrible task," said Long Jim. "Me bein' the best cook in the world, it'll all be done in a couple uv hours more, an' bein' sparin' we kin hold out on it two or three weeks ef we hev to."

"I don't think it will be that long," said Henry confidently. "In fact we mustn't let it be too long. We've got to be out and away, following that red army with the cannon."

They continued their work without interruption, although at intervals they saw the Indians on the far slope, well out of range, but attentively watching the smoke that came from the mouth of the cavern. When the task was nearly over Long Jim took a good long look at them. Then he laughed deeply and a long time, doubling over with merriment.

'"Scuse me, Henry," he said, "but this life is so full uv jokes. I enjoy it all the time, ev'ry minnit uv it. A little while ago I wuz laughin' at the notion of A-killus with a hundred pounds or more uv brass on him, runnin' away from the warriors, jumpin' in a creek an' stickin' in the mud at the bottom clean down to his waist."

"That was the joke then, Jim, what's the joke now?"

"It's them Injuns out thar. They know we're here, an' that thar's a kind uv long narrow mouth to this bee-yu-ti-ful stone house uv ourn. They see smoke comin' out uv it, an' they don't understand it. They wonder ef fire hez busted right out uv the bowels uv the earth an' burnt us all up, an' ag'in they're 'fraid to come an' see lest they meet rifle bullets ez well ez smoke. I pity them red fellers."

"I think that pity is wasted on men who want to kill us and take our scalps."

"It ain't that. I know they want to do them things to us, but I know, too, that they ain't goin' to do 'em. It's 'cause they're so onsartain in thar minds. Onsartainness is the greatest uv all troubles. Keeps you so you can't eat an' sleep, nor keep still neither. Jest plum' w'ars you out. Ef you know what you're goin' to do you're all right, but ef you don't you're all wrong. That's the reason I feel sorry fur them Injun fellers, lookin' at our smoke an' a-guessin', an' a-guessin', an' a-guessin' an' never guessin' right. We'll be all through in a half-hour an' then we kin let the fire die."

"Right glad I'll be, too," said Paul, who was standing near the door for air, and glad they all were when the last of the deer was cooked, and the last of the coals were shoved out to die among the green bushes. While the work was going on they had frequently thrown water from the little stream over themselves to check the heat, but now they took their blankets and standing in a line at the far end of the cavern swept out all the smoke save that which lingered in the crannies until, in its own good time, it too departed.

Then all sat down near the door. A lucky turn of the wind sent the pure sweet air, crisp with the touch of spring, pouring into their cavern. It was like the breath of Heaven, taking away the sting of smoke from nostrils and throat. The place itself soon filled entirely with a new atmosphere, vital and strong. Then, one by one, they bathed their eyes and faces at the rill, and soon they were all gathered together again at the door, feeling as if they had been re-created. Indians were still visible on the opposite slope, and pity swelled once more in Long Jim's heart.

"Now they're a-guessin', an' a-guessin', an' a-guessin' ag'in," he said, "an' a-guessin' wrong ev'ry time. A little while ago our smoke bothered 'em, an' now they're bothered 'cause thar ain't no smoke. They're wonderin' ef the volcano that busted right under us hez quit so soon, an' whether we're all charred ruins, or real live fellers with rifles in our hands that kin shoot an' hit. That I call a state uv mind that would draw pity from anybody."

"Whatever it is," said Paul, "they'll not guess what has really happened, and ac our army of four is now provisioned indefinitely, we can bid them defiance."

"I like them words 'bid them defiance,'" said Long Jim. "Ef I met 'defiance' all by itself I wouldn't know what it meant, but speakin' ez you do, Paul, an' with all the surroundin's you give it I understan' it, an' it sounds mighty fine. Braxton Wyatt, I bid you defiance; Blackstaffe, I bid you defiance; Red Eagle, I bid you defiance, an' I bid defiance to ev'ry warrior an' renegade in all these woods, east uv the Missip, west uv the Missip, north uv the Ohio an' south uv the Ohio."

"But not the lightning, Jim," said Paul. "Ajax did that and got hurt."

"You needn't tell me that, Paul. I don't need the example of no Ajax to teach me sense. I ain't defyin' no lightnin', past, present or future. I know lightnin', an' I've too much respeck fur it. It's about the only thing that kin hit you an' you can't hit back."

"The Indians have retreated further into the woods," said Henry. "They're probably lying down and resting. They won't do anything today, but tonight they'll act. They have every incentive to finish their task here as soon as they can and join the main force. When dark comes we must watch two by two."

Night came slowly, the great sun blazing in red and gold in the west. Henry, with all his lore of the forest and wilderness, never failed to observe a brilliant sunset, and while he watched against an ambush he also watched the deep, rich colors as they faded. The wind had blown gently all day long, but now with the coming of the darkness it swelled into the song which he alone heard, that playing of the breeze upon the leaves, which his supersense translated into notes and bars and harmonies. Whenever he heard it he was uplifted and exalted in a singular manner, as if the distant heralds were already blowing the trumpets of victory. He was sure now of success.

He and Long Jim kept the first watch, which would last until some time after midnight, and he chose it for himself, because he felt certain the attack would

come before it was over. Paul and Tom went to sleep on the leaves inside, but he and Jim lay down just within the door, where they could see some distance and yet remain well sheltered. Now and then they exchanged a word or two.

"It's eyes an' ears both, Henry," said Long Jim. "Uv course, they'll come a-creepin', an' a-slidin', an' I reckon it'll be ears that'll tell us fust they're a-knockin' at our front door."

"Right, Jim. Our ears have saved us more than once, and they're going to do it again. I've an idea that they'll spread out and approach from different points."

"I think it likely. Red Eagle, their leader, is a chief uv sense, and he'll scatter his forces so we won't be able to concentrate our fire."

They waited a long time, the wind meanwhile blowing steadily, and playing its song upon the leaves. There was no other sound, but, when it was nearly midnight, a long howl, inexpressibly dreary and weird, came out of the depths of the forest.

"That's a mighty lonely wolf," whispered Long Jim.

"Listen!" Henry whispered back. "That's no wolf. It's Shif'less Sol."

"Mebbe it's so, but he's shorely howlin' like the king of all wolves."

Long Jim was right. Perhaps no wolf had ever before howled with such vigor and endurance. The long yelping, whining note filled the whole valley and quivered on the air. It rose and sank and rose again, and it was uncanny enough to make any ordinary hearer shiver to his bones.

"Now what in thunder does he mean by sech an awful howl ez that?" whispered Long Jim.

"I know," replied Henry, with a flash of intuition. "He's hanging somewhere on the outskirts of the Indian camp, and he's warning us that the attack is at hand."

"Uv course! Uv course! I might 'a' knowed. That thar Shif'less Sol is one uv the smartest men the world hez ever seed, an' while part uv our band is inside a big part uv it is outside, a-helpin' us."

"Wake up Paul and Tom and tell 'em the time has come."

In an instant all four were crouching beside the opening, their rifles ready. The

extra rifle that Henry had brought in was lying loaded at his feet, and all the while the wolf on the far ridge, moving from place to place, whined and howled incessantly. Despite Henry's knowledge of its source it made his hair rise a little, and a quiver ran along his spine. What then must be its effect upon red men, who were so much more superstitious than white men? They might think it the spirit of some great forgotten warrior that had gone into a wolf which was now giving warning.

Nevertheless he listened with all the power of his hearing for what might happen closer by, and presently he heard a rustling in the grass that was not caused by the wind. A moment later, and the rustling came from a second point and then a third. As he had surmised, Red Eagle had spread out his men until they were advancing like the spokes of a wheel toward a hub, the hub being the mouth of the cavern. And from the far ridge the warning cry of the wolf never ceased to come.

"Do you hear them creeping?" whispered Henry to Ross.

Silent Tom nodded and shoved forward the muzzle of his rifle.

"They'll be on us in a minute," he whispered back.

Paul and Long Jim had heard and they too made ready with their rifles. But all of them relied now on Henry, whose hearing was keenest. The faint, sliding sounds ceased, and he knew that the warriors had stopped to listen for their enemies, hoping to catch them off guard. The howling of the wolf also ceased suddenly, and the wind was again supreme.

At least ten minutes passed in almost intolerable waiting, and then Henry heard the renewal of the faint sliding sounds, coming from many points.

"Be ready," he whispered to his comrades. "When they're near enough they'll all jump up, utter a mighty yell and rush for us."

The rustlings came closer, then they ceased all at once, there was a half minute of breathless silence, and the air was rent by a tremendous war whoop, as twenty warriors, springing up, rushed for the opening. Henry fired straight at the heart of the first man, and snatching up the second rifle sent a bullet through another. The other three fired with deadly aim and all the assailants fell back, save one who, standing on the very edge of the opening, whirled his tomahawk preparatory to letting it go straight at Henry's head. But a moment before it could

leave his hand a rifle cracked somewhere and he fell dead, shot through the head, his figure lying directly across the entrance. From the other Indians came a yell of rage and dismay, and then after a groan or two somewhere in the grass, all were gone.

But the four were reloading with feverish haste. Henry, however, found time to say to Silent Tom Ross:

"Thank you for the shot that saved me."

Tom shook his head.

""Twuzn't me," he said.

"Then you, Paul."

"I shot at an Indian, but not that one. It was a warrior ten yards away."

"Then it must hev been you, Jim."

"It wuzn't, though. I wuz too busy with a warrior off thar to the left. When that feller wuz about to throw his tomahawk I'd done fired."

"And so it was none of you. Then I'm to be thankful that we've a friend outside. Nobody but Shif'less Sol could have fired that shot."

"An' jest in time," said Long Jim. "Good old Sol. He's settin' off somewhar in the bushes now, laughin' at the trick he's played 'em."

"They'll look for him," said Henry, "but whenever they come to a place he won't be there."

"They can't besiege us here," said Paul, "and catch Shif'less Sol at the same time. But I think we ought to remove the body of that fallen warrior at the door. I don't like to see it there."

"Neither do I," said Long Jim, and stepping forward he lifted the slain man in his arms and tossed him as far as he could down the side of the hill. They heard the body rolling and crashing some distance through the grass and bushes, and they shuddered.

"I hated to do it," said Long Jim, "but it had to be done. Besides, they'll get it now and take it away."

"You look for no other attempt tonight?" said Paul.

"No," said Henry. "They've lost too many men. They may try to starve us out."

"Now you an' Jim take your naps," said Silent Tom, "while me an' Paul keep the watch till day."

"All right," said Henry, "but I want to wait eight or ten minutes."

"What fur?"

"You'll see—or rather you'll hear."

Before the appointed time had passed the long howling note of a wolf came from a point a quarter of a mile or more away.

"Shif'less Sol is safe," said Henry, and five minutes later he and Long Jim were sound asleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHIFTLESS ONE

The next day dawned as brilliant as the one that had gone before, a golden sun clothing the vast green forest in a luminous light. It seemed to Henry that each day, as the spring advanced, deepened the intense emerald glow of the leaves. Down in the valley he caught the sparkle of the brook, as it flowed swiftly away toward a creek, to be carried thence to the Ohio, and on through the Mississippi to the sea.

Further up the opposite slope, five or six hundred yards away, were gathered the Indians around a fire in an opening, eating breakfast. Henry saw Wyatt and Blackstaffe with them, and he counted eighteen figures. As they had already suffered severe losses he concluded that they had received a small reinforcement, since they must have out four or five scouts and spies watching the little fortress.

Evidently they had not been daunted by their repulse of the night before, as they were broiling venison on the ends of sharpened sticks and eating heartily. The two white men finishing their food lay down on the grass and rested lazily. By and by the red members of the band did likewise.

"It's just as we thought last night," said Henry, "They will not try to carry us by assault again, but will undertake to starve us out with a long siege. Even if they've guessed the meaning of our smoke they don't know that we have in here running water that runs on forever."

"Would they care to carry on a long siege?" asked Paul.

"Maybe not, if Wyatt were not there. You know how he hates us all, and he will be continually urging them to attack us. Perhaps Red Eagle and Blackstaffe will now go on and join the main army, leaving Wyatt with a chosen band to take us by siege."

"'Pears likely to me," said Long Jim, who was listening. "It's easy enough for them to set thar out uv range an' hold us in here, but they forget one mighty important thing."

"What's that, Jim?"

"Shif'less Sol. He's in the bush, an' he kin stalk 'em when he pleases. They don't know that the warrior killed at the door last night fell afore his bullet, an' he kin bring down one uv 'em any time he feels like it. Thar's a panther in the bushes right by the side uv 'em an' they don't know it. An' it's a panther that will bite 'em, too, an' git away ev'ry time. Hark to that, will you?"

They heard the distant sound of a rifle shot and saw one of the Indians around the campfire sink over in the grass. The others uttered a terrific yell of rage, and a half-dozen darted away in the bushes.

"I ain't no prophet, nor the son uv a prophet," said Long Jim, "but I'll bet my scalp that in an hour or two they'll come back without Shif'less Sol."

"I won't take your bet," said Paul. "Six warriors started away in pursuit, and now we'll see how many return."

"The first will be back in an hour," said Long Jim, "'cause Sol won't leave no trail a-tall, a-tall. He made shore uv that afore shootin'."

"I believe you are a prophet, Jim," said Paul. "Let's watch together."

Within the appointed hour two warriors returned, bringing with them nothing that they had not taken away, and sat down in the opening, their attitude that of dejection.

"They never struck no sign of no trail, nowhere, nohow," said Long Jim, exultantly.

"Too many negatives, Jim," said Paul, reprovingly.

"Too many what?" exclaimed Long Jim, staring. "I never heard of them things afore!"

"It's all right anyhow. There comes another warrior, and he too bears no bright blonde scalp, such as adorns the head of our faithful and esteemed comrade, Solomon Hyde."

"That's three 'counted fur, an' three to come. I know, Paul, that Sol will git away, that they can't foller him nohow, but I'd like fur them three to come back empty handed right now. It would be awful to lose good old Sol. Uv course he's always wrong when he argys with me, but I'm still hopin' some day to teach him

somethin', an' I don't want to lose him."

Paul saw deep anxiety on the face of Long Jim. These two were always in controversy, but they were bound together by all the ties of the border, and the loss of either would be a crushing blow to the other.

Long minutes dragged by and became an hour, and the face of Jim Hart expressed apprehension.

"It's time fur at least one more to come back," he said.

"Well, there he is," said Paul. "Don't you see him stepping out of those bushes on the east?"

"Has he anything at his belt?" asked Long Jim eagerly.

"Nothing that he doesn't usually carry. He has no yellow scalp, nor any scalp of any kind. Empty he went away and empty he has returned."

"So fur, so good. Two more are left out, an' it'll now be time fur them to come trampin' back."

"Be patient, Jim, be patient."

"I am, but you must rec'lect, Paul, that thar comin' back soon means the life uv a man, a man that's one uv us five, an' that we could never furgit ef so be the Injuns took him."

"I'm not forgetting it, Jim, but I've every confidence in Shif'less Sol. I don't believe those warriors could possibly get him."

Another half-hour dragged away, and Long Jim became more uneasy. He scanned the woods everywhere for the two missing warriors, and, at last, he drew a mighty sigh of relief when a tufted head appeared over the bushes, and a warrior returned to the opening.

"He's a Shawnee," said Long Jim. "I marked him when he went away. I kin see that he's tired an' I could tell by the bend in his shoulders that he wuz comin' back with nothin'. He's set down now, an' ez he 'pears to be talkin' I guess he's tellin' the others, to 'scuse his failure, that it wuzn't really a man that he wuz follerin', but jest a ghost or a phantom, or suthin' uv that kind. Thar ain't but one left an' he ought to be in in a few minutes."

But the few minutes and many more with them slid into the past, without bringing back the last warrior, and once more that look of deep apprehension appeared on the face of Long Jim Hart. The man should have returned long before, and Jim held him to personal accountability for it.

"I didn't like his looks when he went away," he complained to Paul. "He wuz a big feller, darker than most uv the others, an' he wuz painted somethin' horrible. I guessed by his looks that he wuz the best scout an' trailer in the band an' that he would hang on like a wolf. Ugly ez he is his face would look nice to me now, 'pearin' in that openin'. He's done outstayed his leave."

"I wouldn't be worried, Jim," said Paul. "We know what a man Sol is in the woods. No single warrior could bring him down."

"That's so. Sol's terrible smart, but then anybody might be ambushed. I tell you, Paul, that wuz the wickedest lookin' warrior I ever saw. His eyes wuz plum' full uv old Satan."

"Why, Jim, we are too far away for you to have seen anything of that kind."

"I know that's so at usual times, but them eyes uv his wuz shinin' so terrible bright with meanness that I caught thar look like the gleam uv a burnin' glass. I reckon he wuz the wust savage in all these woods. All but him hev come back more 'n a half-hour ago, an' I'm beginnin' to hev a sort uv creepy feelin'."

"Hark!" exclaimed Henry, who had been standing almost in the mouth of the opening.

"What is it, Henry? What is it?" exclaimed Long Jim eagerly.

"That strong wind brought the sound of a rifle shot. It was so faint and far away that it was no more than the snapping of a little twig, but it was a rifle shot and no mistake. Sol and that warrior have met."

"And who fired the bullet? And who received it? That's what we'd like to know!" said Paul.

Complete silence succeeded the shot. Evidently the Indians around the campfire had not heard it, as they showed no signs of interest, but the four in the mouth of the cavern waited in painful anxiety, their eyes turned toward the point from which the report had come. At last the scalp lock appeared above the bushes and four hearts sank. Then the figure of the warrior came completely into view and

four hearts sprang up again. The man's left arm was held stiffly by his side and he was walking with weakness. Nor did any bright blonde scalp hang from his waist or any other part of his body.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" exclaimed Long Jim, triumphantly. "He come too close to Sol, an' got a bullet in his arm. It must hev been a long shot or he must hev been nearly hid, else he would now be layin' dead in the bushes. But ez it is he's shorely got enough to last him fur a long time."

Paul was less vocal, but like the others he shared in the triumph of the shiftless one.

"I'll admit I was worried for a while," he said, "but Sol has given us one more proof that he can take care of himself any time and anywhere."

"And he has also proved to our besiegers," said Henry, "that every hour they spend there they're in peril of a bullet from the bush. I think it will give them a most disturbing feeling."

Henry was right, and he was also right in some of his earlier surmises. Red Eagle and Blackstaffe departed to join the main army, leaving Braxton Wyatt in command of the besieging band which had been reinforced by a half-dozen warriors. Wyatt, animated by wicked passion, was resolved not to leave until he could kill or take those in the little fortress, but he was upset by the certainty that one of the terrible five was outside. He had believed from the first that it was Henry Ware, and, when their best warrior came in shot through the arm, he was sure of it.

The warriors shared his state of mind. Their losses had inflamed them tremendously and all of them were willing to stay and risk everything for eventual triumph. Yet a terror soon fell upon them. The single marksman who roamed the woods sent a bullet singing directly through the camp, and the search for him failed as before. An hour later another who went down to the brook for water was shot through the shoulder. Wyatt saw that in spite of their desire for revenge superstitious fears were developing, and in order to prevent their spread he organized a camp, surrounded by sentinels whom nothing could escape. Then he awaited the night.

Henry and his comrades had heard the second shot and they had seen the man whose shoulder had been pierced by the bullet, run toward the others leaving a red trail behind him, but they were not alarmed this time, as nobody left the

camp. Evidently the warriors, stout-hearted though they were, did not care to trail the shiftless one once more, and in the growing dusk, too, when they would be at the mercy of his rifle.

"He's got 'em stirred up a lot," said Henry, "and if they come again he will surely be a host on our side."

Another attack was made that night, but it did not come until late, halfway between midnight and morning, and, as Henry had suspected, it was not an assault, but an attempt by sharpshooters, hidden in the dark brush, to pick off watchers at the opening. The bullets of the besiegers were fired mostly at random and did nothing but chip stone. The besieged fired at the flash of the rifles and were not sure that they hit an enemy, but believed that they succeeded more than once. Then, as the night before, came the report of the lone rifle in the thicket, and a warrior, throwing up his hands, uttered his death cry, making it apparent to the defenders that the shiftless one was neither idle nor afraid.

Then the Indians withdrew and the primeval silence returned to the valley. The four remained for a while without speaking, watchful, their rifles loaded anew and their fingers on the trigger.

"Sol could come in now," said Long Jim. "He must know that the way will be clear for a little while."

"He doesn't want to come in," said Henry. "He's our link with the outside world, and when they attack he can be of more help to us because they don't know from what point he will strike. The besiegers are also besieged."

"I'm thinkin' they won't attack ag'in fur a long time," said Long Jim, "an' that bein' the case, I'm goin' to eat some uv my own cookin', knowin' that it's the finest in the world, an' then go to sleep."

"All right, Jim," said Henry, "you deserve both."

Long Jim was soon asleep, but Henry remained awake until daylight. He considered whether they should not attempt to escape now, join Shif'less Sol, and follow as fast as they could the main Indian army with the cannon. But he decided in the negative. The savages, despite their repulse, would certainly be on watch, and they were still too numerous for a fight in the bush.

Hence they entered upon another day in the cavern, which was beginning to assume some of the aspects of home. It looked cosy, with the supply of venison

and bear meat, the pleasant rill of cold water, the dry leaves upon which their blankets were spread for beds, and it was filled with cold fresh air that poured in at the opening. Henry felt once more that they had had luck, and he chafed at nothing but the long delay.

And delay now it was certainly going to be, as Braxton Wyatt refrained from attack, both that day and the next, although he drew his lines so close to them that they had no chance to slip out. But cultivating Indian patience, they kept one man always on guard while the others lay at their ease on their beds of leaves, and, after the fashion of those who had much time, talked of many and various things. On the third day when the siege seemed to have settled down to a test of endurance, the day being clear and sharply bright, the four sat near the door of the fortress. Silent Tom was keeping watch with an eye that never failed, but he was able at the same time to hear what his friends said, and, when he felt the impulse, he joined in with a monosyllable or two.

They were speaking of the main band going south with the cannon for the great attack upon the settlements, a subject to which Henry's mind returned constantly. Alloway and the chiefs had a start of days, but he was incessantly telling himself that his comrades and he, as soon as they were released from the siege, could overtake them quickly. The cannon which made their great strength also made their march slow.

"Besides," he said to the others, "they will have to cross many rivers and creeks with them, and every crossing will take trouble and time. As I figure it, they could go four-fifths of the way and we could still overtake them before they reached the settlement."

"I hope we'll ruin the cannon fur 'em," said Long Jim earnestly, "an' that at last the settlers will beat 'em so bad that they'll never cross the Ohio ag'in. All this fightin' with 'em breaks up my plans."

"What are your plans, Jim?" asked Paul.

"They're big ones, but thar's nary one uv 'em that don't take in you three here an' Shif'less Sol that's outside. I want to git in a boat, an' go on one uv the rivers into the Ohio an' then down the Ohio to the Missip, an' down the Missip to New Or-lee-yuns whar them Spaniards are. I met a feller once who had been thar an' he said it wuz a whalin' big town, full uv all kinds uv strange people, an' hevin' an' inquirin' mind I like to see all kinds uv furriners an' size 'em up. Do you reckon, Paul, that New Or-lee-yuns is the biggest city in the world?"

"Oh, no, Jim. There are many much larger cities in the old continents, Europe, Asia and Africa."

"Them are so fur away that they hardly count nohow. An' thar's a lot uv big dead cities, ain't thar?"

"Certainly. Babylon, that our Bible often speaks of, and Nineveh, and Tyre, and Memphis and Thebes and——"

"Stop, Paul! That's enough. I reckon I ain't sorry them old places are dead. It took a heap uv ground fur 'em to stand on, ground that might be covered with grass an' bushes an' trees, all in deep an' purty green like them out thar. Me bein' what I am, I always think it's a pity to ruin a fine forest to put a town in its place."

"Those cities, I think, were mostly in desert countries with an artificial water supply."

"Then I don't want ever to see 'em or what's left uv 'em. People who built cities whar no water an' trees wuz ought to hev seen 'em perish. Wouldn't me an' Sol look fine trailin' 'roun' among them ruins an' over them deserts? Not a buff'ler, nor a deer, not a b'ar anywhar, an' not a fish; 'cause they ain't even a good big dew fur a fish to swim in.

"But leavin' out them old places that's plum' rusted away, an' comin' back to this here favored land o' ours, I want, after seein' everythin' thar is to be seen in the great city of New Or-lee-yuns, to go straight west with you fellers, an' Shif'less Sol that's outside, clean across the great buff'ler plains that we've talked about afore."

"Cross 'em!" said Silent Tom, speaking for the first time. "You can't cross 'em. They go on forever."

"No, they don't. Once I come across a French trapper who had been clean to the edge uv 'em, tradin' with the Injuns fur furs. I don't know how many weeks an' months it took him, but cross 'em he did, an' what do you think he found on the other side, Tom Ross?"

"The sea."

"Nary a sea. He found mountains, mountains sech ez we ain't got this side the Missip, mountains that go right up to the top uv the sky, cuttin' through clouds

on the way, mountains that are covered always with snow, even in the summer, an' not a half-dozen or a dozen mountains, but hundreds uv 'em, ridges an' ranges runnin' fur hundreds an' thousands uv miles."

"An' beyond that?" asked Silent Tom.

"Nobody knows. But think what a trip it would be fur us five! Why it raises the sperrit uv romance mighty high in me. Paul hez often told us how them old Crusaders from France an' England an' Germany an' all them Old World countries started off, wearin' their iron clothes even on the hottest days, to rescue the Holy places from the infidel. I guess the sperrit uv adventure helped a heap in takin' 'em, but thar travels wouldn't be any greater, an' grander than ourn across all them great plains an' into them almighty high mountains beyond. You couldn't even guess what we'd find."

Long Jim drew a deep breath, as his spirit leaped before him into the vast unknown spaces, and Paul's eyes sparkled. The seed that Jim was sowing fell upon fertile ground.

"I believe I'd rather travel in the unknown than the known," the boy said. "We'd come to rivers, big ones and lots of 'em, too, that no white man had ever seen before, and, when at last we reached the mountains, we'd explore in there for months and months, a year, two years may be. And we'd name the highest five peaks for ourselves."

"An' I'd want a river named after me, too, Paul, an' I don't want it to be any little second rate river, either. I want it to be long an' broad an' deep an' full uv mighty clear water, an' when after a while, fur hunters come along in thar canoes, I'd say to 'em, 'Dip down! Dip down with your paddles an' don't be afeard. This is the Long Jim Hart river, an' me bein' Jim Hart, the owner, I give you leave.'"

"I heard the sound o' a shot," said Silent Tom.

"And there goes another," said Henry. "It seemed to be up the valley. Is it possible that Shif'less Sol has let himself be trapped in broad daylight?"

All crowded into the doorway and looked and listened, intense anxiety, despite themselves, tearing at their hearts. Shots at such a time were deeply significant. The Indians at the camp opposite, Braxton Wyatt with them, had risen and were looking fixedly in the same direction.

A long triumphant shout suddenly came from a point in the forest up the valley,

and then was succeeded by another in which six or seven voices joined, the Indian chant of victory. The hearts of the four dropped like plummets in a pool, and they gazed at one another, aghast.

"It can't be that they've got him!" exclaimed Long Jim.

"Listen to that song!" faltered Paul. "It celebrates the taking of a scalp!"

"I'm afeared fur good old Sol," said Tom Ross.

Henry was silent, but a great grief oppressed him. The Indian chant was so triumphant that it could mean nothing but the taking of a scalp, and there was no scalp but that of the shiftless one to take.

Louder swelled the song, while the singers were yet invisible among the bushes, and suddenly, the band gathered in the opening, began to sing a welcome, as they danced around the coals of their low campfire. Around and around they went, leaping and chanting, and the songs of both bands came clearly to those in the cave.

Henry's face darkened and his teeth pressed closely together. An accident must have happened or the shiftless one would never have allowed himself to be trapped in the day. Yet he had hope, he said resolutely to himself that he must retain hope, and he watched continually for the smaller band that was approaching through the bushes.

They emerged suddenly into view, and as his heart sank again, he saw that the leading warrior was whirling a trophy swiftly around his head. The cries of the others at sight of the scalp redoubled.

"It's Sol's, uv course!" growled Long Jim. "He's gone an' a better man never trod moccasin!"

The others were silent, overwhelmed with grief. The two bands now joined and the dance of a score of warriors became wilder and wilder. At intervals they caught a glimpse of the scalp as it was waved aloft, and they raged, but were powerless.

"We can't go after them cannon now," said Long Jim. "We've got to stay an' git revenge fur poor old Sol."

"An' that's shore," said Tom Ross.

Henry and Paul were silent. It was the most terrible irony to stand there and see the savages rejoicing over the cruel fate of their comrade, and, as the water rose in their eyes, there came at the same time out of the depths of the forest the long lone howl of the wolf, now a deep thrilling note, something like a chord.

"It's Shif'less Sol! he's safe!" cried Long Jim. "It's jest a trick they're workin', tryin' to beat down our sperrits, an' good old Sol is tellin' us so!"

"It's shorely time," said Silent Tom, "an' that's an old scalp they're whirlin'."

They had never before known the cry of a wolf to have such a deep and thrilling quality, but it came again as full and resounding as before, and they were satisfied. Not a doubt remained in the heart of any one of them. The shiftless one was safe and he had twice told them so. How could they ever have thought that he would allow himself to be trapped so easily? The savages might dance on and sing on as much as they pleased, but it did not matter now.

"After lookin' at them gyrations," said Long Jim, "I needs refreshment. A dancin' an' singin' party always makes me hungry. Will you j'in me in a ven'son an' water banquet, me noble luds?"

"Go ahead the rest o' you," said Tom Ross, "I'll watch."

They drank from the rill, lay down on their couches and ate the deer meat with splendid appetites. The revulsion was so great that anything would have been good to them.

"That wuz a purty smart trick, after all," said Long Jim. "Ef they'd made us think they'd got Shif'less Sol's scalp they'd make us think, too, that they'd git our own soon. An' they reckoned then, mebbe, that we'd be so weak-sperrited we'd come out an' surrender."

"I foresee another dull and long period of inaction," said Henry.

And what he said came to pass. They remained two more days in their little fortress, besieged so closely that they did not dare to move. Yet the besiegers themselves were kept in a constant state of alarm. One of their best hunters, sent out for deer, failed to come back, and his body was found in the forest. The others began to be oppressed by superstitious fears, and it required all of Wyatt's eloquence and force to keep them to their task.

It was in Henry's mind to wait for a wet night and then risk all and go. It was the rainy time of the year, and on their sixth night in the cavern the storm that they wished for so earnestly came, preceded by the usual heralds, deep thunder and vivid lightning.

The four made ready swiftly. Every one carried upon his back his blanket and a large supply of venison. The locks of rifles and other weapons and powder were kept dry under their hunting shirts. Henry thrust the extra rifle into a crevice, having an idea that he might need it some day, and would find it there. Then as the thunder and lightning ceased and the deep darkness and rushing rain came they took a last look at the strong little castle that had been such a haven to them. Only eyes like theirs trained to dusk could have made out its walls and roof and floor.

"It's like leaving home," said Paul.

"Thar's one good thing," said Long Jim. "The savages in thar meanness can't

destroy it."

Henry led, and, Silent Tom bringing up the rear, they slipped into the open air, keeping close to one another lest they be lost in the thick darkness. Despite the pouring rain and the lash of the wind it felt good out there. They had been so long in one small close place that it was freedom to have again the whole open world about them. The four stood a little while to breathe it in and then Henry led through the underbrush to the top of the hill.

"Bend low," he whispered to Paul, who was just behind him. "They must have a sentinel near here somewhere, and we don't want to run into him."

Paul obeyed him and went on, but none of them noticed that Tom Ross, who was last, turned softly aside from the path, and then swung the butt of his rifle with all his might. But all heard the impact and the sound of a fall, and, as they whirled around, Henry asked:

"What is it?"

"The sentinel," replied Ross. "He won't bother us."

On they went in single file again, but Paul shuddered. As their flight lengthened they increased their speed, and, when they were a half mile away, Paul jumped, as the long piercing howl of the wolf rose directly in front of him. It was Henry sending the signal to the shiftless one, and in an instant they heard a similar note in answer from a distant point.

As they advanced further the signals were repeated and then the shiftless one came with swiftness and without noise through the bushes, rising up like a phantom before them. There were happy handshakes and the five, reunited once more, fled southward through the darkness and rain.

"I thought you'd come out tonight, Henry," said Shif'less Sol. "An' I wuz waitin' on the ridge 'til I heard your signal. Ain't it grand fur all o' us to be together ag'in, an' to hev beat Braxton Wyatt?"

"It was you, Sol, who were our greatest help."

The shiftless one chuckled, pleased at the compliment.

"Guess I wuz the flyin' wing o' our little army," he said. "Mebbe Wyatt an' them warriors will hang 'roun' thar two or three days afore they find out we've gone."

"Not that long. The head of a warrior met Tom's clubbed rifle as we came away, and if they don't find him tonight they certainly will in the morning."

"I don't care anyway. That band can't overtake us, an' it can't trail us on a night like this. Thar! They've found the warrior!"

The faint sound of a yell, more like an echo, came on the wind and rain, but it brought no fears to the five. They were quite sure that no pursuit could overtake them now. After a while, they let their gait sink to a walk, and began to pick their way carefully through the dripping forest. As they were wet, all save their ammunition, they did not hesitate to wade many flooded brooks and they felt that when day came their trail would still be hidden from even the keenest of the Indian trailers.

Henry did not believe that Wyatt and his warriors could find them unless by chance, and as they were now many miles from the cavern, and the day was not far away, he began to think of a stopping place. Continued exertion had kept them warm, despite the rain, but it would not be wise to waste their strength in a rapid flight, continued a long time.

"All of you keep an eye for shelter," he said "Maybe we can find a windrow that will at least shut off a part of the rain."

He alluded to the masses of trees sometimes thrown down by a hurricane, often over a swath not more than two hundred yards wide. Where men did not exist to clear them away they were numerous in Kentucky, accumulating for uncounted years. But it was more than an hour before they came upon one of these heaps of tree trunks thrown thickly together.

Yet it was a good den or lair. Many of the fallen leaves had sifted in and lay there. Perhaps bears had used these recesses in the winter, but the five were not scrupulous. Their lives were passed in the primitive, and they knew how to make the most of everything that nature offered, no matter how little.

"I reckon we den up here," said Long Jim.

"We do," said Henry, "and we might go farther and find a much worse place."

The trees evidently had been thrown down a long time, as great masses of vines had grown over them, forming an almost complete roof. Very little rain came through, and, as they had managed to keep their ammunition as well as their blankets dry, the lair was better than anything for which they had hoped.

Trusting to the darkness and their concealment, all five wrapped themselves in their blankets and went to sleep.

Now and then drops of rain forced their way through the vines and fell on the sleepers, but they did not awake. Such trifles as these did not disturb them. They were a part of the great wilderness, used to its ways, and troubled little by the ordinary hardships of human beings. The mental tension and the anxieties from which they had suffered were gone. The siege broken, and reunited, they could pursue the main force and the cannon with speed.

The great revulsion made their sleep easy and untroubled. Not one of them stirred as he lay beneath the covering made by the ancient hurricane, and every one of them breathed long and deep.

Nature was watching over them while they slept. They belonged to the forest, and the forest was taking care of its own. The rain increased and it was driven harder by the wind, but folded in their blankets they remained snug, while their clothing dried upon them. A bear that had hibernated there, fleeing from the rain sought his own den, but he was driven away by the man smell. A bedraggled panther had an idea of taking the same shelter, but he too was repelled in like manner.

The forest watched over its own not only through the night but after the sun rose. Braxton Wyatt and his warriors, consumed with rage, could find no sign of a trail. They had entered the cavern and seized upon the portions of venison left there, although the rifle escaped their notice, and then they had begun the vain pursuit. Long before day they gave it up, and started after the main army.

It had been Henry's intention to sleep only the two hours until dawn, but the relaxation, coming after immense exertions and anxieties, kept him and all the others sound asleep long after the dripping forest was bathed in sunlight. It was a bright ray of the same sunlight entering through a crevice and striking him in the eye that awakened him. He looked at his comrades. They were so deep in slumber that not one of them stirred.

He heard a light swift sound overhead and saw that it was a gray squirrel running along their roof. Then came a song, pure and sweet, that thrilled through the forest. It was sung by a small gray bird perched on a vine almost directly over Henry's head, and he wondered that such a volume of music could come from such a tiny body.

The squirrel and the bird together told him that nothing unusual was stirring in the forest. If warriors were near that morning song would not be poured forth in such a clear and untroubled stream. The bird was their warder, their watchman, and he told them that it was sunrise and all was well. Feeling the utmost confidence in the small sentinel, and knowing that they needed more strength for the pursuit, Henry closed his eyes and went to sleep again.

The little gray bird was the most redoubtable of sentinels. Either the figures below were hidden from him or instinct warned him that they were friends. He hopped from bough to bough of the great windrow, and nearly always he sang. Now his song was clear and happy, saying that no enemy came in the forest. He sang from sheer delight, from the glory of the sunshine, and the splendor of the great green forest, drying in the golden glow. Now and then the gray squirrel came down from a tree and ran over the windrow. There was no method in his excursions. It was just pure happiness, the physical expression of high spirits.

The shiftless one was the next to awake, and he too looked at his sleeping comrades. His task had been the hardest of them all. Although his body had acquired the quality of steel wire, it had yielded nevertheless under the strain of so many pursuits and flights. Now he heard that bird singing above him and as it told him, too, that no danger was near, he shifted himself a little to ease his muscles and went to sleep again.

A half-hour later Long Jim came out of slumberland, but he opened only one eye. The bird was trilling and quavering in the most wonderful way, telling him as he understood it, to go back whence he had come, and he went at once. Then came Paul, not more than half awakened, and the music of the song lulled him. He did not have time to ask himself any question before he had returned to sleep, and the bird sang on, announcing that noon was coming and all was yet well.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE GREAT TRAIL

An hour after the little gray bird had announced that it was noon and all was well Henry awoke, and now he sat up. The bird, hearing rustlings below, and feeling that his task of watchman was over, flew away. His song was heard for a moment or two in the boughs of a tree, then it grew faint and died in the distance. But his work was done and he had done it well.

Henry put his hand on Sol's shoulder, and the shiftless one also sat up.

"You've slept a week, Sol," Henry said.

"That's a whopper. I just laid down, slept a minute, waked up, heard a bird singin', then slept another minute."

"Just the same happened to me, but it's past midday. Look through the vines there and see the sun."

"It's so. How time does pass when the warriors are lettin' your scalp alone."

"Wake up, Jim."

Shif'less Sol poked Long Jim with his moccasined foot.

"Here you, Jim Hart," he said. "Wake up. Do you think we've got nothin' to do but set here, an' listen to you snorin' fur two days an' two nights, when we've got to overtake an Injun army and thrash it?"

"Don't tech me with your foot ag'in, Sol Hyde, an' don't talk to me so highfalutin'. It's hard to git me mad, but when I do git mad I'm a lot wuss than Paul's friend, A-killus, 'cause I don't sulk in my tent, specially when I haven't got any. I jest rises up an' takes them that pesters me by the heels an' w'ar 'em out ag'in the trees."

"You talk mighty big, Saplin'."

"I'm feelin' big. I think I'll go out an' stretch myself, bein' ez it's a fine day an' these are my woods."

The talk awoke Paul also and all went outside. Henry and Silent Tom scouted for some distance in every direction, and, finding no sign of an enemy, the five ate cold venison and drank from one of the innumerable streams. Then they deliberated briefly. They must find the trail of the Indian army and they were quite sure that it lay toward the east. If it were there they could not miss it, as a way for the cannon had to be cut with axes. Hence their council lasted only five minutes, and then they hastened due eastward.

Speed was impeded by the creeks and brooks, all of which were swollen yet further, compelling them in several cases to swim, which had to be done with care, owing to the need of keeping their ammunition dry. Night came, the great trail was still unfound, and they thought they might possibly have been mistaken in going to the east, but when they debated it again they resolved to continue their present course. Every probability favored it, and perhaps the Indian army had taken a wider curve than they had thought.

"I've had so much rest and sleep that I'm good fur all night," said Long Jim, "an' the ground bein' so soft from so much rain them cannon wheels will cut ruts a foot deep."

"That's so," said Shif'less Sol. "Why we could blindfold ourselves an' hit that trail. Out o' the mouths o' men like Long Jim wisdom comes sometimes, though you wouldn't think it."

"All that you are, Solomon Hyde," said Long Jim, "I've made. When I fust knowed you a tow-headed boy you didn't have sense enough to come in out uv the rain. Now, by long years uv hard trainin', mixin' gentleness with firmness, I've turned you into somethin' like a scout an' trailer an' Injun fighter, fit to travel in the comp'ny uv a man like myself. Now an' then when I look at you, Solomon Hyde, I'm proud uv you, but I'm prouder uv myself fur makin' a real man out uv sech poor stuff to start with."

"I'm still willin' to learn, Jim," grinned Shif'less Sol.

"The trail! The trail!" suddenly exclaimed Henry.

They had emerged from heavy forest into a stretch of canebrake through which ran a long swath, trampled by many feet and cut by deep ruts. Here the cannon had passed perhaps a week ago, and they could follow the ruts as easily as the wheel of an engine follows the rails.

"I 'low they can't make more'n ten or fifteen miles a day," said Silent Tom.

"While we, if we were hard pressed, could go thirty or forty, or more," said Paul.

"We could overtake 'em in three days," said Henry.

"An' hevin' done it," said the shiftless one, "what are we goin' to do next?"

"It's the cannon we're after, as we all know," said Henry, "and I confess that I can't see yet how we're going to get at 'em."

"I fancy we can tell more about it when we approach the Indian army," said Paul.

"There's no other way," said Henry. "If we keep close beside 'em we may get a chance at the cannon, but we've got to look out for Braxton Wyatt and his gang, who will be just behind us, on the same trail."

"Then we go straight ahead?" said Paul.

They followed the great trail nearly all night, under the clear moon and stars, a fine drying wind having taken away all the dampness. As usual Henry led and Silent Tom brought up the rear, the one in front keeping an eye for a rear guard and the one behind watching for the advance of Braxton Wyatt's force. The trail itself was leisurely. The speed of the cannon had to be the speed of the army, and there was ample time for parties to leave on hunting expeditions, and then rejoin the main band with their spoils.

"They're living well," said Henry, as he pointed to the dead coals of numerous fires, and the quantities of bones scattered about "They've had buffalo, bear, deer, turkey and lots of small game."

"It's an ideal country for an Indian army to travel in," said Paul. "The game fairly swarms in it."

"An they don't spare it neither," said Shif'less Sol. "These warriors are jest eatin' thar way down to the settlements."

"Here's where they kept their cannon," said Henry, pointing to a place near the edge of the opening, "and they covered them for the night with strong canvas."

"How do you know that?" asked Long Jim.

"See this thorn bush growing just beside the place. The edge of the canvas caught on the thorns and when they pulled it away it left these threads. See, here

are three of 'em."

"But how do you know it was strong canvas?"

"Because if it hadn't been, more than these three threads would have been left. I'm astonished at you! What have you done with your wits? It was just over there, too, that Alloway and Cartwright sat with the chiefs and held a council. Two or three bushes were cut down close to the ground in order that a dozen men or so might sit comfortably in a ring. They smoked a pipe, and came to some agreement. Here are the ashes that were thrown from the pipe after they were through with it. Then Alloway and Cartwright walked off in this direction. You can see even now the imprint of their boot heels. Moccasins would leave no such trace. It must have rained that night, too, because they spread their tent and slept in it."

"You're guessing now, Henry," said Long Jim.

"I don't have to guess. This is the simplest thing in the world. One has only to look and see. Here are the holes where they drove the tent pegs. But the two officers did not go to sleep at once after the council. They sat in the tent and talked quite a while."

"How do you know?"

"More ashes, and on the ground covered by the tent. Evidently they have pipes of their own, as most all English officers do, and they wouldn't have sat here, and smoked, while on a hard march, if they did'nt have something important to talk about. I take it that the leaders of the Indian army are trying to solve some question. Perhaps they don't know which of the settlements to march against first."

"Over here is where they kept the horses fur the big guns," said Silent Tom. "Mebbe we might git at them horses, Henry."

"We might, but it wouldn't help us much. The warriors are so many that, although they don't like work, they could take turns at pulling 'em along with ropes. They could do that too, with the wagons that carry the ammunition for the cannon. Come on, boys. It don't pay us to linger over dead campfires. Here goes the trail which is as broad as a road."

He led the way, but stopped again in a few minutes.

"They had their troubles when they started the next morning," he said, as he pointed with a long forefinger.

They saw flowing directly across the road one of the innumerable creeks, swollen to a depth of about four feet by the rain, and with rather a swift current. Hundreds of footprints had been left in the soft soil near the stream, and they examined them carefully. In two places these traces were packed closely.

"About twenty warriors gathered at each of these spots," said Henry, "and lifted the cannon into the wagons. Look how deep some of these footmarks are! That was when the weight of the cannon sank them down. The Indians could have gone across the creek without the slightest trouble, but the cannon and the wagons delayed them quite a while. Come, boys, we've got to do some wading ourselves."

Reaching the opposite bank they found where the cannon had been lifted out again, and saw the deep ruts made by their wheels running on through the forest.

"I don't find the traces of no boot heels," said Silent Tom. "What's become uv them English?"

"They're riding now," replied Henry. "They're not as used as the Indians to forest marches, and they've all been compelled to take to the wagons for a while. But they won't stay in 'em long."

"Why not?"

"Because Alloway won't want the warriors to look down on him or his men, and the Indians are impressed by physical strength and tenacity. As soon as they're fairly rested he'll get out and make all the others get out too."

In a half-hour he called their particular attention to a point in the great trail.

"All of them got out of the wagons here," he said. "Look where the boot heels cut into the ground. What's this? A warrior coming out of the forest has joined them here. Perhaps he was a man sent by Braxton Wyatt or Blackstaffe to tell how they were getting along in their siege of us, and here is another trail, where a dozen warriors split from the band."

"A huntin' party, o' course," said the shif'less one as he looked at it. "They send 'em off on ev'ry side, ev'ry day, an' we've got to watch mighty close, lest some o' them light on us."

"Still," said Henry, "when they got their game they wouldn't come straight back to a trail already old. They'd go on ahead to catch up. It's lucky that we've got plenty of venison and don't have to do any hunting of our own. Jim, you certainly did noble work as a cook back there."

"Which reminds me," said Long Jim, "that I'll chaw a strip uv venison now."

"Jim wuz always a glutton," said the shiftless one, "but that won't keep me from j'inin' him in his pleasant pursuit."

Daylight found them in dense canebrake with the road that the army had been forced to cut for the cannon leading on straight and true.

"We'll find another camp about a half mile ahead," said Henry.

"Now that's a guess," said Long Jim.

"Oh, no, it isn't. Jim, you must really learn to use your eyes. Look up a little. See, those buzzards hovering over a particular spot. Now, one darts down and now another rises up. I suppose they're still able to pick a few shreds of flesh from the under side of the big buffalo bones."

"I reckon you're right, Henry."

They reached the old camp presently, within the indicated distance, but did not linger, pressing on over little prairies and across streams of all sizes. They noticed again and again where the hunting parties left the main army, and then where they came back.

"They've lots of ammunition," said Henry. "They must have the biggest supply that was ever yet furnished by Detroit."

"Mebbe we kin git some uv it fur ourselves later on," said Tom Ross.

"That's not a bad idea, to get ammunition at the expense of the enemy. Their bullets might not fit our rifles, but we could use their powder. We may have our chance yet to raid 'em."

At noon they turned aside into the forest and sought a deep recess where they could rest and plan. Foliage and earth were dry now and they stretched themselves luxuriously, as they ate and talked. They reckoned that they could overtake the army on the following night or at least on the morning after, as its progress had been manifestly slower even than they had thought. Taking cannon

through the great woods in which not a single road existed was a most difficult task. But every one of the five felt the need of exceeding great caution. Besides the hunters they might have to deal with the party that had left under Blackstaffe and Red Eagle. For all they knew, this band might have taken a shorter course through the woods, and chance might bring on an encounter at any time.

"If they should strike our trail they're likely to follow it up," said the shiftless one. "Some o' 'em in lookin' fur game are shore to be far in the rear, an' them too may stumble on us."

"'Pears to me," said Long Jim, "that we've come knowin' it, plum' into a big hornet's nest, but we ain't stung yet."

"An' we ain't goin' to be," said the shiftless one confidently.

Thus did the knights of the forest discuss their chances, and they were as truly knights as any that ever tilted lance for his lady, or, clothed in mail, fought the Saracen in the Holy Land, and, buried in the vast forest, their dangers were greater, they so few against so many.

Knowing now that they had no need to hurry and that to hurry was dangerous, they lay a long time in the woods, and some of them slept a little, while the others watched. But those who slept awoke when they heard the haunting cry of the owl. The five sat up as another owl far to the left hooted in answer. Not one of them was deceived for an instant, as the signals were exchanged three times. Indian, they knew, was talking to Indian.

"What do you think it means, Henry?" asked the shiftless one.

"I've a notion that a small band has struck our trail and that it's signaling to a bigger one."

"I'm sorry o' that."

"So am I, because it will put the great band on guard against us. Our best weapon would have been the ignorance of the Indians that we were near."

"Ef troubles git in our way we kin shoot 'em out uv it," said Long Jim philosophically.

"So we can," said Henry, "but there goes one of the owls again, and it's much nearer to us than it was before."

"An' thar's the other answerin' from the other side," said Shif'less Sol, "an' it, too, is much nearer."

"'Pears ez ef they knowed more about us than we thought they did, an' are tryin' to surround us," said Long Jim.

"An' we jest won't be surrounded," said Shif'less Sol. "We ain't trained to that sort o' thing an' it ain't a habit that we'd like."

"Come on," said Henry, and, rifle on shoulder, he flitted through the thickets. The others followed him in single file, and they advanced toward a point mid-way between the opposing bands. Their line formed according to its invariable custom, Henry leading, the shiftless one next, followed by Paul, with Long Jim following, and Silent Tom covering the rear.

They traveled now at high speed, and Henry felt that the need was great. He was sure that the bands, besides signaling to each other, were also calling up wandering hunters. The circle about them might be more nearly complete than they had thought. They kept to the darkest of the forest and fled on like a file of phantoms. A rifle suddenly cracked in the thicket and a bullet whistled by. Henry's rifle flashed in reply and no further sound came from the bushes. Then the phantoms sped on faster than ever.

Henry reloaded his rifle, and all of them listened to the chorus of the owls, as they cried to one another in a circle the diameter of which might have been a third of a mile. The heart of every one beat faster, not alone because they were running, but because of that demon chorus. All the warriors had heard the rifle shots and they knew now just about where the fugitives were. The cry of an owl has a singularly weird and haunting quality, and when so many of them came together, coming as the five knew, from the throats of those who meant them death, its effect was appalling even upon such hardy souls as theirs.

"I wish they'd stop them cries," growled Long Jim. "They git into my bones, an' give me a sort uv creepy weakness 'bout the knees."

"Don't let your knees buckle," said Shif'less Sol. "Good knees are mighty important, jest now, 'cause you know, Jim, we'll hev to make a pow'ful good run fur it, an' ef your legs give out I'll hev to stay back with you."

"I know you would, Sol, but that creepy feelin' 'bout my knees don't weaken the muscles an' j'ints. Runnin' is my strongest p'int."

"I know it. I don't furgit the time your runnin' saved us all when the emigrant train wuz surrounded by the tribes."

"Down!" suddenly called Henry, and the five dropped almost flat, but without noise, in the bushes. Two dusky figures, evidently scouts, were running directly across their line of flight about fifty yards ahead of them. But Henry was quite sure that the two warriors had not seen them and the five, lying close and scarcely breathing, watched the dusky figures. The warriors paused a moment or two, looked about them, but, seeing nothing went on, and were quickly lost to sight in the brush.

"It was lucky," said Henry, as they rose and resumed their flight, "that the warriors didn't look more closely. I think fortune is favoring us."

"It ain't fortune or luck," said Shif'less Sol. "It's jedgment, an' our long an' hard trainin'. I tell you jedgment is a power."

A fierce yell arose behind them, a yell full of savagery and triumph.

"They've hit our trail in the moonlight," said Henry, "and as we have no time to dodge or lie in cover, there's nothing to do but run faster."

"An' keep a good lookout to both right an' left," said Shif'less Sol. "They're comin' now from all directions."

The owls now began to hoot in great numbers, and with extraordinary ferocity. The cry made upon Paul's sensitive mind an impression that never could be effaced. He associated it with cruelty, savagery and deadly menace. His ear even multiplied and exaggerated the sinister calls. The woods were filled with them, they came from every bush, and the menacing circle was steadily and surely drawing closer.

Henry heard the heavy panting breaths behind him. They were bound to grow weary before long. Even if one were made of steel he could not run on forever. But he recalled that while they could not do so neither could the warriors. His keen ear noted that no cry of the owl came from the point straight ahead, and he concluded therefore that the circle was not yet complete. There was a break in the ring and he meant to drive straight through it.

"Now, boys," he said, "slow up a little to let your breath come back, then we'll make a great burst for it and break through."

Their pace sank almost to a walk, but the beat of their hearts became more nearly regular, and strength came back. Meanwhile the cries of the owls never ceased. They drummed incessantly on the ears of Paul, and made a sort of fury in his brain. It was a species of torture that made him rage more than ever against his pursuers.

They stopped in a clump of cane and watched a single warrior pass near. When he was gone they stepped from the cane and began to run at high speed toward the opening in the circle which Henry judged could not be more than a hundred yards away. It was fortunate for them that the forest here contained little undergrowth to impede them.

It was a great burst of speed to make after so long a flight, but the brief rest had helped them greatly, and they spurned the earth behind them. Now the Indian warriors caught sight of them, and rifles flashed in the night. The last owl ceased to hoot, and instead gave forth the war hoop. The forest rang with fierce yells, many anticipating a triumph not yet won. Many shots were fired on either flank, and leaves and twigs fell, but the five, bending low, fled on and did not yet reply.

The young leader in those desperate moments was cool enough to see that no shots came from the point straight ahead, making it sure that the opening was still there. He counted, too, on the dusk and the generally poor markmanship of the savages. A single glance backward showed him that none of his comrades was touched. Farther away on either side he saw the leaping forms of the warriors and then the flash of their wild shots. And still his comrades and he were untouched.

"Now, boys," he cried, "let out the last link in the chain!" and the five bounded forward at such speed that the Indians in the dusk could not hit the flying targets, and, still untouched they drove through the opening, and beyond. But the warriors behind them joined in a mass and came on, yelling in anger and disappointment.

"Now, Sol," said Henry, "we might let 'em have a couple of bullets. The rest of you hold your fire!"

Henry and the shiftless one, wheeling swiftly, fired and hit their targets. A cry of wrath came from the pursuers, but they dropped back out of range, and stayed there awhile. Then they crept closer, until a bullet from Silent Tom gave them a deadly warning to drop back again, which they did with great promptness.

Then the five, summoning all their reserves of strength, sped southward at a rate that was too great for their pursuers. Paul soon heard the owls calling again, but they were at least a half mile behind them, and they no longer oppressed him with that quality of cruelty and certain triumph. Now they only denoted failure and disappointment, and, as his high tension relaxed, he began to laugh.

"Stop it, Paul! Stop it!" said the shiftless one sharply. "It's too soon yet to laugh! When the time comes I'll tell you!"

Paul checked himself, knowing that the laugh was partly hysterical, and closely followed Henry who was now turning toward the west, leading them through rolling country, clothed in the same unbroken forest and undergrowth. It was his idea to find a creek or brook and then wade in it for a long distance to break the trail, the simplest of devices, one used a thousand times with success on the border, and they ran at their utmost speed, in order to be out of sight of even the swiftest warrior when they should come to water.

They passed several tiny brooks too small for their purpose, but, in a half-hour, came to one two feet deep, flowing swiftly and with muddy current. Henry uttered a sigh of satisfaction as he stepped into the water, and began to run with the stream. He heard four splashes behind him, as the others stepped in also, and followed.

"As little noise as you can," he said. "There may be a lurking warrior about somewhere."

After the first hundred yards they waded slowly, in order to avoid more splashing, and, after another hundred, stopped to listen. They heard faint cries from the warriors, but they were very far away, at least a mile, they thought, and the hearts of every one of the five rose with the belief that the Indians had taken the wrong course. But they neglected no precaution, wading in the middle of the brook for a long distance, the water enclosed on either side with a thick and heavy growth of willows and bushes so dense, in truth, that one could not see into the stream without parting the foliage.

"Didn't I tell you we were lucky!" said Henry. "This branch poked itself right across our path at the right moment to help us break our trail."

"Jedgment, Henry! Jedgment!" said the shiftless one. "We knowed that it wuz best fur us to find a branch, an' so we jest run on till we found one."

"It 'pears to me," said Long Jim, "that we're takin' to water a heap. Always jumpin' into some branch or creek or river an' wadin', I feel myself turnin' to a fish, a great big long catfish sech as you find in the Ohio. Fins are comin' out on my ankles right now."

"An' your face is plum' covered with scales already," said Shif'less Sol. "You're shorely a wonder, Jim."

Long Jim involuntarily clapped his hand to his face, and then both laughed.

"At any rate," said Long Jim, "I'll be glad when we take to dry ground ag'in."

But Henry led them a full mile, until he parted the bushes, and stepped out on the west bank. The others followed and all five stood a moment or two on the bank, while the water dripped from their leggings.

"Them fins has done growed on me, shore," whispered Long Jim to Shif'less Sol. "Cur'us how water sticks to deerskin."

"How much further do we go, Henry?" asked Paul.

"Far enough to be safe," replied Henry. "I think two or three miles more will put us out of their range. The walking won't be bad, and it will help to dry our leggings."

"Wish I had one o' their hosses to ride on," said Shif'less Sol. "'Twould jest suit me, a lazy man. I guess hosses wuzn't ever used in these parts afore, but I'd ride one like the old knights that Paul talks about, an' you, Long Jim, could hang on to the tail."

"I wouldn't hang on to the tail of nobody's hoss, an' least uv all to the tail uv yourn, Sol Hyde."

"You'd hev to, Jim Hart, 'cause you'd be my serf. Knights always had serfs that wuz glad to hang on to the tails o' their hosses, when the knights would let 'em. Wouldn't I look grand, chargin' through the forest on my war hoss, six feet high, me in my best Sunday brass suit, speckled with gold scales, with my silver spear twenty feet long, an' my great two-handed, gold-hilted sword beside me, an' Long Jim tied to the tail o' my hoss, so he wouldn't git tired an' fall behind, when I wuz chargin' the hull Shawnee tribe?"

"You'll never see that day, Sol Hyde. When we charge the Shawnee tribe I'll be

in front, runnin' on these long legs uv mine, an' you'll be 'bout a hundred yards behind, comin' on in a kinder doubtful an' hesitatin' way."

"Here is good dry ground now," said Henry, "and I don't think we need to go any farther."

They were on a small hilltop, densely covered with trees, and the five gladly threw themselves down among the trunks. They were sure now that they were safe from pursuit, and they felt elation, but they said little. All of them took off their wet leggings and moccasins, and laid them out to dry, while they rested and ate venison.

"I'm gittin' tired, paddlin' 'roun' in wet clothes," said Long Jim, "and I hope them things uv mine will dry fast, 'cause it would be bad to hev to run fur it ag'in, b'ar-footed this time, an' with not much of anythin' on up to your waist."

"But think how much harder on you it would be ef it wuz winter," said the shiftless one. "Ef you hed to break the ice in the branch ez you walked along it, an' then when you come out hed nothin' but the snow to lay down in an' rest, it would be time fur complainin'. Ez Henry says, we're shorely hevin' luck."

"That's true, an' we've found another fine inn to rest an' sleep in. Ain't this nice solid dry groun'? An' them dead leaves scattered 'bout which we kin rake up fur pillows an' beds, are jest the finest that ever fell. An' them trees are jest ez big an' honest an' friendly ez you could ask, an' the bushes are nice an' well behaved, an' thar shore is plenty of water in the forest fur us to drink. An' we hev a good clean sky overhead. Oh, we couldn't come to a nicer inn than this."

"I'm going to sleep," said Paul. "I'm going to wrap my blanket around the lower half of me, and if the warriors come please wake me in time, so I can put on my leggings before I have to run again."

All soon slept save Henry and Ross, and, after a while, Henry clothed himself fully, everything now being dry, and with a word to Ross, started eastward through the forest. He believed that Blackstaffe, Red Eagle and their party were somewhere in that direction, and he meant to have a look at them. He was thoroughly refreshed by their long rest, and alone he felt able to avoid any danger.

He advanced through the forest, a great flitting figure that passed swiftly, and now, that he was the trailer and not the trailed, all of his marvelous faculties were

at their zenith. He heard and saw everything, and every odor came to him. The overwhelming sense of freedom, and of a capacity to achieve the impossible, which he often felt when he was alone, fairly poured in upon him. The feeling of success, of conquest, was strong. He and his comrades, so far, had triumphed over every difficulty, and they had been many and great. The omens were propitious and there was the rising wind singing among the leaves the song that was always a chant of victory for him.

He inhaled the odors of the forest, the breath of leaf and flower. They were keen and poignant to him, and then came another odor that did not belong there. It was brought on the edge of the gentle wind, and his nostrils expanded, as he noticed that it was growing stronger and stronger. He knew at once that it was smoke, distant, but smoke undeniably, and that it must come from a campfire. In all probability it was the fire of Blackstaffe, Red Eagle and their band.

He went at once toward the smoke, and gradually the light of a fire appeared among the trees. Approaching cautiously, he saw the correctness of his surmise that it was Blackstaffe, Red Eagle and their band. Most of the warriors were lying down, all save two or three asleep, but the renegade and the chief were talking earnestly. Henry was eager to hear what they were saying, as it might prove of great value to him in the little campaign that he was leading. Since Wyatt and the rest of the band had not had time to come up, they could not yet know that it was the five with whom they had been in battle that night.

He resolved that he would overhear them at all costs, and lying down in the bushes he began to edge himself forward in the slow and difficult manner of which only an accomplished scout is capable. Fortunately the fire was near the edge of a thicket, from which he could hear, but it took him a long time to gain the position he wished, creeping forward, inch by inch, and careful not to make a bush or a leaf rustle.

When he was at last in place, he lay hidden by the foliage and blended with it, where he could easily see the faces of Blackstaffe and Red Eagle, in the firelight, and hear what they said.

CHAPTER XIII

FIVE AGAINST A THOUSAND

Red Eagle and Blackstaffe were talking in Shawnee, every word of which Henry heard and understood. They sat in Turkish fashion upon the ground, on the same side of the fire, and the blaze flickered redly over the face of each. They were strong faces, primitive, fierce and cunning, but in different ways. The evil fame of Moses Blackstaffe, second only to that of Simon Girty, had been won by many a ruthless deed and undoubted skill and cunning. Yet he was a white man who had departed from the white man's ways.

Red Eagle, the great Shawnee chief, was older, past fifty, and his bronzed face was lined deeply. His broad brow and the eyes set wide apart, expressed intellect —the Indian often had intellect in a high degree. He too was cruel, able to look upon the unmentionable tortures of his foes with pleasure, but it was a cruelty that was a part of his inheritance, the common practices of all the tribes, bred into the blood, through untold generations of forest life.

Henry felt a certain respect for Red Eagle, but none at all for Blackstaffe. Him he hated, with that fierceness of the forest, some of which had crept into his blood, and if he met him in battle he would gladly send a bullet through his heart. The man's face, burnt almost as dark as that of an Indian, showed now in its most sinister aspect. He was suffering from chagrin, and he did not take the trouble to hide it, even from so great a man as Red Eagle, head chief of the Shawnees.

They were talking of Wyatt and the band they had left behind for the siege, and Henry, with a touch of forest humor, enjoyed himself as he listened.

"We did not see well those with whom we fought tonight and who escaped us," said Red Eagle, "but they showed themselves to be warriors, great white warriors. They were more than a match for my young men."

"It is true," said Blackstaffe. "I didn't see them at all, but only the five whom we left besieged in the cave could do what they did."

"But Wyatt and good warriors hold them there."

"So they hoped, but do they, Red Eagle? The manner in which those scouts escaped from our circle makes me believe their leader could have been none but this Henry Ware."

"One of them was outside the cave. He may have come through the forest and have met other white men."

"It might be so, but I'm afraid it isn't. They have broken the siege in some manner and have eluded Wyatt. I had hoped that if he could not kill or capture them he would at least hold them there. It is not well for us to have them hanging upon our army and ambushing the warriors."

"You speak wisely, Blackstaffe. The one they call Ware is only a youth, but he is full of wisdom and bravery. There was an affair of the belt bearers, in which he tricked even Yellow Panther and myself. If we could capture him and make him become one of us, a red warrior to fight the white people to whom he once belonged, he would add much to our strength in war."

Blackstaffe shook his head most emphatically.

"Don't think of that again, great chief," he said. "It is a waste of time. He would endure the most terrible of all our tortures first. Think instead of his scalp hanging in your wigwam."

The eyes of Red Eagle glistened.

"It would be a great triumph," he said, "but our young men have chased him many times, and always he is gone like the deer. We have set the trap for him often, but when it falls he is away. None shoots so quickly or so true as he, and if one of our young men meets him alone in the forest it is the Shawnee over whom the birds sing the death song."

"It's not his scalp that we want merely for the scalp's sake. You are a brave and great chief, O Red Eagle, and you know that Ware and his comrades are scouts, spies and messengers. It's not so much the warriors whom we lose at their hands, but they're the eyes of the woods. They always tell the settlements of our coming, and bring the white forces together. We must trap them on this march, if we have to spread out a belt of a hundred warriors to do it."

"I hope the net won't have any holes in it. We overtake the great band tomorrow, and then you'll have all the warriors you need. They can be spread out on the flank as we march. Hark, Red Eagle, what was that?"

Henry himself in his covert started a little, as the long whine of a wolf came from a point far behind them. One of the warriors on the other side of the fire returned the cry, so piercing and ferocious in its note that Henry started again. But as the chief, the renegade and all the warriors rose to their feet, he withdrew somewhat further into the thicket, yet remaining where he could see all that might pass.

The far wolf howled again, and the near wolf replied. After that followed a long silence, with the renegade, Red Eagle and his men, standing waiting and eager. The signals showed that friends were coming to join friends, and Henry was as eager as they to see the arrivals. Yet he had a shrewd suspicion of their identity.

Dusky figures showed presently among the trees, as a silent line came on. Red Eagle and Blackstaffe were standing side by side, and the renegade broke into a low laugh.

"So Wyatt comes with his men, or most of them," he said.

"I see," said the chief in a tone of chagrin.

"And he comes without any prisoners."

"But perhaps he brings scalps."

"I see no sign of them."

"It is yet too far."

"If they came bearing scalps they would raise the shout of victory."

Red Eagle, great chief of the Shawnees, shook his head sadly.

"It is sure that those whom we pursued in vain tonight were those whom we left besieged in the cave."

"I fear that you speak the truth. They bring no scalps, nor any prisoners to walk on red hot coals."

He spoke sadly and Henry noted a certain grim pathos in his words, which were the words of a savage. Yet the attitude of Red Eagle was dignified and majestic as he waited.

The file came on fast, Braxton Wyatt at its head. When the younger renegade reached the fire, he flung himself down beside it, seized a piece of deer meat,

just cooked, and began to eat.

"I'm famished and worn out," he said.

"What did you do with the scalps, Braxton?" asked Blackstaffe, in silky tones—it may be that he thought the younger renegade assumed too much at times.

"They're on the heads of their owners," growled Wyatt.

"And how did that happen? You had them securely blockaded in a hole in a stone wall. I thought you had nothing to do but wait and take them."

"See here, Blackstaffe, I don't care for your taunting. They slipped out, although we kept the closest watch possible, and as they passed they slew one of our best warriors. I don't know how it was managed, but I think it was some infernal trick of that fellow Ware. Anyway, we were left with an empty cave, and then we came on as fast as we could. We did our best, and I've no excuses to make."

"I do not mock you," said Red Eagle gravely. "I have been tricked by the fox, Ware, myself, and so has Yellow Panther, the head chief of the Miamis. But we will catch him yet."

"It seems that we have not yet made any net that will hold him," said Blackstaffe with grim irony. Since it was not he directly, but Red Eagle and Wyatt who had failed, he found a malicious humor in taunting them. "It is the general belief that it was this same youth, Ware, who blew up the scows on which we were to carry our cannon, and then sank the lashed canoes. He seems to be uncommonly efficient."

Among the broken men and criminals who fled into the woods joining the Indians and making war upon their own kind, Moses Blackstaffe was an outstanding character. He was a man of education and subtle mind. It was understood that he came from one of the oldest of the eastern provinces, and that there was innocent blood on his hands before he fled. But now he was high in the councils of the Indian nations, and, like the white man of his type who turns savage, he had become more cruel than the savages themselves.

His gaze as he turned it upon Braxton Wyatt was lightly ironical, and his tone had been the same. Again the younger renegade flushed through his tan.

"I have never denied to him wonderful knowledge and skill," he said. "I have warned you all that he was the obstacle most to be dreaded. He has just proved

it. Had he not been there to help 'em at the cave we should have got 'em all."

"And they are giving the laurels of Shif'less Sol to me," said Henry to himself in the thicket. "I shall have to hand them over to him when we go back."

But the great Shawnee chief, Red Eagle, had heard enough talk between the two white men. He was full of the wisdom of his race, and he did not intend that Blackstaffe and Wyatt should impair their value to the tribes by creating ill feeling against each other.

"Peace, my sons," he said in his grave and dignified manner. "It is not well for those who march with us to taunt each other. Words that may be light in the village, breed ill will on the war path. As head chief of the Shawnees it is for me to say these things to you."

As Red Eagle stood up with his arms folded across his broad breast and his scarlet blanket hooked over his shoulder, he looked like a forest Roman. Henry thought him an impressive figure and such a thought, too, was most likely in the mind of Blackstaffe, as he said:

"The words of the chief are wise, and I obey. Red Eagle has proved many and many a time that he is the best fitted of all men to be the head chief of the Shawnees. Wyatt, I was only jesting. You and I must be good comrades here."

He held out his hand and as Wyatt took it, his face cleared. Then the three turned to animated talk about their plans. It was agreed that they should push on in the morning at all speed, and join the main band and the artillery. Dangerous as these cannon were, Henry saw that the Indians gave them almost magic powers. They would completely blow away the settlements, and the forests would soon grow again, where the white man had cut a little open place for himself with the ax.

The conference over, Red Eagle wrapped himself in his blanket and lay down with his feet toward the fire. Again Henry felt an impulse of respect for him. He was true to his race and his inheritance, while the renegades were false in everything to theirs. He did not depart from the customs and thoughts bred into him by many generations, but the renegades violated every teaching of their own race that had brought civilization to the world, and he hated and despised them.

He saw Blackstaffe and Wyatt wrap themselves in their blankets and also lie down with their feet to the fire. All the Indians were at rest save two sentinels.

Henry watched this strange scene a few minutes longer. The coals were dying fast and now he saw but indistinctly the figures of white men and red men, joined in a compact to destroy his people utterly, from the oldest man and woman to the youngest child.

Henry did not know it, but he was as much a knight of chivalry and romance as any mailed figure that ever rode with glittering lance. Beneath the buckskin hunting shirt beat a heart as dauntless as that of Amadis of Gaul or Palmerin of England, although there were no bards in the great forest to sing of his deeds and of the deeds of those like him.

He intended to stay only two or three minutes longer, but he lingered nevertheless. The Indian campfire gave forth hardly a glimmer. The figures save those of the sentinels became invisible. The wind blew gently and sang among the leaves, as if the forest were always a forest of peace, although from time immemorial, throughout the world, it had been stained by bloodshed. But the forest spell which came over him at times was upon him now. The rippling of the leaves under the wind he translated into words, and once more they sang to him the song of success.

This new task of his, straight through the heart of danger, had been achieved, and in his modesty, which was a modesty of thought as well as word, he did not ascribe it to any strength or skill in himself, but to the fact that a Supreme Being had chosen him for a time as an instrument, and was working through him. Like nearly all who live in the forest and spend most of their lives in the presence of nature, he invariably felt the power of invisible forces, directed by an omniscient and omnipotent mind, which the Indian has crystallized into the name Manitou, the same as God to Henry.

For that reason this forest spell was also the spirit of thankfulness. He had been guided and directed so far, and he felt that the guidance and direction would continue. All the omens and prophecies remained good, and, with the wind in the leaves still singing the song of victory in his ears, he silently crept away, inch by inch, even as he had come. Well beyond the Indian ear, he rose and returned swiftly to his comrades.

Ross was still on guard and the others sleeping when Henry's figure appeared through the dusk, but they awoke and sat up when he called, low, to them.

"What are you wakin' us up fur, Henry?" asked the shiftless one, as he rubbed a sleepy eye. "Are the warriors comin'? Ef so, I'd like to put on my silk knee

breeches, an' my bee-yu-ti-ful new silk stockin's an' my new shoes with the big silver buckles, afore I run through the forest fur my life."

"No, they're not coming, Sol," said Henry. "They're asleep off there and tomorrow morning Blackstaffe, Braxton Wyatt, Red Eagle and the others hurry on to join the main band."

"How do you know that, Henry?"

"They told me."

"You've been settin' laughin' an' talkin' with 'em, right merry, I reckon."

"They told me, just as I said. They told me their plan in good plain Shawnee."

"An' how come Braxton Wyatt with Red Eagle and Blackstaffe?"

"Leaving a fruitless quest, he overtook them. I was lying in the thicket, in hearing distance, when Wyatt came up with his men, joined Blackstaffe and Red Eagle, and had to tell them of his failure."

"You shorely do hev all the luck, Henry. I'd hev risked my life an' risked it mighty close, to hev seed that scene."

Then Henry told them more in detail of the meeting and of the plans that Red Eagle and the two renegades had talked over, drawing particular attention to the net the Indians intended to spread for the five.

"'Pears to me," said Shif'less Sol, "that the right thing fur us to do is to make a big curve—we're hefty on curves—an' go clear 'roun' in front of the band. They'll be lookin' fur us everywhere, 'cept right thar, an' while they're a-plottin' an' a-plannin' an' a-spreadin' out their nets, we'll be a-plottin' an' a-plannin' an' mebbe a-doin' too what we've undertook to do."

"The very thing," said Henry.

"A true strategic march," said Paul.

"Looks like sense," said Silent Tom.

"You do hev rays o' reason at times, Sol," said Long Jim.

"Then it's agreed," said Henry. "We'll take a little more rest, and, soon after daylight, we'll start on one of our great flying marches."

Paul and Long Jim kept the watch, and, not long after the sun rose, they were up and away again. They were now beginning to forge another link in their chain, and, as usual, the spirits of all five rose when they began a fresh enterprise. Their feet were light, as they sped forward, and every sense was acute. They were without fear as they marched on the arc of the great circle that they had planned. They were leaving so wide a space between themselves and the great trail that they could only meet a wandering Indian hunter or two, and of all such they could take care easily.

In truth, so free were they from any kind of apprehension, that plenty of room was left in their minds to take note of the wilderness, which was here new to them. But it was their wilderness, nevertheless, all these fine streams and rolling hills, and deer that sprang up from their path, and the magnificent forest everywhere clothing the earth in its beautiful robe of deepest green, which in the autumn would be an equally beautiful robe of red and yellow and brown.

Their curve was toward the west, and all that day they followed it. They saw the golden sun go creeping up the blue arch of the heavens, hang for a while at the zenith, as if it were poised there to pour down perpendicular beams, and then go sliding slowly down the western sky to be lost in a red sea of fire. And the view of all the glory of the world, though they saw it every day, was fresh and keen to them all. The shiftless one was moved to speech.

"When I go off to some other planet," he said, "I don't want any new kind o' a world. I want it to be like this with big rivers and middle-sized rivers and little rivers, all kinds o' streams an' lakes, and the woods, green in the spring an' red an' yellow in the fall, an' winter, too, which hez its beauties with snow an' ice, an' red roarin' fires to keep you warm, an' the deer an' the buff'ler to hunt. I want them things 'cause I'm used to 'em. A strange, new kind o' world wouldn't please me. I hold with the Injuns that want to go to the Happy Huntin' Grounds, an' I 'xpect it's the kind o' Heaven that the Book means fur fellers like me."

"Do you think you're good enough to go to Heaven, Sol?" asked Long Jim.

The shiftless one deliberated a moment and then replied thoughtfully:

"I ain't so good, Jim, but I reckon I'm good enough to go to Heaven. People bein' what people be, an' me bein' what I am, all with a pow'ful lot to fight ag'inst an' born with somethin' o' the old Nick in us, an' not bein' able to change our naturs much, no matter how hard we try, I reckon I hev a mighty fine chance o' Heaven, which, ez I said, I want to be a world, right smart like this, only a heap bigger an'

finer. But I don't mean to go thar for seventy or eighty years yet, 'cause I want to give this earth a real fa'r trial."

In which the shiftless one had his wish, as he lived to be a hundred, and his eyes were clear and his voice strong to the last.

"That's a mighty fine picture you draw, Sol," said Long Jim, appreciatively, "an' if you're up thar settin' on the bank uv a river that looks plum' like runnin' silver with green trees a thousand feet high risin' behind you, you ketchin' fish thirty or forty feet long, an' ef you should happen to turn an' look 'roun' an' see comin' toward you a long-legged ornery feller that you used ter cahoot with in the wilderness on both sides uv the Ohio, would you rise up, drop them big fish an' your fishin' pole, come straight between the trunks uv them green trees a thousand feet high toward that ornery lookin' long-legged feller what wuz new to the place, stretch out your right hand to him, an' say: 'Welcome to Heaven Long Jim Hart. Come right in an' make yourself to home, 'cause you're goin' to live with us a million an' a billion years, an' all the rest uv the time thar is. Your fishin' pole is down thar by the bank. I've been savin' it fur you. Henry is 'bout a mile farther up the stream pullin' in a whale two hundred feet long that he's had his eye on fur some time. Paul is down thar, settin' under a bush readin' a book uv gold letters on silver paper with diamonds set in the cover, an' Tom Ross is on that hill, 'way acrost yonder, lookin' at a herd uv buff'ler fifty miles wide which hez been travelin' past fur a month.' Now, Sol, would you give your old pardner that kind uv a welcome?"

"Would I Jim? You know I would. I'd blow on a trumpet an' call all the boys straight from what they wuz doin' to come a-runnin' an' meet you. An' I'd interduce you to all our new friends. An' I'd show you the best huntin' grounds an' the finest fishin' holes right away, an' when night come all o' us with our new friends would hev a big feast an' celebration over you. An' all o' us thar in Heaven that knowed you, Jim, would be right proud o' you."

"I knowed that you'd take me right in, Sol," said Long Jim, as they shook hands over the future.

"Now for the night," said Henry. "We must be at least fifteen miles west of the great trail, and as the woods are so full of game I don't think any of the Indian hunters will find it necessary to come this far for it. So, I propose that we have a little warm food ourselves. We need it by this time."

"That's the talk," said Long Jim. "It would be jest a taste uv Heaven right now.

What wuz you thinkin' to hev fur our supper table, Henry?"

"I had an idea that all of us would like turkey. I've been noticing turkey signs for some time, and there, Jim! don't you hear that gobbling away off to the right? They're settling into the trees for the night, and it should be easy to get a couple. Just now I think turkey would be the finest thing in the world."

"I've a mighty strong hankerin' after turkey myself an' the way I kin cook turkey is a caution to sinners. Ever since you said turkeys a half minute ago, Henry, I'm famishin'. Bring on your turkey, the cook's ready."

"Me an' Sol will go an' git 'em," said Tom Ross, and the two slipped away in the twilight toward the sound of the gobbling. Presently they heard two shots and then the hunters came back, each with a fat bird. Selecting a dip from which flames could be seen only a little distance, they dressed the turkeys in frontier fashion and Long Jim, his culinary pride strong within him, cooked them to a turn. Then they ate long, and were unashamed.

"Jest a touch o' Heaven right now," said Shif'less Sol, in tones of deep conviction. "This is the healthy life here, an' it makes a feller jump when he oughter jump. Me bein' a naterally lazy man, I'd be likely to lay 'roun' an' eat myself so fat I couldn't walk, but the Injun's don't give me time. Jest when I begin to put on flesh they take after me an' I run it all off. You wouldn't think it, but Injuns has their uses, arter all."

"Keep people from comin' out here too fast," said Ross. "Think they wuz put in the wilderness to save it, an' they will, long after my time."

"Why, Tom," said the shiftless one, "you're becomin' real talkative. I think that's the longest speech I ever heard you make."

"Tom is certainly growing garrulous," said Paul.

Silent Tom blushed despite his tan.

"I'm through, anyway," he said.

"Guess Sol thought Tom wuz takin' part uv his time," said Long Jim Hart. "That's why he spoke up. Sol claims all uv his own time fur talkin', all uv Tom's, an' all the rest that may be left over by any uv us."

"Mighty little you ever leave over, Jim," said the shiftless one. "Besides, there's a

dif'rence between you an' me talkin'. When I talk I'm always sayin' somethin'; but yourn is jest a runnin' gabble, like the flowin' uv a creek, always the same an' meanin' nothin'."

"Well," said Henry, "we've had plenty of good fat turkey, an' it was cooked mighty fine, in Long Jim's best style, but there's some left, which I think we'd better pack in our knapsacks for tomorrow."

After putting away the food for a later need, they carefully smothered the last coal of the fire, and then, as a precaution, should the flame have been seen by any wandering warrior, they moved a mile farther west and sat down in a little hollow where they remained until well past midnight, all sleeping save a guard of one, turns being taken. About two o'clock in the morning they started again, traveling at great speed, and did not stop until noon of the next day. They delayed only a half-hour for food, water and rest, and pressed on at the long, running walk of the border that put miles behind them at an amazing rate.

Late in the afternoon they came to high hills clothed, like the rest of the country, in magnificent forest, and, while the others watched below, Henry climbed the tallest tree that he could find. The sun was declining, but the east was yet brilliant, and he saw faintly across it a dark line that he had expected. The great Indian camp surely lay at the base of the dark line, and when he descended he and his comrades began to curve toward the east.

Morning would find them ahead of the Indian army, and between it and the settlements. Every one of them felt a thrill of excitement, even elation. The forging of the new link in the chain was proceeding well, and brilliant success gives wonderful encouragement. They did not know just what they would do next, but four trusted to the intuition and prowess of their daring young leader.

Their minds were at such high tension that they did not sleep much that night, and when dawn came again they had traveled so far that they calculated they had arrived at the right point of the circle. It was a question, however, that could be decided easily. Henry again climbed the highest tree in the vicinity, and looking toward the north now saw the smoke of the same campfire apparently three or four miles away.

"Are they thar, Henry?" asked Shif'less Sol, as he climbed down.

"Yes. They haven't moved since sundown yesterday, and I judge they're in no hurry. I fancy the warriors suppose the cannon can easily secure them the

victory, no matter how much we may prepare against them, and the Englishmen are probably weary from hard traveling through the forest."

"I guess all that's true, but they'll shorely start in an hour or two anyway, an' then what are we to do to stop 'em?"

The eyes of the great youth filled with sudden fire.

"We're five against a thousand," he said. "We've rifles against cannon, but we can do something. We're coming to the edge of a country that I know. Three miles to the south of us is a river or deep creek that can't be waded, except at a place between two hills. The Indians know that ford, and so they'll make for it. We'll be on the other side, and we'll hold the ford."

The others stared at him.

"Henry," exclaimed Paul, "you just said that we were five against a thousand, and rifles against cannon, now how could we possibly hold the ford against such an army? Besides, the Indian warriors, by scores, could swim the river elsewhere, and flank us on either side."

"I don't mean that we shall hold it a long time. We'll make 'em give battle, stop 'em for a while, and then, when the flankers swim the stream we'll be gone. We will not let ourselves be seen, and they may think it a large force, retiring merely because their own army is larger."

"That is, we've got to give 'em a skeer," said Long Jim.

"Exactly. We want to make those Indians think that Manitou is against 'em. We want to sow in their minds the seeds of fear and superstition. You know how they're influenced by omens and things they can't understand. If we give 'em a brisk little fight at the ford, and then get away, unseen, it will set them to doubting, and plant in their minds the fear of ambush by large forces."

The face of the shiftless one shone.

"That suits me clean down to the ground," he said. "It's wile an' stratagem which I like. Lead on to this ford, Henry, an' we'll lay down an' rest beside it till they come up."

The others showed as much enthusiasm, and, carefully hiding their trail, they reached the ford, which they found highly favorable to their purpose. Save here the banks of the river were high on both sides, and the gorge, through which the red army with its cannon and wagons must approach the ford, was not more than

twenty feet wide. On both banks the forest was unbroken and there were many dense thickets.

"This place was shorely made fur an ambush," said the shiftless one as they waded across. "Ef we had a hundred good men we could turn back their whole army for good, 'cause they can't flank so easy, ez them high banks on both sides run ez fur ez I kin see."

"And here is the thicket in which we can lie," said Paul.

"They can't catch a glimpse of us from the other side. They can see only the fire and smoke of our rifles," said Henry.

"An' since we're here in our nest," said Shif'less Sol, "we'd better set still an' rest till they come up. I 'low we'll need all our strength an' nerves then."

CHAPTER XIV

HOLDING THE FORD

The five lay down in the thicket, completely hidden themselves, but commanding a splendid view of the deep, clear stream and the gorge by which the red army must approach. They were calm in manner, nevertheless their hearts were beating high. The sunshine was so brilliant that every object was distinct far up the gorge, and Henry felt sure the Indian army would come into sight, while it was yet beyond rifle shot. Nor were the leaders likely to send forward scouts and skirmishers, as they apprehended no danger in front. It was on their flank or rear that they expected the five to hang.

The five did not speak and the silence was complete, save for the usual noises of the forest. Birds chattered overhead. Little animals rustled now and then in the thickets, fish leaped in the river, but there was no sound to indicate that man was near. They were not nervous nor restless. Inured to danger, waiting had become almost a mechanical act, and they were able to lie perfectly still, however long the time might be.

They saw the column of smoke fade, and then go quite away. There was not a fleck on the sky of blazing blue, and Henry knew that the red army had broken up its camp, and was on the march. He had a sudden fear that they might send ahead scouts and skirmishers, but reflection brought him back to his original belief that they would not do so, as they would not foresee the transference of the five to their front.

The hours passed and Shif'less Sol, who had been lying flat upon the ground, raised his head.

"I hear wheels," he said laconically.

Henry put his own ear to the ground.

"So do I," he said.

"Wheels of cannon and wagons."

"Beyond a doubt."

"Them that we're lookin' fur."

"There are no others in the wilderness. Long Jim, how's your voice today?"

"Never better, Henry. I could talk to a man a mile away. Why?"

"Because I may want you to give out some terrible yells soon, the white man's yells, understand, and, as you give 'em, you're to skip about like lightning from place to place. This is a case in which one man must seem to be a hundred."

"I understand, Henry," said Long Jim proudly, tapping his chest. "I reckon I'm to be the figger in this fight, an', bein' ez so much is dependin' on me, I won't fail. My lungs wuz never better. I've had a new leather linin' put inside 'em, an' they kin work without stoppin', day an' night, fur a week."

"All right, Jim. Do your proudest, and the others are to help, but you're to be the yell leader, and the better you yell the better it will be for all of us."

"I'll be right thar Henry."

"They'll soon be in sight," said the shiftless one, who had not taken his ear from the ground. "I kin hear the wheels a-creakin' and a-creakin', louder an' louder."

"And they have not sent forward anybody to spy out the country, which is better for us," said Henry.

"An' now I kin hear somethin' else," said Shif'less Sol. "They're singin' a war song which ain't usual when so many are on the march, but they reckon they've got at least two or three hundred white scalps ez good ez took already."

Now the ferocious chant, sung in Shawnee, which they understood, came plainly to them. It was a song of anticipation, and when they translated it to themselves it ran something like this:

> To the land of Kaintuckee we have come,
> Wielders of the bow and the tomahawk, we,
> Shawnee and Miami, Wyandot and Delaware
> Matchless in march and battle we come,
> Great is Manitou.
>
> The white man will fall like leaves before us,
> His houses to the fire we will give,

All shall perish under our mighty blows,
And the forest will grow over his home,
Great is Manitou.

It went on in other verses, rising above the creak of the wheels, a fierce, droning chant that drummed upon the nerves and inflamed the brain. Much of its power came from its persistency upon the same beat and theme, until the great chorus became like the howling of thousands of wolves for their prey.

"Ef I couldn't feel my scalp on my head right now," said Shif'less Sol, "I'd be shore that one o' them demons out thar had it in his hands, whirlin' it 'roun' an' 'roun'."

"Guess I won't need nothin' more to make me yell my very darndest," said Long Jim.

"They'll be in sight in a minute or two," said Paul, "and I'm truly thankful that we have ground so favorable. We wouldn't have a chance without it."

"That's so," said Henry, "and we must never lose our heads for a minute. If we do we're gone."

"Anyway, surprise will be a help to us," said Shif'less Sol, "'cause all the signs show that they don't dream we're here. But jest to ourselves, boys, I'm mighty glad that river is between us an' them. Did you ever hear sech a war chant? Why, it freezes me right into the marrer!"

"They've gone mad with triumph before they've won it," said Henry. "They intoxicate themselves with singing and dancing. Look at those fellows on the outer edges of the line jumping up and down."

"An' did you ever see savages more loaded down with war paint?" said Long Jim. "Why, I think it must be an inch thick on the faces uv them dancers an' jumpers!"

The forest, in truth, had beheld few sights as sinister as this Indian army advancing, keeping step to its ferocious chant. Henry saw Yellow Panther come into view, and then Red Eagle, and then the rumbling guns with their gunners, and then Blackstaffe and Wyatt, and then the English Colonel, Alloway, his second, Cartwright, and three or four more officers riding. After them came the caissons and the other ammunition wagons, and then more warriors, hundreds and hundreds, joining in that ferocious whining chorus. The red coats of the

British officers lent a strange and incongruous touch to this scene of forest and savage warfare.

"I don't like to shoot a white man from ambush," said Henry, "but I'd be perfectly willing to send a bullet through the head of that Colonel Alloway. It would help our people—save them, perhaps—because without the British the Indians can't use the guns."

"You won't git a chance, Henry," said Long Jim. "He's too fur back. The warriors will come into range fust, an' we'll hev to open fire on 'em. I don't see no signs of flankers turnin' off from the crossin'."

"No, they won't send 'em up such high hills when they don't think any enemies are near. Make ready, boys. The foremost warriors are now in range. I hate to shoot at red men, even, from ambush, but it has to be done."

Five muzzles were thrust forward in the bushes, and five pairs of keen eyes looked down the sights, as on came the chanting army, painted and horrible. The vanguard would soon be at the water.

"Be sure you don't miss," said Henry. "The more deadly our first blow the better chance we have to win."

Every one of the five concentrated all his faculties upon his target. He saw or thought of nothing but the painted chest or face upon which he directed his aim.

"Ready," said Henry.

Five gunlocks clicked.

"Fire!"

Five triggers were pulled, and five streams of flame darted from the bushes. Never had the five aimed bullets to better purpose, since their targets, broad and close, lay before them. Five warriors flung up their arms, and uttering the death howl, fell. A tremendous yell of surprise and rage arose from the Indians, and they crowded back upon one another, appalled, for the moment, by the sudden and deadly messengers of death.

"Now, Jim, now!" exclaimed Henry. "Yell as if you were a thousand men. Run up and down in the bushes that your yells may come from point to point! Shout, man, shout!"

Long Jim needed no command. His tremendous battle cry burst out, as he rushed back and forth in the thickets. It was some such shout as the old Vikings must have uttered, and it pealed out like the regular beat of a big drum. It expressed challenge and defiance, victory and revenge, and, to the ears of the red hearers on the other shores, the thickets seemed fairly to swarm with fighting men. The four added their efforts to those of Long Jim, but their cries formed merely a chorus, above which swelled the thundering note of the forest Stentor.

The cords in Long Jim's throat swelled, his cheeks bulged, his eyes stood out, but his voice never broke. Without failing for an instant, it poured forth its mighty stream of challenge and invective, and the others, as they reloaded in all haste, looked at him with pride. It was their own Long Jim, he of the long legs and long throat, who had made many a great effort before, but none like this.

The warriors had recoiled still further. Both Yellow Panther and Red Eagle drew back in the ruck. The singing of the warriors ceased, and, with it, ceased the creaking wheels of the cannon and ammunition wagons. Henry saw Alloway and his officers stop, and he looked once more at the colonel, but it was too far for certainty, and they must not send forward any shots that missed. In front of the recoiling army lay five dark figures on the green, and they must continue with the deadliness of their fire to create the impression of great numbers.

"Now boys!" exclaimed Henry. "Again! Steady and true!"

Five rifles cracked together and Long Jim, who had ceased only long enough to aim and pull the trigger resumed his terrific chant. This time three of the warriors were slain and two wounded. Henry, a true general, quickly changed the position of his army, Long Jim still shouting, and no missile from the fire poured out now by the Indians, touching them. A few of the bullets entered the portion of the thicket where they had crouched, but the rest fell short. A great flight of arrows was sent forth, but the distance was too great for them, and with most of the bullets they fell splashing into the water.

"Now, boys," said Henry, "creep back and forth, and pick your warriors! There's plenty for all of us, and nobody need be jealous! If you can get any of the white gunners so much the better!"

And they responded with all the fire and skill and courage belonging to such forest knights, knights as brave and true and unselfish as any that ever trod the earth. Five against a thousand! Young forest runners against an army! Rifles against cannon they yet held the ford and flung terror into the hearts of their

foes! Before that rain of death, and that thundering chorus of mighty voices, coming from many points, the warriors recoiled yet farther, and were stricken with superstitious dread by the sudden and mortal attack from an invisible foe. Even the face of Alloway, and he was brave enough, blanched. This was something beyond his reckoning, something of which no man would have dreamed, he was not used to the vast and sinister forest—sinister to him—and the invisible stroke appalled him. His courage soon came back, but he cursed fiercely under his breath, when he saw one of his gunners go down, shot through the heart, and a moment later another fall with a bullet through his head. Like the Indians, he saw a numerous and powerful foe on the opposite bank, and the ford was narrow and steep.

"They're drawing back for a conference," said Henry. "I believe we've made 'em think we're not a hundred only, but two hundred. Long Jim, your title as king of yellers is yours without dispute as long as you live. You've done magnificent work."

"I think I did shout a little," said Long Jim triumphantly, "but Henry, I'm just plum' empty uv air. Every bit uv it hez been drawed up from my lungs, an' even from the end uv ev'ry toe an' finger."

"Well, sit down there, Jim, and refill yourself, because we may have need of your lungs again. There's no better air than that we find in the forest here, and you'll have plenty of time, as they won't be through with that conference yet for at least five minutes."

Henry saw the savages gathered in a great mass, well out of rifle shot, and, on a little hill back of them, the British officers, the renegades and the chiefs were talking earnestly. Beyond all possible doubt they had agreed that they were confronted by a formidable force. The proof of it lay before them. Valiant warriors had fallen and the two slain gunners could not be replaced. Henry knew that it was a bitter surprise to them, and they must think that the settlers, hearing of the advance against them, had sent forward all the men they could raise to form the ambush at the ford.

He was full of elation, and so were his comrades. Five against an army! and the five had stopped the army! Rifles against cannon. And the rifles had stopped the cannon! The two slain gunners were proof of an idea already in his mind, and now that idea enlarged automatically. They would continue to pick off the gunners. What were a few warriors slain out of a mass of a thousand! But there

were only seven or eight gunners, no, five or six, because two were gone already! He whispered to his comrades to shoot a gunner whenever there was a chance, and they nodded in approval.

The conferences lasted some time, and the gorge in front of them was filled with savages, a great mass of men with tufted scalp locks, some bare to the waist, others wrapped in gaudy blue or red or yellow blankets, a restless, shifting mass, upon which the sun poured brilliant rays, lighting up the savage faces as if they were shot with fire. It was a strange scene, buried in the green wood, one of the unknown battles that marked the march of the republic from sea to sea. As the five stared from their covert at the savage army the vivid colors were like those of shifting glass in a kaleidoscope. The whole began to seem unreal and fantastic, the stuff of dreams. To Paul, in particular, whose head held so much of the past, it was like some old tale out of the Odyssey, with Ulysses and his comrades confronting a new danger in barbaric lands.

"They're about to do somethin'," whispered the shiftless one.

"So I think," said Henry.

The British officers, the renegades and the chiefs walked down from the mound. Among the savages arose a low hum which quickly swelled into a chant, and Henry interpreted it as a sign that they now expected victory. How! He wondered, but he did not wonder long.

"They're goin' to use the cannon," said the shiftless one.

It seemed strange to Henry that he had not thought of this before, but now that the danger was imminent his mind met it with ready resource.

"We must crawl into a hole, boys," he said, "and stay there while the cannon balls pass over us."

"Here's a gully," said the shiftless one, "and it will hold us all."

"The rest of you go into it," said Henry. "I've changed my mind about myself."

"What are you thinking of?" asked Paul.

"Do you see that big tree growing further down the slope, a little closer to the river. It's hidden to the boughs, by the bushes growing thick all around it, and above them the foliage of the tree is so heavy that nobody twenty yards away

could see into it. I mean to climb up there and make it hot for those gunners. This rifle of mine will reach pretty far."

Henry had a beautiful long-barreled weapon, and the others, although knowing the danger, could say nothing in opposition.

"Suppose we let them fire two or three shots first," said Henry. "Then, as we make no reply, they may bring the cannon up closer."

Again four heads nodded in approval, and Henry, creeping forward through the bushes, climbed rapidly up the tree. Here, hidden as if by walls, he nevertheless saw well. The gunners, helped by the Indians, were bringing forward both of the cannon. They were fine bronze guns, glistening in the sun, and their wide mouths looked threatening. Spongers, rammers and the real gunners all stood by.

Henry saw a twelve pound ball hoisted into each bronze throat, and then, as the gunners did their work, each mass of metal crashed through the thickets, the savages yelling in delight at the thunderous reports that came back, in echo after echo. There was no reply from the thickets, and they began to reload for the second discharge. Then Henry marked the gunner at the cannon on his right, and slowly the long muzzle of the beautiful blue steel barrel rose until it bore directly upon the man. Paul, from his position, could see Henry in the tree, and he was sorry for the gunner who was about to die there in the forest, four thousand miles from his native land, a good-natured soldier, perhaps, but sent by his superiors on an errand, the full character of which he did not understand.

The sponger and rammer did their work. The shot was fired and the gunner leaned forward, looking eagerly at the dense woods and thickets to see what damage his shot had done. No reply came save a rifle shot, and the gunner fell dead upon his gun. Paul in the thickets shivered a little, but he knew that it must be done.

The allied tribes again gave forth a whoop of rage and chagrin, and Henry from his place in the tree clearly saw Alloway, waving his sword and encouraging them. "If he would only come a little nearer," grimly thought the young forest runner, as he reloaded rapidly, "he might by the loss of his own life save the lives of many others." But Alloway kept back.

They were now making ready the second cannon, but as the rammer stepped forward the deadly marksman in the tree reached him with his bullet, and, falling beside his gun, he lay quite still. Once more the thousand voices of the warriors

joined in a terrible cry of wrath and menace, but the young forester reloaded calmly, and the sponger, smitten down, fell beside his comrade.

Long Jim and the shiftless one, who lay side by side, gazed at the tree in silent admiration. They knew the ability of their comrade as a sharpshooter, but never before had he been so deadly at such long range.

"They'll hev to draw them cannon back," whispered Shif'less Sol, "or he'll pick off every one o' the white men that manage 'em."

"Then I hope they won't draw 'em back," said Long Jim.

But Alloway and the chiefs saw the necessity of taking the gun beyond rifle range, and they withdrew them quickly, although not quickly enough to keep another of the white men from receiving a painful wound. The savages discharged a volley from their rifles and muskets, and flights of arrows were sent into the thickets, but arrows and bullets alike fell short. Many of the arrows merely reached the river, and Paul found a curious pleasure in watching these feathered messengers fly through the air, and then shoot downward into the water, leaving bubbles to tell for a moment where they had gone.

"They're goin' to shoot them cannon ag'in," said Shif'less Sol, "but they're puttin' a different kind o' ammunition in 'em."

"It's grape," said Paul.

"What's grape?" asked Long Jim.

"All kinds of metal, slugs and suchlike, that scatter."

"Like a handful uv buckshot, only bigger an' more uv it."

"That describes it."

"Then it 'pears to me that we'd better back water a lot, an' give all them grape a chance to bust an' fly whar we ain't."

"Words of wisdom, Jim," said Henry, "and we'd better get behind trees, too."

"An' good big ones," said Shif'less Sol. "Ef I've got an oak seven feet through in front o' me they kin go on with thar fireworks."

They retreated hastily and lay down behind the great trunks, none too soon either, as the cannon roared and the grapeshot whistled all about them, cutting

off twigs and leaves and ploughing the earth.

"That shorely is dang'rous business—fur us," said Shif'less Sol. "I'm glad they didn't start with it. It's like a swarm o' iron bees flyin' at you, an' ef you ain't holed up some o' 'em is bound to hit you."

"Back there!" exclaimed Henry to the shiftless one, who was peeping behind his oak, "they're about to fire the second gun!"

The discharge of grapeshot again fell in the thicket, but it hurt no one, and the five did not reply. Two more shots were fired, doing great damage to the forest at that spot, but none of the five. Then came a pause.

"The white men and the chiefs have gone into consultation again," announced Henry.

"Why haven't they sent out flankers to cross the river?" said Paul. "I haven't seen a single warrior leave the main band."

"They've been confident that the cannon would do the work," replied Henry, "and besides, the warriors don't like those high banks. Now you mustn't forget, either, that they think we're a big force here."

"But they'll come to that," said the shiftless one. "They don't dare charge down that narrow gorge, on through the river, an' up the hill ag'inst us. Sooner or later, warriors will cross the stream out o' our sight, both above an' below us, an' that's just what we've got to look out fur."

"Right you are, Sol," said Henry, "but I don't think they will do it for a while. They'd like to force the passage without waste of time and go right ahead with their march."

Several more charges of grape were fired into the thickets, and leaves and twigs again rained down, but the five, sheltered well, remained untouched by the fragments of hissing metal. Then the guns relapsed into silence.

"Likely the redcoat colonel has ordered 'em to stop shooting," said Paul. "He won't want 'em to waste their ammunition here, but to save it for the palisades of our settlements."

"Sounds most probable," said Henry. "They can't get any new supply of gunpowder and cannon balls and grapeshot, in these woods."

"What'll they do now?" asked Tom Ross.

"I don't know," replied Henry.

"I wish I had one uv them spyglasses I saw back east, when I wuz a boy," said Long Jim.

"What's a spyglass?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"It's two magnifyin' glasses in short tubes fastened side by side, what you put to your eye an' then you bring things near to you an' see 'em big."

"Then I wish I had one too, Jim. I'd like to see the face o' that British colonel. I know that the blood hez all run to his head an' that he's hoppin' mad. Them reg'lar army orficers ain't never much good in the woods. I've heard how Braddock had all his forces cut plum' to pieces by a heap smaller number o' warriors, 'cause he wouldn't use our forest ways. An' I'd like through them glasses to see the face o' Braxton Wyatt too, 'cause I know he's turned blue with rage, an' I'd like to hear him grindin' his teeth, 'cause I know he's grindin' 'em hard, and Blackstaffe must be grindin' in time with him too. An' I'd like to see them two chiefs, Yellow Panther an' Red Eagle so mad that they're pullin' away at their scalp locks, fit to pull them clean out o' their heads."

"Since we ain't got any spyglass," said Long Jim, with a sigh, "we've got to imagine a lot uv it, but I've got a fine an' pow'ful imagination, an' so hev you, Sol Hyde."

"Yes, I'm seein' the things I want to see. It's cur'us how you kin do that sometimes, ef you want to hard enough."

"I think," said Henry, "that they're going to try the flankers now. I can see the leaders talking to warriors whom they've called to 'em."

"And does that mean that it's time fur us to light out?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"Not yet. The banks on both sides are high and steep for a long distance, and we can see anyone who tries to pass. We must spread out. Long Jim, our great yeller, the prize yeller of the world, we must leave here, and, if any of us bring down any warrior who tries to cross, he must yell even better than he did before. Stretch those leather lungs of yours, Long Jim, as if you were a pair of bellows."

"You kin depend on me," replied Long Jim complacently. "I'm one that's always

tryin' to do better than he did before. Ef I've yelled so I could be heard a mile then I want to yell the next time so I kin be heard a mile an' a half."

Henry and Paul went upstream and Shif'less Sol and Silent Tom down stream, taking good care to keep hidden from the very best eyes in the savage army. It was not merely the youthful general's object to make a delay at the ford—that in itself was of secondary importance—but he must turn into a cloud the veil of fear and superstition that he knew already enveloped the savage army. They must be smitten by unknown and mysterious terrors. The five must make the medicine men who were surely with them believe that all the omens were bad. Henry, although the word "psychology" was strange to him, knew the power of fear, and he meant to concentrate all the skill of the five upon its increase. He felt that already many doubters must be in the ranks of the red and superstitious army.

"Paul," he said, when they had gone three or four hundred yards, "you stay here, and if you see any warriors trying to cross the stream take your best aim. I'm going a little farther, and I'll do the same. With our great advantages in position we should be able to drive back an attack, unless they go a very long distance to make the crossing."

"I'll do my best," said Paul, and Henry went about three hundred yards farther, lying close in a clump of laurel, where he could command a perfect view of the opposite shore, noticeable there because of a considerable dip. It was just such a place as the flanking warriors would naturally seek, because the crossing would be easier, and he intended to repel them himself.

He lay quite still for a quarter of an hour. Nothing stirred in the forest on the other shore, but he had expected to wait. The Indians, believing that a formidable force opposed them, would be slow and cautious in their advance. So he contained himself in patience, as he lay with the slender muzzle of his rifle thrust forward.

Finally, he saw the bushes on the opposite shore move, and a face, painted and ghastly, was thrust out. Others followed, a half-dozen altogether, and Henry saw them surveying the river and examining his own shore. The muzzle of his rifle moved forward a few inches more, but he knew that it would be an easy shot.

The leader of the warriors presently began to climb down the bank. He was a stalwart fellow and Henry knew by his paint that he was a Miami. Again the great youth was loath to fire from ambush, but a desperate need drives scruples away, and the rifle muzzle, thrusting forward yet an inch or two more, bore

directly upon the Indian's heart.

The man was halfway down the bank, about thirty feet high at that point, when Henry pulled the trigger. Then the Indian uttered his death yell, plunged forward and fell head foremost into the stream. His body shot from sight in the water, came up, floated a moment or two with the current and then sank back again. The other warriors, appalled, climbed back hastily, while from the bushes that fronted the ford below came a series of triumphant and tremendous shouts, as Long Jim, hearing the shot, poured forth all the glory of his voice.

Truly he surpassed himself. His earlier performance was dimmed by his later. The thickets, where he ranged back and forth, shouting his triumphant calls, seemed to be full of armed men. His voice sank a moment and then came the report of a shot down the stream, followed by the death cry. Long Jim knew that it was Shif'less Sol or Silent Tom who had pulled the fatal trigger and he began to sing of that triumph also. Clear and full his voice came once more, moving rapidly from point to point, and Henry in his covert laughed to himself, and with satisfaction, at the long man's energy and success.

The great youth did not fail to watch the opposite shore, quite sure that the party would not retire with the loss of a single warrior, but would make an attempt elsewhere. His eyes continually searched the thickets, but they were so dense that they disclosed nothing. Then he moved slowly up the stream, believing that they would go farther for the second trial, and he was rewarded by the glimpse of a feather among the trees. That feather, he knew was interwoven with a scalp lock, and, as the slope of the bank there was gradual, he was sure that they were coming.

It seemed to Henry that verily the fates fought for him. He knew that they were going to try the crossing there, and they would be easy prey to the concealed marksman. Even as he knelt he heard Long Jim's voice raised again in his mighty song of triumph, and although he could not hear the shot now, he was certain that the rifle of Silent Tom or Shif'less Sol had found another victim. So they, too, were guarding the ford well, and he smiled to himself at the courage and skill of the invincible pair.

He saw another scalp lock appear, then another and another, until they were eight in all. The warriors remained for several minutes partly hidden, scanning the opposite shore, and then one only emerged into full view, as if he were feeling the way for the others. Henry changed his tactics, and, instead of waiting for the

man to begin the descent of the cliff, fired at once. The warrior fell back in the bushes, where his body lay hidden, but the others set up the death cry, and Henry was so sure that they would not try the crossing again soon—at least not yet—that he went back to Paul's covert, and the two returned to Long Jim. Shif'less Sol and Silent Tom were called in and the leader said:

"I think we've done all we can here. We've created the impression of a great force to hold the ford. We've also made them think it can stretch far enough to watch its wings. Four warriors just fallen prove that. They'll probably send scouts miles up and down the stream to cross, and then hunt us out, but that'll take time, until night at least, and maybe they won't know positively until morning, because scouting in the thickets in the face of an enemy is a dangerous business. So, I propose that we use the advantage we've gained."

"In what way?" asked Paul.

"We'll go now. We don't want 'em to find out how few we are, and we don't want 'em to learn, either, that we're we."

"That is, they must continue to think that we're behind 'em or on their flanks, and that this is another and larger force in their front."

"That's the idea. What say you?"

"I'm for it," said Paul.

"Votin' ez a high private I say too, let's leg it from here," said Long Jim.

"The jedgment o' our leader is so sound that thar ain't nothin' more to say," quoth the shiftless one.

"Let's go," said Silent Tom.

Then the little band, five against a thousand, rifles against cannon, that had victoriously held the ford, stole away with soundless tread through the greenwood. But they did not travel southward long. When darkness came they turned toward the east, and traveling many miles, made camp as they had done once before on a little island in a swamp, which they reached by walking on the dead and fallen trees of many years. There when they sat down under the trees they could not refrain from a few words of triumph and mutual congratulation, because another and most important link in the chain had been forged with brilliant success.

"Although it's dark and it's seven or eight miles away," said Shif'less Sol, "I kin see that Indian army now, a-settin' before the ford, an' wonderin' how it's goin' to git across."

"An' I kin hear that savage army now, movin' up an' down, restless like," said Long Jim. "I kin hear them redcoat officers, an' them renegades, an' them Injun chiefs, grindin' thar upper teeth an' thar lower teeth together so hard with anger that they won't be able to eat in the mornin'."

"And I can see their wrath and chagrin tomorrow, when their scouts tell them no enemy is there," said Paul. "I can tell now how the white leaders and the red leaders will rage, and how they will wonder who the men were that held them."

"And I can read their minds ahead," said Henry. "The five of us will become not a hundred, but two hundred, and every pair of our hands will carry forty rifles."

"We've fooled 'em well," said Silent Tom, tersely.

"And now to sleep," said Henry, "because we must begin again in the morning."

Soon the five slept the deep sleep that comes after success.

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT CULMINATION

It could almost be said of them, so sensitive were they to sound or even to a noiseless presence, that usually when sleeping they were yet awake, that, like the wild animals living in the same forest, warnings came to them on the wind itself, and that, though the senses were steeped in slumber, the sentinel mind was yet there. But this morning it was not so. They slept, not like forest runners, who breathe danger every hour, both day and night, but like city dwellers, secure against any foe.

It was Silent Tom who awoke first, to find the day advanced, the sun like a gigantic shield of red and gold in the western heavens, and the wind of spring blowing through the green foliage. He shook himself, somewhat like a big, honest dog, and not awakening the others, walked to the edge of their island in the swamp, the firm land not being more than thirty feet across.

But on this oasis the trees grew large and close and no one on the mainland beyond the swamp could have seen human beings there. The swamp was chiefly the result of a low region flooded by heavy spring rains, and in the summer would probably be as dry and firm as the oasis itself. But, for the present, it was what the pioneers called "drowned lands" and was an effective barrier against any ordinary march.

Silent Tom looked toward the north, and saw a coil of smoke against the brilliant blue of the sky. It was very far away, but he was quite sure that it came from the Indian camp, and its location indicated that they had not yet crossed the river. He felt intense satisfaction, but he did not even chuckle in his throat, after the border fashion. He had not been named Silent Tom for nothing. He was the oldest of the five, several years older than Long Jim, who was next in point of age, and he was often called Old Tom Ross, although in reality the "old" in that case was like the "old" that one college boy uses when he calls another "old fellow."

But if Silent Tom did not talk much he thought and felt a very great deal. The love of the wilderness was keen in him. Elsewhere he would have been like a lion in an iron-barred cage. And, like the rest of the five, he would have

sacrificed his life to protect those little settlements of his own kind to the south. It has been said that usually when the five slept they were yet almost awake, but this morning when Silent Tom was awake he was also dreaming. He was dreaming of the great triumph that they had won on the preceding day: Five against a thousand! Rifles against cannon! A triumph not alone of valor but of intellect, of wiles and stratagems, of tactics and management!

He did not possess, in the same great degree, the gift of imagination which illuminated so nobly the minds and souls of Henry and Paul and the shiftless one, but he felt deeply, nevertheless. Matter-of-fact and practical, he recognized, that they had won an extraordinary victory, to attempt which would not even have entered his own mind, and knowing it, he not only gave all credit to those who had conceived it, but admired them yet the more. He was beginning to realize now that the impossible was nearly always the possible.

Life looked very good to Tom Ross that day. It was bright, keen and full of zest. A deeply religious man, in his way, he felt that the forest, the river, and all the unseen spirits of earth and air had worked for them. The birds singing so joyously among the boughs sang not alone for themselves, but also for his four comrades who slept and for him also.

He listened awhile, crossed the swamp on the fallen trees, scouted a little and then came back, quite sure that no warrior was within miles of them, as they were marching in another direction, and then returned to the oasis. The four still slept the sleep of the just and victorious. Then Tom, the cunning, smiled to himself, and came very near to uttering a deep-throated chuckle.

Opening his little knapsack, he took out a cord of fishing line, with a hook, which, with wisdom, he always carried. He tied the line on the end of a stick, and, then going eastward from the oasis, he walked across the fallen or drifted trees until he came to the permanent channel of a creek, into which the flood waters drained. There he dropped his hook, having previously procured bait, worms found under a stone.

Doubtless no hook had ever been sunk in those waters before, and the fish leaped to the bait. In fifteen minutes he had half a dozen fine fellows, which he deftly cleaned with his hunting knife. Then he returned, soft-footed, to the island. The four, as he wished, still slept. After all, he did have imagination and, a feeling for surprise, and the dramatic. Had his comrades awakened then, before his preparations were complete, it would have spoiled his pleasure.

It was a short task for one such as he to use flint and steel, and kindle a fire on the low side of the island, facing toward the east, but yet within the circle of the trees. Dead wood was lying everywhere and it burned rapidly. Then, quickly broiling the fish on sharpened ends of twigs and laying them on green leaves, he went back and awakened the four, who opened their eyes and sat up at the same time.

"What's the smell that's ticklin' my nose?" exclaimed Long Jim.

"Fish," replied Silent Tom gruffly. "Breakfast's ready! Come on!"

The four leaped to their feet, and followed the pleasant odor which grew stronger and more savory as they advanced.

"Ain't cooked like you kin do it," said Silent Tom to Long Jim, "but I done my best."

"Kings could do no more," said the shiftless one, "an' this is the finest surprise I've had in a 'coon's age. I wuz gettin' mighty tired o' cold vittles. A lazy man like me needs somethin' hot now an' then to stir him up, don't he Jim?"

"Guess he does, an' so do I," said Long Jim, reaching hungrily for a fish.

All fell to. The fish were of the finest flavor, and they had been cooked well. Silent Tom said nothing, but he glowed with satisfaction.

"How'd you do it, Tom?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"Line, hook, bait, water, fish," replied Ross, waving his hand in the direction of the creek.

"Ain't he the pow'ful talker?" laughed the shiftless one. "When Tom dies an' goes up to heaven to take his place in them gran' an' eternal huntin' groun's that we've already talked about, the Angel at the gate will ask him his name. 'Tom Ross,' he'll say. 'Business on earth?' 'Hunter an' scout,' 'Ever betrayed a friend?' 'Never,' 'Then pass right in,' That's all old Tom will say, not a word wasted in explanations an' pologies."

"It'll be shorter than that," said Long Jim.

"How's that?"

"The Angel will ask him jest one question. He'll say, 'Who's your best friend on

earth?' an' Tom will answer 'Long Jim Hart, what's comin' on later,' an' the Angel will say: 'That's enough. Go right in and pick out the best place in Heaven fur yourself an' your friends who will be here, some day.'"

Silent Tom blushed under the praise which was thoroughly sincere, and begged them, severally, to take another fish. But they had enough, and prepared to travel again, to forge another link in the chain which they were striving so hard to complete.

"What's the plan, Henry?" asked the shiftless one in his capacity as lieutenant.

"I think we ought to complete that circle around the Indian army, curving to the west and then to the north, until we're in their rear. Then we can complete the impression that two forces are attacking 'em, one in front and the other behind. What do you think?"

"I'm hot fur roundin' out the circle," replied Shif'less Sol. "I always like to see things finished, an' I want to make the warriors think a couple o' hundred white riflemen march where only five really make tracks."

"Same here," said Jim Hart, "Suits me 'cause I've got long legs, made out uv steel wire, close wrapped. I see clear that we've got to do a power o' marchin', more of it than fightin'."

"I don't believe any one can think of a better plan," said Paul, "and yours, Henry, certainly promises well."

"I'm for it," said Silent Tom.

"Then we go now," said Henry.

The smoke that Tom had seen earlier was gone, and the five believed that the Indian army, discovering the absence of their foe, had probably crossed the river.

"Since they're on the march again," said Henry, "we can take it slowly and need not exhaust ourselves."

"Jest dawdle along," said Shif'less Sol, "an' let 'em pass us.

"Yes, that's it."

"We'll keep far enough away to avoid their scouts and hunters," said Paul.

It was really the hunters against whom they had to keep the most watchful guard,

as so numerous a force ate tremendous quantities of game, and, the men seeking it had to spread out to a considerable distance on either flank. But if the hunters came, the five were sure that they would see them first, and they felt little apprehension.

They passed out of the swampy country, and entered the usual rolling region of low hills, clothed in heavy forest, and abounding in game. Here they stopped a while in their task of completing the circle, and waited while the Indian army marched. Henry calculated that it could not go more than a dozen miles a day, since the way had to be cut for the cannon, and even if they remained where they were, the Indian army when night came, would be very little farther south than the five.

"I vote we turn our short stop into a long one," said Shif'less Sol, "since, ef we went on we'd jest have to come back again. An' me bein' a lazy man I'm ag'in any useless work. What do you say, Saplin'?"

"I'm with you, Sol, not 'cause I'm lazy, which I ain't, an' never will be, but cause it ain't wuth while to go back on our tracks an' then come forward ag'in. What I do say is this; since Tom Ross is such a good fisher I reckon he might take his hook an' line an' go east to the creek, which can't be fur from here, an' ketch some more fish jest ez good ez them we had this mornin'. After dark I'll cook 'em, takin' the trouble off his hands."

All fell in with the suggestion, including Tom himself, and after a while he went away on the errand, returning in due time with plenty of fish as good as the others. This time Long Jim cooked them when night came, in a low place behind the trees, and once more they had warm and delicate food.

When the moon rose in a clear sky, they were able to trace the smoke of the Indian campfire, almost due west of them, as they calculated it would be, and a long distance away. Henry regarded it thoughtfully and Paul knew that his mind was concentrated upon some plan.

"What is it?" he asked at last.

"I think some of us ought to go late tonight and see what chance we have at the guns."

"You'll take me with you, Henry?"

"No, Paul. It'll have to be Shif'less Sol, while the rest of you stand by as a

reserve. What call shall we use, the owl or the wolf?"

"Let it be the wolf," said the shiftless one, "'cause I feel like a wolf tonight, ready to snap at an' bite them that's tryin' to hurt our people."

"Sol gits mighty ferocious when thar ain't anythin' more terrible than a rabbit close by," said Long Jim.

"It ain't that. It's my knowin' that you'll run to my help ef I git into trouble," said Shif'less Sol.

Paul felt a little disappointment, but it disappeared quickly. He knew that Shif'less Sol was the one who ought to go, and in the high tasks they had set for themselves there were enough dangers for all.

"Then it will be the cry of the wolf," said Henry. "To most people their yelps are alike, but not to us. You won't forget the particular kind of howl that Sol and I give forth?"

"Never," said Long Jim. "Thar ain't another sech wolf in the woods ez Shif'less Sol."

A few more brief words and Henry and his comrade were gone, traveling at a swift rate toward the Indian camp. Dark and the forest separated the two from the three, but they could send their signal cries at any time across the intervening space, and communication was not interrupted. They advanced in silence several miles, and then they became very cautious, because they knew that they were within the fringe of scouts and hunters. With so many to feed it was likely that the Indians would hunt by night, especially as the wild turkeys were numerous, and it was easy to obtain them in the dark.

Both Henry and Shif'less Sol saw turkey signs, and their caution increased, when they noticed a dozen dusky figures of large birds on boughs near by, sure proof that the warriors would soon be somewhere in the neighborhood, if they were not so already. They began to stoop now, and use cover all the way, and presently Henry felt that their precautions were well taken, as a faint but distant sound, not native to the forest, came to his ear.

"There, Sol!" he whispered. "Did you hear it? To the right."

The shiftless one listened a moment or two and replied:

"Yes, I kin make it out."

"I say it's the twang of a bowstring, Sol."

"So do I, Henry."

"They're probably shooting the turkeys out of the trees with arrows. Saves noise and their powder and lead, too."

"Wherein the Injun shows a heap o' sense, Henry."

"I can hear more than one bow twanging now, Sol. The turkeys must be plentiful hereabouts, but even with bows and arrows only used against 'em they're bound to take alarm soon."

"Yes, thar go some o' 'em gobblin' now, an' they're flyin' this way."

They heard the whirr of wings carrying heavy bodies, and frightened turkeys flew directly over their heads. As the Indians might come in pursuit, Henry and Shif'less Sol lay down among the bushes. A shouting broke out near them, and the forest, for a wide space, was filled with the whirring of wings.

"The biggest flock o' wild turkeys that ever wuz must hev roosted right 'roun' us," said Shif'less Sol, "'cause I seem to see 'em by the dozens."

"More likely fifteen or twenty flocks were scattered about through the woods, and now they have all joined in a common flight."

"Mebbe so, but whether one flock or twenty j'ined, this is suttinly Turkeyland. An' did you ever see sech fine turkeys. Look at that king gobbler, Henry, flyin' right over our heads! He must weigh fifty pounds ef he weighs an ounce, an' his wattles are a wonder to look at. An' I kin see him lookin' right down at me, ez he passes an' I kin hear him sayin': 'I ain't afeared o' you, Sol Hyde, even ef you hev got a gun in your hand. I kin fly low over your head, so low that I'll brush you with my wings, and with my red wattles, which are a wonder to see, an' you dassn't fire. I've got you where I want you, Sol Hyde. I ain't afeard o' anything but Injuns tonight.'"

Shif'less Sol's words were so lugubrious that Henry was compelled to laugh under his breath. It did look like an injustice of fate, when hunters so keen as they, were compelled to lie quiet, while wild turkeys in hundreds flew over their heads, and although the shiftless one may have exaggerated a little about the

king gobbler, Henry saw that many of them were magnificent specimens of their kind. Yet to lie and stir not was the price of life, as they soon saw.

Indians came running through the great grove, discharging arrows at the turkeys, many of which flew low, and the air was filled with the twanging of bow strings. Not a rifle or musket was fired, the warriors seeming to rely wholly upon their ancient weapons for this night hunt. They appeared to be in high good humor, too, as the two crouching scouts heard them laughing and chattering as they picked up the fallen birds, and then sent arrows in search of more.

Shif'less Sol became more and more uneasy. Here was a grand hunt going well forward and he not a part of it. Instead he had to crouch among bushes and flatten himself against the soil like an earthworm, while the twanging of the bows made music, and the eager shouts stirred every vein.

The hunt swept off to the westward. The dusky figures of warriors and turkeys disappeared in the brush, and Henry and Shif'less Sol, ceasing to be earthworms, rose to their knees.

"They didn't see us," said the shiftless one, "but it was hard to stay hid."

"But here we are alive and safe. Now, I think, Sol, we'd better go on straight toward their camp, but keep a lookout at the same time for those fellows, when they come back."

They could not hear the twang of bowstrings now, but the shouts still came to them, though much softened by the distance. Presently they too died away, and with silence returning to the forest Henry and Shif'less Sol stood upright. They listened only a moment or two, and then advanced directly toward the camp. Crossing the brook they went around a cluster of thorn bushes, and came face to face with two men. Shif'less Sol, quick as a panther, swung his clubbed rifle like lightning and the foremost of the two, a Shawnee warrior, dropped like a log, and Henry, too close for action, seized the other by the throat in his powerful hands.

It was not a great and brawny throat into which those fingers of steel settled, and its owner began to gasp quickly. Then Henry noticed that he held in his grasp not an Indian, but a white man, or rather a boy, a fair English boy, a youthful and open face upon which the forest had not yet set its tan.

He released his grasp slowly. He could not bear the pain and terror in the eyes of

the slender English youth, who, though he wore the uniform of a subaltern, seemed so much out of place there in the deep woods. Yet the forester meant to take no needless risk.

"Promise that you will not cry out and I spare you," he said, his blue eyes looking straight into those of the lad, which returned his gaze with defiance. The steel grasp settled down again.

"Better promise," said Henry. "It's your only chance."

The obstinate look passed out of his eyes, and the lad nodded, as he could not speak. Then Henry took away his hand and said:

"Remember your word."

The English youth nodded again, gurgled two or three times, and rubbed his throat:

'"Twas a mighty grip you had upon me. Who are you?"

"The owners of this forest, and we've jest been tellin' you that you've no business here on our grounds," said the shiftless one.

The boy—he was nothing more—stared at them in astonishment. It was obvious to the two forest runners that he had little acquaintance with the woods. His eyes filled with wonder as he gazed upon the two fierce faces, and the two powerful figures, arrayed in buckskin.

"Your forest?" he said.

"Yes," replied Henry quietly, "and bear in mind that I held your life in my hands. Had you been an Indian you would be dead now."

"I won't forget it," said the youth, who seemed honest enough, "and I'm not going to cry out and bring the warriors down upon you for two very good reasons—because I've promised not to do so, and if I did, I know that your comrade there would shoot me down the next instant."

"I shorely would," said Shif'less Sol, grimly.

"And now," said Henry, "what is your name and what are you doing here?"

"My name is Roderick Cawthorne, I'm a subaltern in the British army, and I came over to help put down the rebels, in accordance with my duty to my king

and country. All this land is under our rule."

"Do you think so?" asked Henry. "Do you think that this wilderness, which extends a thousand miles in every direction, is under your rule?"

The young subaltern looked around at the dark forest and shivered a little.

"Technically, yes," he replied, "but it's a long way from Eton."

"What's Eton?"

"Eton is a school in England, a school for the sons of gentlemen."

"I see. And would I be considered the son of a gentleman?"

Young Cawthorne looked up at the tanned and powerful face bent over him. He had already noted Henry's good English, and, feeling the compelling gaze of one who was born to be a master, he replied, sincerely and cheerfully:

"Yes, the son of a gentleman, and a gentleman yourself."

"An' I'm a gentleman too," said Shif'less Sol. "My good rifle says so every time."

"It was the power of earlier weapons that started the line of gentlemen," said Cawthorne. "Now what do you two gentlemen propose to do with me?"

"Do you know what would be done with us if things were changed about?" asked Henry, "and we were the prisoners of you and the colonel and the red men with whom you travel?"

"No. What would it be?"

"You'd have the pleasure of standing by and seeing the two of us burned alive at the stake. We wouldn't be burned quickly. It can be protracted for hours, and it's often done to our people by your allies."

The young Englishman paled.

"Surely it can't be so!" he said.

"But surely it is so!" said the young forester fiercely.

"I'm at your mercy."

"We ain't goin' to burn you now," said Shif'less Sol. "We can't afford to set up a

big torch in the forest, with our enemies so near."

Cawthorne shivered.

"Do you still feel," asked Henry, "that you're the ruler over the wilderness here, five thousand miles from London?"

"Technically only. At the present time I'm making no boasts."

"Now, you go back to your colonel and the renegades and the red chiefs and tell them they'll find no thoroughfare to the white settlements."

"So, you don't mean to kill me?"

"No, we don't do that sort of thing. Since we can't hold you a prisoner now, we release you. It's likely that you don't know your way to your own camp, but your red comrade here will guide you. My friend didn't break his skull, when he struck him with the butt of his rifle, though it was a shrewd blow. He's coming to."

Cawthorne looked down at the reviving savage, and then looked up to thank the foresters, but they were gone. They had vanished so quickly and silently that he had not heard them going. Had it not been for the savage who was now sitting up he would not have believed that it was real.

Henry and the shiftless one had dropped down in the bushes only a little distance away, and, by the moonlight, they saw the look of bewilderment on the face of the young Englishman.

"It don't hardly look fair to our people that we should let him go," said the shiftless one.

"But we had to," Henry whispered back. "It was either kill him or let him go, and neither you nor I, Sol, could kill him. You know that."

"Yes, I know it."

"Now, the warrior has all his senses back, though his head is likely to ache for a couple of days. We don't lose anything by letting them have their lives, Sol. The talk of their encounter with us will grow mightily as they go back to the Indian army. The warrior scarcely caught a glimpse of us, and he's likely to say that he was struck down by an evil spirit. Cawthorne's account of his talk with us will not weaken him in his belief. Instead it will make him sure that we're demons

who spared them in order that they might carry a warning to their comrades."

"I see it, Henry. It's boun' to be the way you say it is, an' our luck is still workin' fur us."

They saw the English lad and the warrior turn back toward the camp, and then they rose, going away swiftly at a right angle from their original course. After pursuing it a while, they curved in again toward the camp.

In a half-hour they saw the distant flare of lights, and knew that they were close to the Indian army. They were able by stalking, carried on with infinite pains and skill, to approach so near that they could see into the open, where the fires were burning, but not near enough to achieve anything of use.

Alloway, Cartwright, the renegades and the chiefs stood together, and Cawthorne, and the warrior who had been with him, stood before them. Evidently they had just got back, and were telling their tale. Both of the foresters laughed inwardly. Their achievement gave them much pleasure, and they felt that they were making progress toward forging the new link in the chain.

"Can you see the cannon?" whispered Shif'less Sol.

"Over there at the far edge. The ammunition wagons carrying the powder and the balls and the grapeshot are drawn up between them. But we can't get at 'em, Sol. Not now, at least."

"No, but see, Henry, a lot of them warriors are beginnin' to dance, an' thar are two medicine men among 'em. They've overheard the news o' what we've done, an' they're gittin' excited. They're shore now the evil sperrits are all 'roun' 'em."

"Looks like it, Sol, and those medicine men are not afraid of Alloway, the renegades, the chiefs or anybody else. They're encouraging the dancing."

Henry and the shiftless one saw the medicine men through the glow of the lofty flames, and they looked strange and sinister to the last degree. One was wrapped in a buffalo hide with the head and horns over his own head, the other was made up as a bear. The glare through which they were seen, magnified them to twice or thrice their size, and gave them a tint of blood. They looked like two monsters walking back and forth before the warriors.

"The seed we planted is shorely growin' up good an' strong," whispered Shif'less Sol.

More and more warriors joined in the chant of the medicine men. The two saw Alloway gesture furiously toward them, and then they saw Yellow Panther and Red Eagle shake their heads. The two interpreted the movements easily. Alloway wanted the chiefs to stop the chanting which had in it the double note of awe and fear, and Yellow Panther and Red Eagle disclaimed any power to do so.

Again the foresters laughed inwardly, as the monstrous and misshapen figures of the two medicine men careered back and forth in the flaming light. They knew that at this moment their power over the warriors was supreme. The more Alloway raged the more he weakened his own influence.

"An' now they're dancin' with all their might," whispered the shiftless one. "Look how they bound an' twist an' jump! Henry, you an' me have seed some wild sights together, but this caps 'em."

It was in truth a most extraordinary scene, this wild dance of the hundreds in the depths of the primeval forest. Around and around they went, led by the two medicine men, the bear and the buffalo, and the hideous, monotonous chant swelled through all the forest. It did not now contain the ring of triumph and anticipation. Instead it was filled with grief for the fallen, fear of the evil spirits that filled the air, and of Manitou who had turned his face away from them.

Alloway and the white men who were left, drew to one side. Henry could imagine the rage of the colonel at his helplessness, and he could imagine too that he must feel a thrill of awe at the wild scene passing before him. The time and the circumstances must work upon the feelings of a white man, no matter how stout his heart.

"If we could strike another good strong blow now," said the shiftless one, "I think they would break into a panic."

"True," said Henry, "but we must not depart from our original purpose to get at the cannon. I don't think we can do it tonight and so we'd better withdraw. Maybe we'll have another chance tomorrow night."

"I'm agreein' with you, Henry, an' I'm beginnin' to think mighty like the warriors do, that Manitou, which is jest their name for our God, turns his face upon you or turns his face away from you."

"It looks so, Sol. I suppose the Indians in most ways don't differ much from us. Only they're a lot more superstitious."

Slowly they crept away, but when they finally rose to their feet in the depths of the forest they could still see the glow of the great fires behind them. Henry and the shiftless one knew that the Indians had been heaping logs upon coals until the flames sprang up fifteen or twenty feet, and that around them nearly the whole army was now dancing and singing. The wailing note of so many voices still reached them, shrill, piercing and so full of lament that the nerves of the forest runners themselves were upset.

"I want to git away from here," said the shiftless one, and then he added wistfully: "I wish we could strike our big blow, whatever it is, tonight, Henry. Their state o' mind is terrible. They're right on edge, an' ef we could do somethin' they'd break, shore."

"I know it," said Henry, "but we're not able to get at what we want to reach."

Nevertheless they stood there, and listened some time to the wailing note of all the hundreds who were oppressed and afraid, because the face of Manitou was so obviously turned from them.

Henry and the shiftless one, as they returned toward their comrades whom they had left behind, did not relax their caution, knowing that hunting parties were still abroad, and that veteran chiefs like Yellow Panther and Red Eagle had sent scouts ahead. Twice they struck trails, and fragments of feathers left on the bushes by warriors returning with turkeys.

They were at least two miles from the camp when they heard noises that indicated the passage of a small body of the Indians, and as they stepped behind trees to conceal themselves Shif'less Sol's foot suddenly sank with a bubbling sound into an oozy spot. In an instant, all the Indians stopped. Henry and his comrade heard rustling sounds for a moment, and then there was complete silence. The two knew that the warriors had taken to cover, and that probably they would not escape without a fight. They were intensely annoyed as they wished to return to Paul, Long Jim and Silent Tom.

The shiftless one withdrew his foot from the ooze, and he and Henry crouched on dry ground, watching with eye and ear for any movement in the thicket opposite. They knew that the warriors, with infinite patience, were waiting in the same manner, and it was likely that the delay would be long.

"Luck has turned ag'in us fur a little bit," whispered Shif'less Sol, "but I can't think that after favorin' us fur so long it'll leave us fur good."

"I don't think so either," said Henry. "I hear one of them moving."

"That bein' the case we'll lay nearly flat," said Shif'less Sol.

It was well they did so, as a rifle flashed in the thicket before them, and a bullet cut the leaves over their heads. They did not reply, but crept silently to one side. A few minutes later another bullet crashed through the bushes at the same place, and this time Henry fired by the flash. He heard a low cry, followed by silence and he was sure that his bullet had struck a target. Shif'less Sol held his rifle ready in case a rush should come, but there was none, and Henry reloaded rapidly.

A full half-hour of waiting followed, in which only a single shot was fired, and that by the warriors, to go wide of the mark, as usual, and the wrath of Henry and the shiftless one, at being held there so long, became intense. It seemed the veriest piece of irony that this unfortunate chance should have occurred, but Henry presently recalled the arrangement they had made with the three, wondering why they had not thought of it sooner.

"The warriors are before us," he whispered to Shif'less Sol, "and Long Jim, Paul and Tom are behind us. They may have heard the rifle shots or they may not, but at any rate there is something that will carry further."

"You mean the howl of the wolf! O' course, that's our call to them."

"Yes, and if we bring 'em up it won't be hard to drive off this band."

"Let me give the signal then, Henry. Ef Long Jim is the best yeller among us mebbe I'm the best howler. I'm right proud o' bein' a wolf sometimes, an' I feel like one jest now."

"Go back then some distance," said Henry. "When the boys come up you must meet 'em and not let 'em run into any ambush."

The shiftless one glided away toward the rear, and Henry, lying almost flat on the grass and watching the thickets in front of him so intensely that no warrior could have crept out of them unseen, waited. At the end of five minutes he heard behind him a note, low at first, but swelling gradually so high that it pierced the sky and filled the forest. It was fierce, prolonged, seeming to come from the throat of a monster wolf, and, as it died away, a similar cry came from a point far back in the forest. The wolf near by howled again, and the wolf deep in the forest replied in like fashion. The signal was complete, and Henry knew that Paul, Silent Tom and Long Jim would come fast to help.

There was a stirring in the thicket before him, evidently prompted by the signals, and another vain bullet crashed through the bushes. Henry fired once more at the flash, but he could not tell whether or not he had hit anything, although it was sufficient to hold the warriors in the bush. Evidently they did not consider themselves strong enough for a rush, and again he waited patiently, judging that the three would arrive in twenty minutes at the furthest.

They came several minutes within the allotted time. He heard soft rustlings behind him, and then the five were reunited and ready for action.

"Sol, you creep around on the right flank, and Tom, you take the left," whispered the young general. "They're not in numbers and I think we can soon rout 'em without loss to ourselves."

The flanking movement was carried out perfectly. Shif'less Sol and Silent Tom opened fire on the right and on the left at the same time, and the other three, sending in bullets from the center, began to shout the charge, although they did no charging. But it was sufficient. They saw dusky figures darting away, and then, rising from the bushes the three divisions of their small army met victoriously upon the field, abandoned by the enemy in such haste.

They saw red stains, and then a dark form almost hidden in the grass, a powerful warrior, painted hideously and dead an hour. Henry looked down at him thoughtfully. The retreating warriors had taken away his weapons, but his paint bag and the little charms against evil spirits remained, tied to his belt. It was the paint bag that held Henry's eye, and, holding it, gave him the idea.

He detached the bag, the waistcloth and moccasins, and calling to his comrades retreated farther into the forest. Every one of them, as they watched his actions, divined his intent.

"You're going to disguise yourself and go into the Indian camp," said Paul, when they stopped. "I wouldn't do it. The risk is too great. Besides, what can you do?"

"I went among 'em once and came back alive," said Henry, "and I think I can do it again. Besides, I mean to accomplish something."

"I'm to go with you, o' course?" said Shif'less Sol, eagerly.

Henry shook his head.

"No, Sol," he said reluctantly. "There's only equipment for one, and it must be me. But the rest of you can hang on the outskirts, and if I give a cry for help you may come. It will be, as before, the howl of the wolf, and now, boys, we will work fast, because I must strike, while they're still in the frenzy, created by the medicine men."

Henry took off his own clothing, and, with a shudder, put on the leggings and breechcloth of the dead Indian. Then Shif'less Sol and Tom Ross painted him from the waist up in a ghastly manner, and, with their heartfelt wishes for his safety and success, he departed for the camp, the others following in silence not far behind. He soon heard the sound of the chant and he knew that the orgie was

proceeding. An Indian dance could last two days and nights without stopping, fresh warriors always replacing those who dropped from exhaustion.

It was now far past midnight, and Henry was quite sure that all the hunters had gone. The little party which he and his comrades had fought had probably spread already the tale of a mysterious foe with whom they had met, and who had slain one of their number. And the story, exaggerated much in the telling, would add to the number and power of the evil spirits oppressing the red army.

Keeping for the present well hidden in the forest, Henry approached the fires which had now been heaped up to an amazing height, from which lofty flames leaped and which sent off sparks in millions. The chant was wilder than ever, rolling in weird echoes through the forest, the dancers leaping to and fro, their faces bathed in perspiration, their eyes filled with the glare of temporary madness. The Englishmen and renegades had gone to small tents pitched at the edge of the wood, but Yellow Panther and Red Eagle stood and watched the dancers.

All things were distorted in the mingled dusk and glow of the fires, and Henry, bending low that his great stature might not be noticed, edged gradually in and joined the dancers. For a while, none was more furious than he. He leaped and he swung his arms, and he chanted, until the perspiration ran down his face, and none looked wilder than he. In the multitude nobody knew that he was a stranger, nor would the glazed eyes of the dancers have noticed that he was one, anyhow.

Nevertheless he was watching keenly, while he leaped and shouted, and his eyes were for the cannon, drawn up just within the edge of the forest, with the ammunition wagons between them. After a while he moved cautiously in their direction, threw himself panting on the grass, where others already lay in the stupor of exhaustion, and then, taking hold of one of the burning brands which the wind had blown from the bonfires, he edged slowly toward the forest and the wagons.

This was the last link in the chain, but if it were not forged all the others would be in vain. Three or four times he stopped motion altogether, and lay flat on the ground. Through the red haze he dimly saw the figures of Yellow Panther and Red Eagle who stood side by side, and he saw also the two medicine men, the Bear and the Buffalo, who danced as if they were made of steel, and who continually incited the others.

Henry himself began to feel the effect of the dancing and of the wild cheering, which was like a continuous mad incantation. His blood had never before leaped so wildly and he saw through a red haze all the time. He felt for the moment almost like an Indian, or rather as if he had returned to some primeval incarnation. But it did not make him feel one with those around him. Instead it incited him to extreme effort and greater daring.

He edged himself forward slowly, dragging the torch upon the ground. He still saw Blackstaffe and Wyatt at the edge of the opening some distance away, but they were gazing at the great mass of the dancers. Alloway presently came from his tent and also stood looking on, though he did not join the renegades. Henry could imagine his feelings, his bitter disappointment. But then, one must know something about Indians before undertaking to go on campaigns with them. He hoped, however, that young Cawthorne would remain in his tent.

His slow creeping lasted ten minutes. He felt now that he had reached the very crisis of the campaign made by the five, and he must not make the slightest slip of any kind. He reached the grass behind the wagons and lay there four or five minutes without stirring. He discovered then that besides those between the cannon there were four behind them loaded with powder. The horses were tethered in the woods two or three hundred yards away. He was glad that so much distance separated them from the cannon and powder.

The torch, although he kept it concealed in the grass, was beginning to crackle. The problem was not yet simple, but he thought rapidly. The wagons were covered with canvas. Reaching up, he quickly cut off a long strip with his hunting knife. Then he inserted the strip inside the wagon and into the powder, driving the knife deep through canvas and wood, and leaving it, thrust there to hold the strip fast.

The other end of the thick canvas fell from the wagon to the ground, a length of about a foot lying in the grass. He ignited this with his torch, and saw it begin to burn with a steady creeping flame. Then he moved swiftly away until he reached the edge of the forest, when he rose and ran with all his might. Three or four hundred yards distant, he stopped and uttered the cry of the wolf. The answer came instantly from a point very near, and in two minutes the four joined him.

"Is it arranged?" exclaimed Paul.

"Yes," replied Henry. "There's a chance of a slip, of course. The torch is set and burning. An Indian may see it and put it out, but I don't——"

The sentence was never finished. The night was rent by a terrible crash, and as they were looking toward the Indian camp they saw a pyramid of fire shoot far up into the sky, and then sink back again. A half minute of dreadful silence followed, when every leaf and blade of grass seemed to stand still, and then through the distance came a long and piercing lament.

"It's done!" said the shiftless one, speaking in a tone of awe.

"The cannon are blown to pieces," said Paul.

"Nothin' but scattered metal now!" said Long Jim.

"Busted up, shore!" said Silent Tom.

"They'll be running in a panic presently," said Henry, "and they won't stop until they're far across the Ohio."

The hearts of the five swelled. They alone, five against a thousand, rifles against cannon, had defeated the great Indian army headed by artillery. They had equalled the knights of old—perhaps had surpassed them—although it was not done by valor alone, but also by wile and stratagem, by mind and leadership. Intellect had been well allied with bravery.

But they said little, and turning back into the deeps of the forest, they slept until morning.

The five rose at dawn, and went swiftly to the place where the Indian camp had stood, to find there, as they had expected, complete silence and desolation. The ruin was utter. All the wagons had been blown to bits, and the cannon were shattered so thoroughly that they lay in fragments. Probably Indians near by had been killed, but the warriors, following their custom, had taken their dead away with them.

Henry, looking near the edge of the forest, suddenly started back at a gleam of red among the bushes. He knew that it had come from a red coat, and when he looked again he saw the body of Colonel Alloway lying there. He had been hit in the head by a piece of flying metal and evidently had been killed instantly. Doubtless the other English had wanted to bury him, but the panic of the Indians had compelled them to leave him, although they took their own dead.

"We'll bury him, because he was a white man," said Henry.

They dug a grave with their knives and hatchets and laid him in it, putting stones over the dirt to keep prowling wild animals from digging there, and then took the Indian trail.

It was a trail so wide and deep that a blind man could have followed it. The panic evidently had been terrible. The warriors had thrown away blankets, and in some cases weapons. Henry found a fine hunting knife, with which he replaced the one he had used to pin down his fuse, and Silent Tom found a fine green blanket which he added to his own.

They followed to the Ohio River, and some distance beyond. Then, satisfied that this expedition was routed utterly, they came back into Kentucky.

"I'd like to go to that little house of ours inside the cliff," said Paul.

"So would I," said Long Jim. "It's the snuggest home we've ever found inside the wilderness."

"An' Indian proof, ez we've proved," said the shiftless one.

"Good fur rest," said Silent Tom.

"Then we go there," said Henry.

They reached the valley the next day and climbed up into the cleft which had been a home and a fortress for them. It was sweet and clean, full of fresh, pure air, and the tiny rill was trickling away merrily. Nothing had been disturbed.

"Now ain't this fine?" said Long Jim, coming outside and looking over the hills. "Paul, I've heard you talk about palaces, them that the old Greeks an' Romans had, an' them that they hev now in Europe, but I know that thar has never been one among 'em ez snug an' safe an' cozy ez this."

"At least," said the shiftless one, "I don't believe any o' 'em ever had a water supply like ourn, clean, cool, an' unfailin'."

Silent Tom took something from his knapsack.

"I'm goin' to git some fish in that creek farther down," he said. "You'd better hev your fire ready. Out here on the shelf is a good place."

Long Jim, happy in the task that he liked, hurried away in search of dead wood.

The others carried dried leaves into the hollow and made places for their beds.

Silent Tom caught plenty of good fish, to which they added venison and buffalo steaks, and, sitting on the shelf they ate and were at peace. The glow of triumph was still in their hearts. Alone, they had achieved a great deed for the sake of humanity. They had been through their Iliad, and like the heroes of antiquity, they took their well-earned rest.

The foliage was now in its deepest flush of green. Henry, as he looked over a vast expanse of wilderness, saw nothing but green, green, the unbroken green that he loved.

A bird in a tree over their heads began to pour forth a volume of clear, triumphant song, and the five looked upon it as a voice meant for them.

"It's the last touch," said Paul.

"And the victory is complete," said Henry.

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