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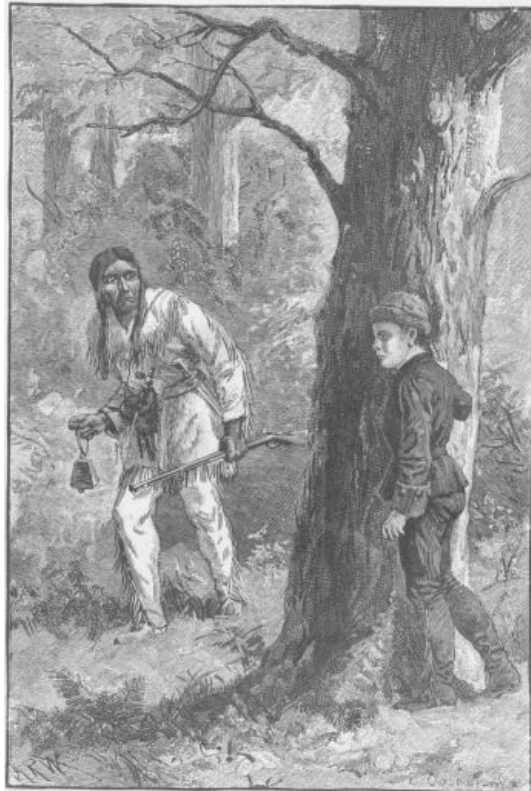
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HUNTERS OF THE OZARK ***



"Terry heard distinctly the footsteps of the warrior."

THE HUNTERS OF THE OZARK.

BY
EDWARD S. ELLIS,
AUTHOR OF "YOUNG PIONEER SERIES," "LOG CABIN SERIES,"
"GREAT RIVER SERIES," ETC., ETC.

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THE HUNTERS OF THE OZARK.

CHAPTER I.

One day in the autumn Terence Clark came to the house of Frederick Linden and urged him to join in a hunt for a cow that had been missing since the night before. The latter got the consent of his mother and the two lads started on a search that proved to be the most eventful one they had ever known.

A few words in the way of explanation must be given at this point. The date of the events I have set out to tell was toward the close of the last century, and the scene the south-western part of the present State of Missouri, but which was then a part of the vast territory known as Louisiana. Though the town of St. Louis had been settled a good many years before, there were only a few pioneers scattered through the almost limitless region that stretched in every direction from the Mississippi. Here and there the hunters and trappers were often absent from their homes for months at a time, during which they suffered much exposure and hardship. They slept for weeks in the open woods, or when the severity of the weather would not allow this, they found refuge in caves or hollow trees. Then, when enough skins had been gathered to load their pack-horses they started on the long tramps to the French trading post on the Mississippi. They followed faintly marked paths or trails that converged from a score or hundred different points until they reached the Father of Waters, where the peltries were soon sold and the proceeds, too often, squandered within the succeeding few hours.

At the date of which I am speaking, a small settlement known as Greville stood in the south-western section of the large State of Missouri, as it is now known. The first cabins were put up only a few years before, and the settlers, including men, women and children, numbered about two hundred. Near the center of the straggling settlement stood a rude but strong blockhouse to be used for refuge in the event of an attack by Indians. As yet this emergency had not arisen, for the red men in that section were far less warlike and hostile than those in Ohio and Kentucky.

The father of Fred Linden was one of the hunters and trappers who made regular visits to the wild section near the Ozark Mountains for the purpose of gathering furs. He never had less than two companions, and sometimes the number was half a dozen. As you are well aware, the furs of all animals are in the finest condition in wintry weather, since nature does her best to guard their bodies from the effects of cold. Thus it came about that the party of hunters, of whom I shall have more to say further on, left Greville in the autumn of the year, and as a rule were not seen again until spring. Since they entered a fine, fur-bearing country, these trips generally paid well. One convenience was that the hunters were not obliged to go to St. Louis to sell them. An agent of the great fur company that made its headquarters at that post, came regularly to Greville with his pack-horses and gave the same price for the peltries that he would have given had they been brought to the factory, hundreds of miles away. He was glad to do this, for the furs that George Linden and his brother hunters brought in were not surpassed in glossiness and fineness by any of the thousands gathered from the four points of the compass.

Among the daring little band that made these regular visits to the Ozark region was an Irishman named Michael Clark, who had had considerable experience in gathering furs along the Mississippi. It was at his suggestion that Greville was founded, and one-half of their periodical journeys thus cut off. On the year following, Clark was shot and killed by a prowling Indian. Since his wife had been dead a long time, the only child, Terence, was thus left an orphan. The lad was a bright, good-natured fellow, liked by every one, and he made his home with the family of one of the other hunters named Rufus MacClaskey. The boy was fifteen years old on the very day that he walked over to the cabin of Fred Linden and asked him to help him hunt for the missing cow.

The family of George Linden, while he was away, consisted of his wife, his daughter Edith, fourteen, and his son Fred, sixteen years old. All were ruddy cheeked, strong and vigorous, and among the best to do of the thirty-odd families that made up the population of Greville.

"Has the cow ever been lost before?" asked Fred, as he and the Irish lad swung along beside each other, neither thinking it worth while to burden himself with a rifle.

"Niver that I knows of, and I would know the same if she had been lost; we're onaisy about the cow, for you see that if this kaaps on and she doesn't come back I'll have to live on something else than bread and milk and praties."

"Our cow came back just at sunset last night."

"And so did them all, exciptin' our own, which makes me more onwillin' to accipt any excuse she may have to give."

"Let me see, Terry; Brindle wore a bell round her neck, didn't she?"

"That she did, and she seemed quite proud of the same."

"Did you make hunt for her last night?"

"I hunted as long as I could see to hunt; she wasn't missed, that is till after they got home. Whin I found that I didn't find her I started to find her; but I hadn't time to hunt very long whin it got dark and I had to give it up."

"And didn't you hear any thing of the bell?"

"Do ye think that if I heard the bell I wouldn't have found the cow? Why was the bell put round

her neck if it wasn't to guide friends? I listened many a time after it got dark, but niver a tinkle did I hear."

"That is queer," said Fred half to himself; "for, when no wind is blowing and it is calm, you can hear that bell a long ways; father has caught the sound in the woods, when the Brindle was all of a mile off. I wonder whether she could have lost the bell."

"I've thought of that, and said to meself that it might be also that she had become lost herself in trying to find it."

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Fred laughed.

"She hardly knows enough for *that*; and, if she found the bell she wouldn't know what to do with it; but if that leathern string around her neck had broken, it may be that she is close by. A cow after losing one milking is apt to feel so uncomfortable that she hurries home to be relieved; but what's the use of talking?" added Fred, throwing up his head and stepping off at a more lively pace; "we've started out to find her and that's all we have to do."

Perhaps a dozen acres had been cleared around the little town of Greville. This had been planted with corn, potatoes and grain, though scores of unsightly stumps were left and interfered with the cultivation of the soil. Beyond this clearing or open space extended the immense forests which at one time covered almost the entire face of our country. On the south side of the town and distant a furlong wound a creek, which after many shiftings and turnings found its way into the Mississippi and so at last into the Gulf of Mexico. The course of this stream was so winding that it extended on two sides of the town and ran in a westerly direction, exactly the opposite of that it finally had to take in order to reach its outlet.

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As a rule, it was about twenty feet wide with a depth of from one or two to six feet. It was subject to tremendous overflows which sometimes tripled its volume and increased its width to that of a river. At such times a series of enormous rocks through which the creek at "low tide" lazily wound its way, lashed the turbid current into a fury somewhat like that seen in the "whirlpool" below Niagara. Could you have stood on the shore and looked at the furiously struggling waters, you would have been sure that even if a man were headed up in a barrel, he could not have lived to pass through the hundred yards of rapids, though there was reason to believe that more than one Indian had shot them in his canoe.

Terry Clark told his friend that his search of the night before and of the morning following had been to the north and west of the settlement, so that it was hardly worth while to continue the hunt in that direction. The cows sometimes stood in the water, where so much switching of their tails was not needed to keep away the flies, and, though there was quite a growth of succulent grass on the clearing, the animals often crossed the creek and browsed through the woods and undergrowth on the other side.

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The boys were inclined to think that the brindle had taken that course during the afternoon and had actually gone astray,—something which a quadruped is less likely to do than a biped, though the former will sometimes make the blunder. There was nothing unreasonable in the theory that the bell had fallen from her neck and that the owner therefore might be not far away.

At intervals, Terry shouted "*Bos! bos! bos!*" the Latin call which the cow sometimes recognized, though she generally paid no attention to it. It was the same now, possibly due to the fact that she did not hear the call.

Reaching the edge of the stream, the boys began walking along the bank toward the left and scrutinizing the spongy earth close to the water. If the missing animal had crossed the creek she could not have failed to leave distinct footprints.

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CHAPTER II.

THE TINKLE OF A BELL.

The examination of the shore of the creek had lasted but a few minutes, when Terry Clark, pointing to the moist earth at their feet, called out in some excitement:

"Do ye mind that now?"

There, sure enough, were the footprints of a cow that had entered the stream from the same side on which the boys stood. The impressions could be seen for some distance in the clear water, which in the middle of the stream was no more than a yard deep, and they were plainly observed where the animal had emerged on the other side.

"I don't suppose there is any difference in the tracks of cows, but I guess, Terry, that we are safe in making up our minds we are on the trail of Brindle."

"I'm thinking the same," replied the other, who was not only looking across the creek, but into the woods beyond, as though he expected to catch sight of the cow herself; "though it may be the one that crossed there isn't the one that we're after."

Fred Linden was asking himself whether there was not some way in which they could reach the other side without going to the trouble of removing their shoes and leggins, and hunting a shallow portion, or allowing their garments to become saturated. He exclaimed: "Why didn't I think of it? There's our canoe!"

A number of these frail craft were owned in Greville, and Fred had a fine one himself, which was only a short distance off. Three minutes later the two reached it.

The barken structure was moored by means of a long rope to a tree a considerable distance from the water, so that in case of one of those sudden rises that sometimes took place, it would not be carried away by the freshet. The boat was quickly launched, and a few strokes of the paddle carried the two to the opposite bank of the stream.

"I wonder whether there is any danger of a rise," remarked Fred, as he carried the rope to a tree twenty feet distant and made it fast to a limb; "there was a good deal of thunder and lightning last night off to the east."

"But the creek doesn't come from that way," said the surprised Terry; "so what is the odds, as me father said he used to ask when the Injins was on all sides of him, and a panther in the tree he wanted to climb, and he found himself standing on the head of a rattlesnake."

"The creek winds through every point of the compass, so it doesn't make much difference, as you say, where it rains, since it is sure to make a rise; the only question is whether the rain was enough to affect the creek so that it will trouble us."

"If it was goin' to do that, wouldn't it have done so before this?" was the natural question of his companion.

"That depends on how far away the rain was."

The boys were not idle while talking. The canoe was soon made fast, and then they resumed their hunt for the estray. They were not skillful enough in woodcraft to trace the animal through the forest by the means that an Indian would have used, but they were hopeful that by taking a general direction they would soon find her. If she still had the bell tied around her neck, there was no reason why they should not be successful.

But while walking forward, Fred Linden asked a question of himself that he did not repeat aloud.

"Has she been stolen?"

This query was naturally followed by others. It certainly was unreasonable to think that a cow would leave her companions and deliberately wander off, at the time she was milked twice daily. She would speedily suffer such distress that she would come bellowing homeward for relief. If she really was an estray, she had missed two milkings—that of the previous night and the morning that succeeded.

It was certain, therefore, that if she was stolen, the thief had attended to her milking. But who could the thief be? That was the important question that Fred confessed himself unable to answer.

There had been occasional instances of white men who had stolen horses from the frontier settlements, but the lad could recall nothing of the kind that had taken place in that neighborhood; all of which might be the case without affecting the present loss, since it was evident that there must be a first theft of that nature.

But, somehow or other, Fred could not help suspecting that the red men had to do with the disappearance of the animal. I have intimated in another place that Greville had never been harmed by the Indians, who were scattered here and there through the country, for there was no comparison between them and the fierce Shawanoes, Wyandottes, Pottawatomies and other tribes, whose deeds gave to Kentucky its impressive title of the Dark and Bloody Ground; but among the different bands of red men who roamed through the great wilderness west of the Mississippi, were those who were capable of as atrocious cruelties as were ever committed by the fierce warriors further east.

What more likely, therefore, than that a party of these had stolen the cow and driven her away?

There were many facts that were in favor of and against the theory; the chief one against it was that if a party of Indians had driven off one cow, they would have taken more. Then, too, the soft earth that had revealed the hoof tracks ought to have shown the imprint of moccasins.

You will see, therefore, that Fred could speculate for hours on the question without satisfying himself. He was sorry that he and Terry had not brought their guns with them, and was half inclined to go back. It was not yet noon, and they had plenty of time in which to do so.

"Terry," said Fred, turning suddenly about and addressing his friend, who was walking behind him, "we made a mistake in not bringing our guns."

The Irish lad was about to answer when he raised his hand in a warning way and said:

"Hist!"

Both stood as motionless as the tree trunks about them, all their faculties centered in the one of hearing.

There was the low, deep roar which is always heard in a vast wood, made by the soft wind stealing among the multitudinous branches, and which is like the voice of silence itself. They were so far from the creek that its soft ripple failed to reach them.

"I don't hear any thing," said Fred at the end of a full minute.

"Nor do I," said Terry.

"Why then did you ask me to listen?"

"I was thinkin' be that token that we might hear something."

"What made you think so?"

"The tinkle of a bell."

"What!" exclaimed the amazed Fred, "are you sure?"

"That I am; just as I was about to speak, I caught the faint sound—just as we've both heard hundreds of times."

"From what point did it seem to come?"

His friend pointed due south.

"Strange it is that ye didn't catch the same."

"So I think; it may be, Terry, that you are mistaken, and you wanted to hear the bell so much that the sound was in your fancy."

The lad, however, would not admit this. He was sure there had been no mistake. Fred was about to argue further when all doubt was set at rest by the sound of a cow-bell that came faintly but clearly through the forest.

"You are right," said Fred, his face brightening up; "we are on the track of old Brindle sure enough. It's mighty strange though how she came to wander so far from home."

"She got lost I s'pose," replied Terry, repeating the theory that had been hit upon some time before.

"It may be, but it is the first instance I ever heard of, where an animal lost its way so easily."

The boys were in too high spirits, however, to try to explain that which puzzled them. The cow was a valuable creature, being the only one that belonged to the family with whom Terence lived, and who therefore could ill afford her loss.

The friends had pushed perhaps a couple hundred yards further when Terry called to Fred that he was not following the right course.

"Ye're bearing too much to the left; so much so indaad that if ye kaap on ye'll find yersilf left."

"Why, I was about to turn a little more in that direction," replied the astonished Fred; "you are altogether wrong."

But the other sturdily insisted that he was right, and he was so positive that he stopped short, and refused to go another step in the direction that his friend was following. The latter was just as certain that Terry was amiss, and it looked as if they had come to a deadlock.

"There's only one way to settle it," said Fred, "and that is for each of us to follow the route he thinks right. The cow can't be far off and we shall soon find out who is wrong. The first one that finds Brindle shall call to the other, and he'll own up what a stupid blunder he has made."

"Ye are speakin' me own sentiments," replied Terry, who kept looking about him and listening as if he expected every moment that the cow herself would solve the question. Fred Linden read the meaning of his action, and he, too, wondered why it was that when both had plainly caught the tinkle of the telltale bell, they should hear it no more. Strange that when it had spoken so clearly it should become silent, but such was the fact.

Little did either suspect the cause.

CHAPTER III.

AN ABORIGINAL PLOT.

The boys tried the plan of Fred Linden; he swerved slightly to the left, while Terry Clark made a sharp angle to the right. They never thought of getting beyond hearing of each other, and, but for the plentiful undergrowth they would have kept in sight. They had taken but a few steps when Fred looked around and found that he was alone. He could hear his young friend pushing his way among the trees, and once or twice he caught snatches of a tune that he was whistling—that being a favorite pastime of the lad when by himself.

"It's curious how he could make such a blunder," thought Fred, with a smile to himself; "he will go tramping around the woods only to find that he was nowhere in the neighborhood of the cow. Ah, the storm is not yet over."

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He was looking to the eastward, where the sky, as he caught a glimpse of it among the treetops and branches, was as black as if overcast with one huge thunder cloud.

"It was there it raged so violently last night, and the rain is falling in torrents again. We shall find the creek a river when we go back."

The sturdy youth pressed on fully two hundred yards more, when the old suspicion came back to him. There was something wrong. When he could not explain some things he was satisfied that it was because there was an element of evil in those things—something that boded ill to both him and his friend.

"I have traveled far enough since hearing that bell to pass a long ways beyond it," he said, compressing his lips and shaking his head; "and if that was Brindle that rang it the first time, she would have done it the second time."

Twice before Fred fancied he heard something moving among the undergrowth a short distance in advance, and a little to one side. The noise was now so distinct that he could no longer deceive himself; there was some specific cause for it.

27

"I guess Terry has worked over this way, finding what a mistake he has made—no! by gracious! it isn't Terry!"

Fred started in alarm, confident that it was an Indian that was moving through the wood. It will be admitted that there was cause for his fear, if such should prove to be the case, for he was without any firearms with which to defend himself; but while he stood meditating whether he should turn and take to his heels, he caught enough of a glimpse of the object to make out that it was a quadruped instead of a biped.

This was a great relief, though it did not remove all fear, for he was not in form to meet any of the wild beasts that one was liable to run against at any time. The next minute, he broke into a hearty laugh, for that which he saw was the lost cow, quietly browsing on the tender herbs, as though just turned loose by her owner.

"Well, that is funny," said the youth, walking hastily toward her; "this proves that I was right. You are a pretty one, old Brindle, to lead us on such a chase!"

28

The cow, hearing the voice and footsteps, stopped cropping, and with her motionless jaws dripping with leaves and buds, started at Fred as if she wasn't sure of his identity. She knew enough, however, to see that he was a friend, and so resumed her feeding.

Assuring himself that she was the estray, Fred looked at her bag to see the condition of that. It was only moderately full, proving that she had been milked later even than the preceding night.

Fred Linden had approached close enough to place his hand on the handsome creature, when he noticed—what indeed he knew before—the bell was not fastened to her neck; that explained why, after hearing the sound, it was heard no more.

"The cord has broken just after the tinkle, and let the bell fall to the ground; no wonder that it was not heard again. Some one has been kind enough to give Brindle a milking."

The words were yet in the mouth of Fred when he received a shock that for a moment held him speechless; a long distance to the right he caught the sound of the cow-bell!

29

It was precisely the same that he and his friend had noticed, and since the bell of Brindle was gone, there could be but one meaning to the signal; it was made by some one for the purpose of drawing the boys into a trap.

Without pausing to think over the dozen questions that came with this conclusion, Fred set off at the most hurried pace possible to warn his friend of his peril.

"He has no suspicion of any thing wrong, and is sure to do the very thing that he ought not to do."

Fred Linden was right in this conclusion. It can be readily understood, why no thought of peril should enter the brain of the Irish lad, who was never so sure that he was right and Fred wrong when the two parted to take different routes in search of the cow.

"It's a bright lad—is Fred," said Terry, "but there isn't any law that I knows of by which he is to be right ivery time and Mr. Terence Clark wrong. I'm going straight for the point where the tinkle of the bell came from."

30

The same thought puzzled him that puzzled Fred Linden; after walking more than the whole distance that first intervened, the cow was still invisible. There was nothing in the fact that when she had strayed so far from home, she should keep on in the same direction.

"It may be that she has heard something about the Pacific Ocean, and has set out to see for

herself whither the reports are correct," was the quaint thought of the Irish lad, as he pushed vigorously through the undergrowth, which was dense enough to turn him aside more than once and compel him to keep his wits about him to prevent going astray altogether.

Now and then he paused, naturally expecting (as did Fred), that he would hear more of the bell; but it is not necessary to say that, like his companion, he was disappointed. He had fixed the point whence came the noise so firmly in his mind, that he could not go wrong, though a boy of less experience in the woods would have been sure to do so.

Now, if any of you lads have ever driven cows or sheep, around whose necks bells were hung, you have noticed the natural fact that they have a sound peculiar to themselves. Referring particularly to cows, you may have observed the *jangle, jangle*, made by the motion of the head in cropping the grass, varied now and then by the confused jumble caused by the animal flinging her head over the back of her neck or fore part of the body to drive away the insects plaguing her. There is a certain regularity in all this which will continue for hours, and that may be said to be produced by the natural action of the animal, and which is altogether different from that made by the swaying motion of the hand.

But Terry Clark inherited a sharpness of wits from his parents, and, while pushing forward among the trees and undergrowth, it struck him that there were several curious features about the matter.

"It was a mistake, as Fred said," he thought more than once, "that we did not bring our guns with us."

Then the second sound of the cow-bell fell upon the ear of Fred Linden; Terry was within a hundred feet of the point whence it came, and he could not have heard it more distinctly had he been standing on the spot himself. The noise was so peculiar that a flood of misgiving overwhelmed him. The *tinkle, tinkle, tinkle*, was so regular that nothing was plainer than that no living quadruped could have made the sound.

"That was not the cow," whispered the startled Terry; "she has more sinse than to do any thing of the kind, as me uncle used to obsarve whin he was accused of kaapin' sober; but I'll find out by the same token what it all means."

Since he had no firearms with which to defend himself, and since he was sure he was threatened by danger, he ought to have hastened homeward; but his curiosity would not permit him to do so.

He advanced with all the caution possible, parting the obstructing bushes in front and stepping as lightly on the carpet of leaves as though he were a scout entering the camp of an enemy. He often stopped, listened and peered, not only in front and the sides, but to the rear. Whatever might take place, he did not intend to be surprised.

He had advanced a couple of rods in this manner, when a faint sound from the bell caught his ear, but was instantly suppressed, as though some one had stopped at the instant he started to sway it. Faint as was the tinkle, however, he was able to locate the precise point whence it came, and after a little hesitation he moved toward it.

All at once he caught sight of a figure in a crouching position, stepping softly among the trees and undergrowth. He stood still, and a moment later was able to distinguish the figure of an Indian warrior, bending slightly forward, advancing inch by inch and holding the cow-bell in his hand.

CHAPTER IV.

A PARTY OF THE THIRD PART.

The Indian warrior whom Terry Clark saw advancing stealthily through the undergrowth, cow-bell in hand, was a frightful object. His head and shoulders were bent forward, and he was stepping slowly and silently, while he glanced from right to left, as if searching for some object, or awaiting the occurrence of an expected event. His face was daubed with black and red paint, his long hair, as coarse as that of a horse's tail, dangled about his shoulders and alongside his neck, so that his eyes, when staring through it, seemed to be blazing among so much tangled brush. The ordinary hunting shirt, fringed in front, inclosed his chest, and was gathered at the waist by a sash or belt into which were thrust his hunting knife and tomahawk. The usual breechcloth, leggins and moccasins completed his dress.

He carried a fine rifle in his left hand, in a trailing position, while a powder horn and bullet pouch were supported by a string passing over his shoulder. He was what may be called a

thoroughly equipped warrior, without taking into account the cow-bell, which was suspended by the thumb and fingers of the right hand. It was thus he must have grasped the implement when he caused it to give out the sound that caught the ear of Fred Linden and Terry Clark. But at the moment the Irish lad saw him, and for some minutes after, he held the bell in such careful poise that it gave no sound at all.

The Indian probably suspected his imitation of the action of the animal was so poor that it was likely to cause distrust, and therefore he was sparing in resorting to the stratagem.

Now, nothing can be clearer than that if the warrior was in such a plain view of Terry Clark, the latter was equally exposed to his eye. The Indian was moving in his guarded fashion over a course at right angles to that followed by the lad, who was quick to realize his peril. He knew that every second he remained thus exposed he was likely to be seen. He had hardly taken a glance of his enemy, when he stooped so that his knees almost touched the ground, and moved as noiselessly and quickly as he could to the nearest tree, behind which he took shelter.

36

This tree was an oak, large enough to hide two such boys, standing side by side, so that the youth felt secure for the time.

"Ah, if I only had me gun," was the regret that naturally came to him; "I would quickly settle with the spalpeen that stole old Brindle, and now wants to run away wid me."

It will be admitted that the situation of Terry was peculiar, for he was quite close to the warrior, who, there was every reason to believe, was hunting for him, and who was so nigh that there was imminent danger of discovery. It might be asked why the redskin should have taken this course, for in some respects it had more than one absurd feature. If he wanted to kill a white person, all this maneuvering with a cow-bell was ridiculous, while his conduct from first to last was in some respects unreasonable. The best explanation was that which was made sometime afterward by a person, who as yet has not been introduced to the reader, but who, when he does appear, will be admitted to be the best judge. I allude to Deerfoot the Shawanoe.

37

The Indian with the cow-bell was a Winnebago warrior, whose home was a long ways to the northward, but who had gone thither in company with several others on what may be called a tour of investigation. The driving off of the cow was probably an inspiration of the moment. The Indians kept her until they had got all the milk they wanted, first removing the bell so that her friends could not recover her until they were through. The stratagem which I have been describing was an afterthought. None of the Winnebagos except the one who tried the plan would have any thing to do with it, though they were willing enough that every white person in the settlement of Greville should perish, if the same could be brought about without risk to them.

Left to himself, the Winnebago decided to make a prisoner of whomsoever should be sent to find the cow. He had reason to believe that this person would be a youth, and since every thing was so quiet in that section, he was not likely to be armed. Hence, it would be an easy matter to decoy him a goodly distance from the settlement, when the warrior could pounce upon, make him a prisoner and compel him to go with him. After the couple were far enough from the settlement the lad could be put to death, if his captor or the party to which the captor belonged, should so elect.

38

Terry Clark had stood behind the sheltering tree for perhaps five minutes, when he became aware of an alarming fact: the warrior with the bell was slowly approaching him. The faint tinkle that it gave out once or twice told this, and when finally the lad ventured to peep around the side of the tree, the sight was a startling one. The Indian had risen almost to the upright posture, and holding the gun and bell as described, was moving directly toward the oak behind which the boy stood. Moreover at the moment the latter took the cautious look, the visage of the Indian showed that he was looking straight at the tree.

"By the powers!" gasped Terry, "but the spalpeen observed me, and I'm thinkin' that he saw me before I did him."

39

It was not at all unlikely that such was the case. The Indian may have felt sure of his victim, and so he indulged in a little by-play, as a cat often does with a mouse. Such a cruel proceeding was characteristic of his race.

The belief that this was the case placed Terry Clark in a most trying position. He was without the means with which to defend himself, and in fact was hopeless. It was useless to try to run away, for if the warrior could not overtake him at once, he could bring him down with his rifle.

You know how rare a thing it is for an Irishman to submit meekly, even when there is no hope in resistance. Terry muttered:

"If he lays hands on me, there's going to be a fight; I wish Fred was near, that he could see that I git fair play."

No person could have been more in earnest than was the Irish lad.

"I'll wait till his head comes round the corner of that tree and then I'll give him a whack that'll tumble him over on his back, afore he knows what's the matter wid him; then I'll amuse myself wid hammerin' him after he is down till I git tired and then I'll take his gun and knife and tomahawk and the bell and make him walk before me to the sittlement."

40

The lad had just gone over in his mind this roseate programme, when a soft tinkle told him that the Winnebago was within a few steps of the tree; and at the same moment that the youth made this interesting discovery, another still more astonishing one broke upon him.

Just fifty feet away and behind a trunk very similar to the one that sheltered the lad, stood a second Indian warrior. His position was such that he was in plain view of Terry, though the Winnebago could not see him except when the latter should approach quite close to the shelter of the boy. The strange Indian was closely watching the hostile one, and, with that remarkable intuition that sometimes comes to a person in grave crises, Terry was convinced that he was an enemy of the Winnebago, though whether a friend of the youth was not so certain.

41

In his amazement, the lad for the moment forgot his own danger and gave his attention to the stranger, who was the most striking looking warrior he had ever seen. He seemed to be about eighteen or twenty years of age, and was the picture of manly grace and beauty.

He had long, luxuriant black hair which hung about his shoulders, being gathered by a loose band at the neck, so as to keep it from getting in front of his eyes. In the crown of this natural covering were thrust three stained eagle feathers, while there were two rows of colored beads around the neck. The fringed hunting shirt which reached almost to his knees was of a dull, yellow color and the sash or belt around the waist was of a dark red. A small but handsome bracelet encircled his left wrist, and the fringes of his leggins were of varied and brilliant hues, as were the beaded moccasins that incased his shapely feet. A tomahawk and knife were in his girdle, while he held a finely ornamented rifle in his right hand, the manner in which he manipulated the weapon showing that he was left-handed.

The face was strikingly fine, the nose being slightly aquiline, the cheek bones less prominent, and the whole contour more symmetrical than is generally the case with his race. There was something in the situation that evidently amused him, for Terry saw him smile so unmistakably that he noticed his small and regular white teeth.

42

It was plain that he was watching the movements of the Winnebago, though he said nothing, and made no gesture to the lad, whose wondering look he must have understood. Be that as it may, the sight of the strange Indian, and the belief that he was an enemy of the other with the cow-bell, inspired the Irish lad with a courage that he would not have known had the other warrior been absent.

"He's waiting to see how I condooct meself when the spalpeen lays hands on me," thought Terence; "he won't have to wait long."

The youth was right. The crouching Winnebago, doubtless feeling that he had no immediate use for the bell that had served him so well, dropped it to the ground beside him, and holding only his rifle in hand, stepped forward with the same cat-like tread that had marked his advance from the first. He knew that his victim was shrinking behind the trunk of the oak, and he was having his own peculiar sport with him.

43

So intense was the attention of Terry that he heard distinctly the footsteps of the warrior, who a moment later was close enough to touch the tree with his hand, had he been so minded.

44

CHAPTER V.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Terry Clark, the Irish lad, placed his right foot behind the left, his weight equally supported on both, and stood as rigid as iron, with both fists clinched and half raised, in the attitude of one holding himself ready to use nature's weapons to his utmost ability.

He heard the soft moccasin press the layer of brown autumn leaves, and the next moment the point of a knobby, painted nose came slowly in sight around the side of the trunk, followed by the sloping forehead, the hideous face and the shoulders of the warrior, whose right hand was held so far to the rear with the gun that it was the last to come into view.

As the Winnebago caught sight of the white-faced boy, his countenance was disfigured by a grin that made it more repulsive than before.

45

"Oogh! brudder!—oogh!—Yenghese—"

Just then Terry Clark let fly. He was a lusty lad, and he landed both fists, one after another, squarely in the painted face, with such force that the warrior was knocked completely off his feet. He went over backward as though from the kick of a horse; but, contrary to the hopes of his assailant, he did not let go of his gun. Had he done so, the youth would have caught it up and shot him before he could regain his feet.

The blow was most presumptuous, and would have insured the death of the one who gave it but for the intervention of the second Indian, who seemed to take but a couple of bounds from the tree near which he was standing when he landed on the spot. The infuriated Winnebago was in

the act of clambering to his feet, when he caught sight of the lithe, graceful warrior, standing only a couple of steps away, with loaded rifle pointed at him.

"Dog of a Winnebago," he said in a voice slightly above an ordinary tone; "if he harms the pale face, he shall die!"

There are some expressions so forcible that they can not be made more so. The young Indian spoke in the lingo of the Winnebago, whose totem he had recognized, but his posture, erect on his feet, with his cocked rifle in such a position that he had only to pull the trigger to send the bullet through the bronzed skull before him;—all this required no words of explanation. The Winnebago grasped the situation, and, to use the homely expression common at this day, he saw that the other "had the drop" on him.

The Indian, though larger, older, heavier and stronger, was taken at such disadvantage that he ceased his effort to rise, and looked up at his conqueror with a helplessness so grotesque that under other circumstances it would have caused a smile. Indeed, Terry Clark did indulge in a slight laugh, for he saw that it was safe to do so; the Winnebago was on the ground before his master.

"If ye want me to ring the old coow-bell, I'll be glad to obleege, for the performance looks as if a little moosic would give tone to the same. Howsumever, I'll step back and let this good looking young gintleman run the show."

Thereupon Terry withdrew several paces and watched the proceedings with a depth of interest that can be fully understood.

The look of the Winnebago, who was half reclining on his side, supporting his body with the hand that grasped his gun, plainly indicated the question that came from his lips.

"Why does my brother look with evil eyes on the Wolf, who has come from the lodges of the Winnebagos? Are not all red men brothers?"

"Deerfoot is a Shawanoe, whose warriors have consorted with those of the Winnebagos; but Deerfoot has left his lodge beyond the Mississippi and lives alone in the woods. He will not hurt the brave Winnebago who fights men, but he slays the Wolf that bites the children of the pale faces, that have never harmed him."

Possibly the Wolf was inclined to argue the matter with the Shawanoe, who had caught him at such disadvantage; but the manner and words of Deerfoot showed that he was in no mood for discussion.

"What does my brother want?" asked the Winnebago, in a voice that proved all fight had left him. The most, indeed, that he ventured to do was gently to rub his forehead and nose, where the fists of the sturdy Terry Clark had landed.

"Let the Wolf rise to his feet, but when he does so, his gun must lie on the ground."

This was a harsh order, but there was no help for it; the Indian hesitated a moment, and then, black and scowling, he slowly assumed the upright posture, and, folding his arms across his chest, looked in the face of the bright-eyed Deerfoot, to signify that he was awaiting his next command.

"The Wolf shall now turn his face away from Deerfoot."

The Winnebago obeyed the order as promptly as if he were a soldier undergoing drill.

"Let my brother now raise his eyes, until he sees the beech with the white trunk," said Deerfoot, using the word "brother" for the first time.

The object to which he alluded was perhaps fifty yards distant, the light color of the bark showing only here and there among the branches and undergrowth that happened to be less frequent than in other directions. The Wolf signified that he recognized the tree to which his conqueror referred.

"Now let my brother run; when he reaches the beech he can leap behind it, and it will shield his body; if my brother is slow Deerfoot may fire his gun and Wolf will never bite again."

The Winnebago wanted no explanation of this threat. It was hard for him to depart, leaving his rifle, but it was harder for him to lose his life, and he did not hesitate as to the choice. He made one tremendous bound that carried him a dozen feet, and then sped through the wood like a frightened deer. When he had passed half of the intervening distance, he seemed to fancy that he was not making satisfactory time for the Shawanoe, who, he doubtless imagined, was standing with leveled gun, finger on the trigger. He therefore began leaping from side to side, so as to disconcert the aim of the dreaded Deerfoot. In the hope also of further confusing him, he emitted several frenzied whoops, which added such grotesqueness to the scene that Terry Clark threw back his head and made the woods ring with laughter.

"I never saw a frog hop about like that, which beats any show."

Deerfoot did not have his rifle cocked or in position. The moment the Wolf started, he saw how great his fright was, and, lowering the flint of the weapon, he rested the stock on the ground and watched the antics of the fugitive. The Shawanoe, unlike most of his race, had a vein of humor in his composition. When Terry broke into mirth, he too laughed, but it was simply a smile, accompanied by a sparkle of his bright eyes which showed how much he enjoyed the scene.

The moment the Wolf arrived at the beech, he darted behind it, and for the first time looked

over his shoulder. The sight could not have been reassuring, for he continued his frenzied flight until the keen ear of the Shawanoe could no longer hear him threshing through the wood.

By this time Terry Clark had made up his mind that whoever the new arrival might be, he was a friend. The Irish lad had not been able to understand any of the words that passed between the two, though their actions were eloquent enough to render much explanation unnecessary. But a person who treated the Winnebago in such style could not feel otherwise than friendly toward the one in whose behalf the interference was made. Terry blushed a little as he walked forward and reached out his honest hand.

"If it's all the same to ye, I'll be glad to give that purty hand of yours an owld-fashioned shake, such as a fellow sometimes gits when he catches the chills an' faver."

Deerfoot looked at the jolly lad with an odd expression, as he gave him his hand, which, I need not say, was shaken with enthusiasm. The young Shawanoe smiled in his own shadowy way and returned the pressure warmly.

"My brother is happy," said he when the salute was finished; "it makes the heart of Deerfoot glad that he could be his friend."

"Ye were a friend indade, though ye'll admit, Deerfut, that I toppled over the spalpeen in foine style, now didn't I?"

"The Wolf who is a Winnebago, fell as though the lightning struck him."

"How is it," asked Terry with no little curiosity, "that ye, who are as full-blooded an Injin as the Winnebago, can talk the English with almost as foine an accint as meself?"

"Deerfoot has lived among the pale faces; when he was a small child he went with the Shawanoes to harm the white men, but they took him prisoner; they treated him kindly, and told him about God, who loves all His children, whether they be white or red, or the color of the night; they showed him how to read books, and to make his name and words on paper, so that others might read."

"Can ye read and write?" asked the astonished Terry.

Deerfoot smiled and nodded his head.

"Well, well, that bates ivery thing!" said Terry, who instantly repeated the absurd belief of many of his race, by adding, "I didn't s'pose that an Injin could learn."

Without replying to the last remark, the Shawanoe, looking the lad steadily in the eye, said, "Deerfoot has a message for Fred Linden; does my brother know him?"

"Do I know him?" repeated Terry; "I know the same better than I know mesilf; he started wid me to hunt the coow, and I rickons that he can't be very fur away."

"He's coming," quietly said Deerfoot, looking off to the left of Terry, as if about to salute a new arrival. The Irish lad wheeled in his quick way, but his sharp eyes caught no glimpse of his approaching friend.

CHAPTER VI.

FRED LINDEN RECEIVES A MESSAGE FROM THE OZARK CAMP.

As soon as Fred Linden discovered the deception respecting the cow-bell, he made all haste toward the point whence came the sound, in the hope of warning Terry in time to save him from treachery. You will understand how quickly events passed when told that, although he came almost directly to the spot, he did not reach it until Deerfoot the Shawanoe asked for him. This wonderful Indian, of whom I shall have considerably more to tell, heard the coming of the lad whom he had never seen, before either the eye or ear of Terry Clark could detect his approach.

As may well be supposed, Fred Linden was amazed at what met his eyes. The sight of Terry in friendly converse with a strange Indian was the opposite of what he expected to see. He slackened his hurried walk and looked inquiringly at Terry. The latter could talk fast when he chose, and the few sentences he rattled off as his companion came up made the matter tolerably clear.

While the questioning and talk were going on, Deerfoot stood leaning on his long gun and gazing with a certain natural dignity at the two friends. He said nothing nor did he appear to show any special curiosity, though had any one studied his countenance, he would have seen that he was watching Fred Linden. He had said that he carried a message to him, and it was no more than natural that he should wish to know something about him.

As for Fred himself he did not try to hide his profound interest in the remarkable warrior who had appeared at such an opportune time, but of whom he had never before heard a word. He knew that the settlers along the frontier often found valuable allies in the friendly Indians, and he concluded that this red man was one of those who, having been maltreated by his own people or kindly used by the whites, had given his loyalty to the latter; for in the brief narrative of Terry Clark, he had time only to tell the leading facts about the rescue of himself. Just then, therefore, the Irish lad knew more about Deerfoot than did the American.

56

But it takes only a little time for such a group to become acquainted with each other. A general handshaking followed, and it happened more than once that all three were talking at the same moment. Had any one been able to translate the expression of Deerfoot's countenance, he would have seen that he was pleased with both the lads whom he now met for the first time. There was a rollicking good nature, a cheery courage and ever bubbling hopefulness about Terry that were contagious, and like so much sunshine that went with him wherever he went.

Fred Linden was of that manly mold and rugged appearance that he would have drawn favorable attention wherever he might be.

Such a lad in these days would have been picked out as a born athlete, one who was capable, with proper training, to become a first-class ball player, oarsman or boxer. He was a swift runner, a strong leaper, an expert rifle shot, and his rugged frame and rough, outdoor life gave him an endurance that few men could surpass. He was as tall as Deerfoot, with broad shoulders, muscular arms and legs, clear, keen eyes, a fine chest and a symmetrical frame.

57

The clothes of the two boys, it is hardly necessary to say, were of homespun, for a hundred years ago it would have been hard for them to procure any other kind of goods. The short coat was somewhat like those used to-day by bicyclists, reaching only a short distance below the waist, where the girdle was fastened in front. The trowsers, of the same material, reached to the knees, below which were the hunting leggins, common along the border. Then came the warm, woolen stockings and thick, heavy shoes, while the head was surmounted by a woolen cap, made by the deft fingers at home, and without any pattern. It was soft, and having no forepiece, sat on the head in whichever position it happened to be first placed. In this respect it resembled the valuable sealskins of the present day. The coats of the lads were open in front, and within were the pockets, which they used as required, the trowsers also being provided with a couple of these prime necessities.

58

When the rattling conversation had gone on for several minutes, Terry ran a few steps and picked up the bell that the Indian had placed on the ground. The string which had held it about the neck of the animal was missing, having probably been cut by the knife of the impatient Wolf.

"I'll take the same back home wid me and put it on Brindle if I iver maat her; I shouldn't be so 'stonished that I couldn't spake if I should find that the spalpeen had killed her."

"No," said Fred, "she isn't harmed; I found her off yonder, cropping the buds and leaves, as innocently as though she hadn't done any thing wrong in leading us on this long chase. I started her toward home, and if she keeps up the gait she must be pretty near there by this time."

This was good news to Terry, for the loss of the animal would have been serious to the family of Mr. MacClaskey, her owner. The Irish lad had hardly picked up the bell when Deerfoot pointed to the gun lying on the ground, where it had been left by the Wolf.

59

"That belongs to my brother."

The delighted Terry could hardly believe what was told him, and he stood looking doubtfully at Deerfoot, as if suspecting he had heard him amiss.

"It was you who captured the gun, Deerfoot, and so, if it belongs to any one, ye are the spalpeen."

The Shawanoe looked down at his own handsome weapon and shook his head. He had no need of any other weapon. Besides, this singular youth could not have conscientiously taken it. He did not feel justified in keeping it for his own use, no matter if in sore need of such a weapon; but, since the Winnebago had made his demonstration against Terry Clark, and was compelled to leave the gun behind, when he was permitted to go, it seemed proper that the prize should fall into the hands of the Irish lad.

What gave special propriety to the act was the fact that, although Fred Linden was the owner of a fine gun, Terry had none. When his father lost his life, his rifle was never recovered, and though there was one in the family of MacClaskey, the youth had no claim upon it. He longed for such a weapon, with a longing that it would be hard to understand. The prize, therefore, was appreciated to its full value. He picked it up with an embarrassed grin, which quickly became natural when he turned it over in his hands and saw what an excellent piece it was.

60

"More than likely it belonged to a white man in the first place," said Fred; "so it is right enough that it should come back to one of his own race."

"It's loaded," said Terry, slightly raising the hammer and noticing the powder in the pan. Then he brought the gun to his shoulder and pointing it at the white trunk of the beech, which partly showed through the intervening branches and undergrowth, he said:

"If the spalpeen should peep out from behind that tree, I'm thinkin' I could hit him a harder blow than when I landed me two fists on his mug."

61

"The Winnebago is a long ways off," said Deerfoot, with a shake of his head; "he may meet my

brother some day, but it will not be in this place."

The young Shawanoe having learned all that was to be learned about his young friends, now reached his hand in the breast of his hunting shirt and drew out a small, closely-printed Bible, from between the leaves of which he took a piece of paper that had been folded several times. He glanced at the superscription, as if to make sure it was right, and then handed it to Fred, who, as may be supposed, took it with astonishment. He recognized the penciled writing as that of his father.

Parting the folds, he read the following:

MY DEAR FRED: **

You know that when we left home there were three of us, Hardin, Bowlby and myself. There are three of us still, but Bowlby considers himself of no account for some weeks to come, because of a hurt to his foot which will prevent his getting around for a long time. Such being the case, I have concluded, now that I have the chance, to send for you to join us. You are old enough and strong enough to make a full hand, and you can give us good help. Since we have all the animals, you will come afoot, but you will find no trouble in keeping to the trail, which has been traveled often enough to make it plain. It is no more than a hundred miles from Greville to our camp at the foot of the Ozark Mountains, so you ought to have no difficulty in reaching here in the course of three or four days. Love to your mother and Edith.

I send this by a young Shawanoe warrior, called Deerfoot. He is the most remarkable Indian I ever knew. I shall have a good deal to tell you about him when you reach here.

YOUR FATHER.

"Deerfoot bids his brothers good-by," said the young Indian, offering his hand, when he saw Fred had finished reading his letter; "he hopes that he shall see them again."

"It won't be our fault if he doesn't," was the cordial response of Fred Linden, in which Terry heartily joined him. After a few more pleasant words they parted, Deerfoot following in the footsteps of the fleeing Winnebago, while the others moved to the northward in the direction of the creek. They turned aside a little from the direct course so as to hunt for Brindle, that Fred had seen, but she was not found. To their delight, however, they saw her footprints on the edge of the creek, proving that she had gone home with the directness of one who felt remorse for wandering from the straight path. She had swum the stream, and was doubtless before the MacClaskey cabin at that moment.

But standing close to the edge of the creek, the boys became aware of a hard fact: it had not only risen with great rapidity during the last half hour, so as to become a rushing torrent, but it was still rising so fast that it was extremely dangerous for the boys to try to cross it in the canoe. Indeed, they hesitated to make the attempt, but finally concluded to do so.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HUNTERS OF OZARK.

I must tell you how it was that Deerfoot the Shawanoe came to bring the important letter of George Linden to his son Frederick.

It has already been stated that it was the custom of a party of hunters and trappers to leave the settlement of Greville in the autumn of each year and spend most of the cold weather among the streams at the foot of a certain part of the Ozark Mountains. At that period, the fur bearing animals abounded in the section, as they were found in hundreds of other portions of the vast area known under the general name of the Louisiana Territory. You must bear in mind that there were thousands of square miles that had not been trodden by a white man, and so sparse were the Indian villages that large portions of the country remained to be visited even by them.

Beaver, otter, foxes, bears, and buffaloes were the chief animals that were afterward driven west by the advancing tide of civilization, until the agents of the Missouri and Western Fur Companies were forced to do most of their work in the far west and north-west, where they came in collision with that vast monopoly known as the Hudson Bay Company, which, until recent years, not only trapped and hunted throughout Oregon, but along the Pacific coast as far south as California.

George Linden, Rufus Hardin and James Bowlby composed the party who, in the autumn of the year of which I am writing, rode each a horse a hundred miles to the south of the frontier settlement of Greville, and pitched their tent at the foot of the Ozark range. Beside the animals

ridden, each hunter took a pack-horse to help bring back the peltries that were to be gathered during the cold weather. As a matter of course, they were provided with guns and plenty of munitions, and indeed with every necessity for their limited wants. They had spent several winters there and knew what was before them. They had hunted and trapped for years in other parts of the great west, and more than once had made the long journey to the post of St. Louis to dispose of their furs, a necessity that, as I have explained, was removed by the annual visit of the agents with their long train of pack-horses to gather up the peltries.

66

And so, without giving any of the interesting particulars of the ride southward from Greville, let us take a look at the little party gathered at their primitive camp in the wild Ozark region.

The six horses had been relieved of their burdens on reaching the place, and were turned loose to crop the grass that was plentiful in many places. Although there was snow now and then through the winter, there was hardly enough to cause any suffering on the part of the animals. When the storms, however, were violent or prolonged, the hardy beasts were provided with some of the stores of dried grass that was kept in stock, as may be said. In case that gave out they could make shift with the cottonwood and other trees, whose bark was not lacking in succulent qualities.

67

Although a tolerable shelter could have been found in any one of the numerous caves within reach, the hunters preferred to erect a rough cabin, that was almost strong enough to withstand a cyclone. The keen axes enabled them to trim off the interfering limbs, and they were joined at the corners so well that very little, if any, rain or snow could force its way through. Other logs and branches were laid across the top and ends fastened to the logs beneath by means of withes, so that the roof was not likely to be carried away unless the cabin itself went with it.

On the top of the roof was a thick layer of branches and leaves, packed so closely that little moisture could find its way through. There were no windows, for none was needed. The single door in front was large enough to allow free egress and ingress. At night, when there was a possibility that some curious wild animal might come snuffing around, the door was closed by means of a framework of thick limbs, also fastened together with withes, swinging on leathern hinges, and made secure by a brace leaning against it from the inside.

68

Within this structure were stored their supplies, and the blankets on which they slept were spread upon the bare ground. Their slumber was sweeter, too, than it would have been had they stretched themselves on "downy beds of ease," for health and weariness are two soporifics which art can never supplant.

The traps and appurtenances used in their toil were never taken away from the place, for there was no call to do so. Such repairs as were needed from time to time were made in the cabin or on the spot, as the necessity arose. The rifles, of course, furnished the food needed, while an abundance of fish could be taken at any time from the streams in the neighborhood.

A diet solely of flesh and fish is not acceptable to any one. Therefore, among the supplies annually brought to the cabin, were a quantity of coarse flour, meal, sugar, coffee, salt and tea. It may be said, that in one respect they were like modern campers out, except that they took the wrong season of the year for what so many boys consider the acme of enjoyment.

69

There was little in the appearance of the three men to call for special description. All were in middle life, strong, rugged, and inured to hardship. Linden was rather tall, his face covered by a heavy beard in which not a gray hair had yet appeared. Hardin was fully as tall, with shoulders somewhat bent, and his scant, dark beard was plentifully sprinkled with gray. Bowlby was short and stocky in appearance. When in the woods he allowed his black beard to grow all over his face, but at home he was always smooth-shaven. He was of a swarthy complexion, inclined to be silent, and often moody, but like his companions he was brave, industrious and patient, holding a strong dislike of all Indians, though not inclined to go to any unjustifiable length in his feelings.

The dress of the three men was similar to that of Fred and Terry, which has already been described. No one of them knew any thing about the modern overcoat or cloak. If there should come a spell of unusually severe weather, they had only to wrap a blanket or buffalo robe about the shoulders when compelled to visit the traps or remain long outdoors. Should it become necessary to kindle a fire within the cabin for the sake of warmth, a broad, flat stone was removed from an opening in the roof directly over the blaze, and the smoke, if so inclined, found its way to the clear air outside. The cooking was done under the adjoining trees. Of course it was of the most primitive character, but it suited, and that is all that is necessary.

70

The hunters reached their cabin about the middle of the forenoon of an autumn day. They had eaten their regular morning meal, and they got to work without delay. The horses were unloaded and turned adrift, the stores safely housed, the blankets spread on the floor of simple earth in the cabin, and then the men scattered to look after their traps. This was a large job, for the implements had to be examined and many of them slightly repaired, after which they must be carried long distances and set.

These traps were of the ordinary pattern, such as have been in general use for hundreds of years. The iron jaws was forced wide apart and kept in place by a catch, which was sprung by a slight pressure on the broad, flat portion in the middle. The trap being carefully hidden from sight, the unsuspecting animal had hardly time to rest one paw on this plate, when the fierce jaws, impelled by steel springs of prodigious strength, came together with the suddenness of lightning, and the animal, whatever he be, was in a grip from which there was no escape.

71

You can understand the care required to set these traps so that they would do their work. The

beaver is highly intelligent, and quick to detect the signs of man's presence. Nothing can tempt him to venture where he sees that his worst enemy has been before him. The fox is the synonym of cunning, and will often outwit the shrewdest trapper. He will walk around the trap and stealthily secure the bait without harm to himself. One of those animals has been known to reach forward and spring the implement, jerking back his paw quickly enough to escape the sharp teeth. A fox, too, when caught in a steel trap will sometimes gnaw off the leg just above where it is imprisoned, and afterward go through life with little inconvenience on three legs. You may be sure that he is never caught again in that fashion.

72

It was easy to see where the sagacious beavers were in the habit of leaving the water and climbing the bank. The trap was carefully placed below the surface out of sight, and often it had no bait at all, for it would seem that the bait itself was liable to awaken the suspicion of the beavers. Occasionally, however, when it was desirable to attract them to the spot, an oily odoriferous substance obtained from the animal itself was smeared over the ground near the bank.

The otters were scarcer than the beavers, but were hunted much in the same manner. For foxes and fur-bearing animals that roamed the woods, the steel trap was baited with such food as they were fond of (which was about every thing), and they were so numerous through that part of the territory that the hunters had little difficulty in securing what was wanted.

At the end of the second day all the traps were in position, and the three friends were grouped on the outside of the cabin smoking their pipes and talking over the outlook for the winter, which all agreed was favorable.

73

The bison or buffaloes, of which mention has been made, were found in the open spaces or prairies where there was plenty of grass. No such multitudinous herds were seen as have been gathered in later years on the western prairies, but there were enough to make very lively hunting for the trio, who had shot and skinned several while on their way to the beaver runs.

Within a half hour's walk of the camp was a beaver dam fully half a mile wide, built with astonishing skill and strength. The backwater flooded the country for many square miles, and gave the remarkable animals just the place they wanted for their curious huts, of which I shall have something to tell you further on.

74

CHAPTER VIII.

A WELCOME ACQUAINTANCE.

On the fourth day after the arrival of the hunters at their cabin, the accident of which Mr. Linden made mention befell Bowlby. It was early in the morning, when the three were making their round of visits to the traps. Since no two inspected the same ones, they were quite widely separated from each other. Bowlby was walking over a rocky stretch of land alongside the creek when a loose stone turned under his foot, giving his ankle such a wrench that when he tried to stand he found he could not bear the least weight on it. It was one of those hurts that are more painful and troublesome than a fractured limb.

"Here's a pretty go," he growled, as he sat down on the ground, his face contorted with pain; "it'll be a long time before I'll be able to stand, and the boys will have to bring one of the hosses here or else carry me home. *Hello!*"

75

He shouted at the top of his voice, feeling no alarm, for he knew that his friends would come to his relief before long, even if they did not hear his voice; but then he reflected, as he sat on the ground beside the two beavers that he had killed and was carrying to his home, that he was in bad form if a wild animal should assail him, or there should happen to be a hostile Indian prowling in the vicinity. He had left his gun at the cabin, as was his practice, since he needed all his strength to bring in the products of the traps.

He was startled, therefore, after his third shout; an Indian warrior, fully armed, walked out of the wood and came toward him; but his signs of peace, and more than all, the words he uttered, removed his fears.

"My brother suffers; Deerfoot will help him to his cabin."

"If that's so," said the greatly relieved Bowlby, "you're just the chap I'm waiting for. We'll leave these beavers here for the others to come after, and if you'll let me lean on your shoulder I guess I can hobble back; but I'll have to lean heavy," he added, looking doubtfully at the Indian, "and you ain't much more than a likely lad."

76

"Let my brother try me," said Deerfoot, with a smile.

The disabled hunter did try him, often compelled, as he was, to bear to such an extent upon his new friend that it may be said the latter sustained half his weight. The progress was slow, and when they reached a small stream of water, Bowlby sat down and allowed the young Shawanoe to bathe the inflamed limb. Great relief was felt.

During this labored walk homeward, the two naturally talked a good deal together and learned much about each other. Deerfoot said that he had often hunted through the surrounding country, and he told why it was he had found it necessary to leave his tribe on the other side of the Mississippi. He said that he had spent more than one night in the deserted cabin of Bowlby and his friends during the summer months, when he found himself belated in the vicinity, and he once shot a wolf that was resolved on entering against his protest. It was his intention to make a call upon the hunters, and if they needed his aid, he was glad to give it in the way of helping trap or shoot game. You need not be told that though James Bowlby felt an innate dislike of the American race, there was now one exception: henceforth he was the sworn friend of Deerfoot the Shawanoe.

77

Linden and Hardin had got back from making their rounds, and were wondering what could have delayed their friend, when they saw him limping painfully on one foot, and supported by a fine looking young Indian warrior. Their astonishment was great, for they could not understand what it meant. Linden hastened to the help of Bowlby, but he waved him aside and said no one could do as well as Deerfoot.

While Hardin went out to bring in the two beavers that had been taken from the traps by Bowlby, the latter was assisted to a seat on the log in front of the cabin. Then Deerfoot insisted on giving attention to the injured limb. It had swollen a great deal since he bathed it. There was nothing in the cabin in the way of ointment or liniment, but Deerfoot hastened into the wood and soon came back with the leaves of some plant whose virtues seemed to be well known to him. These were wrapped in a piece of linen, which the establishment managed to afford, and pounded to a pulp, and then the poultice was gently applied to the inflamed ankle. Bowlby declared that it felt better at once, but his face lengthened when Deerfoot told him that it would be a moon, or several weeks, before he would fully recover the use of his limb.

78

"That will make us short-handed, and we need every one," said Mr. Linden; "I wish Fred was here to give us help."

"I think I can ride my hoss to Greville," said Bowlby, "and bring him back with me."

"That is hardly worth while."

"Where is the home of my brother?" gently asked Deerfoot.

"At the settlement of Greville, about a hundred miles to the north."

"Deerfoot knows where it is," he replied; "he will take a message for his brother, for his footsteps lead him that way."

79

"You're a mighty clever Indian; I will be ever so much obliged to you," said Linden; "I will write a few lines to my boy, which will explain our trouble, though I have no doubt you could take the message just as well; but it is such an unexpected one that the boy might doubt it unless it was in my own writing. See?"

The Shawanoe nodded his head to signify that it was all clear to him. Linden passed within the cabin, where he hurriedly wrote the few lines that are already known to the reader, folded the paper, and wrote on the outside:

"FREDERICK LINDEN, **ususual
Grevil."

He then handed it to Deerfoot, saying:

"There is no special hurry, and if you are in the neighborhood of Greville, and can make it convenient to leave that at my house, it will be a great kindness to me."

"If the Great Spirit does not will different it shall be in his hands before the setting of three more suns, but," added Deerfoot, looking at the superscription on the back of the paper, "has not my brother made a mistake?"

80

"What do you mean?"

"When Deerfoot writes the word 'Greville,' he adds two letters more than does my brother; perhaps, though, Deerfoot is wrong."

No pen can describe the amazement that appeared on the faces of Linden and Bowlby. Here was a young Indian teaching a white man old enough to be his father how to spell in the English language! Was the like ever known?

For a full minute neither of the hunters spoke. They were sitting on the log, while Deerfoot was standing in front of them. He held his rifle in his right hand and the folded piece of paper in his left, while he looked inquiringly down in the faces of the two men, whose mouths and eyes were open, as though they could not believe the evidence of their own senses. Finally, with a deep sigh, Linden slowly rose to his feet—

"Well, by gracious! if that don't beat every thing! Do you mean to say that you can read *writing*? Impossible!"



"For a full minute neither of the hunters spoke."

Then, as if still in doubt, he reached out and took the paper. Drawing a stump of a lead pencil from his pocket he completed the word properly, opened the paper, and handing it back to the Indian, said:

"Let's hear you read *that*."

"My brother writes so that any one can read his words," observed the young Shawanoe by way of introduction, and then in a low, soft voice he read the brief note from beginning to end.

Bowlby, who had not yet spoken, seemed unable to express his emotions. Unable himself to read, the attainment of the Indian was almost past belief. As the best thing, therefore, that he could do, he solemnly reached out his hand to Linden and shook it with great earnestness. Settling painfully back on the log, he nodded his head several times as if he was almost overcome, as indeed was the case.

I should state at this point that although Linden had not seen fit to make it known, he had heard of Deerfoot the Shawanoe long before. He knew of some of his exploits in Kentucky, as well as those of later years on the western bank of the Mississippi (which are told in the "Young Pioneer" and the "Log Cabin Series"), but he had never met the youth, nor had he ever heard or suspected that he knew how to read and write. Taking hold of his arm, he asked:

"Where in the name of all that is wonderful did you learn that? When I wrote to Fred that I would tell him some things about you I did not know of the most extraordinary of all—that which I have just seen. Sit right down here, between me and Jim, and let us know all about it."

Deerfoot held back, but yielded, and finally answered in his modest way the numerous questions with which he was plied. Bowlby had managed to find his tongue, and his queries were about twice as numerous as those of his companion. By the time that Deerfoot had time to rest, Hardin came back, and there was little left to tell.

The Shawanoe had captured the Hunters of the Ozark. They insisted that he should stay to dinner with them, and he did so. Then he was badgered to enter into a shooting match. All were fine marksmen, and Linden was the best shot in Greville. Using his own rifle, Deerfoot beat every one of them. Then he exchanged weapons and allowed the crippled Bowlby to rest his piece, and the Shawanoe beat all three just as badly as before. They were delighted, and slapping him on the back, asked him to spend a week with them, but he shook his head.

The sun was already beyond the meridian, and there were reasons for his departure which he could not explain. They liked him too well to insist, though they made him promise that on the first chance he would make them a visit. Then Deerfoot gravely pressed hands with all and quickly disappeared in the woods, taking the trail that led toward Greville. You have already learned about his meeting with Terry Clark and Fred Linden.

CHAPTER IX.

A MISHAP.

Fred Linden and Terry Clark were alarmed when, on their way home, they came to the creek across which they had paddled only a short time before. It was then the comparatively shallow stream that was scarcely an obstacle in their path; now it was a rushing torrent, whose volume was increasing with great rapidity. The sinuosities of the creek had caused it to gather in a large part of the rain that had fallen some miles away, and its usual boundaries were overflowed.

It was well that Fred had tied his canoe to the tree that was quite a distance from the stream, for had he not done so it would have been swept away like an egg shell. As it was, the water had reached the base of the tree, while the boat was bobbing up and down almost in a straight line with the course of the creek, as though it was tugging to get loose.

"My gracious, Terry!" said Fred, "this is a little worse than I expected; it is going to be hard work to get across."

"Ye are right for once," added the other, gravely shaking his head; "them rapids are a little closer than I loike."

"It seems to me," added Fred, who was unwilling to admit that he was afraid to try the task, "that I have gone over the creek when it was just as high and rapid, and have crossed at this place, too."

"Who swung the paddle?"

"Father did once and Mr. Bowlby at another time."

"Did ye iver manage the paddle yersilf when the creek got onto one of its tears?"

"I don't remember that I have, but that has been only because the need did not arise; I am not afraid to try it, even if you are."

"Who said I was afraid?" demanded Terry; "I'm riddy to hop into the boat and sway the paddle mesilf, and I'll do it, too."

He stepped into the water, which was up to his shoe tops, and began drawing in the rawhide rope which held the frail boat from breaking away. His companion laughed and said nothing until the canoe was at their feet and drawn up on the land away from the rushing current.

"Don't be quite so touchy, Terry; that boat belongs to me and I can handle the paddle better than you; anyway I shall try to take us to the other side, and all that you have to do is to keep those limbs and trees from capsizing us."

The time occupied in pulling the boat to the spot had given the Irish lad a chance to regain his usual good nature, and he made no protest against the decision of his companion, though Terry was no unskillful handler of the paddle himself.

The creek was probably over a hundred feet wide, and the roiled current abounded with limbs and trees that swung up and down, sometimes out of sight and then popping up again, as though they were frolicking in the swift waters. It would require a strong arm and a cool head to force the birchen craft through these obstacles to the shore on the other side. It must be admitted, too, that it was a piece of imprudence on the part of the lads, who would have been wiser had they quietly waited where they were until the overflow exhausted itself. A stream that rises so fast subsides with the same quickness, and long before nightfall the creek would shrink to proportions that would take away all peril to any one in paddling across.

They would have been compelled to go a long distance up stream before finding a place where the crossing was easier, and it would have been almost impossible to drag the canoe thither. They would have held fast to one end of the rope and allowed it to dance through the rapids, so as to allow them to make the passage below, where the great peril was removed, had they not known that the chances were ten to one that it would be snatched from their grasp, thus shutting them out altogether.

Looking up and across the sloping clearing, the cabins forming the settlement of Greville could be seen at no great distance. From several of the stone chimneys the smoke was curling lazily upward, and now and then glimpses could be caught of persons moving hither and thither, but no one appeared to be looking in the direction of the creek, or if any one was doing so, he saw nothing of the two boys standing on the further shore and debating with themselves the best course to follow. At any rate no one would think they were unable to take care of themselves.

Both Fred and Terry knew that there was but one prudent plan to follow; that was quietly to wait where they were until near night, by which time all danger would be gone. But neither proposed the course nor made mention of it. It is natural for youth to be rash, and there was a semblance of timidity in such a shrinking back that was repellent to American and Irish lad alike. And so you will understand how it was that each showed an eagerness to enter into the contest with the angry current.

You will see, too, how foolish they were, when I tell you that during the few minutes they stood

by the tree to which the rope had been tied discussing the situation, they saw the proof that the creek was subsiding. There was a perceptible lowering of the surface, as was shown by the soiled line against the trunk of the tree. Even Terry, when he looked down, observed that he was not standing in quite as deep water as he was a few minutes before. No danger, however, of his making mention of it.

It took but a minute or so to untie the long thong that was wrapped about the limb, and then, as Fred was on the point of flinging the coil into the bottom of the boat, the end of which was drawn up on the bank, and to take up the paddle and push off, Terry, with some excitement, caught his arm and said:

"Plase wait a minute, will ye?"

"What for?"

"I'll not be gone long; howld the boat only for a twinkling."

He ran a dozen steps or so from shore to where was the stump of a tree that had probably been splintered by a thunder-bolt, and around which sprouted a number of bushes that were dense enough to hide a large object within. Carefully parting these, Terry laid down his rifle and the bell, and then as carefully smoothed the undergrowth in place. Then he hurried back.

90

"There are plinty of lads about me own size," said he, "but there's only one gun that belongs to me, and if the canoe should upsit and both of us get drowned I want to be sure and save me gun."

Fred smiled at this Irish-like explanation, but he was glad that Terry had left the gun on shore. It was safely hidden until he should wish to get it again, while its presence in the canoe would be the worst kind of encumbrance. The new owner was so charmed with his prize that he would think more of saving that than of saving the boat. It was clear that the task of Terry in fighting off the rushing timber would be almost as difficult as that of guiding it across the swift stream.

"In with you!" said Fred to Terry, who carefully seated himself near the bow of the canoe and took up the long pole that lay in the bottom and projected some distance over the end of the boat. Fred Linden gave it a vigorous shove, landed in the stern, caught up the paddle, and instantly began his struggle.

91

You will see the difficulty and danger of his task, and must therefore join with me in condemning the lack of judgment showed by both. They had to paddle more than a hundred feet across a furious torrent in which were scores of uprooted trees, wrenched-off limbs, and craggy stumps, all speeding downward with great swiftness and force. The course of the boat being at right angles to these objects, must bring it in collision with some of them, at the great risk of overturning or shattering the canoe, that was not calculated to withstand any such blows.

And yet, though the task was a hard one, there was little doubt that the two lads could make their way across, provided they were given enough time in which to do so; but there were the rapids, so near that their roar was plainly heard. In case of an overturn or accident, the two would be swept among them. It was the same, on a smaller scale, as if a person should start to row across Niagara River, just above the falls, where by vigorous work he could make the passage, provided he did not drop a stroke on the way. You will say that any one making such an attempt placed little value on his own life.

92

Fred Linden used his paddle after the manner of an Indian—that is, he dipped the broad end first on one side of the boat and then on the other. The paddle was not widened at each end, as is sometimes the case, the one who wields it using the sides alternately and with great rapidity. In calm water such a light structure as an Indian canoe can be driven with great speed, and I have no doubt that the youths would have made a speedy passage had it not been for the interference of the floating objects to which I have referred.

Ten feet from land Fred was forced to back water suddenly to avoid a jagged stump that danced in front like a bull getting ready to charge, and finally did strike the bow with a thump that startled both the occupants.

"Me pole slipped off the side of that," Terry explained, as he brandished the stick in front on the lookout for the threatening waste-wood; "have a care that ye don't drive the boat agin something that is stronger than the boat itsilf."

93

By coolness, alertness and strength, Fred fought his way in safety until probably one-third of the distance was passed. Then he saw the great blunder he had made in trying to cross while the current was so high. The constant fighting with the floating stumps and trees caused them to lose so much ground—or rather water—that they were drifting frightfully close to the rapids, whose roar grew plainer every moment. But he had gone so far that it was as safe to keep on as to turn back, and so he dipped the paddle and swung it with renewed vigor.

"Look out!" he called to Terry, who in parrying the rush of a stump a couple of yards in advance, did not notice one that was coming broadside on, its presence betrayed by a tiny branch that protruded a few inches above the surface like the fin of a shark. Fred did his utmost to avoid it, but he was too slow, and a second later the pointed log not only struck the side of the canoe, but capsized it.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

The partly sunken log crashed into the side of the canoe with such suddenness that the craft was overturned and ruined, and the occupants struggling in the water, before either had time to utter more than a single exclamation.

But they were powerful swimmers, and, but for the nearness of the rapids, they could have afforded to laugh at their mishap. As it was, Terry Clark shouted, as he blew the muddy water from his mouth:

"What a sensible young gentleman I was to lave me gun on the other side."

"We both would have been much more sensible had we left ourselves there," rejoined Fred, who was struggling with might and main for the land in front; "there's no time, Terry, to waste in talk; we've got to swim as never before, for nothing else will save us."

95

The other seemed to rouse to his peril, for he made the only wise response he could—which was putting forth every atom of strength and skill that he possessed in the effort to breast the furious torrent.

It is singular how often the slightest advantage turns the scale for life or death. At the moment the canoe was smashed and capsized Terry Clark was seated some six or eight feet nearer the shore toward which they were paddling than was Fred Linden, and this difference remained when the two went into the water and began swimming. The Irish lad was fully as skillful as the other, and he did not lose an inch of the gain thus given him.

They were near the middle of the stream when the catastrophe took place. Of course they would have done better had they been without any clothing, but there was no time to remove any of that, and beyond question the two made the most gallant kind of a fight for life.

Fully aroused to his peril, Terry swam with amazing power, his lips compressed and his eyes fixed on the land in front, which seemed quite near, and yet was never so hard to reach. The lad had proven by repeated tests that he could swim faster on his left side than in any other position. He quickly flung himself over and used his arms and legs like one who knew fully the stake for which he was contending.

96

By this recourse he actually gained on Fred, who continued to breast the water with all the strength at his command. Terry was hopeful, and now that he was fully roused, he did not waste his strength in shouting to his companion. As he advanced in his crab-like fashion, he frequently flirted his face around so as to look in front, and thus to keep aware of his progress.

"I'm doing well, and will make it," was his thought; "I hope Fred will be as fortunat as mesilf."

An important point was gained by swimming on his left side; his face was turned up stream, and he caught sight of the floating timber quicker than when advancing with his face toward the land. Thus it came about that he saw a plunging tree, or log, similar to that which had destroyed the canoe, and when it was fully as close to him.

97

Like a flash, Terry dove, intending to pass clean under it. He could not know any thing about the portion beneath the surface, and was a little startled when he found himself among leaves and a lot of small branches; but he swam with the same vigor and skill when below as when above the surface, and quickly fought his way through, rising on the other side a considerable distance nearer land.

But he gasped with terror, for during the brief period he lost a great deal more than he gained. A furtive glance to the left showed him the mist and spray flying high in air, as the muddy waters were tossed to and fro by the rocks below: he was fearfully close to them.

But he was also close to land, and he saw his chance; indeed, his only one. A tree growing out toward the creek curved downward so that the lower part of the trunk was within a few inches of the water. A short time before the current had washed against it, but was now falling away from it.

98

The portion which inclined downward like a bow was several feet from shore, and some distance below him. It will be seen, therefore, that the thing for him to do was to bend all his efforts toward reaching that. If he could advance far enough to allow the current to sweep him beneath, or quite close to the tree, he could grasp it and save himself.

"That's what's got to be done," was his conclusion the instant he saw the crooked tree; "or it's good-by to Terry Clark and his rifle."

He would succeed; he saw it the next moment. The curving tree seemed to be sweeping up stream with frightful swiftness, but at the right second Terry, by a supreme effort, threw himself partly out of the water, and flinging both arms around the trunk, which was no more than six inches in diameter, he held fast.

The strain was great, and he felt his fingers slipping over the shaggy bark, but he held on like grim death, and by a skillful upward hitch of his body, locked his fingers above the trunk, and was safe; he was then able to hold double his own weight.

99

His next move was to throw his feet around the trunk, when it was an easy matter for him to twist himself over on top, where he was as secure as lying on his own trundle bed in the cabin at home.

The instant his own safety was secured his whole soul was stirred by anxiety for Fred Linden, who, he knew, was placed at more disadvantage than he. Since he was further from shore than was he, and since the latter had been able to save himself only by a hair's breadth, it was clearly beyond the power of Fred to escape in the same manner—though it might be that there was some other remote chance for him.

The first glance that Terry cast over the muddy waters showed him his friend, swimming manfully for shore, but so far out in the stream that it was impossible for him to reach it before passing into the grip of the rapids.

"It's no use," called out Fred, in a voice in which there was no tremor or shrinking; "I'm bound for the rapids, and here goes."

And deliberately facing about, he swam coolly in the direction of the boiling waters as though he were bathing in a still lake.

"Be the powers, but he is plucky," muttered Terence, thrilled by the sight; "if he can get through there alive, I'll be proud of him!"

The rapids, of which I have made mention several times, were caused by a series of irregular rocks, extending a hundred yards, in the space of which the stream made a descent of a dozen or twenty feet. At ordinary times the creek wound languidly around these obstructions, forming many deep, clear pools of water, that afforded the best kind of fishing. There was so much room for the current that there was no call for it to make haste.

But you can understand how different it was when the creek was swollen by violent rains. It then dashed against the rocks, was thrown back, plunged against others, whirled about and charged upon still others, by which time it was a mass of seething foam, with the spray flying high in air, and a faint rainbow showing through the mist when the sun was shining. After fighting its way between and around and over these obstructions, the current emerged at the bottom one mass of boiling foam and dancing bubbles, which continued for several hundred feet before the effects of the savage churning that the water had received could be shaken off.

Now, it would be idle to say that these rapids were as dangerous as the famous whirlpool below Niagara Falls; for it would not only be untrue, but it would shut me out from taking Fred Linden safely through them: for I am bound to do that, since he is too good a fellow to sacrifice at this early stage of my story, and you would not forgive me for doing so.

But all the same the danger was great, and was enough to cause the bravest man to shrink from attempting the passage. Fred would have been glad to shrink from going through, but since that was beyond his power he did the wisest course—faced about and kept his wits with him.

There was one consolation—the suspense could last but a few moments; he was sure to emerge from the lower falls within the space of a minute, whether alive or dead.

The first object that caught his eye was his broken canoe. Naturally it was but a short distance below him, though it had gained a little while he was struggling so hard to make land. It was turned on its side, spinning sometimes one way and then whirling the other, according to the whim of the current; then sea-sawing up and down, until all at once it shot upward like a huge sturgeon, which sometimes flings its whole length out of the water.

Another point must be named that was gained by this facing about of Fred Linden. Since he was going with the current he kept pace with every thing else that was afloat, and he was therefore in no danger from the trees and branches that had caused him so much, and, in fact, nearly all his trouble.

At the moment he was about to enter the boiling rapids he found himself partly entangled in the branches of a large uprooted tree that was dancing about in a crazy fashion.

"This may help to shield me from being dashed against the rocks," was his thought, as he seized hold of a thick limb close to the point where it put out from the trunk; "at any rate I don't see that it can make matters any worse."

The act of Fred Linden in grasping the limb saved his life. The next moment he was whirled hither and thither, half strangled with foam, head now in air, now beneath the surface, his body grazing the jagged rocks by the closest possible shave, and all the time shooting forward with dizzying rapidity, until at last he emerged into the calmer water below as well and hearty as he ever was in all his life.

CHAPTER XI.

An ejaculation of thankfulness escaped Fred Linden when he found himself floating in the comparatively still water below the rapids, and he knew that although he was pretty well bruised, none of his bones was broken. He let go of the limb of the tree that had served him so well, and flirting the water from his eyes, struck out with his old time vigor for the shore, toward which he had started in the canoe.

When Terry Clark saw his friend go spinning into the whirlpool, he scrambled back from the trunk of the tree, on which he had found refuge, and ran at full speed down the bank. Fast as he went, he was just in time to see Fred swimming through the foaming waters toward the land.

"Give me yer hand!" called out the delighted youngster; "there isn't any body in the wide wurruld that could bate that unless it is mesilf, and I couldn't do it." 105

"Whew!" exclaimed Fred, as he laboriously clambered up the steep bank; "that was the biggest lot of swimming and diving crowded into the space of a minute or two that I ever knew; I wouldn't like to take such a trip each day."

"And I'm thinkin' that it'll be a few days after this whin we try it agin," added Terry, delighted to see his loved comrade before him unharmed; "I jist give up when I seen you plunge in among the rocks, and was wonderin' how your father and mother and sister Edith would faal when I should be luggin' your dead body home."

"I'm thankful that you haven't *that* to do," said Fred with an earnestness that could not be mistaken; "but come, the clothes of us both are dripping, and we can't get away any too soon."

It was not far to walk, and a few minutes later they reached the other side of the clearing, where the cluster of cabins stood. The first living object on which their eyes rested was Brindle, lying on the ground and chewing her cud with an air of contentment which belongs exclusively to her kind, or rather kine. 106

The boys laughed and Terry said:

"If she had such a thing as conscience she wouldn't be takin' things in that aisy style, after givin' us a duckin' that come nigh bein' our last one."

"You are right, Terry, but what did you do with that bell that Deerfoot took away from the Winnebago?"

"I lift it wid my gun on the other side of the creek; I didn't want it tollin' our funeral knell all the time we was goin' through the rapids and splittin' the rocks to pieces by bangin' our heads agin them."

"It is just as well, for the creek will be so low that there will be no danger in crossing it tomorrow, and you can get the bell again; well, here we are at home."

The boys separated, and at the same moment, each entered the cabin where he lived. They were only a short distance apart. Several men and a number of the lads, some older and some younger than the two in whom we are interested, were moving about, and looked curiously at the dripping figures. A couple asked an explanation of Fred, but he laughingly answered that he would tell them after he had got dry, and immediately disappeared in his own house. 107

Mrs. Linden and Edith, her daughter, who was two years younger than Fred, looked up in surprise when they saw the state of the lad.

"Terry and I started to paddle across the creek, that is higher than usual, and were overturned by a tree that stove in the side of the boat and gave us a ducking."

Having heard this explanation his folks seemed to feel no more curiosity about it. The lad passed into his room, he being one of those fortunate ones who had two complete suits of clothing, with the exception of cap and shoes. It took him but a short time to effect the change, when he reappeared, placing his foot and head gear near the fire, where they would soon dry.

The home of Fred Linden may be taken as a type of the best that were found on the frontier. As a matter of course, it was made of logs, with a stone chimney so huge that it projected like an irregular bay window from the rear. The fire-place took up the greater part of one side of the house, where the immense blocks of oak and hickory not only diffused a cheery warmth through the lower portion, but sent fully one-half the heat up the enormous throat of the chimney. 108

The large room, which served for parlor, sitting and dining room, was furnished simply, but comfortably, with plain chairs, a bench, spinning-wheel, a rocking-chair, table, a few cheap pictures and the indispensable cooking utensils. There was no stove, every thing being prepared in the fire-place. At that day, as you well know, no one had ever dreamed of using coal as an article of fuel, and the old-fashioned stoves were exceedingly few in number. Carpets, of course, were not thought of, though the rough floor was kept clean enough to serve as a table for food.

A rifle rested on two deer prongs over the mantel-piece, and there seemed to be any number of knick-knacks about the room, though it would have been found that nearly every one had a distinct use in the household. 109

Two rooms were connected on the same floor with the larger apartment. One of these served as the sleeping quarters for the parents when Mr. Linden was at home, and the other for Edith, while Fred occupied the loft, which had the rafters for a ceiling, and extended over half the

lower floor. During the absence of the father, Edith and her mother used one room, while Fred had the other.

Noon had passed when the son came home, and his substantial dinner of venison—procured some days before by Fred himself—brown bread, potatoes, butter and milk, were awaiting him. Taking his place at the table, he ate as only a rugged, growing boy of sixteen can eat.

He made no further mention of the dangerous adventure that had just befallen him, but gave the full particulars of Terry Clark's encounter with the Winnebago Indian, who stole the bell from the cow, and tried to have a little sport at the expense of the boy. It was an interesting story, and mother and daughter listened with rapt attention. Edith, who was a bright girl, and very fond of her brother, asked many questions as to how the Winnebago looked, what he said, and whether he really meant to kill poor Terry. Then her interest suddenly transferred itself to Deerfoot, and she plied Fred with all sorts of queries, until he laughingly told her that she was asking them two and three times over, and really he had nothing more to tell.

110

Then Fred drew out the moist and soiled bit of paper that he had taken from his other clothes, and which contained the message of his father. This, of course, caused a sensation, for it made known the fact that the son was to join his parent for several months. It would be supposed that this would cause some inconvenience, but in such a primitive community all were neighbors, and the chores and work that would have been done by Fred Linden would be cheerfully attended to by others. It was not until many years afterward, when the settlements became towns, that the social distinctions between families were formed.

During all the conversation, after it had been agreed that Fred should start alone on a hundred mile journey through the wild forest, nothing was said about such a thing as the personal danger attending it. And that, too, directly on the heels of the Winnebago's attempt on Terry Clark. The habit of self-reliance was taught to the children of the pioneers at such an early age, that their parents felt no solicitude, where in these times they would have been tortured by anxiety, and, no doubt, with abundant reason.

111

Mrs. Bowlby was told of the mishap that had befallen her absent lord, when she was asked by Edith to come over in the evening, but she was assured that there was no cause for alarm, and so she felt none. She wrote a letter to her husband, as did the wife of Hardin, and Fred's own mother. These constituted all the extra luggage that he was to take, for it would have been oppressive to load him with any thing in the nature of a burden when the hunters had been absent only a few days.

The decision was that Fred should make his start at early dawn the next day. It was his purpose to reach camp on the fourth day; that would be only an ordinary tramp for a rugged youngster like him, and he was confident that he would have no trouble in keeping to the trail that had been ridden over so recently by his friends.

112

The little personal articles, as they may be called, which the lad would require, were mostly the same as those of his father, and could be utilized by the son. Such, as from the nature of things, could not answer for both were tied into a compact package with his linen and strapped over his shoulders with a thick blanket. His powder horn and bullet pouch were not forgotten. An extra flint for his rifle was placed in his pocket, and the weapon, which belonged to the lad himself, was slung over his shoulder after the manner of a professional hunter. Then making sure that nothing had been left behind, Fred gave his sister and mother a warm hug and kiss apiece, called to them a jaunty good-by, and set his face toward the Ozark mountains.

It had become known that he was to start on quite a lengthy journey, and those who were astir at that early hour called their hearty good wishes to the lad, who was popular with all. Fred looked for Terry, and seeing nothing of him, shouted his name as he passed by his door, but receiving no response, concluded that he was still asleep.

113

The heart of the boy was light as he strode at a rapid pace across the clearing. He felt no inconvenience from the bruises received the day before, during the passage of the rapids, and his natural buoyancy caused him to look upon the tramp through the woods as a school boy views his long expected vacation. There was no fear of any peril in the stretch of unbroken forest that opened before him. It was fortunate indeed for his peace of mind that he did not know what was awaiting him in the dark arches and labyrinths of the almost interminable wilderness.

114

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE ANIMAL.

When Fred Linden reached the creek where he had met with his stirring adventure the day before, he could not help smiling. It had shrunk to its usual volume, and was winding along as lazily as usual, the only sign of the violent freshet being the *débris* left along the bank and the slightly roiled appearance of the current.

The pioneers had so many occasions to cross this stream of water that they had made several attempts to put up a rude but strong bridge; but no matter what pains they took, they could never erect a structure strong enough to withstand the furious freshets which, as you can well understand, were often resistless.

The result, therefore, was a reliance upon the canoes, some of which lay on one side of the stream and some on the other; but a surprise awaited young Linden. Seeing no boat in sight, he walked along the shore in quest of one, for he was resolved to keep out of the water as long as he could, though a lad on the frontier makes far less ado about dripping garments than you or I.

115

That which surprised him was the sight of a long, uprooted tree which, coming down the creek, when the water was rapidly falling, had swung around in such position that the roots caught fast in the clayey soil on the bank, and the limbs were imbedded in the sand and mud on the other shore. The result was as good a bridge as a foot traveler could want.

"That will do until there comes another rise," he said, as he carefully stepped upon the limbs, using them to reach the trunk, along which he walked across the water, leaping to the ground on the other side.

He stepped off with his elastic gait, keeping so close to the path that he and Terry had taken the day before that he caught sight of the bushes around the splintered trunk of the tree where the rifle captured from the Winnebago had been hidden.

116

"He'll be over early to get his prize," thought Fred; "for it is beyond all worth to him. If it wouldn't make him feel so bad I would plague him a little by hiding it."

He parted the bushes and peered within. The first object on which his eye fell was the battered old cow-bell that had played such a curious part the day before, but he saw nothing of the gun itself; a brief but hurried search convinced him that it was gone.

"That will break Terry's heart," said he to himself; "he never owned a gun, and now, to lose such a handsome one when it has been in his possession only a brief while, will grieve him as much as the loss of a dear friend."

Just then young Linden caught the faint but clear notes of some one whistling. He had but to listen a second or two, when he recognized it, as he did the hearty laugh that followed. Looking to his right, he saw Terry himself standing but a few paces away, and, so to speak, in his "war paint." Bullet pouch, powder-horn, bundle on his back, and, more than all, the splendid rifle was there. The round, chubby face, clear eyes, and pug nose of the Irish lad seemed to radiate delight as he made an elaborate salute to his friend, and, with mock gravity, doffed his hat and scraped his foot along the ground. "Why, Terry," said the delighted Fred, asking the useless question, "what is the meaning of this?"

117

"I'm going wid ye to the camp in the Ozark Mountains; do ye think I could rist aisy, knowin' that ye had to travel such a long distance wid no one to take care of ye?"

"Well, now, that just pleases me more than I can tell you," said the overjoyed Fred, slapping him on the shoulder; "there isn't any one in the wide world whose company I want as bad as yours; I lay awake half of last night trying to get up some plan by which I could have you with me, but I couldn't think of any, and had to give it up. Father sent only for me, and I didn't suppose that Mr. MacClaskey would spare you. Tell me how you managed it."

A quizzical expression came upon the face of the Irish lad, who, leaning on his rifle, took off his hat and scratched his head for a few seconds before answering.

"Wal, bein' it's yersilf, Fred, I don't mind sayin' that it took some strategy, as I suppose Deerfut would call it. Last night, after we had eat our supper, and the chores were done wid, and Mr. MacClaskey had took his seat by the fire and lit his pipe, and Mrs. MacClaskey had started her spinning-wheel a-hummin', and the children had been packed off to bed, I told the folks the whole story. I managed it in such a style that the owld gentleman, who, you know, has spint two winters in the mountains, said it would make the folks out there desprit short of hands. I observed, in me careless way, that such was the case, and that Mr. Linden had sent word to ye that he wanted ye to come, and, from things that I knew, me own prisence would give great satisfaction to sartin parties. Ye understand that I had yersilf in me eye, though I didn't think there was nade of making it all plain how it was.

118

"Wai, the owld gintleman wouldn't listen to me goin' away, but I managed it so well that after awhile he kind of remarked that if the folks wanted me, he'd no objection to me goin', as he belaved that I would make more there than I would at home.

119

"That was the p'int," added Terry, with a wink, as he replaced his cap; "and there was where me genius showed itself; I spoke about the big lot of furs that had to be gathered, and how much money the hunters would make, and what a chance there was for a risin' young man of industrious habits. The owld gintleman took it in, and at last said, bein' as I had the new gun, why he didn't know but what I might give it a trial.

"Wal, that was all I wanted. I started to run over last night to tell ye, but afore I got to yer house I thought of this 'cute plan of s'prisin' ye. I got all ready last night, ate breakfast airy, and was down here and had me gun just as I observed ye makin' yer way across the clearin' toward this

spot."

And so it came about that on this beautiful sunshiny day in autumn, Fred Linden and Terry Clark set out, each with ammunition and loaded rifle, for a hundred mile tramp toward the wild region of the Ozark Mountains. The air was crisp and cool, and every thing joined to give them a buoyancy of spirits such as falls to the lot only of rugged, growing boys in bounding health.

120

The two, however, had seen enough of life in the woods to know that the sunshine and clear air would not last. They might continue until they reached camp, but more than likely clouds, rain, chilly weather and possibly a flurry of snow would overtake them. Winter was at hand, and though, as I have shown, they were in quite a temperate clime, it was subject to violent changes, as trying as those in a much more northern latitude.

Besides, the trail, although distinctly marked, did not lead over any thing like even ground all the way. Long before they could reach the vicinity of the camp the character of the country told of the wild, rocky region, covering thousands of square miles, and known as the Ozark Mountains. No route could lead to such a distance through an unsettled country without crossing a number of streams, and passing through regions that were any thing but attractive to the traveler.

All this, however, gave just the element of danger and difficulty to the enterprise that was one of the most delightful features to the young lads, who stepped off with swinging gait to the southward. Had the journey been smooth and even, it would have lost the major part of its charms.

121

The boys carried enough with them to give them all they were likely to need in the way of food for twenty-four hours. It would have been little trouble to take enough to last through the four days; but there was something unprofessional in such a course which caused their souls to rebel. The magnificent forest contained plenty of game, and they would have been poor sportsmen, indeed, had they confessed by their action that they distrusted their ability to procure it.

The trail over which the two walked, Fred slightly in advance, was marked with such distinctness by the hoofs of the six horses that had passed along it in Indian file but a short time before that it was no trouble for the boys to recognize it, nor were they likely to have any difficulty in keeping to it throughout the whole distance.

It was a little past noon, when they reached a small brook whose current was so cold and clear that they took a long draught from it, and then sat down and ate their simple lunch. They felt little fatigue, and as a goodly number of miles remained to be traveled, according to the schedule of Fred Linden, they leaped lightly across the waste and were soon under way again.

122

"Do you know," said Fred, later in the afternoon, "that I've been thinking we have not paid enough attention to one or two important matters."

"What are they?"

"I don't know what has become of Deerfoot, and we may not see him again; but we know enough of him to understand that whatever he says is worth remembering. Now, he told us yesterday that that Winnebago, from whom he took that rifle, belonged to a party of those warriors, and it seems to me that if they are anywhere, it is between us and the camp, and we are likely to see more of them."

"I'm of the same opinion with yersilf, but jest now there is somethin' else that gives me concern."

123

"What is that?" asked the surprised Fred, stopping and turning around.

"Some person or animal has been followin' us for the last half hour. I've heard it more than once, and it ain't fur off this very minute."

The two boys stood still and looked over the trail along which they had been traveling. Fred Linden's fear was that Terry had discovered the presence of some of the very Winnebagos whom he dreaded, but he was mistaken. That which they saw was not a person, but a strange animal of such fierce mien and hostile intent that they instantly looked to their rifles, knowing that a savage fight was inevitable.

124

CHAPTER XIII.

A TROUBLESOME VISITOR.

There is no reason to discredit the truth of the accounts given by hunters in the west of wild

beasts of prodigious activity, strength and ferocity, and that, belonging to no distinct class of animals, are a mixture of the fiercest. Trappers and explorers in the wild regions of the Rocky Mountains, sometimes meet a beast to which they have given the expressive name of "Indian devil," whose power and daring are such that a party of veteran hunters have been known to withdraw from a section frequented by him, simply to avoid a fight. While the stories about them may be exaggerated at times, there is no doubt that such animals exist, and there is good reason to hold them in dread.

The beast that Fred Linden and Terry Clark saw in the path before them resembled a panther more than any animal they could call to mind. It might have been described as a cross between a tiger and panther, had that been possible. Fred had heard his father speak of those creatures that were detested and feared, and he was sure that they were going to have trouble with this one. How fortunate that each boy held a loaded gun in his grasp!

125

The action of the hybrid was as peculiar as his appearance. He seemed to have been trotting quietly along the trail with his nose down, as though following the scent, when he became aware that his game had stopped, and were surveying him with some interest. The beast also came to an abrupt halt and threw up his head, as though he was equally curious to learn something about the party of the first part.

Standing thus, with his nose quite high in the air, it struck both boys that he showed a resemblance to a wolf as well as a panther. He was larger than either, and there could be no doubt that he was amazingly muscular, active and courageous.

Thus stood the opposing parties, as they may be called, for a full minute. Each looked steadily at the other, the space between them being no more than fifty yards. Had it been less, both boys would have fired at him, but they were afraid that such wounds as they could inflict would only rouse his fury. One of the most marked peculiarities of the "Indian devil" is his toughness, some of the stories in this respect being almost incredible.

126

All at once the beast seemed to be overcome with disgust for the two youngsters. He whisked squarely about and trotted away, showing a bushy fox-like tail that almost swept the ground.

"I call that an insolent!" exclaimed Terence Clark, bringing his gun to his shoulder, taking quick aim and letting fly, before his companion could object. He insisted that he had hit the animal, but it is likely he was mistaken, for it gave no sign of being touched, trotting with the same even step until it passed from sight around a bend in the path.

"I hit him hard," insisted Terry, who proceeded to reload his piece; "there's no doubt of the same."

"If you had done so, he would have given some evidence of it, but there was not the slightest."

127

"Ye know that such creatures are tough," coolly remarked Terry; "and the bullet has glanced off his side as from a rock."

"If I could believe that," said the other, "I would hide somewhere until he went away, for it would be only a waste of powder and ball to shoot at him."

"Hasn't he gone off? What are ye talking about?"

"Gone away? Yes; for awhile, but we are not done with that beast yet; we shall have trouble with him."

"If we keep our guns loaded and our powder dry, we'll open on him, and if we can't kill him we'll fill him with so much lead that he won't be able to travel fast, and we'll bid him good-by and walk from him."

The boys waited a few minutes, thinking possibly that the strange creature would show himself again, but he did not appear, and they turned about and resumed their journey.

They were now on one of the best stretches of the trail. The ground was even, there were no boulders or rocks in the path to make walking difficult, and the undergrowth, which in some places was quite an obstruction, did not interfere. By the middle of the afternoon, Fred was confident they were twenty miles at least on the road, and he said that if they came upon an inviting place, they would go into camp for the night. The package which each carried on his back was wrapped in a blanket that could be used to lie upon by the fire, or in severe weather, though they would have cared little had they owned nothing of the kind.

128

Their good spirits continued, and they were walking at a leisurely pace, when a rustling in the bushes on the left caused them to look in that direction. There stood the strange beast, not fifty feet away, head erect, and staring at them with the same inquiring look that he showed some time before.

"I wonder how he likes a side view of us," said Terry, partly amused, but somewhat frightened; "I think he is close enough for us to fetch him this time."

Fred was inclined to give him a shot, but he felt some doubt, and while he was considering the question, the beast whisked about and vanished like a flash.

129

"He is a strange animal," said Fred, lowering his gun, which he was in the act of raising; "and I am more satisfied now than ever that we shall have trouble with him. The first time that we gain a fair shot, that is, like we had just now, let's tumble him over. He may be as daring and tough as the hunters say, but there isn't any animal tough enough to withstand a couple of well-aimed bullets."

"I agree wid ye—that is, after one was fired. That shot of mine was well aimed and struck, but it takes somethin' more to bring him down, as a colored friend of mine once said when a house tumbled over on his head."

"You saw how spry a creature he is, and if he should happen to drop down upon us from the branch of a tree, those sharp claws of his would play the mischief with us."

Since there was no place in sight that suited for camping, Terry reloaded, and they kept on. After the fright they had received, you may be sure they maintained a close watch of the wood in every direction. As yet they had seen no game from which to procure food, but they wanted to go into camp near a spring or stream of water. The latter is generally looked upon as one of the indispensables by a party of campers, and it was not likely that the youths would have to travel far before finding what they wanted.

130

The sun had not yet dropped below the horizon when they struck the very spot. There were the bubbling brook, lined by mossy banks, the small open space, the tall column-like trunks; and the heavy overhanging boughs, which, late though it was in the season, would allow but few drops of a shower to find their way through. The air was cool, but there were no signs of a storm.

"There couldn't be a better place," said Fred, when he had noted all the points; "here is every thing that a party can want, except it be supper, which they ought to bring with them."

"And somebody has been here ahead of us," added Terry, kicking apart the ashes at the base of a large tree; "there's where the fire was kindled."

131

"No doubt it is where father and the rest of them spent the first night after leaving home: that shows that we have made good progress, and, if no accident happens, we shall arrive on time."

"There is no need of our hurryin', as I understood that a gintleman once obsarved whin they were goin' to hang him; if we are two or three days late in gettin' there, what's the odds?"

"None—though this fine weather can not last long, and when it is over, I should like to be at the end of our journey, where we shall have good shelter. I wonder what has become of the wild beast?"

"Be the powers! but there he comes!"

The words had hardly passed the lips of the startled Terry Clark, when the strange animal was seen in the path in front of them, in precisely the same position as when first noticed. He had evidently passed around to the front, as though determined to study the boys from every point of view. He seemed to have been standing for some minutes before discovered by the boys, and was now observed approaching, as the Irish lad had announced.

132

He did not gallop or trot, but walked slowly, just as though having made up his mind to take a select meal off the youngsters, he was going to do so with the deliberation of an epicure that extracts the fullest enjoyment from his delicacies.

There was something unnerving in the sight of the frightful animal approaching in this noiseless fashion, his jaws parted just enough to show his long, white teeth, but giving utterance to no growl, or threatening act, beyond the mere advance itself. His large, round eyes had a phosphorescent glow, and the long, sinewy body and limbs were the repository of a strength and activity that might well make a veteran hunter timid about encountering him.

"By gracious!" said Fred Linden; "we're in for it now; he doesn't mean to wait for us to attack him, but is coming for us."

"If I was called on to make a wager," said Terry, as cool as ever, "that would be the view that I would take of the same."

133

"You fire first and I will follow; take good aim, and send your bullet right between the eyes."

There was no time to spare, for the beast at that instant was within a dozen yards. Terry Clark brought his rifle to his shoulder, sighted quickly, and pulled the trigger.

That he struck the creature was proven by his snarling growl and slight upward leap; but instead of stopping, he broke into a gallop and came straight on.

Then Fred Linden aimed and fired, but he also failed to check the advance of the animal.

134

CHAPTER XIV.

A WELCOME ALLY.

Fred Linden, like his companion, aimed directly between the eyes of the strange beast, and, like

him, he struck the mark; but both shots only served to awake the irrestrainable ferocity of the animal, which, with another rasping howl and parted jaws, bounded toward them. Since both weapons were discharged, and they had no other firearms, the boys were almost helpless, and it may be said their enemy was upon them.

"Run!" called out Fred, wheeling about and leaping toward a tree, behind which he took refuge; but sturdy Terry had no thought of turning away from such a foe. Throwing one foot back so as to steady himself, he seized his fine rifle with both hands, near to the muzzle, and held it so as to use it as a club or shillaleh.

The brute was so close that he had no more than time to gather his strength, and swing the heavy stock with might and main, when the animal bounded at him straight from the ground.

There was a "dull thud," as it may be called, and the stock crashed against the side of the beast's head, knocking him a couple of yards to the left, and almost at the feet of Fred Linden; but in point of fact the blow did no harm except to thwart the creature for a second or two.

He was now snarling, and gave utterance to one or two peculiar barking sounds like a dog or wolf. His eyes were ablaze, and there could be no doubt that his fury was at white heat. Crouching for an instant, he made a bound for Terry, before he had time to balance himself to deliver his second blow with the same power as the first.

Fred Linden could not stand still and see his companion torn to shreds in that fashion. He leaped from behind the tree, with his gun also clubbed, and hastened to strike with all his might; but he was too late.

It was a curious fact, not understood at the moment, that the savage creature, although he leaped straight at Terry, passed fully two feet over his head, and that, too, when the lad was standing erect, and braced to deliver his second blow.

Striking on his belly, several paces beyond, the beast rolled over and over, clawing, snapping, snarling, and beating the air, with lightning-like blows. The leaves and dust flew in all directions, and the foam which he spat from his jaws was flecked with blood.

He continued rolling and struggling until he was a rod distant, and then suddenly stopped, stone dead.

In the excitement and swirl of the moment both Fred and Terry were conscious that their guns were not the only ones that were fired. At the instant the brute was in the act of rising from the ground a second time for his leap, the sharp report of another rifle was heard. The peril was so imminent that the lads could give no attention just then to any thing but the immediate business in hand; but now, seeing their fearful foe was dead, they knew that it was the third bullet that had done it, and they glanced around to see who their friend was.

No one was in sight, and they advanced to the carcass, which they were somewhat timid about touching, even though convinced that it was beyond the power of doing any more harm. They saw that both of their bullets had struck the skull, though not at the precise points at which they aimed. One had passed near the right eye of the nondescript, and must have inflicted serious injury, but its toughness would have enabled it to keep up the fight, and to have slain both of the boys before they could have reloaded and fired a second time.

A little search showed where the fatal wound had been given. Just in front of the fore leg the lead had entered and gone through the heart. No animal, so far as known, amounts to any thing after his heart has been torn in twain, though he may live and move for a time.

"I tell you, Terry, that I don't believe there is another beast in the country that, after receiving two bullets in the head, like that, could make such a fight."

"I begs to corriect ye," said the other; "it was three shots, for do ye not mind that I bored a hole through him when we first made his acquaintance?"

"So you claimed, but you haven't explained how it was that such a shot could be made without leaving any wound?"

"It may have healed up since then," suggested the Irish lad, who knew as well as his companion that the first bullet did not touch the beast.

"I hadn't thought of that," meekly observed Fred; "but there is one thing certain, that if that last shot hadn't been fired, it would have been the last of us: where could it have come from?" he asked, looking around and finding the answer to his question in the sight of Deerfoot the Shawanoe, who came from behind a clump of bushes on the other side of the small stream.

Fred uttered an exclamation of delight when he recognized the graceful young warrior, who was holding the stock of his gun in his left hand, with the barrel resting idly in the hollow of his right arm. Fred jumped across the brook, with hand extended to greet him.

"I'd rather see you than any person in the world," was the truthful exclamation of the youth: "when you gave me the letter yesterday I thought what a splendid trip this would be if Terry would go with me, and behold, he has come! I would have liked to have you too but I didn't dare say so, for I didn't think it was possible: but ever since we started I have felt that we only lacked *you* to make the party complete. Now, ain't I glad to see you, and how are you, old fellow?"

The lad in his boisterous way wrung the hand of Deerfoot and slapped him on the shoulder; then laughed, and shook hands again with an enthusiasm that left no doubt of the cordiality of his welcome.

As for Deerfoot, he showed a gentle dignity that was never absent. His faint smile lit up his handsome face, and he was pleased with the pleasure of the others.

"Deerfoot has seen the faces of his brothers not many times, but it brings sunshine to his heart to meet them again."

140

Then his countenance was crossed by an expression of gravity like an eclipse passing over the face of the sun.

"Is my brother ill, that he suffers so much?"

This question referred to Terry Clark, Deerfoot looking over the shoulder of Fred at the Irish lad behind him. Fred heard a curious noise, and turned to learn what it meant. His friend had leaned his gun against the nearest tree, so as to give his limbs free play, and was flinging his arms aloft, and dancing a jig with a vigor that made it look as if his legs were shot out, and back and forth, by some high pressure engine. Now and then he flung his cap aloft, and, as it came down, ducked his head under and dexterously caught it. His mouth was puckered up most of the time, while he whistled with might and main, though the energy of his general movements shut out all resemblance to a tune. Occasionally he stopped whistling and broke into snatches of song which, from the same cause, could not be identified.

Fred Linden laughed. He was demonstrative, but not so much so as Terry. Looking sideways at Deerfoot, he saw his eyes sparkling and the corners of his mouth twitching. Rarely had he been amused as much as he now was by the extravagant manifestations of the Irish lad, for whom he had formed a strong regard.

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Deerfoot and Fred having turned their glances toward Terry, the latter appeared to catch sight of them for the first time. With a whoop he flung his hat higher than ever in the air, caught it with right side up on his crown as it came down, and then shouted:

"How are yees, me friends?" and made a dash for them.

In his enthusiasm he forgot the brook running through a small hollow between them. His feet went down in the depression without any knowledge on his part, and he sprawled headlong, his cap rolling at the feet of Deerfoot, who pushed the toe of his moccasin under the edge, and flung it to him as he rose to his feet.

"It's all the same, and a part of the show," laughed Terry, "as the wife of the bear-keeper obsarved when the bear ate him up, and it's how are ye, and how do ye expect to be, and what have ye to say for yersilf, and why are ye so long answerin' me quistion?"

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Deerfoot simply smiled, and made no reply until Terry had replaced his cap, and was done with his noisy greeting. Then he pointed to his gun leaning against the tree, and said:

"When my brother is in the woods, he should keep his gun within reach of his arm."

"Yer moral sentiments are corrickt," remarked Terry, hurrying back—this time without falling—to regain his piece. When he once more stood beside the laughing Fred, the Shawanoe addressed both:

"Are the guns of my brothers loaded?"

Both felt the rebuke; they had violated one of the elementary rules of the hunter's life, which is that the first thing to be done after discharging a weapon is to reload it. Fred flushed, for he did not remember that he had ever forgotten it before.

"It was a piece of forgetfulness of which Terry and I ought to be ashamed, but it was the first time we had ever had a fight with such a beast as that: what do you call it, Deerfoot?"

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The Shawanoe shook his head to signify that he knew of no distinct name for the animal, but he explained to the boys, what they already knew, that it was a cross of some kind, concentrating in itself, as it seemed, all the power, activity, daring and ferocity of the most dreaded animals of the woods. Deerfoot could not deny that his shot had saved the boys from being torn to shreds by the brute. Had it been a few seconds later, or differently aimed, nothing could have saved them from its fury.

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CHAPTER XV.

"DEERFOOT WILL BE SENTINEL TO-NIGHT."

"We are on our way to the camp in the Ozarks," said Fred Linden; "and am I mistaken in believing that you will go with us all the way?"

"Such is the wish of Deerfoot," replied the Shawanoe, whereat Terry Clark gave signs of

breaking out again; but at a warning look from Fred he restrained himself.

"Deerfoot loves the Hunters of the Ozark; he has promised to make them a visit; he will do so with his friends that he has found in the woods, and who forget to keep their guns loaded."

"No use!" exclaimed Terry, bounding in the air, striking his heels together, and flinging his hat aloft with a loud whoop; "I must give gintle exprission to me emotions, even though it makes a war with England."

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The others showed no objection to this harmless ebullition, and he speedily became quiet again.

Had Fred Linden been intimately acquainted with Deerfoot, he would have noticed that he was not entirely at ease. Now and then he darted glances about him, as though he half expected the appearance of some unwelcome person. The glances were so quick and furtive that neither Fred nor Terry noticed them.

"Deerfoot," said Fred, the three still standing; "we have concluded that there isn't a better place along the trail for a camp."

To the surprise of the boys, he shook his head in dissent.

"Why, this is where father and the rest spent the night when they last went this way."

He nodded to signify that he agreed with them.

"There were three of them, and they had their horses, that could not be well hid; when my brothers go into camp for the night, they should take a place where all who went by would not see them."

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It struck the others as curious that the Shawanoe should talk in that fashion, when they could not see any cause for alarm; but they had enough faith in him to accept his judgment on such an important matter. He added:

"Come with Deerfoot and he will show his brothers where they may slumber in peace."

Without any more explanation the Shawanoe moved down the bank of the brook, following a course parallel to the flow of the water, the other two keeping at his heels. He did not look around until he had gone more than a hundred yards. Then it was that the little party found itself in a rocky section, with a rough cavern on their right—that is, the bowlders and rocks were jumbled together in such a fashion that there was some resemblance to a cave. The chief merit of the place, however, was the privacy that it afforded, rather than the strength as a means of defense against an enemy.

"This suits very well," said Fred, taking in all the points at a glance; "here is a rocky bed on which we can start a fire, and the other rocks and bowlders will keep off the wind, if there happens to be any; the water is handy, if we should need it, and it is certain that we are not as likely to be seen here as where we first selected."

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"Deerfut," said Terry, who was nosing about, "I obsarve ashes here, as though somebody had been ahead of us."

"Deerfoot built a fire but a few moons ago, and staid over night."

"If it was good enough for ye, I can stand it," said Terry, "which is the remark me uncle made when the Duke of Argyle asked him to stay to dinner."

The boys unfastened the bundles from their backs and prepared to spend the night where they were. The blankets were spread on the flinty floor, and Deerfoot, setting down his gun beside theirs, helped to gather the wood with which to keep a fire burning. The three were so active that it took but a short time to collect all that was needed. This was thrown into one pile, from which it could be withdrawn as wanted.

I must give you a better idea of the spot where the three decided to spend their first night in the woods together. They had walked northward from the trail, and, so far as they could see, the country was of the most broken nature, though the abundance of trees and undergrowth did not permit an extended view. Two masses of stone rose to the height of a dozen feet, and were separated by about the same distance. These rough walls extended back to a distance of three or four yards, where they came against a similar formation. Thus, as may be said, there were three sides to an inclosure, that part facing the brook being entirely open. On top of these supports were tumbled an irregular mass of bowlders and rocks which formed the roof. The latter had so many openings that it was as well ventilated as the roof of the house about which the Arkansas Traveler tells us.

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The rear part of the cavern, if it may be allowed that name, was stone, while the front was earth. Near the center, Deerfoot had kindled his fire when he staid there, the smoke finding ready escape through the openings above. Such a fire might give some warmth were it needed, but the blaze was so well hidden by the surrounding walls that it was not likely to be seen by any one passing no nigher than fifty feet: therein lay the reason why it was selected by Deerfoot.

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After piling up the fuel for the night, the youths threw some branches on the ground, near the rear of the cavern, and then spread their blankets over them. The Shawanoe carried no blanket with him, so it was expected that he would share the couch of his friends.

While the three were busying themselves in this manner, Fred Linden was disturbed by a suspicion that had been growing from the moment Deerfoot expressed dissatisfaction with the spot selected for their camp. This suspicion was that the young Indian had a fear of something to which, as yet, he had made no reference.

I have already shown that it was not generally considered a dangerous business in which the hunters of Ozark engaged. The rough, outdoor life sometimes brought with it hardships, and occasionally sufferings, but chief among the dangers was not that from Indians. It was known that now and then the red men fired spiteful shots at the invaders of their hunting grounds (as was the case with Michael Clark, the father of Terence), but in this section of the west that particular peril was deemed less than that which threatened from wild beasts. There was no instance of the hunters having been molested on their way to and from the trapping regions: why then this special caution of Deerfoot?

Fred Linden, while turning these thoughts over in his mind, gave but the one answer—*the Winnebago*. He was an intruder in that part of Louisiana, and he had shown by his acts how ready he was to shed the blood of innocent white persons. It was not a supposition merely that this fierce warrior had companions. The keen eyes of Deerfoot had discovered the proofs that there were a half dozen, at least, with him, and from whom he separated for a short time while he entered into the "side speculation" with Brindle and her bell; so it will be seen that Fred Linden was not only right in his suspicion that the Wolf had to do with the unrest of Deerfoot, but that the latter possessed good cause for his misgiving.

The Winnebagos, having drifted so far away from their own hunting grounds into this part of the world, were either going further from home, or were on their way back. Had the Wolf behaved himself, the band would have gone and come without the knowledge of any of the pioneers, unless there was a chance meeting in the wood, when it is not likely that any harm would have resulted.

But one of the Winnebagos was struck in the face by a white boy, while a young Indian, a friend of the latter, having "got the drop" on the Wolf, had taken his gun from him. In other words, the crime of assault and robbery had been committed.

Would the rest of the Winnebagos pocket the outrage and meekly withdraw from the country?

That, it would be seen, was the all important question, upon which great events, as affecting the friends in whom we are interested, hinged.

It was in violation of the nature of the American race that any member thereof should refuse to resent an indignity, when there was a chance of doing so. The Winnebagos had the best of reasons for believing that, by prowling around the settlement, or along the trail leading thereto, they would soon gain an opportunity to wipe out the disgrace put upon the Wolf, and, if not able to get back the gun that had been taken from him, would be able to procure another.

The fact that this valuable weapon was carried in the hands of a boy, who had started to tramp through the woods to a point a hundred miles off, and that it was not at all impossible that the Winnebagos found, or would find it out, gave emphasis to the cause of Deerfoot's uneasiness.

It is worthy of note that, while Terry Clark never once took this view of the situation, it occurred to his friend Fred, who waited for the Shawanoe to make some reference to it.

"He knows best, and if he doesn't choose to say any thing about it, there is no call for me to do so."

The shadows of night were creeping through the wood when the fire was started, and the smoke began stealing upward through the openings in the rocky roof.

"Deerfoot," said Fred, when the fire crackled brightly, "the rule is, that a party in camp like this, must have some one on guard while the others sleep. I don't know as there is any need now, but if you think so, let Terry and me do it, for we are not in need of sleep."

The Shawanoe looked at him intently for a moment as though he would read his thoughts, and then quietly said:

"Deerfoot will be sentinel to-night!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AROUND THE CAMP-FIRE.

Inasmuch as Terry and Fred had enough lunch left to furnish all that was wanted, Deerfoot decided not to hunt for any thing else. At that hour, when it was growing dark, it would have been hard to find any game; but he told them that at no great distance above, the tiny brook issued from a small lake, where he could easily get all the fish he wanted.

Accordingly, the fire having been started at the rear of the cavern, where the smoke found free vent, the three sat within a circle of light, and partook of the coarse bread and cold venison. The

latter was tough, but it could not withstand the teeth of the two youths, whose appetites were such as wait on high health.

It was noticeable that the young Shawanoe ate no more than half as much as each of the others. Then saying that he wished to view the camp from the outside, he went out in front of the cavern. He remarked that he would be gone only a few minutes, but he took his gun with him. 155

When Deerfoot emerged from the rude shelter it was fully dark. There was a moon in the sky, but the density of the surrounding forest kept out the rays, so that the gloom could not be penetrated to any distance.

He stood still and listened. His sense of hearing, like that of sight, was trained to a wonderfully fine point, as you have learned in the incidents previously related, so that faint noises, such as you or I could not have detected, would have told their full story to him.

But nothing more than what may be called the natural sounds of the wood fell on his ear. Then the young Indian leaped lightly across the small brook in front of the cavern and walked some two rods beyond, where he paused and listened again. After this he made a complete circuit of the cavern. This compelled him to cross the little stream once more, brought him back to the mouth of the retreat, and caused him also to climb over a great deal of broken ground, but a shadow could not have made the circuit more noiselessly. He stopped several times and listened with the same profound attention, occasionally looking toward the cavern within which his friends were eating their supper and talking together in low, guarded tones. He caught the murmur of their voices, which would have been audible to no one else beyond a dozen feet. Just above the large opening in the cavern, through which most of the smoke found its way, a faint, dull glow showed that the camp-fire was burning below. 156

The inspection made by Deerfoot was satisfactory; he had discovered no sign of any prowling enemy, and the party could not have found a place where there was less likelihood of disturbance by any foes who were in the neighborhood. It would seem indeed that nothing short of a most exceptional mishap could bring any danger near. So he once more entered the cavern, and seated himself by the fire, upon which Fred Linden had just thrown a bundle of sticks that filled the cavern with a light like that of noonday. 157

Terry insisted that Deerfoot should take his blanket, because the Shawanoe had none, and the one belonging to Fred Linden was enough for the others. Deerfoot at first declined, but his young friend persevered, so the half-dozen yards of heavy stuff were spread on the rock and earth floor of the cabin, and then Deerfoot disposed of himself in a lolling attitude, reclining on his left elbow, while he looked across and through the blaze at his two friends, who were stretched out in almost a similar attitude. It will be borne in mind that he was nearer the mouth of the cavern than were the others: in fact he was about half-way between where they were stretched and the open air. Fred and Terry did not notice this, or, if they did, they supposed it was accidental, though it was done with forethought by the sagacious young Shawanoe.

The evening was yet young, and the circumstances were such as to make the boys talk at a rate that almost overwhelmed Deerfoot, who always showed a deliberation in his speech, as if he weighed each word before allowing it to fall from his lips. 158

Fred and Terry had formed a strong liking for the young Shawanoe, and since he seemed to be in fine spirits, they plied him with questions until they learned the chief facts in his history. When the long conversation ended they knew that Deerfoot was the son of a Shawanoe chief, and that he was born in the Dark and Bloody Ground. When but a small boy he was like a spitting wildcat in his hatred of the white people, and it was not until he was wounded and nearly beaten to death, that he could be taken prisoner on one of the excursions of his people against the white settlements.

He fell into good hands and was nursed back to strength. Not only that, but those that had him in direct charge told him about God, who made the world, who loved His creatures, and who sorrowed to see them trying to harm each other, and who had sent His only Son to die for His lost children. It was a wonderful story to which Deerfoot listened with rapt attention, and all in time (as you have been told in another place), the extraordinary young Shawanoe became a devout follower of the meek and lowly One. He felt that he could never repay the whites for showing him the way to eternal life. Thenceforward he became their friend, and devoted his life to protecting them against the enmity of the red men. 159

Deerfoot told Fred and Terry something about his stirring experiences with Ned Preston and Wildblossom Brown, and afterward with Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub, but did not hint at one-tenth the services he had rendered the white people. Of all the fierce tribes that made portions of Ohio and Kentucky like sheol on earth, the Shawanoes were the worst: they were the Apaches of the last century. Deerfoot had fallen into their hands and many of his most desperate encounters were with them. Finally the efforts to take him prisoner became so far reaching that he saw that his usefulness as a friend of the settlements was at end. The rage of the Shawanoes was such that it may be said that some of their campaigns were planned with the sole purpose of capturing the young renegade, whom they hated with a hatred like that of the tigers of the jungle. 160

You will see, therefore, that not only was the usefulness of Deerfoot as an ally of the whites ended, but he became even an element of danger to them. He had been urged to make his home with those who held him in such high regard, but he could not do so. He quietly withdrew from the country and crossed the Mississippi into the vast Louisiana Territory. There he had lived for a couple of years, and there he expected to end his days.

"Deerfoot," said Fred Linden, when his remarkable narration had ended, "Terry and I are not new hands in the woods, and we would be much better satisfied if you would allow us to share the night in watching with you."

"Why does my brother think of danger?"

"Because *you* do; I know it by your actions."

The quickness of this reply struck Deerfoot favorably. He did not think that his conduct had been noticed, and he was gratified that his friend was so observant. That there should be no mistake about his suspicions, Fred added:

"I don't know whether you have seen that Winnebago or not since you started him on the run yesterday; he may be still running, but I am quite sure, from the way you have behaved, that you suspect that he and the rest of his companions are prowling through the woods, on the lookout for a chance to revenge themselves."

Deerfoot's face glowed. Fred Linden had hit the nail on the head.

"My brother speaks the words of truth; his thoughts are the thoughts of Deerfoot."

Terry Clark looked at his companion in astonishment.

"How come ye to know all that, Fred?"

"I see nothing remarkable about it; all I had to do was to observe the actions of Deerfoot since he joined us to-day. In the first place, he wouldn't have made us change our camping place if he hadn't had some misgiving, and then the way he has been mousing around the outside, and his decision to keep watch to-night: why what could tell the story more plainly?"

"Begorra," said the admiring Terry, "ye are not such a big fool as you look to be; I never thought of that."

"Which looks as if you are a bigger dunce than you seem; but," added Fred, turning toward the Shawanoe, "have you seen any thing of the Winnebagos?"

"Deerfoot has seen their footprints in the woods; they are on the watch for his white brothers that they may gain their scalps, because the gun of the Wolf was taken from him."

"They seem to have hard work in finding us: where do those Winnebagos come from?"

Deerfoot pointed to the northward, or rather to a little east of north.

"Their hunting grounds are many suns' travel that way."

"Why do the spalpeens come down in this part of the world, and why don't they behave thimselves whin they do?" demanded Terry, with some indignation.

Deerfoot shook his head, as though the question was more than he could answer.

"Deerfoot has met Shawanoes and Sacs and Wyandottes and Pawnees far away from their villages and hunting grounds, besides the strange Indians who come much further from the setting sun. The red men travel whither they will. Why the Winnebagos passed near the home of my brothers only they can tell."

"Well, they're a bad lot," said Terry, "to try the mean trick they did on me; though," he added the next moment, "I'm glad they done the same, for if they hadn't, how would I've got hold of this lovely gun? Do ye think we shall have any more trouble with them?"

"Deerfoot believes there will be trouble, and it will come soon!"

"Well, if it does, all ye have to do is to take away the rist of their guns and set 'em on the run home agin."

CHAPTER XVII.

A SUSPICIOUS SOUND.

By and by Fred Linden and Terry Clark became drowsy. Devoutly kneeling, they spent several minutes in prayer, and then stretched out on a single blanket, with their backs toward each other, and the face of Fred in such a position that he could look across the blaze at Deerfoot on the other side. The latter had remained still and motionless, while the lads, remembering the lesson they had learned at their mothers' knee, asked their Heavenly Father to hold them in His keeping. The young Shawanoe, who spent many an hour in communion with his Maker, was touched to see that his friends did not forget their duty.

Deerfoot stirred the burning wood so that it threw out more light, and then, reclining on his left

elbow, so that the illumination came directly in his face (the worst direction possible), he drew from beneath his hunting-shirt the small Bible, that had been presented to him by the Preston family, and began reading it.

Fred Linden, who had his eyes fixed upon him, was so interested that his drowsiness departed. Without moving he watched him closely. He saw him turning the leaves back and forth, as if looking for some place he had in mind. It took him but a minute to find it, when, still leaning on his elbow, and with the light striking his face and the printed page, he seemed to become so absorbed as to lose all consciousness of his surroundings.

Fred Linden, without betraying that he was awake, surveyed this remarkable performance with an admiration that for the moment made his eyes misty with emotion.

The eyes of Deerfoot were downcast, as he read the page, so that they could not be seen but the handsome oval face; the luxuriant black hair, with the eagle feathers thrust into the crown; the rows of gleaming beads around the neck; the deerskin shirt that covered the breast and arms to the wrists, on the left one of which shone the golden bracelet; the red sash, behind which were shoved the knife and tomahawk; the brilliant fringes of the hunting-shirt and leggins; the small, ornamented moccasins; all these of themselves made a striking figure; but Fred, handsome and rugged himself, who was not accustomed to see any thing like beauty in the human form, was struck with the symmetry of the figure before him. He particularly noticed the tapering legs, and could not help saying to himself:

"There is no Indian or white man that can run as fast as he."

And the mental declaration of the lad was truth. The fleetness of the young warrior had never been equaled, and he had never yet met the person whom he could not outrun with ease and without putting forth his whole speed.

"He don't look strong, but he is the last person that I would want to meet in a fight; I'll bet he is so quick that he could dodge the bullet fired at him."

I must draw the line here: Deerfoot could not do any thing of the kind.

"And he is reading his Bible! I never in all my life saw an Indian who could read a word of print, or do more than sign his name with a cross or some figure like a bug: I wonder whether we couldn't hire him to teach school for us at Greville."

Fred thought a great many queer things about his new friend, but lay watching him fully ten minutes before he spoke. Then, when he saw him turn a leaf, he said in a low voice:

"Deerfoot, will you please read aloud?"

Fred expected that the Shawanoe would start and look up in surprise; but he never raised his eyes, or gave the least sign that these words of his were unexpected. He knew that Fred was watching him from the first, and so, before the words were more than fairly out of his mouth, Deerfoot began reading in a low, impressive monotone, as though he had merely resumed, after turning over the leaf.

"After this I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

"And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God.

"Singing, Amen; blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto our God for ever and for ever, Amen.

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, Who are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

"And I said unto him, sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

"They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

"For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Deerfoot read a few minutes longer from his favorite part in the New Testament and then ceased. He had not lifted his eyes from the page, but he knew that Fred Linden was asleep. He observed it in his breathing, which was as soft as that of an infant.

The rocky cavern, the smoldering camp-fire, the two sleeping boys, the motionless Indian stretched out and reading his Bible by the faint light, the great, solemn forest walling them in, the profound stillness that reigned everywhere: these were elements in a picture the like of which it may be said (except where Deerfoot was one of the figures), had never been seen anywhere else, and was not likely ever to be seen again.

The fire sank lower and the light on the printed page became so dim that even the keen eyes of the young Shawanoe could not trace the words. He looked at the embers as if asking himself whether he should renew the blaze and continue reading. But the hour for meditation had come,

and he closed the book. Looking fondly at the stiff, wooden cover, he touched his lips with infinite tenderness to it, and carefully placed it in the inner receptacle of his hunting-shirt, murmuring as he did so:

"The best friend that Deerfoot ever knew!"

O light of life! Comforter of the sorrowing heart! Consoler of the stricken soul!

In the flush of bounding health, when the passions throb high, we may not heed thy blessed teachings, but when man's promises prove false, and the head bows before the endless strife, and woes overwhelm us like a flood, there is relief, there is light, there is life in Thee. The wicked may jeer, the learned may scoff, the powerful may despise, the favored may turn away, but there comes the time when learning, gifts, wealth, power, beauty and all the world can give turn to ashes, and they have no boon compared to Thine. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The pampered monarch, the dying beggar, the statesman, the slave, the mother bowed with woe, the father shaken with grief, childhood in its innocence, man in his strength, beauty in its scorn, trembling old age, can find no balm but in Thee. Better that the sun should be blotted from the heavens and the earth left a trackless void than that Thy light should be denied the world.

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Deerfoot lay flat on his face, his arms crossed so that his head and shoulders were held a few inches above the flinty floor, and his dark eyes were fixed on the embers in front. It was his favorite enjoyment, when the stirring incidents of the day were done, and he had read from the only Book he ever wanted to read, to spend a time in meditating on the truths that it may be said had become a part of his very being.

Many a time had he lain thus, as motionless as if dead, while the wonderful brain was busy with thoughts that stirred the profoundest depths of his nature. There are beliefs that come to us at which reason may laugh, but which it can not shake or disturb. There are questions that the glib unbeliever may ask that we can not answer. But away down in our hearts is a faith which the whole world can not remove, and which can be uprooted only by ourselves. Woe to him who dares lay violent hands upon it!

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Deerfoot no more doubted that he and every one was in the direct keeping of God than he doubted that he breathed and moved. He knew that the Great Spirit had caused him to be made a prisoner by whites so that he might learn the way of life; he knew that He had given him an insight into the mysteries of His word that was denied to many others. A deep, outstretching sympathy for those less favored than he suffused his whole being. Gladly would he have given up his life in pain and torture and agony, as did One in the dim long ago, if by so doing he could earn the smile of his Heavenly Father.

But this remarkable young Christian felt that he was doing the work appointed for him to do. Here and there he dropped a word that proved to be seed sown upon good ground, and which had borne its fruit. He had met his enemies in fair combat and had never taken wrong advantage of them: his marvelous bow and arrow, and his still more effective rifle, had brought many a dusky miscreant low, but he had used his amazing gifts in the line of duty, and for the good of others. Would that he could have won them by love, but it was not in the nature of things that he should do so. He had "broken the Bread of Life" to more than one, and he hoped that ere he should be called home, he should point the way to others.

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Suddenly he raised his chin from his hands and turned his head slightly to one side. His ear, whose acuteness was almost beyond belief, had caught a suspicious sound. Profound as might be the meditation of the Shawanoe, he could never forget his surroundings.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

The crisp autumn night had not reached its turn when the full moon climbed from behind the straggling clouds obscuring her face, into the clear air above, and shone down on the wilderness, with the same calm splendor with which it had shone during the ages before the foot of a white man had rested on the soil of our country. Here and there, at widely-separated points, as the orb moved toward the zenith, could be seen the star-like twinkles of light which showed where the sparse settlements had been planted by the pioneers. At intervals, too, miles away from the clearings, could be distinguished the glimmer of the hunters' camp-fires, where the hardy men had lain down wrapped in their blankets, and to sleep the sleep of health. Still further away, by the side of some calmly flowing river or creek, were the ragged tepees of the wild Indians. Mountain, forest and stream made up the landscape, that was illuminated by the moon on the night when Fred Linden and Terry Clark lay down in slumber by the fire in the

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cavern, and Deerfoot the Shawanoe took upon himself the duty of acting as a sentinel over them.

It was not yet midnight when the figure of a crouching Indian emerged like a shadow from the little gully which marked the course of the tiny stream in front of the camp. Just at the point where he appeared, a few rays of the moonlight found their way among the limbs, and added impressiveness to his appearance. A glance would have told that he had approached at the most stealthy gait of which he was capable, and was still using all the skill at his command.

Finding himself within the faint light of the moon, he straightened up, like one who is not certain of his surroundings and is using his eyes and ears to their utmost. Standing erect in this manner he showed himself to be a full-grown warrior in middle life, of strong limbs and frame, and attired in the usual dress of his people. 176

The long, coarse hair dangled about the shoulders, some of the strands having fallen forward in front of the chest, at the time his head drew it over while in a crouching posture. It grew so low on his forehead that no more than an inch was between the roots and shaggy eyebrows. Beneath these the eyes glittered like those of a snake. The ugly features were made more ugly by the different colored paints—most of it black—that was daubed over them, and the countenance was distorted by a swelling recently produced.

The breast and arms were covered by deerskin, a fringe running down in front to the belt, which held his tomahawk. The frightful horn-handled knife was tightly grasped in his right hand. Below the belt was breechcloth, followed by leggins and moccasins, but it was noticeable that he carried no rifle with him.

Perhaps you have guessed the reason; he had none to carry, for he was the Wolf who had been deprived of his valuable weapon on the day before by Deerfoot the Shawanoe. 177

As was learned in due time, the Winnebago, after being despoiled by Deerfoot, had made all haste to rejoin his band, that were encamped at no great distance from Greville. When he told his brother warriors of the indignity to which he had been subjected, they were as rampart as he for revenge. They were on the point of starting for a settlement, intending to await the chance to shoot down some of the unsuspecting people, when the leader, a man of iron will, interposed.

He said that according to the story of the Wolf himself, his gun had been taken from him by a single warrior. A Winnebago ought to be ashamed to confess such a thing, and the only way by which the Wolf could redeem himself was to recover his gun unaided by any of his people. Let him come back to the party with his rifle and then they would risk their lives a dozen times over to repay the young Shawanoe and his youthful friend (they knew nothing about Fred Linden) for the insult they had put upon one of the leading warriors of the Winnebago tribe.

You can well understand how displeasing this decision was to the Wolf, but there was no help for it. The warrior who gave the order was not only the leader of the company, but the principal chief of the tribe. No one dared to dispute his command, and he intimated that it was not only necessary for the Wolf to recover his gun in order to enlist the services of the rest, but his standing at home would be compromised if he went back without his rifle and the story that it had been taken from him by a single warrior of another tribe. 178

From this you will understand the eagerness with which the Wolf set out to regain the weapon.

The fact that Fred Linden and Terry Clark left Greville the next morning after the affair, mixed matters to that extent that, for a time, the Winnebago was at fault. It was his intention to prowl around the settlement, awaiting his chance, for he suspected that Deerfoot had gone thither with the lad who had given the Wolf such a blow in the face; but the discovery of the footprints of the two boys leading to the southward mystified the Indian. He was quite close to the creek, and the sun had crossed the meridian at the time this discovery was made. It was natural that he should look for the trail of the Shawanoe, but he could not find it. 179

Finally, with a half-suspicion of the truth, the Wolf went into the settlement to make inquiries. He could speak enough broken English to make himself understood, and, as it so happened, it was Mr. MacClaskey himself whom he accosted. He told the inquirer the truth, adding that Terry took with him a gun that was captured from a vagabond Indian. But for that he would not have been allowed to go, for there was but one rifle in the family, which the settler would trust in no hands but his own for any length of time.

The Winnebago was shrewd enough to disarm any doubt that might have been felt about himself. It was the rule in the settlement to show kindness to every wandering Indian that visited them, and no one dreamed that any thing was to be feared from the Wolf. But his heart was full of exulting malignancy. He knew who had the gun, and aware that the two boys had started for the camp of the Ozarks, he understood where to look for it. The fact that the Winnebago had no gun with him would have caused the belief that he was the vagabond Indian, had he not explained that he left it in the woods as a token of comity. 180

The Wolf sauntered back until he was across the stream and out of sight. Then he sped along the trail, with a long, loping trot, which his race can maintain for hours without fatigue. He had a long distance to travel, but he reached the scene of the encounter with the strange animal, just as it was growing dark.

At this point, he showed admirable woodcraft. The signs on the ground puzzled him for a time, but there was the carcass of the animal, and by and by he found the imprints of the small moccasins, which told him that the young Shawanoe had rejoined the others at this point.

As you can well believe, this was any thing but a pleasant discovery, for, superior as was the strength of the Winnebago, he would have preferred to meet the two boys, even though both were armed, than to find himself face to face again with the remarkable Indian youth.

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But there was no help for it, and the dusky Winnebago compressed his coppery lips with the resolve that the gun should be in his hands before the rising of the morrow's sun.

The light was rapidly fading among the trees and he improved what was left of it. Prowling around the spot in a circle, with his nose close to the ground, he discovered that the three youths had started along the bank of the brook toward its head.

Thereupon the Winnebago formed the correct conclusion; they had moved from the main trail (doubtless on the suggestion of the young Shawanoe), in search of some place to encamp where there would be less danger of detection.

By the time the Wolf had satisfied himself on this point, it had become too dark among the trees for his eyes to detect the trail, which at mid-day would have been as distinct as a beaten path. He therefore adopted the plan of which I have made mention elsewhere: he followed a general rule.

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The conclusion being that the parties for whom he was searching had located themselves somewhere along the creek, it was useless to try and follow the footprints, though there were points here and there where the sense of touch might have helped him. He decided to creep stealthily up stream until he found the camp, and then bide his time.

It is hard to form an idea of the extreme care with which this was done. Had the Winnebago not known of the presence of Deerfoot, he would not have taken half the time consumed, but he had seen enough of that wonderful youth to know that it would require more than a child to outwit him.

At a point about half way between the trail and the camp among the rocks, the Wolf thought his hands touched some imprints in the earth which showed that the three had turned to the right and gone deeper into the woods. It required reconnoitering before he discovered his mistake.

With the same amazing patience he renewed his stealthy progress up the stream, until at last he emerged into the moonlight and found that at last he had reached the spot for which he had hunted so long.

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It so happened that as he straightened up, he looked directly into the mouth of the cave and saw the dull glow of the camp-fire, like the open eye of some monster. Not only that, but he observed the three forms stretched out by it. The heart of the savage throbbed with pleasure, for he felt that success had come at last.

With the same absolute noiselessness he began creeping into the mouth of the cavern. One of the embers fell apart with a soft rustle, which caused him to stop and hold his breath lest the sleepers should awake. But they did not stir, and in a minute he resumed his advance.

The two white lads had flung the blankets from their faces, so that he saw Fred Linden plainly, and enough of the other to identify him as the one who had smitten him. Nearer to the Winnebago than they was the third form, which he knew equally well.

"It is the Shawanoe," was his thought; "I will bury my knife in his heart and then slay the others."

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A minute later he reached forward his upraised right hand and suddenly brought it down with a force that pinned the blanket to the earth. But to his unspeakable disgust Deerfoot was not within it.

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CHAPTER XIX.

SHAWANOE AND WINNEBAGO.

While Fred Linden and Terry Clark lay in that part of the cavern where the floor was of rock, the blanket of Deerfoot was spread on the earth. Consequently when the Winnebago brought down his knife with such vicious spitefulness, it went through the folds of the blanket and was buried to the hilt in the ground underneath.

You know that, despite the marvelous quiet with which the Winnebago approached the cavern, he was heard by Deerfoot, who, pausing only long enough to make sure that an enemy was approaching, whisked outside. There he stood in the impenetrable shadow under the trees, and saw the Winnebago at the moment he emerged into the faint moonlight and stood upright.

The first look confirmed his suspicion that it was the Winnebago, who had come back to avenge

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himself for the affair of the preceding day. Deerfoot smiled to himself, for there was a tinge of absurdity about the whole business that was sure to become still more so.

The Shawanoe paused a few seconds before darting out of the cavern, until he could arrange his blanket, so that it would appear as if it infolded his sleeping form, and then he quietly awaited events.

It must be admitted that it looked like leaving Fred and Terry in great peril to permit such a savage enemy to creep so close to them while they were sound asleep; but Deerfoot knew that the first thing that the Wolf would do would be to attempt his life, precisely as he did attempt it. Before he could do any thing more, the Shawanoe concluded to impress his presence upon the visitor.

At the moment, therefore, that the Winnebago stopped his advance and slowly raised his knife, as he supposed over the breast of Deerfoot, that gentleman, kneeling on one knee, brought his rifle to bear upon the Winnebago, the dull light from the fire shining along the barrel, whose muzzle was within a yard of the unsuspecting Wolf.

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The blanket through which the keen-pointed knife had been driven was no more firmly transfixed for the moment than was the Wolf when a slight hissing noise caused him to turn his head, and he saw the dreaded Shawanoe in a kneeling position with his gun leveled at him, the finger on the trigger, and the bright eye glancing along the barrel.

The Winnebago was literally unable to move or speak, and Deerfoot, motionless himself, held him thus for several seconds. Then with the gun still pointed, he said in a low voice:

"Dog of a Winnebago! Deerfoot has spared the life of the Wolf, and he now seeks to strike him in the dark."

This address loosened the tongue of the terrified warrior, who, seeing his captor raise his head from sighting along the barrel, though he kept the weapon leveled, obeyed the beckoning motion of Deerfoot, and crept noiselessly out of the cavern. On the alert for any chance, he was ready to seize it, but the first object on which his eye rested in the dim moonlight was the figure of the young Shawanoe holding his gun in such a position, that, should it be necessary, he could fire like a flash.

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Deerfoot would not have hesitated to lay his gun aside, and, drawing his knife, give the Winnebago the same chance with himself; but the Wolf had left his weapon where he forced it through the blanket into the ground, so that he had none except his tomahawk, and he was not likely to attempt any thing with that.

Besides, while Deerfoot had not the least fear of his enemy, he did not wish to fight with him. He did not engage in his many desperate encounters through love of victory, but because it had seemed to him that it was his duty, and there was no other way out of the trouble.

It must be said, too, that at this hour the Shawanoe happened to be in a mood which rendered such encounters more than usually distasteful to him. After he had closed his Bible and lay on his face, looking into the embers and meditating, the same thought that had stirred him many a time before filled his mind again.

Why do men strive to kill each other?

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It was a question which has puzzled many a wise man in the past and has not yet been answered. Thousands of affectionate husbands unlock the white arms of the loving little children from their necks, kiss the heartbroken wife good-by, and then rush out to try to murder one whom they have never seen, who has also just torn himself loose from his family. There is something in the thought that mystifies beyond all explanation.

The problem which directly interested Deerfoot was whether the day would not come when the red men of every tribe could meet the pale faces in friendship instead of hatred. Why should they always be at war? Could he do a little to bring about that day of universal peace? Was there not some work which the Great Spirit had laid out for him by which he could help to soften the feeling of the two peoples toward each other?

But Deerfoot had asked himself the same question many a time before, and the only answer was that the most he could do was to follow the light within him: that is, aid to remove a part of the antagonism between the two races.

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Alas, too, that while he was considering the question, his ear caught the soft rustle that told him one of his own race was seeking his life. Deerfoot was sorrowed more than angered. He wished that the Winnebago had taken some other time to make his stealthy attack.

Joined to this emotion was that of another akin to sympathy for the Winnebago in his complete discomfiture. He had come back to regain his rifle, but not only had failed, but had lost his knife, and now was standing at the mercy of a Shawanoe young enough to be his son. The latter resolved that, though the Wolf had earned death, he would not harm him, unless forced to do so in self-defense.

For half a minute the warriors, with ten feet separating them, looked straight at each other in silence. Fred Linden and Terry Clark slept soundly, for as yet there had been no noise sufficient to awake a light sleeper.

"Why does the Wolf seek the life of Deerfoot?" asked the latter, willing to relieve the embarrassment of the other.

"The Wolf sought the gun that had been stolen from him."

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"But it was not hidden in the blanket, that he should drive his knife through it."

"The Wolf believed it was," was the curt response.

"Does the Wolf strike with his knife at his own gun?" asked the Shawanoe, without betraying any emotion.

"He would rather do so than that it should stay in the hands of an enemy."

"It never would have been in the hands of an enemy had the Wolf acted as a brave warrior; but he sought the life of the young pale face who had never done him harm."

"Has not his people stolen the hunting grounds of the red man?" demanded the Winnebago, who, seeing that some grace was to be allowed him, burst into the argument that multitudes of his people have used before and since. Before he could proceed further, Deerfoot asked: "Are these the hunting grounds of the Winnebagos?"

"They are the hunting grounds of his race, though they may not be of his totem; Deerfoot should join with his brother the Wolf in driving the white men into the sea."

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"There was a day when that might have been done," replied Deerfoot, who felt that faint throb and thrill which sometimes came to him, as if to tell him that his Indian nature was not yet entirely dead within him; "once the pale faces were but a handful, and the red men hunted over all the ground that lies between the great waters. They could have swept the pale faces into the sea, but they would not be brothers with themselves; they fought each other. So the pale faces grew, and the day will never come when they need fear the red men."

"The brave warrior does not ask what can be done, but does with all his might that which he knows the Great Spirit wishes him to do."

"The Great Spirit does not tell him to kill his pale face brother; for they are all His children and He loves them. The Great Spirit has spoken to Deerfoot and told him that all His children should love one another."

"Does Deerfoot do so?"

"He does; he never strikes but when the Great Spirit tells him to do so; if he was the Wolf and the Wolf was Deerfoot, he would have slain the Shawanoe long ago."

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The Winnebago would have denied this had he not seen that it was idle to do so. What would he not have given at that moment could he have exchanged places with the handsome and triumphant young warrior?

"The *true* Great Spirit loves all His children, whether they be pale or red or of the color of night; He smiles when they meet each other as friends, and He will reward in the spirit land those who do His will on the earth. Let the Wolf bury the words of Deerfoot in his heart, for they are the words of truth, and if they are heeded he will be happy—Go!"

The amazed Winnebago doubted for a moment that he had heard the command aright; but the wave of the hand which accompanied it, and the fact that it was in perfect consonance with the words he had just heard, satisfied him there was no mistake about it.

"The Wolf thanks his brother for what he has done."

The heart of the Winnebago forced the words between his lips as he turned his face away and walked down the bank of the stream in the direction whence he came. He vanished the next instant in the darkness.

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Deerfoot did not stir until every sound of the soft footsteps had died out. Then he lowered the hammer of his gun, bent his shoulders slightly forward, so as to walk freely, and entered the cavern where his friends were still sleeping.

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CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER NIGHT VISITOR.

Deerfoot the Shawanoe was convinced of one thing—the Wolf would trouble him no further that night. What he might do in the future must be left for the future to tell. Whether the few words that he had dropped should prove the good seed of which I have spoken, or whether they should be choked up by thorns, not even the Wolf himself could tell.

The young warrior showed his convictions by flinging some wood on the fire, so that its blaze filled the cavern, and preparing for sleep. He first sat down and pulled out the knife of the Wolf, whose blade took on an additional gleam from the cleansing it had received in being forced into

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the flinty earth. He examined it with no little curiosity, though it was similar to his own.

A glance, however, showed that it was an inch or two longer. It was straight and oval-shaped, the blade not quite two inches wide, with a handle that had been cut from a deer's horn and fitted with no slight skill. Whether it was the product of aboriginal ingenuity or was the work of some cutler of the Caucasian race could only be guessed, the matter really not being worth the trouble of guessing. Its two edges and the point were very sharp. Deerfoot having laid aside his gun, grasped the blade in his left hand and circled it through the air like a swordsman at play. He was so pleased with it that he decided to keep it. He would not throw away the one that had served him so well, but would present it to Fred Linden, while he retained the one with which he was sure he could do better work.

It was singular that while the Shawanoe was turning the weapon over in his hand, and examining it with so much interest, that the occasion for its immediate use should come, but so it was.

He was on the point of shoving it in behind his belt and lying down to sleep, when a movement of the bushes outside was heard. It was so distinct indeed that he knew it was not caused by a person.

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The rustling was accompanied by a scratching sound and low growl. Turning his head, he saw an immense wolf standing at the entrance of the cavern, his whole figure revealed in the firelight. With his jaws parted and his form erect, he was a formidable creature, before which almost any one would have recoiled. He would have advanced straight to an attack upon the young warrior but for the fire which partly interposed. Even as it was, he seemed making ready to leap at the throat of the youth, who was sitting on the blanket, looking coolly at him.

It would have been the easiest matter in the world for Deerfoot to catch up his gun and shoot him dead, but he chose to do otherwise. Drawing one of the embers forth by the end that was not burning, he held it before him in his right hand, and, grasping the knife in his left, ran lightly toward him, as though he meant to jam it into his eyes.

The bravest animal can not stand unmoved before such an attack, and the namesake of the human enemy whisked about and darted out of the cavern with the Shawanoe close behind him. The former bounded a half dozen steps, pausing on the very spot where the hostile warrior was first seen, and facing about, as if to observe whether his foe dare follow him any further. But Deerfoot had him now where he wished, and he flung the torch aside among the undergrowth, where it lay smoking for a few minutes before it went out.

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The fierce animal must have been of the opinion that he too had his antagonist where he wanted him, for, without the least hesitation, he uttered a snarling growl and made two leaps straight at him. The first carried him a little more than half the intervening distance, and the second was meant to bear Deerfoot to the earth.

The young warrior, however, stepped lightly to one side, so that the wolf missed him altogether, and would have been forced to wheel about and make a second attack had the chance been given him, but at the instant it landed, the left hand, grasping the long, keen knife, shot forward with great force and lightning-like swiftness, and was buried to the hilt in the throat of the brute.

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It was a blow as effective as a cannon ball could have been, for the knife clove the seat of life in twain, and the beast rolled over on the earth dead, almost before it could emit a single yelp of agony.

Deerfoot stood a moment surveying the carcass before him, and then, with no more excitement than he would have shown in speaking to Fred or Terry, he said: "'Tis a good weapon, and will serve Deerfoot well."

Then he walked to the tiny brook, carefully washed the gleaming blade, shoved it behind his belt, where it was held in place without the sheath that clasped the other, and walked back to the cavern. The boys had not been disturbed by the outcry of the wolf, and Deerfoot, throwing some more wood on the flames, lay down on the blanket, drew it partly about him, and in ten minutes was asleep, not opening his eyes again until the light of morning streamed into the cavern and only a few smoldering embers were left of the camp-fire.

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He smiled when he looked upon the two youths, who were still soundly sleeping, all unconscious of the stirring events that had taken place during the darkness. There was no call for a renewal of the fire, and, after spending a few minutes in communion with the Great Spirit, he passed outside the cavern, drank from the clear water in the brook, and laved his face and hands.

Just as he finished, Fred Linden emerged, rubbing his eyes and yawning, while Terry Clark was close behind him.

"Good morning, Deerfoot!" called the former; "it was just like you to let us sleep all night while you kept watch: to-night you must let us take our turn."

"Fred has expressed me own sintimints," added Terry; "we have had so much slumber that we can kaap awake for a month. Helloa!"

The gaze of the boys at that moment fell on the body of the wolf, stiffened in death.

"You have had visitors," said Fred; "my gracious, but he's a big fellow! Killed by a knife thrust too, that looks as if it had gone half way through his body; how was it, Deerfoot?"

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The Shawanoe waited until they had finished bathing their hands and faces, and then he quietly

told them the story, including the account of the warrior's visit. As you may well suppose, the boys opened their eyes, and Terry, running inside, brought out the blanket, which had been folded in such a manner that the knife of the Winnebago passed through three thicknesses of the cloth.

"And to think that we slept through it all!"

"Begorra, but wasn't it lucky that we didn't have the blanket wrapped about us?" gasped Terry, who was in earnest in his momentary belief of the narrow escape of himself and companion.

"It is well that you kept guard last night; neither of us would have heard the approach of the Winnebago; and wouldn't have known any thing about the other wolf until he lit on our shoulders."

"My brother is mistaken," said Deerfoot; "he is like the rattlesnake; he gives warning before he strikes; I heard him growl, and he stopped at the entrance to the cavern, afraid of the fire."

"Why didn't you shoot him?"

"Would he have died more quietly, or with less pain than from the knife? It is the knife that the Winnebago left; Deerfoot wanted to learn whether it would serve him well."

"And I should think ye ought to be satisfied, as a cousin of me own once remarked after working five years for a man without any pay except starvation and kicks."

"The knife proved itself a good one," said Fred; "but the poorest knife would be just as effective in your hands."

Deerfoot withdrew his own weapon from its skin sheath, and handed it to Fred.

"Let my brother carry that, for the hour may come sooner than he thinks when it will be of use to him."

Fred accepted it gratefully, saying, as he managed to find place for it somewhat after the manner of Deerfoot:

"If I can handle it with half of your skill, it will serve me well indeed, but that can never be."

Deerfoot placed the larger weapon within the sheath from which he had withdrawn his own and made no reply to the compliments of his friends. He had heard many such before, but he placed no value upon them. He regarded himself as simply trying to use in the best way the gifts of the Great Spirit. His many escapes from death and injury were due solely to God's protecting care, and he could never take to himself any credit for what he did.

The excitement of the boys having subsided, the three sat down in front of the cavern to eat their breakfast. Enough of the food brought by Fred was left to give each and all the meal needed, but when they were through, not a particle was left; henceforth they must depend upon what their rifles brought them for support while on the way to the camp in the Ozarks.

"We have two or three days' travel yet before we can reach camp," said Fred, while they were making ready to resume their journey; "but I don't think we shall want for food. What troubles me the most is that scamp of a Winnebago. You have spared him twice, but I don't believe it will make a friend of him."

"He was so boilin' mad," added Terry, "because he lost his gun that now that he has also lost his knife he may get so much madder that he'll flop over and become pleased again."

This, however, was a kind of philosophy to which the others could not agree. Deerfoot owned that he was in doubt; the sentiment of gratitude is not one of the chief virtues of the American race, though many story-tellers would have us believe that it is. There have been instances known where a red man has shown something of the kind, but as a rule they have no more of it than had the frozen serpent that was warmed in the bosom of him who proved his foolishness by making the experiment.

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE CAMP OF THE WINNEBAGOS.

Now that the little party had started once more toward the camp in the Ozark Mountains, they moved at a brisk pace. It took them but a short time to reach the main trail, where there was a short pause while Deerfoot made what may be called a microscopic scrutiny of the ground.

The result did not please him, for he saw the proof that the Wolf had turned to the right, and had preceded them over the route which they were to follow. He would have been better

satisfied had he crossed the trail or turned the other way. The fact that he had gone southward meant that the main party which he was seeking to join were in that direction, though the keen eyes of the Shawanoe could detect no signs that they had trodden the same ground. That signified nothing, however, as they might have pursued a slightly different route, falling back upon the main path further on.

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Deerfoot, in telling his young friends what he had learned, added that he had no doubt that they would hear from the Winnebagos again, and possibly at an hour when least expected. Fred Linden was disturbed more by the knowledge that the party were approaching the camp where his father and his companions were unsuspecting of the danger. They could easily steal close enough to the cabin to shoot down all three without warning.

When he mentioned his fear to Deerfoot, that sagacious young warrior told him that he saw no cause for anxiety, though he could not deny that something of the kind might take place. His theory was that the Winnebagos were not disposed to attack any party of whites in mere wantonness, the act of the Wolf being the whim of a single gnarly-brained warrior.

Be that as it may, our young friends were anxious to make the best progress they could, and, for fully a dozen miles, they kept up their brisk gait. At the end of that time, the sun was overhead, and they were obliged to stop on the bank of a broad, swiftly-flowing stream. The prints made by the hoofs of the horses that had passed that way some days before were plainly seen, though there had been a fall of rain since. A glance at the water showed that it was so deep that the hunters must have swam their animals across.

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It would have been an easy matter for the boys to swim also, but they preferred to use a raft. Accordingly, they set to work, and it did not take them long to gather enough logs and driftwood to float all three. These were deftly fastened together by Deerfoot, who used hickory withes for that purpose, and, then, with a long pole which he cut and trimmed with his tomahawk, he pushed from shore.

The propelling pole was fully fifteen feet long, and in the middle of the stream, the boys were surprised to see that when one end was pressed against the bottom, no more than two feet were above the surface: the depth was much greater than they had suspected.

It was hard work to keep the clumsy raft moving at such disadvantage, but Deerfoot would not yield the pole to either of his companions, and, after awhile, he drove it against the shore, and all stepped upon dry land, without so much as their feet having become moistened.

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They had been carried some distance below the trail by the current, but they quickly regained it, and pushed on. Having eaten nothing since morning, all three were ahungered, but Fred and Terry grimly determined to wait for Deerfoot to suggest a stop before they asked for it. Had they but known that many a time, when on the tramp, he had gone two days and nights without taking a mouthful, they would not have been so willing to await his pleasure.

But though he would not have thought of stopping before nightfall had he been alone, he was too considerate to subject them to discomfort; but it was useless to stop, since as yet they had seen nothing in the way of game to shoot.

Terry and Fred were beginning to feel impatient with each other because of their mutual stubbornness when the Shawanoe, who had been walking quite fast, slackened his pace and turning his head, said:

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"My brothers are hungry, and they shall have to eat."

"Ye couldn't tell us better news," replied the grateful Terry, "though I would be obliged to ye if ye would impart the information where there is any chance of our gettin' any such thing, as the people used to say whin me uncle on me mother's side offered to bet a sixpence on anythin'."

Deerfoot made no answer, but walking still more slowly, he was seen to raise his hand to his mouth. Then followed the peculiar cry that a wild turkey makes when it is lost from its companions. The Shawanoe knew that the birds were in the surrounding woods, though none had shown itself.

By and by there was an answer to the call from a point ahead. Asking the boys to wait where they were, he trotted lightly forward, and was not absent ten minutes when he came back with a plump turkey, whose neck he had wrung.

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Since the lads had heard no report of a gun, they wanted to know by what means he had secured it. He replied that he had stood behind a tree and repeated the call until a group of the birds approached within a few rods, when he made a dash among them, and seized his prize before she could spread her wings and fly—all of which told of a dexterity that few others possessed.

In a brief while, a good dinner was boiled over the coals, a short rest taken, and the three were on the road again, it being their wish to travel further than on the day before. Had Deerfoot been alone he would have broken into a trot that would have doubled the distance before the set of sun.

But the trail over which they were walking grew rougher. It was so rocky in some places that it must have tried the endurance of the horses ridden by the hunters. Instead of being direct, it grew very sinuous, made so by the efforts to avoid many formidable obstacles that rose in front. All this was of little account to the dusky leader, though of necessity it prolonged the journey, and he was obliged to slacken his pace to suit those who were less accustomed to such work.

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It was about the middle of the afternoon, when they were checked again by coming abreast of a stream that was too broad and deep to be forded. The trail, however, instead of entering the water, turned up the bank, and the three, under the leadership of Deerfoot, did the same.

This diversion continued for fully two hundred yards, when the path struck the water, the point on the other side where the horsemen had emerged being in plain sight. The former method was resorted to, and in less than an hour after reaching the creek the three had safely ferried themselves across. It was neither so broad nor so deep as the other, but it delayed them fully as much.

Within a half mile from the stream last crossed they came upon the trail of the whole Winnebago party. Just as Deerfoot suspected, they had taken another route, and had come back to the main path a good many miles away from where the Wolf left it the night before.

His experienced eye told him that they were close upon the company, who numbered precisely twelve—several more than he supposed. Whether the Wolf was with them could not of course be learned until a glimpse of the party themselves was obtained. 212

Matters had now taken such a shape that the Shawanoe told his companions that the utmost care must be used, since they were liable to stumble on the very ones whom they were anxious to avoid. He instructed them to allow him to keep fully a hundred feet in advance, and never to diminish the distance without orders from him.

This was a prudent step, and Fred and Terry did their best to carry out the wishes of their guide, who walked on at a moderate pace, without once glancing back at his friends, who he knew would respect what he had said to them.

Bear in mind that this arrangement was made toward the close of the afternoon of an autumn day. The three had not traveled more than two miles, with the leader so far in advance, when the gathering gloom became such that he would not have been visible to his followers had he not fallen back so as to keep in sight. 213

Finally, when less than a dozen yards separated them, and the graceful figure of the young Shawanoe looked like a shadow gliding in advance, he suddenly halted. The eyes of the boys were upon him, and they saw him raise his hand as a signal to stop; they obeyed without so much as a whisper.

He stood like a statue for two or three minutes, and then, turning his head without moving his body, beckoned them to approach. They could barely see the motion of his arm, as they stepped softly to his side; but before reaching him, they caught the glimmer of a light among the trees, somewhat in front and to the right. When they stood near him, they saw it more distinctly.

In a partly open space, near the invariable stream of water, were a group of Indians, some stretched lazily on the ground, some squatted like tailors, two busy cooking something over the fire, and nearly every one smoking long-stemmed, stone pipes. They were a sturdy set of warriors, who were likely to give a good account of themselves in a hunt or fight, and both Fred and Terry knew who they were before Deerfoot, with his arm extended and his finger pointing toward them, said: 214

"It is the camp of the Winnebagos!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"KEEP TO THE TRAIL"

It was an interesting scene on which the three youths looked. There were a dozen Winnebago warriors lolling and smoking in camp, while two of their number were preparing their supper, by half-broiling it over the blaze and coals. Fred and Terry stood in silence by the side of Deerfoot, gazing upon the strangers with a curiosity such as no other sight could have inspired.

A small tree interfered somewhat with the view of Fred, and he took a step forward. Immediately the Shawanoe put out his arm and shook his head to signify that that would not do; they were as close as was safe. Then Fred shifted his position a little to one side, as you feel like doing in a public hall when a column is in front of you. To this Deerfoot offered no objection, and the lad was satisfied. 215

"Begorra, but there's the spalpeen!" whispered Terry, in some excitement, pointing his finger toward the camp, and with no thought of the uselessness of such an act.

The others knew that he referred to the Wolf, who had caused them so much trouble, but they had already seen him. He was standing at one end of the group, with folded arms, while he 216

scowled, and the firelight fell upon his features with such directness that the scowl could be plainly seen. He appeared to be looking at the two warriors busy with the fire, though more than likely his gaze fell indifferently upon them and the rest, all of whom were in his field of vision.

The tomahawk showed in his girdle, but of course he was without any other weapon, and Terry could not avoid a smile when he noted it and he had to say something despite the displeasure of Deerfoot.

"Do ye observe his left eye and the end of his nose where one of me blows landed? What could be foiner than the swell that ye see there? He will naad to use no black paint for several days, as me grandfather—"

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At this point Deerfoot deliberately placed his hand over the mouth of the speaker, abruptly ending what he proposed to say.

Now, nothing could be clearer than that if the Winnebago party were in such plain view of the three youths, the latter in turn were liable to be discovered by them. They were standing beyond the circle of firelight, where the darkness screened them from sight, and, if one of the red men should look in that direction, he could not have seen them; but there was the probability that any moment one of the warriors might start out to reconnoiter their surroundings, in which event, discovery was almost certain. Besides, the exuberant spirits of Terry Clark taught Deerfoot that it was unwise to trust him in such a delicate position.

Altogether, the time spent in watching the Winnebagos was barely ten minutes. During that period, some of those reclining on the leaves got up, walked about and sat down again; others kept their feet, and one stepped to where the two were busy with a steak of some kind that they were broiling over the coals, as though his hunger was making him impatient.

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But the Wolf never stirred a muscle, and Terry afterward insisted that he did not wink his eyes, so motionless was he. The same scowl added hideousness to the painted face, and it was easy to understand that his meditations were of any thing but a pleasant nature.

Turning his back upon the camp, Deerfoot motioned for them to go back. They did so, he following on their heels until not the faintest glimmer of the fire could be seen. Then he led them by a round-about course to the trail beyond the camp, and explained his wishes.

He was now free to admit that there was reason to believe the Winnebagos intended an assault upon the three hunters among the foothills of the Ozark, and who were unsuspecting of such danger. Of course the Shawanoe had no direct knowledge that such was their purpose, but he was so convinced that he meant to take the utmost precautions against it.

He therefore proposed that he should linger near the camp until he could learn of a verity what their intentions were. If they meant to attack the Hunters of the Ozark, then he would hasten to give warning to Linden, Hardin and Bowlby, who, re-enforced by the three youths, would be strong enough to beat off an Indian party twice as strong.

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In the meantime, Deerfoot wished Terry and Fred to push toward the camp with all the speed of which they were capable, he promising to follow as soon as he could. They had walked almost the entire day with scarcely a halt on the road, but he wished them to keep on into the night so long as they could. They would need nothing to eat before morning and between sundown and sunup they ought to make a long advance on their journey.

You will probably wonder why (the situation being such as was explained by Deerfoot), he did not keep company with the lads and help them in their forced march to the mountains. One reason was that he was convinced in the first place that a demonstration would be made by the Winnebagos against the Hunters of the Ozark, and he wanted to get both boys—especially Terry—out of the neighborhood as soon as he could; for their presence hampered his own actions. The safest place for them was in the strong cabin to the southward, and they could not get there too soon.

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Yet they would certainly travel as fast in his company as by themselves, and Fred and Terry, therefore, could not see why he should stay behind instead of going with them; yet Deerfoot the Shawanoe never took a step of that kind without the best reason for it, as you will admit when it is made clear to you. To give this explanation would require such a long diversion from the thread of my story that you would be impatient. Before I am through with the history of Deerfoot, you shall know not only the reason for his course but for several other things that have been referred to in the stories told about him.

The confidence of Fred Lincoln and Terry Clark in the wonderful young Shawanoe was so perfect that they did not question any decision, no matter how little they failed to see its reason. If what he asked was in their power, they would bound at the chance of doing it, just as they did now.

He had a parting warning to give.

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"Let my brothers make sure that they do not lose the trail; they must look at the ground often: when they do not see the path they must stop and await the rising of the sun; they can not reach the cabin too soon, but they can never reach it by going wrong; *keep to the trail!*"

The circuitous route which they had taken under the guidance of Deerfoot, had brought them back to the path at a point fully a hundred yards beyond the camp-fire, which had been started in the small open space only a few rods from the path. So far as they knew there was nothing now between them in the way of a direct advance to the cabin of their hunters.

"Fred," said Terry, after they were fairly under way, and while he almost stepped on the heels of his friend; "Deerfoot thinks we won't go more than five or six miles; let's show him that we ain't such babies as he thinks."

"I feel as you do; I propose that we keep it up all night."

"Will ye be kind enough to raich yer right hand over your lift shoulder and shake wid me on the same?"

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Instead of doing precisely as asked, Fred laughingly turned about and shook hands with his friend, whom he loved and for whom he was ready at any time to risk his life. They were on their mettle and they meant to show the young Shawanoe that they were capable of doing much more than he seemed to believe. They intended that when, after a few hours, he started to overtake them, he would find that he had a good many miles further to travel than he supposed.

Had Deerfoot known of their thoughts he would have smiled and been pleased. He wanted them to do their best and he was willing, should it prove to be safe, to allow them to keep up the delusion that their gait could bear any comparison with the speed of which he was capable.

Meanwhile, the boys started in earnest to carry out their intention. Their only fear was that they might be hindered by the difficulty in keeping to the trail; for though the full moon was again overhead, and though many of the leaves had fallen from the trees, little light was there to help them.

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But for a time, at least, the difficulty was much less than they expected. The path, though it continued to lead over rough places and around obstructions, sometimes up-hill and sometimes down, was still so clearly marked that Fred Linden went forward with scarcely a halt or any hesitation.

Though there are men who have walked their five and six hundred miles with little rest on the road, it is a severe task for any one to keep it up through an entire day and night, as you can soon become convinced by making the experiment; but Fred and Terry were sturdy, strong-limbed fellows, born and bred on the frontier, who were capable of standing a great deal. When, therefore, they meant to astonish Deerfoot by their progress during the night, they felt no distrust of their ability in that direction.

There was no reason why they should put any restraint on themselves, and they talked quite cheerily, Terry indulging now and then in some of his quaint remarks. But a tired boy does not feel like keeping up a lively conversation for any length of time, and so it came about that after awhile they walked steadily forward, for miles at a time, without exchanging more than a few syllables. Terry could see the figure of his friend with his rifle over his shoulder always a few feet in front, there being just enough light in the gloom to keep his form in sight, while Fred heard the steady tramp, tramp behind him, sometimes keeping pace with his own and sometimes falling "out of step."

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"Helloa! this is too bad!" suddenly exclaimed Fred, coming to an abrupt halt; "I guess this ends our tramp for to-night."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

AN INFURIATE SHAWANOE.

WITH the departure of Fred and Terry, Deerfoot felt as though he had flung off a blanket that had been wrapped about his shoulders: his arms were now free and he could use them at will.

He shrewdly suspected that his young friends would fancy they had been put upon their mettle, and would, therefore, exert themselves to their fullest to meet his expectations. He was glad it was so, and he would have been much better pleased could he have known they were in the cabin at the foot of the mountains, or, better still, safe at their home in Greville.

Deerfoot now stealthily approached as close to the camp-fire as was safe. He screened his body behind a tree, but he was nigh enough to catch every word that was said in an ordinary tone, and he understood the Winnebago tongue well enough to want no interpreter.

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The Shawanoe had hardly taken his position to act as coven, when the venison steaks were about one-fourth broiled, which was enough to satisfy the parties interested. Those who had charge of the culinary operations divided the meat into a dozen slices, so that each warrior was provided for, and the feast opened. The strong animal appetites, and teeth like those of the steel traps that were set at the foot of the Ozarks, soon brought the feast to a close, after which the feasters walked the few steps necessary to the brook near at hand, and lying down on their faces drank their fill, just as so many pigs would have done, grunting with satisfaction as they

came back and resumed their pipes.

All this Deerfoot had seen so often that it had no interest to him. He kept his eyes on two warriors—the Wolf and one whom he had never seen before. These two sat near each other on the ground while eating, and they talked together in low tones. Since none of those around could overhear the words, it was impossible for Deerfoot, with all his wonderful acuteness, to catch a syllable. He would have given a great deal could he have done so, for he suspected the dark plot that was taking shape in their dusky brains. There was a dangerous flash in the black eyes of the young Shawanoe while he watched their movements.

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It was clear to him that the Wolf had lost prestige, instead of gaining sympathy by his last misfortune. Having gone out to gather wool he had come back shorn, to go out a second time and to come back shorn to a still more ludicrous degree. The manner in which the Wolf kept apart from the rest, affiliating only with the single warrior at his side, showed the feeling in the party.

It was easy to recognize the leader or chieftain, though his dress was precisely like the rest, but his air of authority told the story plainly enough. The Winnebagos were a fine set of men in their war paint, and, as I have said, were able to give a good account of themselves in any scrimmage in which they might become engaged.

As unexpectedly to the warriors as to Deerfoot himself, the Winnebago chieftain, who was standing on one side of the fire where his rifle with several others leaned against a tree, took his pipe from between his lips and spoke to the Wolf in tones which caused that redskin to look up in wonder. Seeing that the sachem hesitated, as if waiting for him to rise, the Wolf came nimbly to his feet, as did his friend at his elbow. The majority of the rest, however, sat still and showed no special interest in what was going on.

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"The Wolf was the bravest of the Winnebagos," remarked the chief, "when our war parties met those of the Sauks and Foxes and Pottawatomies who dared to come into our country; the heart of the Wolf bounded with delight and no tomahawk was hurled with such swiftness as his: no gun was fired more often; no scalping knife took back more scalps to hang upon the ridge-pole of his wigwam.

"But the Wolf came across the Big Water and his heart longed for the scalp of the pale face; he went out to hunt for it; he came back; the tongue of the Wolf is not double and tells no lies; the Wolf met a Shawanoe warrior who took his gun from him.

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"It was the young Shawanoe called Deerfoot; the Winnebagos have been told about Deerfoot, the friend of the white man; the heart of Black Bear (meaning himself) was angry; he was chief of the Winnebagos; he told the Wolf that he must go forth and bring back his rifle; the Wolf went; he did not bring back his rifle, but left his knife behind; Deerfoot saw him and took it away from him.

"Deerfoot is but a youth; he is not a mighty warrior; the Wolf must get his gun and knife; he must bring back the scalp of the Shawanoe, he shall take Wau-ko-mia-tan with him; each shall have his gun; let them bring back the scalps of Deerfoot and the two pale faces with him; then will Black Bear forget that the Wolf was not always a great warrior.

"Let the Wolf and Wau-ko-mia-tan make haste; the Winnebagos are on the war path; they will carry back with them the scalps of the pale faces who are gathering the skins of the beaver and otter and foxes by the base of the mountain."

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It may be said that this little speech developed the plan of the Winnebago campaign. The Wolf had fallen so low in the opinion of his chieftain and brother warriors, that it was necessary for him to take heroic measures to restore himself. Seeing this, the sachem had just notified him that he must secure the scalps of Deerfoot and the two white boys with him. Wau-ko-mia-tan (who was the warrior that sat at the elbow of the Wolf), was to be his companion. The chieftain knew how closely the two were allied, and he indulged in the little fiction of allowing one to keep company with the other, when the truth was he was afraid to let the Wolf go alone. Since on each of the two former excursions he had lost something, the probabilities were that if he came back again, it would be without his scalp.

The eagerness with which the Wolf accepted this task, the moment he found that he was to have a companion, showed that he was an admirable representative of the average Indian: gratitude to him was a vice rather than a virtue.

The expression on the face of Deerfoot showed that all forbearance was ended. He had twice spared the ingrate: he would do so no more.

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Had the Wolf told his leader that the mercy of Deerfoot had touched his heart, so that his arm could never more be raised in anger against him, but that he would seek the scalps of the hunters at the base of the mountains, the Shawanoe would have felt an admiration for him. Had he sought out Deerfoot and asked for the return of his weapons (though that would have been very unlike his race), Deerfoot would have restored them to him. But now, as it was, when they should meet it would be as mortal enemies.

Nothing showed the vicious ingratitude of the Wolf more vividly than the fact that instead of waiting for the morning before entering upon his wicked enterprise, he started within three minutes after Black Bear, the chieftain, finished his little speech. The sachem picked up his own rifle from where it leaned against the tree and handed it to him, while Wau-ko-mia-tan stood at the other end of the group, until the warrior, his ugly face glowing like that of a demon, stepped to his side. Then the two, without a word or motion like a farewell, turned away and vanished in

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the gloom of the wood.

They had not taken a dozen steps, when Deerfoot glided from behind the tree and passed after them, as if he were the shadow thrown out by the light of the camp-fire. The expression on his face was such as would have hushed Fred Linden and Terry Clark to awed silence could they have seen it.

The two Winnebagos did not come directly back to the trail, but fell into it at almost the precise point where Deerfoot had led his two friends. They stopped a few minutes and talked in their low, guttural tones, none of which was understood by the Shawanoe, who listened with the closest attention.

There was considerable distance at that time between the warriors and Fred and Terry, who had set out with the ambition to keep up their traveling through the entire night. The Winnebagos did not wait long, when they moved on at their usual pace.

Less than a mile from the camp, the warriors again came to a halt and as before talked in a low voice. The point was where the wood was more open, so that the moonlight which found its way among the limbs above showed their forms quite plainly. More than that, enough of their words were audible to enable the listening Shawanoe, who had crept dangerously near, to catch their meaning.

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The Winnebagos turned off at almost a right angle and left the trail behind them. The ground was broken, but they had not gone far, when it became evident that they were following another path, though it was so faintly marked that no eye except that of an American Indian could have discovered it in such an uncertain light.

As they advanced, the surface became not only rougher, but the grade which they ascended was so steep that it would have been tiresome to an ordinary traveler.

Suddenly Deerfoot himself wheeled aside from the indistinct path to which the Winnebagos clung and passed lightly and with great speed through the wood where no one had walked before. So swiftly did he make his way, that, though he crossed a deep ravine and went a considerable distance, it was less than live minutes before he came back to the shadowy trail.

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Instead of keeping along this path, in the same direction as that of his enemies, he turned about and advanced to meet the red men who had dared to come that way. He walked with his usual noiseless step, and stopped on reaching the edge of the ravine over which he had leaped when it crossed his path only a few minutes before.

This gully was more than twenty feet in depth, and about half as wide. The trail led to the edge on one side, continuing on the margin directly opposite, so that any one who wished to keep to it was perforce compelled to leap the chasm—a slight task for any Indian, though it would have been easy to make a bridge by means of a fallen tree.

The moon was now directly overhead, so that a flood of light fell into the craggy ravine, lighting up the gray rocks and boulders, the prostrate trees that had fallen from the sides, the vegetation along the slopes and the mossy grass that had been watered by the torrents when they roared through. The trees grew rank and close to the edge at the top—so close that some of them had slidden off and fallen part way below, carrying the gravel, sand and earth with the prong-like roots part way to the bottom.

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So faint was the mark of the trail opposite that even with the help of the moonbeams, it took an eye as keen as that of Deerfoot to tell where his enemies would appear. But he coolly awaited them, though his calmness was the fearful calm of a fury such as even he rarely knew.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DEFIANCE.

The expression of the face of Deerfoot was terrible. The whole fury of his nature was at white heat. He knew that the two Winnebagos had set out to commit a fearful crime, and it was his work to stay their hands. There was but the single way in which they could be stayed.

The young Shawanoe kept back a couple of paces from the edge of the ravine, where the shadow of the stunted trees above would hide him from his foes when they should come in sight. He held his gun pointed and cocked. Though his passion had the glow of the furnace, he was as calm as death.



"There was a fierce whizz like the rush of an eagle's wing."

He had not long to wait. By and by a low guttural exclamation struck his ear, and his hearing, strung to a marvelously fine point, caught the sound of the soft moccasins on the hard earth. Less than a minute later the form of the Wolf came into the moonlight, as a bather emerges from the side of a lake. Seeing the open ravine at his feet, he stopped, and instantly his companion, Wau-ko-mia-tan, appeared at his side.

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They quickly saw that the leap was an easy one.

"Wau-ko-mia-tan will leap across," said that warrior, "then the Wolf will follow; let us lose no time, for the Shawanoe may be gone."

The speaker recoiled a single pace and gathered his muscles for the leap. He took one quick step and made a terrific bound upward and outward, straight for the rocky brink whereon Deerfoot the Shawanoe instantly stepped into the moonlight.

The Winnebago was in mid-air, crouching like a leaper, with his legs gathered under him and his arms at his side, when there was a fierce whiz, like the rush of an eagle's wing, something flashed in the moonlight, and the tomahawk, driven by a lightning-like sweep of the Shawanoe's arm, was buried in the chest of the Winnebago as it would have sunk in so much sodden earth.

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An ear-splitting screech burst from the throat of the smitten warrior, who struck the edge of the ravine like a bundle of rags flung thither, and then tumbled to the bottom as dead as the jagged rock on which he lay.

The Wolf stood transfixed, unable to understand what had taken place. Then he saw the figure of the youthful warrior on the other side and heard his voice.

"Rattlesnake of a Winnebago! Die the death of the rattlesnake!"

The wretch was given no time to protest again, for the words were yet in the mouth of Deerfoot when the flash of his rifle lit up the partial gloom, and the crack of the weapon mingled with the death shriek of the redskin, who slumped end over end down the ravine and lay beside the body of Wau-ko-mia-tan as dead as he.

"Thus shall die all that seek to follow your footsteps," muttered the Shawanoe, who, standing where he stood when he slew both, proceeded to reload his rifle with as much coolness as though he had just fired at a target on a tree.

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This finished, he let himself over the edge of the ravine, holding fast a moment by one hand, and then letting go, dropped lightly beside the two bodies that lay below. His face showed no excitement now, and he moved with his usual care and deliberation. Drawing the hunting-knife which he had taken from the Wolf, he partly bent over, but straightened up again, saying to himself:

"Deerfoot is a Christian Indian and can not scalp a foe though as base as they."

Picking up each rifle (that of Wau-ko-mia-tan being still clutched by his nerveless fingers while the Wolf's had fallen from his grasp), he deliberately broke the locks of each by striking them on the stones. He then recovered his own tomahawk, and carried off the useless weapons with him.

He passed down the ravine until he reached a point where the sides were not so high. There he clambered out, still keeping the two broken guns. He had reached high ground on the side from

which had come the Winnebagos, and he walked grimly forward, until in a brief while he reached the main trail over which he and the boys had passed a brief while before.

He turned toward the left, which led him in the direction of the camp of the Ozarks as well as toward the camp of Black Bear and his Winnebagos. He took longer steps than usual, but did not trot or run.

When he once more caught the glimmer of the camp-fire among the trees, he slackened his pace and drew nigh with the caution that had become a second nature to him. He quickly saw that the Winnebagos had disposed of themselves for the night. The fire was burning as brightly as ever, because of the attention it received from the two warriors who were standing on guard.

The party were in a portion of the country where they knew there was scarcely a possibility of their being molested by any one; but the American Indian loves nothing like laziness and war; and, treacherous by nature himself, he expects treachery at all times in others. And so, although they knew of no enemies within miles of them (unless it was Deerfoot, whom they did not fear) they had two vigilant sentinels on duty. The rest were stretched out on their blankets with their feet turned toward the blaze, sleeping like so many tired animals.

At the moment of Deerfoot's approach, the Winnebagos on guard were standing some twenty feet apart, with the fire burning between them. Each held a loaded gun in hand and cast his keen glance hither and thither in the gloom, eyes and ears alert for the first suspicious sight or sound.

The sentinel nearer Deerfoot was Black Bear himself. The chieftain evidently believed that the best way to instruct his warriors in their duty was to set the example. His attitude showed that something had arrested his attention. Deerfoot knew that the sound had been made by his moccasin, for he purposely rustled the leaves.

Black Bear looked intently off in the gloom, but seeing nothing, turned his head and told the other guard to fling more wood upon the fire. He obeyed, and the circle of light quickly extended out among the trees.

It would have been an easy matter for the Shawanoe to slay both, but he had no thought of doing so. That would have been killing without justification.

The Winnebago chieftain was gazing intently into the night, when from behind a tree, no more than a dozen steps distant, softly stepped the young Shawanoe.

"Listen, Black Bear," said he, "to the words of Deerfoot the Shawanoe. Twice did he spare the life of the Wolf and the Wolf thanked him, but he went out a third time to take his life; he was a rattlesnake, but he had not the courage of the rattlesnake, for he took with him Wau-ko-mia-tan, whose heart was that of a rattlesnake also; they bent their steps where none but Deerfoot has the right to go; therefore Deerfoot killed them and took away their guns. *There they are!*"

In the same minute that Deerfoot began speaking, the second sentinel stepped forward and took his place beside his chief. That both were amazed need not be said. Each stood with the muzzle of his gun lowered, neither dreaming that the youth thought of assailing them.

Deerfoot spoke in the slow but impressive voice natural to his race. But the last exclamation escaped him like the discharge from a Leyden jar. So quickly that neither saw a movement, he hurled the broken gun of the chief straight at him, following it with the second gun driven at his companion.

Both hit their mark. Black Bear was struck in the chest with such force, that he was carried off his feet and knocked half fainting to the earth. The other was hit and compelled to recoil a step, but the weapon struck him lengthwise, and he was not harmed. He rallied and brought his gun to his shoulder, but by the time it was leveled, the Shawanoe had vanished.

Such an exploit, as you may well suppose, caused consternation among the Winnebagos for the space of several minutes. No gun had been fired, but the American Indian is a light sleeper, and slight as was the disturbance, it aroused every one. There was a gathering about the fallen chieftain, who, however, came to his feet without help, though he gasped and was weak for a few moments. The explanation given by the other sentinel removed the general fear of an attack, but three of the warriors scattered through the wood to make sure that no surprise overtook them, while the others with an agitation rare among red men talked over the astounding occurrence.

The broken rifles lying on the ground left no doubt that when the Shawanoe declared he had slain both the Wolf and Wau-ko-mia-tan he spoke the truth. Else, how could their shattered guns be in his possession?

And this same youth, with an audacity beyond comprehension, had flung the two guns at the chieftain and his brother warrior and defied them. It seemed as though he must be more than a human being, to be capable of such deeds. Legends had reached them of some of the exploits of the wonderful young Shawanoe, but this surpassed them all.

The Winnebagos, however, were among the bravest tribes in the west, and when they broke camp at early dawn, Deerfoot, who was on the watch, knew that it was their determination to slay every one of the three hunters in the camp at the foot of the Ozarks, as soon as they could reach them.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SIGNAL FIRE.

Deerfoot the Shawanoe remained in the vicinity of the Winnebago camp until the warriors made their start at an early hour the following morning. He took more than one survey of the red men, who gathered about the blazing fire and talked over the remarkable events of the night. He could easily have slain every one of the scouts whom they kept moving through the wood, but he had no wish to do so.

He heard and saw enough to convince him that they intended to make an attack on the camp in the mountains, but he did not feel absolutely sure that they would not turn aside and follow in the path of the Wolf and Wau-ko-mia-tan, until the party had advanced several miles to the southward along the Ozark trail.

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It seemed strange that the Winnebagos paid no attention to the two missing warriors, and yet, after all, it was not singular. They knew they were dead and it was therefore a waste of time to give heed to them. If by any possibility they were alive, they must take care of themselves, just as all brave Indians did: if unable to do so, the consequences must be on their own heads.

So the ten Winnebagos, under the lead of the famous chieftain Black Bear, moved along the trail in the direction of the camp of the Hunters of the Ozark, and the expressions and words that had been overheard by the watchful Shawanoe, left no doubt that by way of revenge they meant to slay the three trappers who had located there for the winter.

The Winnebagos came from the north-east. Their lodges, villages and hunting grounds were many moons' travel away, and the section of country through which they were journeying was so sparsely settled that they had no fear of pursuit. Now, when you give an American Indian the chance to commit some vicious mischief with no fear of being made to pay therefor, you may set it down as a truth that nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every one thousand will commit that crime. It was a matter of indifference, in the first place, whether they harmed the hunters or not. Since the latter were removed some distance from their path, it is probable that they would not at that time have taken the trouble to go in quest of them: it was the feeling of revenge that was the deciding weight in the scale.

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Let us recall the situation as it was on the second morning after Fred Linden and Terry Clark left their homes in Greville. The boys themselves were the furthest advanced along the trail to the mountains, while at a considerable distance behind, filed the ten Winnebago warriors, and hovering in the vicinity was Deerfoot the Shawanoe, watching every movement with the vigilance of a lynx.

Whenever he chose he could make a circuit around the Winnebagos, and joining the boys beyond, hasten to the hunters' camp and apprise them of their danger; but there remained an abundance of time in which to do that, and he did not wish to leave the vicinity of the enemies until he saw a little more of them.

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It was evident that the Winnebagos were in no hurry. They must have known that two of the youths were following the trail in advance, for the heavy shoes of the lads could not fail to leave their imprints in many places; but, such being the case, the red men might ask in what manner they could know that a party of Winnebagos were following them, unless such knowledge came through Deerfoot the Shawanoe, who, wherever he might be, certainly was not in front of them.

When the Indians came to a stream of water, they did not rush in and wade or swim to the other side, as they would have done had there been any call for haste, but like those who had gone before, they stopped long enough to make a raft on which they could float across. The American Indian is not as fond of water as he should be, and though the Winnebagos would have cared little for the chill of the stream, it was more pleasant for them to pass over dry shod; so they made their several rafts and poled themselves to the opposite bank.

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You would not look for humor under such circumstances, and yet on one of the three rafts there was so much of it shown that even the grim Shawanoe smiled.

The structures on which the red men floated were, as a matter of course, of the frailest nature, intended as they were to last only long enough to bear them to the other shore. With proper management, all would have done this, but on one of the rafts holding four of the warriors, there was an aboriginal wag. A single Indian managed the pole, while the others squatted carefully in their respective positions and were expected to keep quiet, so as not to disintegrate the frail structure.

The wag to whom I have referred, while sitting with an innocent expression on his painted countenance, quietly loosened the two or three withes, and gave the logs such an impetus that they separated like two bodies positively charged with electricity, when brought together. The warrior who handled the pole was standing with legs somewhat apart, resting on a different log,

when they suddenly separated still more, and he sat down with a splash in the water. Another log revolved backwards, as did the savage who was sitting on it, while the others were also plashing in the stream, which was not deep enough to make them swim, though it came to the neck of the shortest one. The four warriors waded to shore amid the grins of the others, and with no suspicion of the criminal that had played the trick upon them.

The next stream was reached by the Indians a couple of hours later. This was not as deep as the other and they did not stop to make rafts. After a little searching, they found a portion where the current did not come above their knees and they waded.

In doing so, Black Bear took the lead, and, in accordance with a custom universal among Indians, each warrior carefully stepped into the footprints in front of him. The water was so limpid that the impression made by the chieftain's moccasin was plainly shown, so that there was no difficulty in this respect. Had a person been trailing them, he would have seen before him what seemed to be the footprints of a single man. There was but a slight variation near the further shore, where the moccasin of one of the Winnebagos had slid from a stone on which, like all the others, it was placed. The brown stone was slippery with a faint coating of slime, and the scrape of the deerskin down the side gave it a white gleam like the belly of a fish. It was a "slip" in every sense, and, when the slight splash announced it, Black Bear at the head of the procession turned about with his most impressive scowl.

The party made a halt on the other bank. It was considerably past noon, and, while some busied themselves in starting a fire, and a couple began fishing in the stream, two others going into the woods with their guns, Deerfoot was quite sure that they had decided to spend an hour or so for dinner. He concluded, however, to follow the two who went into the woods, and it was fortunate that he did so.

The first surprise that came to him was when the Winnebagos had gone nearly an eighth of a mile from camp. All this time they were making their way up quite a steep slope, so that they were close to the top of a high, wooded ridge.

The Shawanoe might well wonder why they had taken such a course, but when two frightened deer burst through the undergrowth and dashed by at full speed, within easy gun shot, and the Winnebagos looked at them without raising their guns to fire, then it was that Deerfoot was genuinely astonished.

The conclusion was inevitable that these red men were not looking for game.

With a suspicion of their real errand (and that caused another surprise), Deerfoot stealthily followed the Winnebagos until they paused on the highest part of the ridge. He was not long kept in doubt as to their business.

The top of the ridge was almost bare. There were a few stunted trees, a number of bowlders and rocks, and here and there, patches of scraggly grass. From this elevation, however, a magnificent view opened out on every hand before the spectator. To the north stretched the undulating country covered with prairie, stream, valley and forest, the last brilliant with all the gorgeous hues that come with the frosts of autumn.

These flaming colors were visible in whatever direction the eye turned, and the same varied surface was seen everywhere, but to the southward, the Ozark Mountains had a faint bluish tinge, like a mass of clouds resting in the horizon. It was in that direction that the camp of the hunters lay, and thither the footsteps of pale face and redskin were directed.

The two Winnebagos spent only a minute or so in scanning the surrounding country, when they began gathering wood, until they had quite a pile. A quantity of leaves, some of which were damp, was mixed among the twigs, so that when with a little trouble they were fired by means of the flint and steel in the hands of one of the red men, the fuel did not burn clearly but gave off considerable dark smoke, which was what the Winnebagos wanted.

As soon as the fire was fairly burning, one of the Indians flung his blanket over it, his friend seizing the other part, while both held it thus until it was in danger of taking fire or smothering the flames. Had the coarse cloth been a little more cleanly it is likely that it would have been burned, but as it was it strangled the blaze until it may be said there were several bushels of smoke gathered beneath and the embers were at their last gasp.

At that moment, the Indians raised the blanket so that they stood upright, and plenty of fresh air was allowed to feed the blaze. Then they slowly waved the blanket between them, sometimes lowering it until it was scorched by the sleepy flames, and then elevating it above their heads. All the time, they manipulated the blanket, sometimes straight up and down, sometimes diagonally, and indeed, in every possible way.

The result of all this varied swinging was that the black column of vapor which slowly climbed the sky, was broken into circles, spiral curves, and all sorts of odd-shaped figures, which did not dissolve for several minutes in the clear air above.

I need not tell you what this meant, for in another place I have described the same thing. It was a signal fire intended by the Winnebagos for the eyes of a party of friends who were too far off to be reached in any other way. Deerfoot had seen such telegraphy many a time and oft, and more than once he had used it. He could interpret such a signal when made by a Shawanoe, Wyandotte, Sauk or Fox, but he had never learned the code in use by the Winnebago military authorities.

However, it was not possible that there was any very fine shade of meaning in the various

manipulations of the two warriors. Keen brained as is the American Indian, he is unable to do a great many things with which he is credited: one of these is to do more than telegraph the simplest messages by means of fire, though it is beyond question that important tidings has been flashed hundreds of miles in a single night, from mountain top to mountain top, by means of the signal fires of the Indians.

What disturbed Deerfoot was this proof that there was a second party of Winnebagos in that section of the country. He had not dreamed of such a thing, and it might well cause him alarm, that is, for the three men who were so intent on gathering their furs comparatively a short distance away.

Carefully screening himself from observation, the Shawanoe looked intently in the direction of the gaze of the Winnebagos. He saw that they were not peering at any other ridge, but at the broad low valley to the north-west. They had not long to look when they detected a thin bluish column of smoke creeping upward among the tree tops and dissolving in the clear air above.

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Deerfoot also saw it, and he knew that it was a reply to the first signal. There was another party of Winnebagos in the neighborhood; they would soon join Black Bear's party, and there was no time for delay. Indeed, but for the discovery he had made, the Shawanoe would have felt that he had tarried too long already.

It was not far now to the camp of the Hunters of the Ozark, and it was perilous to wait to warn them. Every hour counted. Not only that, but, as you can readily see, Fred Linden and Terry Clark were in still greater danger.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE EDGE OF THE PRAIRIE.

The night was far advanced when Fred Linden and Terry Clark reached the stream, where the former remarked that their progress was stopped. Of course he meant that they could continue if they chose to make another raft or they could wade, but they had journeyed so far since dusk, and the trouble of constructing a float was such that he thought it best to wait where they were until daylight. They were pretty well fagged out, and nothing could have been more grateful than to throw themselves on the ground and sleep for several hours.

Terry was as tired as his companion, but he stood irresolute, inclined to think it best that they should push on.

"The stream doesn't look very deep," said he, "and if ye agraas wid me that we can wade, it'll be wiser if we make tother side and then journey to the nixt straam."

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"But that may be a good many miles further on."

"Thin all we have to do is to travel a good many miles," said the plucky Irish lad, sitting down to take off his shoes.

"I shall never give in to *you*," remarked Fred, also seating himself and beginning to remove his foot-gear.

Before any thing more could be done, however, both were startled by the discovery that some one was on the other side of the stream. First they heard the guttural exclamations which they knew were made by Indians, and then they saw one of the red men come out into full view in the moonlight.

Without a word, the boys hastily moved back under the shadow of the trees, making sure that they also placed several rods between them and the trail which they had followed to the edge of the water. Secure from observation, they fastened their eyes on the other bank, where they saw an interesting sight.

Three Indian warriors stood for fully five minutes in plain sight, while they discussed the same question that had engaged the lads—that is, in what manner the stream should be crossed.

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It did not take them long to decide. The foremost stepped into the water, followed by the other two, none removing his moccasins or leg-gear, and in a brief while they came out upon dry land again, within fifty feet of where the lads were crouching under shelter.

The boys trembled as they realized how narrow their escape had been. Had they not paused for a few minutes, they would have been in the middle of the stream, just as the others came down to the edge of the water. In the light of their recent experience with the Winnebagos, they had not a particle of doubt that the three belonged to the same tribe and that they were fierce enemies. Had they not slain the boys, they would have made captives of both and conducted

them to the main party. Then when it should have been found that one of the prisoners had the gun that once belonged to the Wolf, their fate would have been sealed.

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The incident drove from the mind of Fred all wish to tarry on the road. He wished that they were many miles on their way to the camp in the Ozarks. They considered themselves members of the little party of hunters whom they could not reach any too soon.

"I obsarved while the spalpeens were wadin'," said Terry, "that none of them wint lower in the water than their knees. Why didn't they take off their shoes like dacent gintlemen, and cross as they should; but bein' as they didn't do the same, why, we'll sit them the example."

A minute later, the boys stepped into the stream, and, by using care, reached the other side, with all their garments dry. Their shoes were quickly replaced, and the two were off again, so moved by what they had seen, that for the time they forgot fatigue and every thing else.

"I tell you, Terry, that matters are beginning to look worse than even Deerfoot thought, and you know that when he left us he didn't feel satisfied, by any means."

"Could it be," asked his companion, "that these spalpeens don't belong to the same crowd that we saw?"

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"I am quite sure they do; these three would not have been so separated from the others."

"Where could they have come from?" asked the puzzled Terry.

"Where all the Indians come from—the woods. I suppose a large party of Winnebagos have been off on a tramp, and they are coming together with a view of going home or of making an attack on some place or persons."

A random guess, like this, sometimes comes closer to the truth than a labored theory. The three Indians whom they had so narrowly escaped were members of Black Bear's party and were on their way to meet him. Furthermore, there were more of them at no great distance.

"Me father lost his life by the Indians," said Terry, in a soft voice; "but though it was not known what tribe the same belonged to, I don't think they were Winnebagos; but Indians are Indians and are always ready to kill white people whiniver the chance comes along."

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"You are right; father doesn't think there is the least danger or he wouldn't have sent for me. He has hunted several seasons without any trouble with them, but he ought to have learned long ago to be forever on the watch."

"Fred," said the other, stopping short in his excitement; "do ye think they are goin' to attack the *sittlement*?"

"Impossible! There's the blockhouse and plenty of men to defend it against a thousand savages."

"But the woods saam to be full of thim; there may be some kind of an Indian war that has broke out and these are the first part of the rid army that is to coom down and swaap us over the Rocky Mountains."

But Fred could not share in this prodigious fear. He faced to the front again and laughed, as he resumed his walk.

"There couldn't be any thing like *that* without warning reaching us; some of the runners would have come to Greville with the news; besides, Deerfoot would have been certain to know something about it."

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"*That* sittles it!" exclaimed Terry, with a sigh of relief; "ye are right in sayin' the Shawanoe would have knowed about it; he would have larned it before the spalpeens that started out on the war path, and, bein' as he didn't say any thin', I'm sure ye are right; but all the same, it looks bad for the Hunters of the Ozark, which maans oursilves as well as the men in the mountains."

"There's no use of denying that there is enough to make all of us anxious, but when I remember that father and Mr. Hardin and Bowlby have spent so many years in the Indian country, I can not help feeling hope that they will be able to take care of themselves. You know they are all good shots and they have a cabin strong enough to stand a rough siege."

"I don't forgit the same; but there's a good many more rid than white men and Mr. Bowlby is lame."

"What of that? He doesn't expect to fight with his feet."

"There are many scrimmages in which it's handy to use yer faat. If Deerfut hadn't popped along just as I keeled over the Wolf I'd jumped on him; then, do ye not mind that the men may take it into their heads to run away."

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"They have their horses," said Fred, foreseeing and agreeing with the response that his young friend would make.

"Not one of 'em is worth a cint at such a time; a one-legged Indian could outrun the fastest; they would have to stick fast to the trail while the spalpeens would walk all around 'em."

"All that is true, but if they could get a good start, it would be very handy for Mr. Bowlby to have one of the horses to ride."

"I don't see much chance of the same," was the sensible comment of Terry; "but, me boy, have ye any idaa of what time it is?"

"It must be far beyond midnight: surely we are a long ways in advance of the Winnebago camp where we left Deerfoot."

"They are not meaning to make a start to-night?"

"Of course not; they will not move until morning."

"Thin I'm in favor of an adjournment *sine die*, at once and without waitin' any longer."

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"What do you mean?" asked the puzzled Fred, stopping and looking around at his companion.

"I'm tired out."

"So am I, but I made up my mind to keep walking till I dropped, before I would give in to you. It will be a sensible thing for us to rest, but we must get far enough from the trail, so that if any more stragglers come along this way, they won't stumble over us."

This was only simple prudence. They groped along for several rods, through the undergrowth and among the limbs, and were still walking, when Terry's foot struck some obstruction and he fell flat.

"Are you hurt?" asked Fred.

"Hurt? No; that's the way I always lay down, as me uncle obsarved whin he fell off the roof—call me early, Fred, and be sure ye don't take up more of the bed—than—a—gintleman—"

The poor wearied fellow was asleep.

Fred smiled, as he lay down beside him. The air was quite brisk, so he unstrapped his blanket and flung part of it over his friend and the rest over himself, the two lying back to back as they lay the night before in the cavern. The dried leaves made as soft a couch as they could want and Fred had only time to murmur a prayer to heaven, when he too became unconscious.

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They slumbered for four full hours, when both awoke at the same moment, refreshed and strengthened. The sun was well up in the sky, and fortunately the weather continued clear, crisp and bracing. Indeed it could not have been more nearly perfect.

They laughed when they saw where they had made their bed, right in the open wood, just as any wild animal would have done when overcome by fatigue. There was no water within sight and no food at command. The blanket was quickly folded up into a neat parcel and strapped to the back of Fred and the two retraced their steps to the trail, which they hoped to follow until it took them to the camp at the foot of the Ozarks.

"I have found out one thing, that have I," remarked Terry, with the air of one announcing a great discovery.

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"What is that?"

"The hungriest young gintleman on the western side of the Mississippi is the handsome youth whom ye have the honor of walkin' with this very minute."

"I can feel for you on *that* question," added Fred; "for it seems to me that I never wanted food so bad in all my life; we must be on the lookout for game. Do you know how to make that call that Deerfoot used to bring the turkey to him?"

"No, but I know how to use the turkey after the same is brought to me. If I should try the signal, it would scare all the turkeys and deer and foxes and bears and wolves and beavers out of the country, which bein' the same, I won't try it, principally because I don't know how to begin to try it."

"My gracious, Terry; if you could shoot like you can talk, we wouldn't have to wait long for something to eat."

"Whisht, Fred," whispered Terry, in some excitement; "the wood just beyanst ye looks as if it wasn't any wood at all."

268

Fred Linden had noticed the peculiarity. The trees were becoming so scarce and far apart that it was evident they were approaching some extensive clearing where no trees grew at all. The next minute the two stood on the edge of an immense prairie, which revealed a sight that profoundly interested them.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

A MORNING MEAL.

The two boys stood on the edge of a prairie which had a varying width of from one to three miles. Looking to the right and the left, neither end could be seen, so that there was no means of judging its length.

The trail led straight across to the wilderness on the other side, which at that point was all of two miles distant. You can understand that walking was so much easier on the open ground that any party of travelers would hasten to take advantage of such a chance. The hoofs of the half dozen horses had left such a distinct impression that the eye could follow the trail a long ways from the margin of the woods.

This prairie was entirely covered with a growth of succulent grass. The season was so late that it had lost most of its verdancy, but there was an abundance of nutriment in the blades and it was splendid feeding-ground—one of those breaks in the almost limitless forest of which grazing animals were sure to take advantage.

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The boys had paused only a minute or two, gazing out on the almost level expanse, when Terry uttered an exclamation of delight and pointed to the right. Looking in that direction (as Fred had done at the moment his companion spoke), he saw a welcome sight indeed. A herd of buffaloes were cropping the grass within gunshot of the young hunters.

As I have said in another place, there were no such droves as have sometimes been seen on the vast prairies of the far west, numbering fully a hundred thousand, though a century ago some amazing collections of animals were met within sight of the Mississippi.

The herd upon which our friends looked with so much interest numbered little more than a hundred, and they were ruminating along the side of the prairie instead of cropping the grass in the middle of the plain. Some of them seemed to be browsing among the trees and undergrowth, but the major part were scattered over the prairie to a distance of two hundred yards, while they were strung to a still greater extent parallel with the course of the prairie itself. From this you will see they were much dispersed, none of them being close to another, except he may have brushed against him now and then.

271

The front of the drove was not less than two hundred feet away and others could be heard ruminating among the trees, where their huge bushy heads and big round eyes were often thrust into view. Some of them may have caught sight of the lads, but if so, they did not consider them worth attention, for they continued browsing and grazing, advancing step by step toward the spot where our young friends stood.

"Frederick," said Terry, laying his hand on the arm of his companion, and speaking with the gravity of a judge, "whin ye swoop yer gaze on thim playthings out there, bear in mind that there's our breakfast, as me grandmither obsarved whin the dinner table upsit and ivery thing rolled down cellar."

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"Our opinion is unanimous on that point; I have already selected my victim, and if you will go away and start a fire, it will hurry matters along."

"It ain't as bad as that," said Terry in some surprise, "I'm not so near dead that I'm goin' to die in ten minutes if I don't git somethin' to ate: I will stay and superintind the operations of shootin' one of them little pets out there."

"It isn't the first buffalo I have killed—"

"I'm not aware that ye have killed that yit," interrupted the Irish lad in his quizzical fashion.

"You soon will be, but I have been out with father before to-day and shot buffaloes: have you?"

"No; whin I goes out huntin' yer fither has't the proud distinction of bein' taken along. Lucky for the buffaloes I niver took a notion to go out and kill siveral thousand: for that raison we find the drove out there so innocent and confidin' that they don't know enough to be afeard of us."

"Maybe they have no cause to be."

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"But they can't know that *I'm* not goin' to shoot among them,—so why shouldn't they be scared out of their siven sinses? Howsumiver, ye have me permission to show the animals that ye are actin' under me own eye and orders and it will be an incouragement to yersilf to know the same."

From what has been said, it will be understood that Fred Linden knew much more about buffaloes than did his companion. [The proper name is *bison*: the genuine buffalo is not found in America.] As he had said, this was not the first time he had hunted them, but with Terry Clark it was different. He had spent a good deal of his time in the woods and had gone in quest of wolves, bears and deer, but he had never brought down one of the lumbering animals for whose flesh he now yearned with a yearning that only the most ravening hunger can inspire.

Terry had formed a deep plot during the short conversation. He did not know the best manner in which to shoot a buffalo and he was too proud to ask instruction. He encouraged the scheme, therefore, of Fred making the first shot. That would give him a chance to see how it was done, so that when he came to exhibit *his* skill, he would make no mistake.

274

Although up to this time the animals had not shown that they cared a straw for the two beings who stood so near and were looking at them with loaded guns in their hands, yet they were liable to become stampeded at any moment. A snort and jump by a single animal were likely to set the whole drove on a dead run, in which all hope of a breakfast on buffalo steaks would be gone for that morning at least.

So, as a matter of prudence, Terry stayed where he was, but partly sheltered himself, so as not to startle any one of the animals that might come upon him suddenly. At the same time, Fred bent low and with loaded and cocked rifle began stealing toward the nearest buffalo.

As it happened this was a cow in fine condition. She was plucking a ribbon of grass that

followed the edge of prairie. By some chemistry of shadow and sunshine, there was this little strip of unusually tender herbage, which the cow was eating in her quick, vigorous way, as though afraid that some of her companions would find and take it from her.

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Fred singled out this one as his prize. Being so close to the wood, he could not have wanted a better chance to steal up to her. Indeed he had but to stand still, for she was coming a regular half step at a time as she clipped the grass in front of her; but the youth's hunger would not allow him to wait the few minutes that would have been required.

When within fifty feet of the cow, Fred knelt on one knee and brought his rifle to a level. The cow was still advancing, "head on," when he made a noise similar to that which comes natural to you when you wish to drive the hens out of your garden-patch. The cow stopped abruptly, threw up her head and stared at the hunter. The sight of the crouching figure must have suggested to the stupid animal that every thing was not right, for with a frightened whiff, she bounded short around with the intention of joining the other animals.

At the very moment she turned, Fred Linden fired, sending the bullet directly back of her fore leg, where it tore its way through flesh, muscles, bones and the heart, the battered bullet humming off through the air on the other side.

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No shot could have been more effective. The cow made a couple of wild leaps and then lunged forward, her nose striking the earth with such force that her head doubled under her and she swung over on her back and side with a violence that made it seem as if she had fallen down a high precipice.

Following his old rule, Fred loaded his gun where he stood, before moving out to examine his prize. It was at this juncture that a stampede of the whole drove was due. Now that the boys had secured their breakfast they would not have cared had the animals thundered off out of sight.

But the terror of the smitten creature was too brief to affect the rest, even though several were quite close to her at the time she gave the snort and rolled over on the ground. A cow grazing near did raise her head for a moment and look at her fallen friend as though she hardly understood it. She seemed to meditate plunging into the rest of the drove with head down and with tidings of the disaster, but she must have concluded that since the other cow was dead, it wasn't worth while to make any fuss over it; for she dropped her head and resumed her grazing as though she had no further interest in the matter.

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Even when Fred ran out, and, stooping down, began cutting a large slice from the shoulder of the victim, none of the others paid any attention to him. Close behind him came Terry, who was so desirous of examining the prize, that he postponed starting the fire.

"Terry, how will that do for a shot?" asked Fred, with some pride, as he plied his knife.

"Where did ye land the shot?"

"Right there, behind the fore leg; you can see the hole where it entered."

Terry turned his head to one side, closed an eye and surveyed it as though he was measuring the height of a wall: then he shook his head.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the impatient Fred.

"Ye are a sixteenth of an inch too far forward, be the token of which the ball went through the upper part of the heart: when ye kill a buffalo cow ye should always send the ball through the lower instead of the upper part of the heart. Ye surprise me so much that I am graved with ye, me own Fred."

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The latter laughed.

"I suppose it would have done as well had I sent the bullet through her brain; but that takes the finest kind of marksmanship."

"Av course, which explains why ye didn't dare attempt it: when we have finished our dinner, supper and breakfast all in one, I'll step out on the prairie, strike an impressive attitude and drop the biggest bull in the drove, just to teach ye the gintal way of doin' that same thing."

"Well, I shall be glad to learn the best style of bringing down the creatures."

By this time, Fred had severed a piece of meat from the shoulder of the buffalo. It weighed several pounds, but Terry broke in with the wondering inquiry:

"What are ye goin' to do with *that*?"

"That's for our dinner; what would you suppose?"

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"I thought that was the part of the cow that ye were goin' to be sensible enough to leave behind while we built a fire around the fire and had enough of a meal to stay the pangs of hunger."

Without waiting to hear the response of his companion, Terry ran among the trees and began gathering wood with which to start a blaze. Both boys were such experts at this that only a brief time was necessary. Fred laid the buffalo steak on the leaves and took part, striking the flame with his own flint and tinder. There was no water within reach and this was quite a deprivation, but the boys were hungry enough to wait for that. From his scant store of mixed salt and sugar, Fred drew forth enough to season the enormous slice and it was speedily half broiled.

Two such hungry youngsters are not likely to be particular about their dinner being done to a turn, and they were eager to eat it when it was exceedingly rare. Leaving Terry to make known when it was ready for the palate, Fred walked to the edge of the prairie to take a survey.

280

He could not forget that they had serious business before them, and, though he was warranted in believing that there was nothing to fear from the Winnebagos who had caused so much trouble, he was too wise to take any thing for granted.

He saw the buffaloes cropping the grass with the same vigorous persistency which they will show for hours, while the prairie, extending far to the right and left, failed to show any other living creature upon it. So far as he could tell, there was no cause for fear.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGE RIDE.

When the boys had eaten their fill, there was a quantity of meat left. This was cooked still more over the coals, wrapped about with the greenest leaves that could be got, and then packed in the bundle which Terry Clark strapped to his back.

"There's enough of the same," he explained, "to presarve us from pinin' away with starvation, which reminds me now that I promised ye that I'd show ye the properest way in which to bring down a buffalo."

"I'm willing to wait until some other time," said Fred, who feared there would be dangerous delay; "I am more anxious to get forward than I am to see you make an exhibition of yourself."

"It will not take me long," replied Terry, who was sure there could be no miss where the animals were so plentiful, while of course the delay ought to be slight.

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"If thim Winnebagos that we obsarved last night have started this way, they ain' t any more than fairly goin', which puts thim at the laast calculation a dozen good miles behind us; they won't walk any faster than we do, so we'll git to the camp a long ways ahead of 'em."

"All this sounds reasonable, but you know we have learned that they are not the only Winnebagos in these parts; but then they are under the eye of Deerfoot and he would give us warning."

"That sattles it, as I previously remarked some time ago, in token of which we will shake hands on the same."

The Irish lad had made such an enjoyable meal that he was in the highest spirits. He extended his hand to his friend and shook it warmly, as he was inclined to do for slight cause.

"Now stand still, obsarve, admire and remimber."

And with this high flown counsel, Terry with his gun in position began moving toward an enormous bull. The latter really was not so close to him as was a cow, but he thought it beneath his dignity to spend his ammunition on such game as had served for their dinner.

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Although Terry Clark's natural love of humor often led him to assume what he failed to feel, he was hopeful in the present instance that he would be able to carry out the little scheme in mind. He knew that the weapon in his hand was a good one, and he was already so close to the buffalo that he was sure of bringing it down at the first fire.

While he was willing to admit that Fred's shot could not have been improved, so far as effectiveness was concerned, yet he was in earnest in his intention of firing at the head. He knew that no animal is of any account after its brain has been perforated, and it seemed to him that it was more appropriate for a true sportsman to bring down his game by that means instead of firing at its body.

Terry made a mistake from which his experience on the border ought to have saved him. Had he driven his bullet into the eye of the buffalo, he could have slain him, but he was almost certain to fail by firing simply at the head. It would have been far better had he followed the example that his companion set.

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The bull upon which he had cast his eyes was about twenty yards from the wood. He did not raise his head until this distance was diminished by one half. Just then a cow showed some alarm of the approaching figure and walked hastily away. This caused the bull to throw up his head and stare at Terry.

"Obsarve!" called the latter to his friend, who began to feel uneasy over the appearance of things.

A dozen spears of grass seemed to be dripping from the mouth of the magnificent bull, who glared at the figure of the young man in the act of leveling his gun as though he had some curiosity to know what was going on.

Terry aimed at the head, making the part between and above the eyes his target. This was probably the most invulnerable spot of the animal.

The bull was still staring at the intruder, when the latter, aiming at the point named, fired. The bullet struck the bony ridge at the upper part of the head and glanced off into space, inflicting no more real injury than a paper wad.

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But the impingement of the lead must have given the stupid brute an idea that harm was meant. His anger was roused, and, dropping his head with a savage bellow, he charged the young hunter at full speed.

This was giving the matter an unpleasant turn, but there was no time to argue, and flinging his gun aside, Terry gave the finest exhibition of running he had ever shown. No one could have realized better than did he that the bull "meant business" and it would never do to allow himself to be caught.

Fred Linden himself was so startled by the sudden onslaught of the animal that he was flurried and fired without taking proper aim. He struck him, but he was unable to check his charge: indeed he rather added to his fury. Stepping back, so as to shield himself as much as he could behind the nearest tree, he began reloading his weapon with the utmost haste.

Meantime Terry, by desperate running, reached the tree at which he aimed a few steps in advance of his formidable foe. He had no time to climb the trunk, but believing the lowermost limb was within reach, he made a leap, seized it with both hands and swung himself out of reach, just as the bull thundered beneath like a runaway engine.

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Finding he had missed his victim, the savage beast snorted with rage, wheeled about, came back a few paces and was passing beneath the limb again, when a singular accident gave an astonishing turn to the whole business.

The limb which afforded Terry Clark his temporary safety was unable to bear his weight, and, while he was struggling to raise himself to the upper side and it was bending low with him, it broke like a pipe stem close to the body of the tree.

This took place so suddenly that the youth had not the slightest warning. Indeed it would not have availed him had he known what was coming, for the time was too brief in which to help himself.

Down he came with the limb grasped in both hands and fell squarely on the back of the buffalo bull. Fortunately the bewildered animal had just shifted his position, so that the lad fell with his face turned toward the head instead of in "reverse order."

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Even in that exciting moment Terry saw the grotesqueness of the situation. His legs were stretched apart so as to span the animal just back of his enormous neck. Letting go of the branch that had played him the trick, he grasped the bushy mane with both hands and yelled in a voice that might have been heard a mile away:

"All aboard! off wid ye!"

So far as a bull is capable of feeling emotion, that particular specimen must have been in a peculiar frame of mind. He glared about him, here and there, turned part way round, as if the whole thing was more than he could understand, and then as his bulging eyes caught sight of the remarkable load on his back and he felt the weight of the burden, he was seized with a panic.

He emitted a single whiffing snort, and flinging his tail high in air, made for the other side of the prairie as if Death himself was racing at his heels. His actions were of that pronounced character that his fright communicated itself to the rest of the herd. There was a general uplifting of heads, and then, as the bulls and cows saw their most eminent leader tearing across the prairie with a live boy astride of his back, the sight was too much for them. A wholesale series of snorts and bellows followed, tails were flirted aloft, and away the whole herd went, fairly making the ground tremble beneath their tread.

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By the time the alarmed Fred Linden had his rifle reloaded there was not a buffalo within a hundred yards of him. The one that bore his friend on his back was making as good time as the fleetest and was well toward the head of the drove. The panic began like an eddy of the sea; there was a surging of the animals toward the other side of the prairie and away they went, as I have said, with their tails and heels in the air, as if they meant to keep up their headlong flight for twenty miles, as is sometimes the case, when an immense drove become stampeded on the great plains of the west.

Whatever feelings of amusement might have been first aroused by the figure that Terry cut on the back of the terrified bull were lost in the dreadful fear of Fred that it would prove a fatal ride for his friend.

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He could see him plainly for a fourth of a mile, but by that time the trampling hoofs raised a dust in the dry grass which partly obscured the herd and made it impossible to distinguish the figure of the lad clinging to the mane of his novel charger.

"He will fall off," was the exclamation of Fred, "and will be trampled to death by the others."

He recalled that the bull must have been wounded by his own shot, but that knowledge gave him concern instead of relief; for if the bull should give out, he would be trampled by those who were thundering so close at his heels.

The buffaloes did not preserve the open order which marked them when they were grazing, but

crowded together, so that their backs looked like brown dusty waves, rising and falling rapidly from the motions of their bodies.

Fred quickly recovered from his astonishment. He had reloaded his gun, but when ready to fire, was afraid to do so. Too many other buffaloes interposed between him and the bull, and had he discharged his weapon, he would have been as likely to hit Terry as to wound the brute that was carrying him away with such speed.

Running to where the rifle of the boy lay, Fred picked it up, hastily reloaded it, and started after the herd. He broke into a loping trot such as an Indian shows when hurriedly following a trail. He kept his eyes on the fast receding animals, his interest being now centered on the moment when they should reach the wood on the other side of the prairie.

"It will be the death of him if they dash among the trees," he thought; "for he will be struck by some limb and have his brains dashed out."

But such a catastrophe did not take place. The fleeing animals must have known that their headlong speed could not be kept up among the trees and undergrowth; so, when those at the head of the drove were close to the edge of the wood they swerved to the left, and the others followed with the same furious swiftness with which they had sped across the open.

Fred Linden at this time was not a third of the way across the prairie, and he stopped and viewed the sight. He could distinguish the animals much better than when they were tearing straight away from him. They ran, so to speak, from under the cloud of dust that had obscured his vision, which, sweeping backward, left all in plain view.

What he saw, too, showed that the buffaloes possessed varying rates of speed. A dozen were well to the front, still crowding close together, while the rest, also in close order, were strung along at different distances. Still, they were so far from Fred that his view was any thing but satisfactory. Shading his eyes with his hand, he peered through the autumn air in the search for his friend.

"There he is!" he exclaimed, but the words were hardly out of his mouth when he saw he was mistaken. The distance was too great for him to see clearly.

"How long will this keep up?" was the question which he would have been glad to answer, for it included the fate of Terence Clark. If his steed should grow weary and fall behind the others, possibly he would give his rider a chance to leap to the ground and make off; but the likelihood of that taking place was so remote that Fred could feel no hope.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A YOUNG HUNTER'S STRATEGY.

Fred Linden walked rapidly forward until he reached the middle of the prairie, when he paused and bent his eyes on the swiftly vanishing drove of buffaloes. They were speeding at right angles to the course he had been following, and, so far as he could judge at the distance, were on the same dead run with which they started.

He was convinced that he was mistaken a brief while before, when, for a moment, he thought he caught a glimpse of Terry on the back of the terrified bull. He was unable to distinguish any thing that looked like him. He might—and it was not at all improbable—be still clinging to his steed, but he was too far off and too mixed up with the others for even the keen eyes of Fred Linden to identify him.

There seemed but the one thing to do: that was to follow the drove until he learned the fate of his friend. Certain that he would find him sooner or later, Fred resorted again to his loping trot, which he could keep up for several hours without great fatigue.

But he had not gone twenty steps at this gait, when, to his astonishment and alarm, he observed three Indian warriors, each mounted on a horse, issue from the wood at the point where the buffaloes would have entered it had they not turned to the left. The red men headed their animals directly toward Fred, and advanced at a moderate gallop.

The sight was enough to make the bravest person thoughtful; for you will readily see the critical situation of the boy. It was useless to turn and run, for they would overhaul him before he could get half way to cover. He was in the middle of a grassy prairie, where there was not the slightest object which could be used as a screen in a fight with them. He glanced quickly about, but did not see a stone as large as his hand. Except so far as his weapons were concerned, he was absolutely helpless.

Never did Fred Linden display more coolness and knowledge of Indian character than he did at this time when caught at such fearful disadvantage. He knew that if he showed any timidity, the red men would attack him at once, while, if he could deceive them, as he hoped, there was a possibility that he would escape.

Two hundred yards away, the Indians drew their cantering horses down to a walk: they evidently saw there was no call for haste and they could afford to take all the time they wished. They were riding beside each other, instead of in Indian file, and being nigh enough to be observed distinctly, showed that they were dressed precisely like the Winnebagos whom he had noticed the night before around their camp-fire. This might have been, had they belonged to another totem, for there is a similarity in the dress of different tribes, but Fred had no doubt that these were Winnebagos. It began to look indeed as if there was an irruption of them into that section of the Louisiana Territory.

During those trying moments, when Fred calmly watched the approach of the dusky horsemen, he was observant of the smallest things. He recalled that they were the same in number as the party which he and Terry so narrowly missed the night before on the edge of the stream and he half suspected they were the same, though such supposition did not correspond with the theories formed and accepted at the time.

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He saw the middle horse, which was darker in color than the others, slightly stumble; then the rider turned his head and said something to the warrior on his left, who made answer without taking his eyes from Fred; then the one on the right said something, his painted features relaxing into a frightful grin, the guttural words being plainly audible: all these points being noticed, as I have said, by the young hunter who had so much more important matters to engage his thoughts.

He recalled with relief that on picking up the gun of Terry he had reloaded it, so that he now had two weapons ready for use. With these he could make a brave resistance, and you may depend upon it that the last thing he thought of doing was to surrender. He might easily be shot down where he stood, but he would die fighting.

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The three horsemen advanced with the same deliberate pace, their black eyes fixed upon Fred, who stood erect, looking straight at them. When they were within twenty yards, he quietly turned so as to face the other way, and waved his cap several times over his head. At the same moment he uttered a resounding whoop, replaced his cap, laid Terry's rifle at his feet and leveled his own at the amazed savages, who could not have suspected what was coming.

You understand that the purpose of Fred was to make the Winnebagos believe that he had friends on the edge of the wood behind him to whom he had signaled. The act of laying down his gun was to give the impression that he was so sure of support that he was ready to fight until it should appear.

Now, the red men might have been deceived by this to as full an extent as the youth desired, but the fact remained that, even if there were re-enforcements on the margin of the prairie, they were so far off that they could give no help if the Indians chose to assail the boy. I am inclined to think that had the Winnebagos believed that a dozen white hunters were encamped there, they would not have been restrained from carrying out their design by such fact: but when the cool defiance of the youth was added to the same, there was enough to make them pause.

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They might shoot him down, wheel and dash for the woods from which they had emerged but a short time before; but they would be liable to pursuit, and, when a white borderer takes to the trail, he can be as persistent as the red man himself, though, as I have said, had they been eager to shoot the boy, they would not have been stopped by that knowledge. But they saw that he had his loaded rifle leveled at them: each Winnebago probably imagined he would be the special target. Their guns were still in their hands and no doubt the moment any one attempted to raise his weapon the white boy would fire.

The distance was so short that there could be no miss. It followed therefore that the cost of an assault upon the lad would be the death of one of the Winnebagos, and none of the three could know that he would not be the victim.

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The cost was more than they were willing to pay, for it must be borne in mind that not only was the death of one of their number considered assured, but it was not at all unlikely that such a daring youngster would be able to do something with the gun at his feet before succumbing.

But it is not to be supposed that three mounted Indians would deliberately ride away from a single youth through fear alone,—that is, not until they had tried to circumvent him by strategy. And so it came to pass that within the same minute that Fred raised his rifle, the Winnebago who sat in the middle waved his hand toward him as a sign of comity. At the same time he called out: "Yenghese! Long Knife! Friend—friend—friend!"

But Fred knew too much to be deceived. He was the master of more vigorous English, and, without lowering his gun, he called out:

"Keep off or I'll fire! If you ride another step, I'll let daylight through you!"

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As if to add emphasis to his words, he gently swayed his rifle from right to left, so that it covered each warrior in turn. There was an involuntary ducking of the heads, and the Indians, seeing that nothing was to be done without large risk, opened out—two riding to the right and one to the left. Thus they passed by Fred without lessening the space between him and them.

After all, this was the most trying moment to the youth, for it diverted his attention in the most

exasperating manner. The three horsemen were in his field of vision, but it was hard to keep watch upon each. He suspected the maneuver was for the purpose of taking him off his guard, but it is doubtful whether such was the case, for there was something in the grim pose of the youthful hunter which warned them that it was unsafe to trifle with him.

When the horsemen were opposite each other and on a line with Fred, he suddenly wheeled with great quickness and held his piece still leveled so that he could shift it from one to the other the moment needed. On their part, the Winnebagos watched him with cat-like vigilance, keeping their heads turned until they came together a hundred feet beyond, and between him and the wood which he had just left. There they stopped, their position such that the sides of their animals were turned toward the lad, whom they continued to view with an interest that it is safe to say they had never felt in any other of his race.

It was tiresome to hold his heavy rifle leveled, but Fred stuck to it, for he knew how much depended on the next minute or two.

It looked for a time as though the Winnebagos had decided not to leave without a demonstration, but finally they moved off with their backs toward Fred, and their horses on a walk.

"How nicely I could pick one of them off," said he to himself, as the broad shoulders, with the black hair streaming over them, moved gently up and down with the motion of the animals, and ranged themselves beside each other like three dusky targets. "I could hit *him* or *him* or *him*" he added, shifting his aim from one to the other in turn, "and it's because they know it that they are afraid to risk a shot. If one of them had made a motion to take aim, I would have let fly, and I wouldn't have missed either. Then I would have done something with Terry's gun."

These thoughts had hardly found expression, when the middle Winnebago suddenly turned on his horse, raised his gun and discharged it at Fred Linden. The instant he did so, he and his two companions threw themselves forward on their animals and dashed off on a dead run for the wood.

Had the warrior been less hurried, it is probable he would have struck the astonished youth, who plainly heard the *pinge* of the bullet as it almost touched his ear. His own arms were beginning to ache because of their constrained position, but he took as careful aim as possible and fired at the savage who fired at him.

More than that, he hit him. A screeching yawp broke the stillness, the warrior half straightened up on his steed, seemed to sway, and would have fallen had not one of his companions caught his shoulder and supported him for a minute or two. The horses were brought down to a walk, and finally came to a standstill, though they halted at a point beyond rifle shot.

"I hope I finished him," muttered Fred Linden, with a snap of his eyes; "they are seeking my life, and, if I could have my way, I would tumble every one of them off his horse."

Never was the value of two rifles shown more strikingly than at this time. The moment his gun was discharged—had he possessed no other—Fred would have been helpless, and the Winnebagos would have been upon him before he could reload his piece; for that was in the days of flint-locks, when the charge had to be rammed down and the powder poured into the pan before the weapon was ready for use. It may be said, however, that under such circumstances he would not have fired.

But before the horsemen could wheel about, they would have found the youth standing at "present arms" precisely as before, and the situation unchanged, except that one of their own number had been disabled, and to that extent (which was considerable) the gain was on the side of the lad.

There could be little doubt that the stricken Winnebago was hit hard, though after some attention from his companions, he was able to sit his horse. The three warriors seemed to have lost all interest in Fred, for a few minutes later they rode off at a walk, without, so far as he could judge, once bestowing a look upon him.

It struck him as singular that after his stratagem, by which he believed he gave the impression that he had a party of friends on the margin of the wood, that the Winnebagos should guide their horses to the very point. After all, it began to look as though he was not so successful in that respect as he imagined, and that it was his own courageous demeanor that for the time had saved his life.

"I am glad they have ridden off in that direction," said the youth to himself, as he saw them carefully enter the wood, where they were lost from sight; "for if they had ridden the other way they would have bothered me in my hunt for Terry."

That ride of Terry Clark on the back of the buffalo bull was one which he could never forget had he wished to do so, which of course he did not. The first thrill, when the beast dashed off on a dead run, and the wind began blowing by the ears of the lad, was that of pleasure. He was having an exciting ride, and, as good fortune would have it, the animal was bearing him straight along the trail toward the camp in the Ozarks.

"If the baste will show enough consideration for me," thought the lad, "to kape up his coorse for twinty miles or so, he will give me a good lift toward raichin' the folks, though sorry I am that I haven't Fred alongside or rather behind me."

The bull being on a run, his progress consisted of a series of quick jumps, which jarred the rider so much that had he not kept a good grip upon the shaggy mane, he would have been unseated. The hair of the animal was so long that he was able to make his hold secure, though he had a constant fear that he would stumble, in which case the rider was sure to take a tremendous header that was likely to break his neck.

Terry could feel the throb, as it may be called, of the engine. His position was such that his heels touched the body close to the shoulders of the bull. At that point there was an alternate swelling and sinking of the muscles, as the animal alighted on his feet and leaped away again, which Terry felt as plainly as if he had held his open hand on the shoulder. Then, too, the bull had a peculiar sidelong motion, as though some of his muscles occasionally got out of "gear," and the action of the hind legs did not "dovetail," so to speak, with that of the fore legs.

Nothing escaped the eye of Terry during those exciting minutes. He thought the head of the bull was held unusually low, but he noticed the short, thick horns, curving outward and then coming over until they ended within a few inches of each other, and he was sure that amid the dusty frontispiece of the immense area of skull bone he could see where his useless bullet had struck and glanced off; once or twice he caught a whiff of the breath of the buffalo, redolent with the not unpleasant odor of grass, and now and then he could hear his fierce snort. It seemed to Terry that the animal turned his head partly to one side as if to get a view of the strange creature on his back. Doubtless such was the fact, and, after each sight, it seemed that he bounded away with more terror than before.

Brief as was the time taken by the bull in galloping across the prairie, it allowed Terry to see every thing. As soon as he felt sure of retaining his seat, he glanced at the other animals, all of which were galloping in the same direction as the bull. Some of them were so fleet that they passed him, but he retained his place near the middle of the herd.

The buffalo, or properly the bison, is a stupid animal, but a peculiar fact about the small drove amid which Terry Clark was riding was that a number noticed him and in their way tried to push him off. They would dash up beside the bull with head lowered, and rub their horns against him in the effort to reach the rider and unseat him.

"The only way in which ye can do that," said Terry, when he saw what they were trying to do, "is to climb up and take a saat behind me. Thin, if ye'll lock yer arms about me nick ye may persuade me to stip down, but ye can't do much while on the ground."

The buffaloes were too dull of intellect to realize their helplessness in this respect, and they continued crowding close to the bull until they must have caused him some discomfort. This crowding was of such a marked character that, as you will remember, it was noticed by Fred Linden as far off as he stood.

Once or twice the rider had one of his feet slightly jammed, but he was able to lift it out of danger without imperiling his position. The dust caused by the hoofs of the animals did not rise until his steed had passed beyond, so that he suffered nothing therefrom and every thing in front was in plain view. The speed of the beast, however, caused some inconvenience, for the wind made him blink, and it was only by half closing his eyes that he could peer out between the lids and see clearly.

Before the other side of the prairie was reached, Terry Clark began asking himself the natural and important question,—How is this to end?

The same theories that I have mentioned as occurring to Fred Linden passed through his brain also. If the bull should dash among the trees at that headlong pace, the rider could not retain his place for more than a minute or two; if he was wounded enough to cause him to give out and fall to the ground, he would be trampled upon by those behind and Terry of course would share his fate.

Brief as was the time given for thought, the youth considered a half dozen plans. He glanced over his shoulder and was alarmed to see how many animals were in the rear of him. He asked himself whether he could not slip backward, grasp the swinging tail, and dropping to the ground, keep his feet while he held fast to the caudal appendage, and pulling the other way, act as a brake upon the progress of the animal until all the others had passed on. Then he would "release brakes," and allow the bull to continue his career as suited himself.

But he was compelled to admit that the plan was not feasible. The bull was going at such a pace that the rider would be sure to lose his balance the moment he struck the ground, and, though he might still hold fast to the tail and retard the progress of the beast, he was sure of getting in the way of his heels.

"If his tail was a little longer," reflected Terry, "I would try the same, but I'm afeard I would git mixed up with his hind hoofs and things wouldn't be agraaable."

So that plan was abandoned.

"If he goes in among the trees, I'll lean forward on me face until he knocks out his brains—that is, if he has any—whin I'll dismount."

That was all well enough if the bull should happen to follow the programme, but the prospect of his doing so was too remote to afford much comfort to the youth.

"I guess I'll kaap erict like a gintleman," he concluded, "and as soon as a chance comes for me to jump off, I'll go." 311

Terry had no thought but that the buffaloes would dash among the trees and continue their flight in the same headlong fashion, as long as they could; but, to his amazement, the head of the drove suddenly swerved to the left and the bull followed.

"Be the powers, but this will never do," was his conclusion; "this perarie may raach all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, and the bull doesn't act as if he meant to stop before he raaches there; I'm goin' to make other arrangements."

He kept his seat until the drove had gone several hundred yards with unabated speed. So far as he could judge, the bull was holding his own with the rest: whatever wound he had received was of no account, so far as its immediate effect was seen. The others continued crowding up as before, but Terry did not mind them. He yelled and shook his head in the hope of frightening them off so as to give him the room he wished in order to make his venture, but they did not mind him. The odd crackling of their hoofs, the rattling of their horns as they struck together, and their occasional bellowing, made a din amid which no shout that he could raise would gain any consideration whatever. 312

"There's one thing sartin," said Terry, compressing his lips and showing by his action that he had made up his mind to end the business one way or the other. "I'm tired of this crowd, and I ain't goin' to spind any more time with it."

Between him and the wood were seven or eight buffaloes, crowding close in their idiotic fashion, as though to push off the rider. Terry recalled the day, early in spring, when he ran rapidly across the creek near his home, by stepping upon the surging masses of ice, one after the other, and leaping off again before they had time to respond to his weight. He resolved to try something of the kind.

Holding fast to the wiry mane with his hands, he drew his feet up under him, balanced himself a moment, then straightened up, and, turning quickly, stepped upon the back of the bull that was immediately alongside. Before that creature could know what had been done, the pressure was removed and the weight of the lad was borne by a cow which was his next neighbor. 313

Terry Clark ran as nimbly as a monkey across the backs of the intervening buffaloes, until his foot rested on the one nearest the wood. A slight slip at the moment of stepping upon his back disconcerted him so that he could not recover himself. His intention was to land on the ground with his face in the same direction he was going. Then, even if he could not keep his feet, he could run with such speed that his fall would not hurt him; but unfortunately as he struck the ground he faced the other way, and before he could check himself, he went over backward with such force that he was knocked senseless.

After all, the fall may be considered a fortunate one, for he was not seriously hurt and soon recovered himself. He had received a severe shock, but in a short time he sat up and stared about him. Recalling what had taken place, he looked in the direction of the herd of buffaloes. None of them was in sight, but a dark heap a short distance away showed where the bull on which he had ridden had given out and fallen to the ground. He was wounded more seriously than at first seemed to be the case. Had Terry stayed on his back a few brief minutes longer, he would have gone down with him and been trampled to death by the hoofs of those in the rear. 314

"I think I'm all here, as me cousin used to remark after he had enj'yed himself at Donnybrook Fair," said Terry, rising carefully to his feet, swinging his arms and kicking out his legs. He had been violently jarred, and he was alarmed by a dizziness that caused him to sit down again. But he recovered quickly, and soon was as well as ever. He turned to the left and passed among the trees, where, despite the coolness of the day, he felt the relief of the shade thus afforded him.

"I s'pose Fred will be jealous whin he finds out what a foine ride I have had," he added, his old sense of humor coming back; "but all he has to do is to catch a buffalo bull and git on his back: but I don't think he'll forgit the same right away." 315

Looking over the prairie, he saw the figure of his friend walking in almost a direct line toward him, though he was so far off that he was not distinctly visible, partly because of the dust which still lingered in the air.

Fred's encounter with the Winnebago horsemen had taken place and ended while Terry lay senseless on the ground, so that the latter had no suspicion of the exciting occurrence.

Terry ought to have walked out on the plain, swung his hat and cheered his friend; but that would have been contrary to his nature. He kept out of sight among the trees, until Fred was quite close, when he broke into vigorous whistling.

Fred heard the familiar sound, stopped short, looked about him and then burst into laughter as he saw his comrade. The next moment they ran together, shook hands and mutually

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL.

It was a thrilling story which Terry Clark had to tell about his ride on the back of the buffalo, but, after all, it was not so stirring as the experience which befell Fred Linden, and the Irish lad declared that it surpassed his own in every respect.

"Thim Winnebagos are gittin' altogether too plintiful," said he; "whin they come on horseback as will as on foot, there must be more than we can take care of, though you managed the three as well as I could have done the same mesilf. And so ye hit one of 'em whin ye touched off yer gun, did ye?"

"There is no doubt of it, though I am sorry to say that it did not end his career right away."

"It'll sarve him the good turn of givin' him time to think what a maan spalpeen he is any way, and that's a good deal. And so ye say they was mounted on horseback: what has become of thim?"

"They rode in among the trees over yonder, near where we kindled the fire and cooked the buffalo steak."

Terry walked out to the edge of the prairie, and shading his eyes, peered in that direction.

"I can see nuthin' of thim; they must have found out that ye hadn't any frinds there after all the fuss ye made, and it may be they will come back to sittle with ye."

"If I alone could attend to them, do you think we together have any thing to fear?"

"Of course not, if it's only thim three, but we have seen so many of the spalpeens that they won't be loikely to foind much trouble in scarin' up a few hundred more and makin' it uncomfortable for us."

"Well," replied Fred, with a sigh, "I am so relieved and thankful to know how well we got through it all, that I am hopeful we shall have no great trouble during the rest of the way. We ought to be able to reach the camp by to-morrow night if we don't have any interruption."

The young friends surely had good reason to feel grateful for their deliverance from the perils of the morning, and with hopeful hearts they walked along the margin of the wood until they came to the point where the trail turned to the left. Over this they started at a brisk pace, Fred slightly in advance of his companion, for the path was not broad enough for them to walk any other way with freedom.

"Terry," said the elder, "do you think it possible that the three Winnebagos with whom I had the trouble could be the three that we met last night, when we were about to cross the stream?"

"Niver," was the emphatic reply; "how could they have got around so far in front? It was a good many miles the ither way that we saw the same!"

"I have thought of that, but, you know, we spent several hours in sleep, during which they might have turned back."

"But where could they have got their horses?"

"They may have had them within easy reach?"

"It couldn't be."

"I guess you are right; we hadn't a very good view of them last night, though the moon shone on them when they were wading the stream and I had a fancy that one of them looked like the fellow I hit when I fired."

"All a fancy," insisted Terry.

"Well, there's no use of guessing, for any way it must be only a guess; but where do you suppose Deerfoot is?"

"I've been thinkin' of the fellow and it saams to me that it's time he showed up."

"I wonder whether he could have passed us in the night."

"That couldn't be, for he meant to stay near the camp-fire where we lift him till he found out what the spalpeens were goin' to do, and he couldn't have got that chance till mornin'."

"Unless they made a start last night."

"Which the same they didn't do."

The boys were more in want of water than food, and fortunately they had not gone far when they struck another stream, narrow enough for them to leap across, and which afforded them a draught with which to quench their thirst.

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"Now," said Fred, "since we have had such a good breakfast, we will think of nothing more to eat until night."

"I don't know about not *thinkin'* of the same," said Terry doubtfully, "but I am with ye in agrain' that we won't go out of the path to hunt any of the same onless—that is, unless we should think what I've brought along isn't aqual to our appetites."

"We must have passed considerably more than half the distance between home and the camp in the mountains," added the elder, some minutes later; "so, if all goes well, we ought to be with our friends some time to-morrow afternoon."

"I'm of the opinion," remarked the sagacious Terry, "that Deerfut sint us on ahead last night so as to git us out uv the way; thim pritty legs of his can travel so fast that he wanted a chance to stritch the same without waitin' fur us."

"More than likely you are right; whenever he thinks it necessary, he will branch out ahead of the Winnebagos and overhaul us; so even though we see nothing of him, we ought not to feel much concern."

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"How about the wither, me lad?"

Fred had noticed since resuming their journey, that the sky, which was clear and sunshiny in the morning, had become overcast. The sun was no longer visible, and a chilliness in the air warned them that the fine weather could not last much longer. They had not only been favored in this respect, but for several days before leaving home equally charming skies had spanned them. And so, in accordance with the laws of our changeable climate, a disagreeable turn was to be expected.

"I was hopeful that it would keep off until we reached camp," said Fred, looking up through the tree tops at the darkening sky; "but that is too much, and we must take it as it comes."

"Push on as fast as ye choose."

Taking his friend at his word, Fred broke into a slow, easy trot, not much more rapid than an ordinary walking gait, but one which they could keep up a long time, where the ground was not too rough. Terry of course did the same, and they covered fully two miles in that manner, when they slackened their pace before an extensive rise of the ground. But for that, they would have gone much further at the same speed.

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Some fifteen minutes were spent in clambering up the stony incline, when they descended into a broad valley, the path still rough and difficult of passage. They recognized a dull but increasing roar as made by a rapid torrent, and ere long stopped on the edge of a stream fifty feet wide, which dashed and foamed over the rocks, breaking into eddies, and agitated pools, falling in foamy cataracts and splashing forward again with a rollicking freedom that formed one of the prettiest and most romantic sights on which they had ever looked.

Directly at their feet was a curious formation. By some means at a remote day, a number of hard stones had been flung downward and given a spinning motion, which, acting on the softer sandstone beneath, had begun hollowing it out, as if by the chisel of an engraver. This strange operation had gone on for years, until a bowl a dozen feet across and half as deep had been formed. It was almost mathematically round, very smooth and with a tapering shape to the bottom that made the resemblance to an enormous punch bowl strikingly accurate.

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This formation (which in accordance with the taste prevailing in all parts of our country, should be christened the "Devil's Punch Bowl"), was full of limpid water, fed by a slight overflow from above and overrunning and flowing calmly over the lower rim. In the bottom lay three stones, looking like cannon balls. These were the tools with which the stream had carved the Devil's Punch Bowl. Having done their work, they were resting in the bottom, where they had lain for a period that could not be guessed.

Out beyond, a thin sheet of the water hung like a transparent curtain over the edge of the rocks. It was so smooth and unruffled that it seemed stationary, like a film of glass, but, after striking the stones below, it broke into foam, whirlpools and eddies, which helped to form as lovely and picturesque a scene as the most devoted lover of nature could long to see.

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The picture was so pretty indeed that the boys stood for several minutes lost in admiration. They had never viewed any thing of the kind, and it was something that would always be a pleasant memory to them.

But, great as was their admiration, there was a startling question that came to them: how was this interesting stream to be crossed?

In front and up and down the bank, the eyes searched in vain for a ford. It was idle to think of ferrying themselves over, while the cascades, pools, eddies and general "upsetting" of a broad deep stream, made its passage as perilous as that of the rapids nearer home in which the two had come so near losing their lives.

"There is no possible way by which we can reach the other side," said Fred, after they had walked a few rods up and down the stream.

"I don't observe any way myself," was the response of Terry.

"But there *must* be, for how could father and the rest have crossed?"

"They may have put up a bridge."

"But where is the bridge? There are no signs of any thing of the kind," said the bewildered Fred; "they couldn't have made a bridge without leaving it behind."

"The high water has swept it away."

Fred stood surveying the stream and the banks, for several minutes, during which he once more walked back and forth, but he was right when he said that the place had never been spanned by even the simplest structure, for it could not have been done without leaving some traces behind.

This being the case, the mystery was greater than ever; for it was certain that at that hour their friends were many miles distant on the other side.

"This is a little ahead of any thing I ever heard tell of," remarked Fred, taking off his cap and scratching his head, after the fashion of Terry when he was puzzled.

"It couldn't be," ventured the latter, who also had his cap in his hand and was stirring up his flaxen locks, "that they carried a bridge along with 'em."

"Impossible!"

"That's what I thought, as my second cousin remarked when they told him his uncle carried his shillalah a half mile and passed two persons without belting 'em over the head."

"There's something about this which I can not understand."

Terry turned and looked at him in his quizzical way and solemnly extended his hand. Fred shook it as he wished, though he was far from feeling in a sportive mood.

"They *must* have crossed," he added, replacing his cap with some violence, compressing his lips and shaking his head in a determined way; "do you walk up the bank, while I make a search in the other direction; we *must* find the explanation."

The proposition was acted upon, Terry clambering carefully along the slippery bank and over the rocks, until he was fully a hundred yards from his friend, who busied himself in doing the same thing in the opposite direction.

All at once the Irish lad shouted. Looking up to him, Fred saw that he was beckoning him to approach.

"I knew there must be something of the kind," thought Fred, who after much labor placed himself beside his friend.

To his disappointment, Terry had paused before the worst part of the series of cascades. It was at the broadest portion of the stream, where the falls, whirlpools, eddies and deep water would have turned back the most skillful swimmer.

"What do you mean?" asked the astonished Fred.

"I thought I'd show you the place where they *didn't* cross," was his reply, and then he broke into the merriest laughter, as well he might, for he had solved the mystery.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TERROR IN THE AIR.

"Do observe where the trail comes down to that big bowl?" asked Terry, pointing to the huge, circular cavity below them.

"Of course."

"Well, that's a mistake; *that isn't the right trail.*"

Fred turned about, and jumped and ran back to the Devil's Punch Bowl, at a rate that threatened his neck. Stooping over, he carefully examined the path. He saw that his companion was right; the trail which they had followed to the edge of the stream was one that had been worn by animals in coming to and going from the Punch Bowl. You will admit that no better punch in the wide world could be furnished the dumb beasts than that which was thus freely given to them.

As if to confirm that which did not need confirming, a large buck at that moment appeared in the path, within a hundred feet of where Fred had straightened up, after examining the trail. He

threw up his head on catching sight of the young hunter, gave one quick, inquiring stare and then whirled about and was off like a flash.

Fred Linden could have brought him down at the moment he wheeled had he chosen to do so, but he recalled his own proposition to Terry some time before, about firing such a shot. Indeed, since they had some of the cooked buffalo steak left, there was no call to use any more ammunition for game.

Terry Clark came laughing down the rocks, looking upon the whole business as one of the funniest of incidents, but to Fred it was any thing but a laughing matter. Time was becoming of the utmost value, and this divergence from the trail meant delay—a delay, too, whose length could not be guessed. If they had turned aside several miles back, it was more than likely that they would lose all the advantage gained by the laborious travel of the night before.

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"How could we have made such a blunder?" asked Fred, his eyes wandering back over the path, as though searching for an explanation of the mistake; "I suppose at the point where the trails cross the direction isn't changed much and this is more distinct than the other. Terry, I can't see any thing about this to laugh at."

"I don't observe much of the same meself," said the other, whose face nevertheless was on abroad grin; "I wasn't laughing at yersilf, or the mistake we made."

"What was it then that amused you so much?"

"I was thinkin' how funny it looked to see the deer and bears and buffaloes and foxes and panthers all standing round that big bowl and winkin' at each ither while they drank their health."

"Terry, there's going to be trouble because of this blunder."

"What do ye signify be the same?"

"I believe that all the advantage we gained by traveling so hard last night is lost. When we follow this trail back until it reaches the main one, more than likely we shall meet the Winnebagos at that point, if they will not actually be between us and the camp in the Ozarks."

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"I'm afeard it's not all a falsehood that ye are telling me," said Terry, with an expression in which there was nothing like a jest.

"Let's be off then."

At this juncture the Irish lad made a proposition which his companion accepted, for he thought it promised them much saving in time and travel.

It was quite certain that the false trail followed pretty much the same direction as the true one: at any rate there could be no doubt that it crossed the stream which had stopped them, so instead of picking their way back for several miles, they decided to keep along the edge of the water itself until they struck the path.

To make sure of avoiding another blunder, one should have gone up and the other down stream, for manifestly they could not be certain they were above or below the true path; but each felt too strong a misgiving about such a course. Their surroundings required mutual support.

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Beside this, they were convinced that the trail which they wished to recover lay above instead of below, so that, when making their way they were not held back by any doubt, though each could not fail to see that it was only a piece of guess-work.

Fortunately for their peace of mind, they were right, and the plan saved them much time and travel. They had not gone very far, when they came upon the path, marked so distinctly that there could be no possible mistake.

The width of the stream was about the same as below. The water was smooth, deep, clear and sluggish. The bank sloped gently down from each side and on the other shore were plainly seen the prints of the hoofs where the animals had left the water. It was so deep that whoever went over there had done so by floating or swimming.

The crossing was so far above the point where the cascades began, that nothing was to be feared from them. The clumsiest raft could be ferried over by a child before it would drift into danger, while in case of swimming, the peril was still less.

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"If it wasn't so chilly," said Fred, "I would propose that we swim the stream."

Terry shivered and shook his head.

"We must go over on a raft; it is not only cowl'd, but is gittin' cowl'der."

"There's a storm brewing; it looks as black as ink off yonder."

At this moment the boys made a discovery which both pleased and alarmed them. Such a float as they needed was at their call. There lay a half dozen logs and trees fastened together by several withes, and with enough buoyancy to bear them to the other side. Even the pole to be used in propulsion lay upon the heavy timbers that were pulled just far enough against the bank to prevent them floating off with the current.

While it was pleasant to know that they would not have to go through the labor of constructing any thing of the kind, yet there was a cause for fear in the presence of the structure which led them to hesitate several minutes before using it.

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It proved that some one had crossed from the other side upon it, while the withes were so white

and fresh at the angles, where they were twisted open, as to show that the raft had been made but a short time.

The natural question was as to who could have been coming from the other way.

"I know," said Terry, compressing his lips and shaking his head.

"Who?"

"Winnebagos; they're so plintiful that it couldn't have been any one ilse, for they wouldn't have had a chance."

"I suppose you are right," remarked Fred thoughtfully, "for they do seem to be almost everywhere, though I can't understand why they should be coming this way."

"Suppose there was but one of the spalpeens, and he'd been out on a scout, and was on his way back to the rist of the spalpeens with the news, would it be onraisonable to think he would take a little pains to kaap his leggins and moccasins from gittin' damp enough to give him cowl?"

"Well, I can think of no better reason than that, and am willing to believe it is correct, but don't you see, Terry, that all this goes to prove that we have lost a dangerous amount of time? We ought to have been many miles further on the road than we are."

"The buffalo bull had a good deal to do with our impolite tarryin', and as he is slaapin' with his four mithers, I maan his forefathers, let him rist in pace."

The boys did not allow their words to delay their hands. The raft was shoved clear, and the two took their positions upon it, Fred holding the pole, while his companion looked after the guns. They were astonished to find, directly after leaving land, that the pole, which was nearly twenty feet in length, would not reach bottom.

This compelled them to use it as a paddle. The progress was slow, but the distance was so slight that it did not take them long to reach the other bank, where they set the structure adrift, so that it could not be used by any one else.

Looking directly up stream, where the sky was in plain sight, its blackness startled even the boys, who were used to seeing the most violent changes of temperature. The hue was not of the dark blue which often gives warning of the coming tempest, but there was a greenish tinge to the blackness that would have awed any one.

While they looked, a zigzag ribbon of flame fluttered across the darkened portion, accompanied by a crash that seemed to shiver the earth. Fred Linden, who happened to be staring straight at the fiery burst, saw the upper part of a large cypress that leaned over the water, leap from the trunk as though it had been sawn short off and flung into the water.

It was all ablaze, and, falling upright into the current, kept its equilibrium, that is, it did not fall to any side, but swept slowly downward as upright as when on the tree, and suggested that some giant as big as the Statue of Liberty was walking beneath, with an enormous torch held above his head to light his path.

"Did ye iver see the like?" asked Terry.

"No; it is wonderful."



"Did ye iver see the like?" asked Terry.

Although it was about mid-day, the heavens were so overcast that the gloom was like night

itself. At the same time the darkness had a ghastly tinge which made the faces of the boys, when they looked at each other, livid and unearthly.

The scene was so impressive that they stood motionless, watching the flaming tree and the inky heavens beyond. Suddenly in the sky they saw a figure that resembled a vast balloon slightly inclined to one side, and spinning on its axis with inconceivable swiftness.

At the bottom the snout-like appendage wavered off to one side as though the amazing velocity of the upper part was twisting it loose. A similar formation appeared a few minutes after a short distance behind.

And now began the most extraordinary exhibition of all. Imagine two whirling balloons, a hundred feet in height, and so black that they stood out from the surrounding gloom, showing like pitch against the dimly lit sky behind. They began a witches' waltz in the firmament, sometimes leaning far backward, then dancing forward, as if saluting each other, then "balancing," then dancing up and down, then so far away from each other that one would pass out of the field of vision, soon to reappear, however. At times they seemed as if about to rush into each other's arms, and then they coquetted away again and resumed the weird dance in the skies.

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You understand that I am trying to describe one of those terrible visitations of the west known as a cyclone. Little was heard of them a century ago, and the balloon to which I have compared the form of the ghostly dancers, was unknown to the lads, who watched the exhibition with an interest that was not turned into terror, as it would have been to-day, by the knowledge of the awful power for death and destruction that lies within that concentration of electricity in its most fateful form.

It seemed a long time that this strange scene lasted, though it could not have been many seconds. Suddenly, while the balloon-like forms were saluting each other, they rushed together. There was no shock perceivable when they met, but there were vivid flashes from within the murky folds, as the heat lightning sometimes plays among the clouds at the close of a warm day.

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Having met, the forms engaged in a wrestling bout. Round and round they spun with the same bewildering swiftness, leaning far to one side, as though about to fall, and all the time whirling with such speed on the one spiral leg that it seemed unable to keep pace with the bulkier part above.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRED LINDEN AWAKENS TO AN ALARMING FACT.

The approach of the cyclone was attended by an appalling roar, and a mass of branches and trees flying through the air, which warned the boys of their danger.

"Terry, it won't do to stay here," shouted Fred, casting about for some place of refuge; "where shall we go?"

Quite close to the stream which they had just crossed was an enormous rock. Its irregular surface, a dozen feet in extent each way, must have reached far down in the ground, so that nothing could have been more immovable. It was not the refuge that the boys would have taken, had they been given time to hunt for one, but surely they could not have found a better.

A couple of leaps took Terry to the place, and, as he threw himself on his face, Fred was directly behind him. As they lay, the shelving rock was less than two feet above their heads. Though they could hear, they could not see what was coming. They could look to the right and left, but only for a few seconds in front.

Using their eyes as best they could, they saw the air filled with leaves, twigs, branches, huge limbs and trunks, which spun forward and over and over, like so many feathers in a tornado.

The first shock that came to the boys crouching behind the rock was a dead thump near their heads. An uprooted tree had been hurled from some point above, like an enormous spear, and, striking the rock at a slant, slid over the rough surface like the finger of a player over the face of a tambourine and out beyond, hunting for some spot where it could penetrate. It found it on the ground, but it was instantly wrenched loose by the resistless power that had first thrown it forward, and went end over end into the general wreck and ruin beyond.

The next sight which startled the boys was on their left, directly over the stream. The air was filled apparently with snow, as if a violent squall had suddenly sprung up. It was accompanied by a hissing noise, which mingled with the fearful roar that had not stopped and was like that of the stormy Atlantic beating upon the rock-bound coast.

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Striking the stream, the cyclone whirled most of the water from its bed, scattered the mist and foam among the trees, and saturated the boys where they lay. The huge torch was quenched as suddenly as it was lighted.

The most terrifying moment to Fred and Terry was when they felt the rock in front of them move. It was turned several inches to one side, and for one frightful moment, they believed that that too would be sent skimming through the air, or whirled over upon them. But there was no other refuge to which they could fly; had they attempted to rise to their feet, they would have been snatched up and dashed to death. So they flattened themselves as much as they could on their faces, and the terrific outburst could not reach them.

Such an elemental fury can not last long. Having torn up the ponderous trees, overturned rocks, and cleaned out the stream, the cyclone seemed to mount upward and leave the earth entirely, probably to descend some miles away and continue its work of destruction.

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Fred lay still several minutes after it had passed, and then turned to look at his companion. He had unrolled the package and taken therefrom the cooked buffalo steak, which had been so roughly handled during his ride on the bull.

"Well, well," said the astonished Fred, "I believe you are the only person in the world who could eat his dinner in the middle of such a storm as this."

"I was thinkin', bein' as we are in so much of a hurry, that I would save some toime by dinin' without delay, though ye do me an injoostice by sayin' I'm through the same; I'm jist about to begin and I'll be pleased to have yer company."

Terry may not have had much sentiment, but he was sensible. Fred sat up, his head just rising above the rock, and, for a few minutes, they gave their attention to their meal. There was enough for a fair lunch, but no more. A gentle wind blew against them, being the remnant left by the cyclone, and while they ate, you need not be told they used their eyes.

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The sight was a striking one: the trees lay across each other, many with their prong-like roots pointing toward the sky, limbs and trunks having been tossed about in the most bewildering confusion. The water that had been lifted from the creek rendered not only their clothing wet, but every thing around them was saturated. Walking to the side of the stream, they looked down at the sloping banks, wet and muddy, but with little water except in the bottom. The current, however, was pouring so swiftly from above that this was rapidly filling up, and before long would reach its former level.

Now that the cyclone had passed, the sky rapidly cleared. There was a chilliness in the air, and the sun did not show itself.

The boys took but a short time to view the destruction, great as it was, when they faced about in the direction of the camp which was their destination from the first. It looked as though they were finally separated from the trail, for since it was so covered by fallen trees and limbs, not the slightest trace of it was seen. They were filled with dismay, and indeed would have been at their wits' end had not the cyclone confined its fury to exceedingly narrow limits. All its prodigious force was spent in and directly along the stream. Twenty yards away, the forest was undisturbed, so that the elemental scythe had made a clean swath as it sped along.

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"Hurrah!" called out Terry, "here's the path; I follyed a straight line as I could from the water here, so I'm sure I couldn't coom out very far from the right place."

Fred hurried over the ruins to his side, and a glance at the ground showed that his friend was right: there was the trail at their feet.

"Now," said Terry, recovering his spirits, "if we had only knowed that that storm was coomin', we could have fastened our guns to our backs and swum across, without waitin' to build the raft, and saved all the time that we lost."

"But we would have been wetted all the same, had we done so."

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"And gained that much time; do ye know," added Terry, in a half frightened voice, "what I obsarved?"

"I suppose you saw what I did,—the air full of water, trees, limbs, stones and lightning."

"While we were peepin' over the edge of the rock, ye moind that the wind cut our faces so we had to lower 'em to keep our heads flyin' off where we couldn't find 'em agin. It was yersilf that stuck yer nose in the ground, but I took a paap off beyanst the creek and I saan one of the Winnebagos."

"Can it be possible! what was he doin'?"

"Turnin' summersets at the rate of twinty to the second and about a dozen faat above the ground; I had only the one glimpse of him, but whin I obsarved him it looked to me as if his head and one leg wint off in different directions; I s'pose he's lookin' for the same."

Fred Linden could hardly believe that Terry had seen one of their enemies, though, as you can well understand, from what cyclones have done in recent years, it was not at all impossible. The youth insisted so strongly on the first part of his statement, that Fred decided that at the time the storm burst, one at least of their foes was on the bank behind them.

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All this confirmed the belief he had expressed that they had lost invaluable time by wandering from the trail, and that they would have hard work to keep far enough in advance to reach the camp before the Winnebagos. The proof that they had received too of some of the Winnebagos

being in front complicated the situation and added to the mental discomfort of both.

The sky which, as you will remember, had become overcast sometime before the bursting of the cyclone, continued to clear, and to the surprise of the young hunters, about the middle of the afternoon the sun showed itself. The chilliness, however, remained, though the two walked so briskly that they could have well stood a still lower temperature.

Fortunately for them (though it also operated in favor of their enemies) the trail was traveled without difficulty. The ground was uneven, sometimes up and sometimes down, but it was not hard for the feet and they made good progress. The distance they had to go was too great for them to hope to reach the end of the journey before the morrow, even if they traveled most of the night. They had already proven their pluck and resolution, and you may be sure, now that they were on the right path, that they did not throw away any minutes.

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They had eaten the extra buffalo steak sooner than was intended, but they could afford to wait until the morrow before partaking of any more food.

The afternoon was far along and they were pushing forward in their usual vigor, talking in a hopeful strain now and then, when both were startled by the report of a rifle. It did not sound in front nor to the rear, but only a moderate distance to the left. The boys stopped and looked in each other's face.

"Anither of the spalpeens," whispered Terry; "now there ought to be a gun fired on tother side of us and one in front and one behind us."

"They may be there, all the same," replied Fred, staring in the direction whence came the report, as though he expected the appearance of the one who had caused it. They looked and listened for several minutes, but saw and heard nothing more, and resumed their hurried pace, frequently glancing behind, for they were in that distrustful state of mind which comes to one who has a strong suspicion that an enemy is trying to steal behind him unawares. The actual presence of such an enemy is no more trying than the suspense itself.

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The shot might have been innocent—that is, fired by some wandering white man or Indian who had not the remotest thought that any other person was within hearing. Probably such was the fact, though there was enough uncertainty about it to prevent the theory affording the youth the comfort it otherwise would have done.

The lads, as you may well believe, did not stop to look into the matter, but pressed on at a gait which they were confident would prevent any of their enemies overtaking them, unless they broke into their loping trot, which was hardly likely.

Somehow or other, Terry seemed to be thinking more about the three Winnebago horsemen with whom Fred Linden had had his encounter than he did about his own experience.

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"How thim spalpeens could be ridin', whin all the rist are afoot, is somethin' that puzzles me," said he, after they had walked some distance further; "can't ye give some explanation that will relaeve me mind, Fred?"

"I can certainly know no more about it than you do."

"Didn't ye obsarve them with particularity?"

"I can't say that I did; they were rather small, tough-looking; two were bay in color, while one was black: I noticed the black one more than the others, because the Indian that I hit was riding on him; I remember that he had a star in his forehead."

"Who? The Winnebago?"

"You know well enough that I meant the horse——"

Fred Linden stopped short, and turned his white, scared face upon his friend. He had just awakened to an astounding fact.

"What's the matter, Fred? Are ye ill?"

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"My gracious! why didn't I think of that before? Those three horses belong to father, Mr. Hardin and Mr. Bowlby."

"Are ye sure of the same?"

"Why, of course; I can't understand why I did not notice it the moment I saw them!"

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CANOE.

It certainly was remarkable that when Fred Linden was watching the three Winnebagos so closely, and when, as I have said, he noticed more than one trifling matter, that he failed to recognize the animals they were riding. All three were familiar to him, and the one he had spoken of as being darker in color than the others, and as having a star in his forehead, was the identical animal owned by his father. Fred, himself, had ridden him more than once.

It should be said, however, that they were the pack-horses, which even when put to their best paces, could not make good speed. Nevertheless, they were of great value to the hunters.

The first conviction of the lad on awaking to the alarming fact, was that his father and the other two men had been killed by the Winnebagos. The thought overcame him so that he leaned against the nearest tree and was on the point of fainting.

"They are all dead, Terry—I know it—we may as well give up, and try to reach home."

Terry was agitated, but not so much so as his friend.

"Why, my dear boy, it's not so bad as *that*," he said feelingly; "do ye not moind that whin the gintlemen go to trappin' and huntin' they turn the horses loose to graze? The spalpeens have coom along and run off with the same."

"Do you think so?" asked Fred, looking up yearningly for the grain of comfort that his companion was able to give.

"I don't *think* so; I know so; if the gintlemen took the bastes into the cabin and slipt with the same ivery night, as me relatives do with their pigs in Ireland, why ye might think that they had suffered before the Winnebagos tuk thim away; but they have snaaked up where the animals was grazin', jumped onto their backs and rid off."

This view of the case was so reasonable, that Fred rallied and half smiled at his own faintheartedness. He stood erect and drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

"I believe you are right, but it strikes me that such thieves would have stolen all instead of half the horses."

"They've lift the ither three for their frinds that I make no doubt will be along to take thim, if they haven't done so now."

"You know that the loss of a horse is considered almost as bad as the loss of a man in this part of the world."

"Sometimes he amounts to a good deal more, as me mither—"

Terry paused in his remarks, for just then Fred uttered a warning—"Sh!" to signify that something was in the path in front. The next moment, he ran several paces to the right and sheltered himself behind a tree, Terry being only a few seconds behind him.

Both had discovered what it was. A brown bear of moderate size was waddling along toward them. He had probably struck the trail, and finding it easier walking than among the trees and undergrowth, was swinging forward in the direction of the stream that had received such a visit from the cyclone.

The boys could not know for a minute or two whether the beast had seen them, but they felt no alarm. As I have said, he was not very large nor formidable looking, and, if he chose to turn aside to attack them, they were more than his equal. As it was, their own eagerness to get forward was all that prevented them from shooting him.

Bruin lumbered ahead in his awkward way, and, as the boys peeped forth, they fancied that his big brown eyes glanced mischievously at them; but they were mistaken. He did not see nor scent them, but went by, and, in a few minutes, disappeared from sight among the trees.

Hardly waiting till he had vanished, the youths stepped back into the path and resumed the rapid pace at which they had been traveling. The sun, that had been partly shining from behind the clouds, was low in the sky, and it was not long before they were journeying in the twilight. The moon rose early, but its light was so much obscured by the mists that it gave little if any help, and the friends were disappointed to find it difficult to make any progress at all.

At this trying juncture, they found themselves once more on the bank of a stream that had to be crossed before they could go any further. It was fully double the width of the one last passed, but did not look as if it was deep.

"My clothes ain't all dry yit," said Terry, "and I'm in favor of wadin' if we can."

"I am afraid it is too deep for that, and with our guns and bundles and thick clothes it isn't an easy thing to swim. Besides it's colder than it was last night and it won't be pleasant to spend a few more hours in wet clothing: mine is about dry."

Fred added that if they should decide to push on, the only way of doing so was by the usual means of a raft. It would take considerable time to build one, and probably still longer to work their way to the other side.

"No use of waitin'," said Terry; "let's take hold; I've an idaa that we ain't far from the cabin and ivery mile that we can make now counts."

Fred started to give his help, when to his unbounded amazement, he narrowly missed going headlong over a small Indian canoe that lay at their feet. They would not have been more surprised had they come upon Deerfoot himself in a sound slumber, and not until they had stooped down and examined it closely were they certain that it was not some log fantastically

shaped by nature that had floated thither.

But an Indian canoe it was beyond all mistake, though after searching all around it, they failed to find the paddle so necessary for its propulsion. The boat had been drawn up the bank, underneath some bushes and undergrowth, where it would not have been seen by any one further off than six feet. It was so far back too from the stream that it would require an unusual overflow to carry it away.

It was not so dark that the lads could not see that it was of beautiful pattern and fine make—one of those delicate vessels which under the skillful guidance of its owner skim like a swallow over the water. It was a prize indeed.

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Now, as you very well know, there is nothing wonderful about an Indian canoe, but the astonishment of the boys came from the fact that they found it in this place. Fred Linden, in listening to the accounts given by his father on his return in the spring from his trapping expeditions, had heard him say more than once that there was no Indian village between Greville and the camp at the foot of the Ozarks, and that, according to the friendly red men who occasionally visited them, he believed that the nearest lodge lay nearly two hundred miles to the north-west of Greville. It was this fact that gave the Hunters of the Ozark so much confidence in themselves when they went on their long hunts, though, as you have learned, danger did sometimes come from the wandering Indians, the father of Terry Clark having lost his life at their hands.

All this being known to the boys, they had cause to wonder how it was that an Indian canoe lay hidden under the bushes on the shore. None of those people would go to the trouble of making such a boat, unless he expected to use it many times. It would be the same as if you had a costly rowboat constructed with which to cross only once a canal or small stream of water.

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But, as in many other cases, it was idle to speculate, and the boys did not allow any feeling of surprise to rob them of the valuable minutes. Finding no paddle with which to manage the boat, Fred cut a small sapling and trimmed it so that he had a pole fully twenty feet long. Then the guns were laid in the bottom, Terry took his seat, and they carefully pushed from shore, Fred managing the pole.

As they suspected, the water was quite shallow, the depth nowhere being more than three or four feet; but the current was rapid, and in some places the bottom of the canoe grated over the gravel. Both had to move well to the stern to raise the bow, so as to allow them to reach land with dry feet.

"It's a pity to allow this to float off and be lost," said Fred; "let's draw it up the bank where the owner won't have any trouble in finding it."

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"I would give a good deal if I could be introduced to that same gentleman," remarked Terry, who took off his cap and scratched his head as he added:

"I wonder whither that is one of the canoes from near home?"

"What are you talking about? How could it get *here*?"

"By some subterranean communication, the same as we boys used to send notes to the girls when I was learning the higher mathematics in college."

Fred made no comment upon the remark of his friend. The canoe, when relieved of their weight, was so light that the bow was pulled to the shore by means of the pole. Then Fred alone drew it up beyond the reach of the water, and it was left until the owner should come forward to claim it.

The two now set out to hunt for the trail, with a view of making eight or ten miles more before they stopped to rest; but the result was discouraging. It took more than a half hour to make sure they had found it, and then they had not gone twenty yards, when Fred said he could not tell whether he was in the path or not.

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"It's no use," he added; "we may as well stop, for we are sure to repeat the mistake of to-day: we'll get so far wrong that it'll take many hours to find our way back again, and we shall lose far more than we gain."

"That bein' the same—and I'm willin' to agree that ye are now strivin' to till the truth—let's turn off from the trail, go back so far that there isn't any chance for any one to see us and sleep till mornin'."

Since there was nothing else to do, the boys did as Terry proposed. They were not so tired as they were the night before, and they did not dare to lie down on the leaves and sleep as they did then. There were wild animals prowling through the woods, and the fact that the lads escaped once could be no guaranty that they would have equally good fortune a second time.

Terry proposed that they should climb a tree and make a bed among the branches; but that was hardly feasible. It is not often that the limbs of a tree are accommodating enough to allow any one to rest with comfort. The branches may be pleasant for a time, but the limbs soon become like iron rods and the position so cramped as to drive away all comfort. In addition, there was the danger of a fatal fall during sleep.

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So it was decided to hunt out the most secluded place possible and start a fire. That would keep off the wild animals, and the boys were not in such need of sleep that they could not afford to take turns with each other in watching through the night.

While hunting a suitable spot, they moved down the river bank for fully a hundred yards, and

then entered some dense undergrowth which they penetrated until they were sure that no safer place could be found. So they began gathering twigs, leaves and branches, and piling them against the shaggy bark of a tree, and soon had all they wanted. This was fired by means of the flint and steel, and a roaring, crackling blaze made every thing look cheerful.

"Let's walk off a little ways," said Fred, "and see whether the light can be noticed very far; you know that we can not be too careful."

Terry liked the proposal, and rose to act upon it. They moved in opposite directions, walking several rods, and then carefully passing entirely around the camp-fire. The result was satisfactory, for the undergrowth in all directions was so thick that they felt as secure from discovery as if the fire had been kindled within an impenetrable cave.

And yet they were woefully mistaken, as they were destined to learn in a brief while.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

AMERICA VERSUS IRELAND.

Having satisfied themselves that they could not have fallen upon a safer place, the boys came back to their camp, as it may be called, and sat down in front of the blaze. Their knapsacks were unstrapped from their backs and the blankets spread upon the leaves. There was some moisture in the thick cloth, but not enough to deter them from using them as couches. Their own clothing had become dry, and, under the warm glow of the fire, the blankets would soon be the same.

In spite of the reconnoissance just made, both felt some uneasiness over their own situation. They were confident that no one further away than two or three rods would observe the fire, but the possibility remained that some enemy might pass within that space, brief as it was. Their experience since leaving Greville taught them that a large number of Winnebagos were in the wilderness, and, as Terry remarked, the nearer they approached camp, the more plentiful did they seem to become.

It was this feeling which caused them to let the fire sink to half its first size and led them to keep far back within the circle of light thrown into the surrounding gloom. They talked in low voices, often listening and looking around, and were in any thing but a comfortable frame of mind. The feeling with them was that if any enemy should happen to be lurking in the vicinity, every possible advantage would be on his side.

"I feel, Terry, as though all this is wasted time. I know it is more than likely that the Winnebagos are doing the same as we, that is, nothing at all; but that makes me more anxious to push on."

"I've an idaa," remarked the Irish lad, who was stretched out in a lazy posture, with his cap in hand, while, as was his custom, he scratched his pate with the other; "I'm thinkin' why couldn't we aich take a torch in hand and walk along over the path with the same?"

Fred was half inclined to try the experiment, but fear prevented. They had learned that the Winnebagos were not only in the rear but in front. No more conspicuous target can be given than that of a person carrying a lighted torch: it was the same as when a man with a candle in his hand starts out to explore his house for burglars. So that plan was not adopted.

Terry was about to speak to his companion, when the latter saw him start, and, rising quickly to the sitting position, stare at a point beyond Fred. He had seen something that terrified him.

With his big round eyes still fixed on the gloom behind young Linden, Terry stealthily reached for his gun, which lay on the leaves close by, and softly drew back the flint. Fred, as may be supposed, was alarmed, and starting half to his feet, glanced nervously around.

He saw nothing.

"What's the matter?" he asked in an undertone, as he also laid his hand upon his weapon.

"Whin I was lookin' at ye," said Terry in a husky whisper, "I obsarved one of the spalpeens standin' right behind ye and close enough to touch ye with his hand. Before I could spake, he slipped out of sight like a shadder."

Fred did not ask his companion whether he was sure of what he said, for he knew he was not mistaken.

"That shows we shouldn't have started the fire; it has caught the eye of some of the Indians, who will be here in a few minutes; let's slip back in the darkness and get as far off as we can; it don't make much difference what course we take, but it will never do to stay here."

Fred Linden had no more than completed his guarded remark, when he too caught sight of a

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warrior standing on the very edge of the circle of light and looking straight at him. The view of the dusky intruder was faint but unmistakable.

The outlines and figure received enough of the firelight to cause him to look like a dim painting against a dark background. He was holding a rifle in one hand and appeared to be contemplating the lads, as if seeking to learn their identity before he advanced or performed some action.

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"*Sh!* don't stir," whispered Fred, softly raising the hammer of his gun, "I see him,—I'll drop him!"

With the utmost caution he brought the gun around in front until it was almost to his breast. Then as quickly as he could he raised it to his shoulder and aimed at the daring redskin.

But the latter was invisible, he had vanished like the picture on the slide of a magic lantern.

As you may suppose, the boys began to feel queer. There was something so peculiar about this business that, as Terry expressed it, he was "crawly all over." What they might have done can only be guessed, for before they could move away from the fire, Deerfoot the Shawanoe, who had been having a little amusement at their expense, advanced from the gloom and addressed them.

"The heart of Deerfoot is glad when he sees his brothers do not sleep; he has watched them, but their eyes are open."

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"Wal, be the powers!" muttered Terry Clark, hastily rising to his feet, as did Fred; "the spalpeen that plays that trick on me has got to fight it out."

And he began taking off his coat and spitting on his hands, to show that the matter could only be settled by a bout at fisticuffs. Deerfoot had extended his hand to Fred and he smiled at the combative Irish lad, who put up his fists and began dancing about him in the most belligerent fashion.

"Give him a trial," whispered Fred, with a laugh.

"Deerfoot loves his brothers; he can not hurt them."

"If ye can git the bist of mesilf," said Terry, who was still sawing the air and hopping about as though the ground had become hot; "I'll think more of ye than iver before, bein' that I think more of ye now than I ever can, and I defy ye to sit your gun aside and git the bist of me in any way."

"Go for him," urged Fred, knowing that the Irish boy, strong and active as he was, had no chance with the Shawanoe; "he thinks he is your master when you don't use your weapons. If you will give him a lesson, it will do him good."

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"Deerfoot will try to be a teacher to my brother," said the Shawanoe gravely, handing his gun to Fred, and following with his knife and tomahawk, that he might have no weapons except such as nature gave him. Then he threw some wood on the fire, so that the space immediately surrounding them was as light as noonday. Finally, every thing being ready, he proceeded to "go for" Mr. Terence Clark in a truly aboriginal fashion.

Now, it must be borne in mind that, though there was and could not be the least ill feeling between the youths, yet each was resolutely resolved to overcome the other in the most emphatic manner at his command. Terry did not mean to batter the handsome face of his dusky friend, but to tap it so smartly that he would feel it. The naturally combative lad was an adept with his fists, and he meant to strike Deerfoot often enough to convince him of his inferiority. Then he would rush in, seize the young warrior and throw him to the ground, repeating it several times, until his antagonist cried, "Hold! Enough!" Fred Linden was to play the part of referee, and decide which was the better man. Thus you see the match bore some similarity to those of the present day, in which the victor is declared to be the one who in a certain number of rounds gains the advantage of the other.

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"As I am to be the boss of this business," said Fred, with the keenest zest, "let me explain the terms: Each one is to strike the other as often as he can, the blows to be sharp enough to be felt pretty plainly, but not enough to cause any injury. I will let this go on until one of you has enough, or until I am satisfied of the superiority of one over the other. After that you are to have a wrestling match. When I call for you to stop, you must do so, no matter how anxious you may be to go on. Is that understood?"

"The terms are agraaable to mesilf," said Terry; "it is sitted that there's to be no bettin' on the match."

"I have no objection to your betting if you wish, but inasmuch as you haven't a cent and Deerfoot never did such a thing as bet in all his life, I don't think there will be any trouble about holding the stakes."

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"There ain't to be any foul blows in this," added Terry, who showed that he knew more than most of his friends about the "Irish champions" and the cause that made them champions of England and Ireland.

"What do you mean by foul blows?" asked the puzzled Fred.

"Hits below the belt. What I wished to observe, however, is that we ain't to re-*cog*-nize such things as foul blows in this fight for the championship of Louisiana. Aich one is to git the bist of the ither in the bist way he can. The rule, Deerfut, is for such pugilists to shake hands before

beginnin' to try to knock aich ither out."

And Terry extended his hand, which the young warrior gravely shook, for, as you can well understand, this was something to which he was altogether unaccustomed. He knew, however, the nature of the contest between himself and his doughty Irish friend, and he entered into it with the calm confidence with which he would have engaged Tecumseh himself in a fight to the death with knives.

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Deerfoot did not put up his hands after the manner of a pugilist, nor did he even close them, but fixing his eyes on those of Terry (just as he always did in his deadly fights with his antagonists), he began softly circling about him, like a cat searching for a chance to leap upon his prey.

This did not disconcert Terry, whose pose would have been pronounced excellent by any one competent to judge. The left arm and foot were advanced, the right fist being held across and just in front of the breast, ready to take advantage of the first opening that presented itself.

As Deerfoot circled around Terry, the latter moved around him, each on the alert for a chance.

"Moind yer eye," Terry was kind enough to say; "it's a pity to sp'il such a handsome face, but a sinese of dooty will not allow me to thrifle, and so here goes!"

With that he made a creditable lunge with his left, instantly following it with his right hand, and leaping back to avoid a counter. He did not strike Deerfoot nor did he receive a blow in return.

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"Ye are quick on yer faat and very good at dodgin', but it is an obligation ye owe to yersilf and to Ameri-ca to show whither thim foin purty hands can hit——"

Rap, whack, spat! The Shawanoe smote one cheek of Terry, then the other, and then his mouth, the blows being so quick that they seemed to be simultaneous. At the moment they were delivered, the Irish lad could not see that the young warrior had stirred. He appeared to be moving in his cat-like way around him, but beyond reach of Terry's own tough fists. Seeing that he must force matters, he made a furious rush for his antagonist.

You must not set down Terry Clark as an awkward fellow who went into the contest without any skill. His father in his younger days was one of the best fighters in the north of Ireland, and he had taught considerable of his science to his only son, who gave an exhibition of what he could do when he smote the Winnebago that was swinging the cow-bell. There was not a lad anywhere near his years in Greville whom he could not master.

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Deerfoot knew nothing of the modern rules of self-defense. His superiority lay in his unequalled dexterity and quickness. It was that, as you will recall, which enabled him to win so many victories over foes who were his superior in every other respect.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

AMERICA VERSUS AMERICA.

Terence Clark gathered himself for another rush and blow at the Shawanoe, when the latter with a quickness which the eye of Fred Linden could hardly follow, ducked under the arm of the Irish lad and again struck him a resounding blow with the flat of the hand, first on one side of the face and then on the other. Terry wheeled and returned the blows with skill. Once his hand grazed the black hair that was dangling about Deerfoot's head, and several times he touched the nodding feathers, but strive as much as he might, he could not reach the fellow himself.

Now that the combat may be said to have opened, it went through to the end without halt or break. Here, there, everywhere dodged and struck the Shawanoe, while Terry was always just too late to catch him. Deerfoot might have inflicted considerable injury upon his plucky antagonist, had he struck him with his closed hand, but he always used his open palm. Some of the blows resounded like pistol shots. Having delivered all that he wished, Deerfoot doubled up his left hand so that only the index finger was extended. With this he punched the right and left ribs of Terry, then his chest, and then actually flipped each side of his nose, easily dodging the blows which the half angered Irish lad aimed at him in return.

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Suddenly Terry turned his back on his foe and deliberately struck several times at vacancy. Then he dropped his hands and walked back by the fire, saying, with a shake of his head:

"I've enough! ye could bate the divil and his uncle."

Fred Linden was sitting on the ground shaking with laughter. He had not seen any thing for a long time that pleased him so much. He had observed Terry in more than one fight with the boys at home and he knew he was an ugly customer, as full of grit as a bull dog, but the Shawanoe struck him fully a dozen times, while the Irish lad with all his skill desperately put

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forth never once touched him. The discomfiture of the brave Irish lad was complete.

No witness of the bout, however, could have failed to admire the skill and pluck of Terry. He acquitted himself well and kept up the struggle, even after he was convinced that he could do nothing with his alert antagonist. Then, when Deerfoot began to trifle with him, he turned around as I have shown and struck the empty air.

"Why did you do that?" asked Fred, as the three stood by the fire discussing the incident.

Terry passed his open hand over his cheeks, which were red and smarting from the sharp taps of Deerfoot, and closing one eye and scratching his head, made answer:

"I had been sthrikin' at Deerfut until I obsarved that ivery time I sthruck *at* him I didn't hit him; so thinks I to mesilf, I will see whither I can hit him by tryin' not to hit him; so I sthruck where I knowed he wasn't, thinkin' he was there."

"Well, I must declare Deerfoot the winner."

"I can't deny that he is; I throw up the sponge and extind to him the best wishes for himself and family."

Smiling in a way that left no doubt of his relish of the incident, Deerfoot warmly shook the hand of his friend, whose brave fight had increased his admiration of him.

"My brother is brave," said he admiringly; "perhaps he can lay Deerfoot on his back; Deerfoot will rejoice if he can do so."

"Be the powers! but that suits me," exclaimed the delighted Terry; "I forgot we were to have a wrestling match; Fred, ye will be koind enough to sarve as riferee again; we'll take side holts and it'll be the bist two out of thraa."

Terry was warranted in feeling more confidence in this test of skill. He had failed—as he knew he would always fail—in a sparring contest, for the reason that Deerfoot was so quick that he could not touch him; but one of the necessities of a wrestling match is that the contestants shall first seize each other. Terry believed that he had as much physical strength as Deerfoot, and if he once got a fair hold, he would not let go until he downed him.

Terry being right and Deerfoot left handed, each was able to secure his most effective grip. So, standing side by side, in the old fashioned style, with a dusky left arm around the white neck and a white arm around the dusky neck, they began the struggle.

In this match, as before, Deerfoot allowed his antagonist to dally with him awhile before he took the aggressive. Passing him over his hip Terry gave Deerfoot such a violent fling that a pang of fear shot through him, lest he had broken the Shawanoe's neck; but though he shot headlong out of the grasp of the Irish lad, the Shawanoe landed lightly on his feet and instantly leaped back and closed with Terry again.

"I'll fetch ye this time," he muttered between his compressed lips; "ye shan't git out of me hands till ye's down flat on yer back and mesilf layin' a-straddle of ye. There's a difference between boxin' and sparrin' and I shall taich ye the same, as me grandmither—"

Both went down that instant, but the Shawanoe was on top. His antagonist could not have fallen flatter had he been dropped from the roof of a house.

"Mark the first fall for Deerfut," called out Terry, hastily clambering to his feet, the Shawanoe extending his hand to help.

This result weakened the confidence of the Irish lad in himself, that is, so far as concerned his opponent. He reflected that many of the Indians are skillful wrestlers, and while Deerfoot had had no training in boxing, he had in the other art. Such a cool headed athlete would be sure to learn fast. Terry recognized the peculiar flirt by which he had been turned off his feet as the very trick he had played successfully on his playmates at home, but which he never dreamed was known to Deerfoot.

The Irish lad tried every possible lock, twist and turn upon his rival, but he could not get him off his feet. It seemed to Terry that he whirled in the air when almost on the ground, and that if he had been dropped head downwards from the height of a rod, he would alight on his feet.

Fred saw Deerfoot, who was carefully watching his antagonist, smile, and he knew what was coming. So deftly that, for the life of him, the spectator could not see how it was done, Terry went over again as "flat as a flounder." Not only that, but to the astonishment of the victim as well as of the witness, the Shawanoe remained erect, so that he literally flung his antagonist to the ground and looked smilingly down upon him.

"Ye can baat the baaters," exclaimed Terry, rising to his feet, and shaking hands with his victor. "I niver met any one who could down me in that sthyle. I don't know how ye did the same, but I haven't any doubts that ye done it, as me great uncle remarked whin the cannon ball took off his head."

With the same shadowy smile Deerfoot looked inquiringly at Fred Linden.

"Deerfoot thinks maybe his brother would be glad to lay him on the ground?"

"I'll be hanged if I don't try it," laughed Fred, springing to his feet, and instantly but cautiously closing arms with the graceful warrior.

"My brother can not throw Deerfoot," said the latter; "but the heart of Deerfoot would be glad if he would tell him how he would like to fall—on his shoulders, or side, or back."

"I wouldn't like to fall at all; but if you think you can get me on my shoulders, just try it; that's all."

"It shall be as my brother wishes."

The words seemed yet in the mouth of Deerfoot when Fred felt himself sailing through space, and the next instant he landed on his shoulders with a shock that Terry declared made the ground shake.

As before, Deerfoot himself did not fall, but looked smilingly down on his prostrate friend as he began climbing to his feet again.

"Now, if my brother wishes to fall on his back, it shall be so."

"I've little doubt that you will not do just as you say you will; I only ask that you wait till I say I am ready; you did the last before I had time to prepare."

"Ye bitter not ax him to wait," said Terry, who rolled over on the ground in the exuberance of his mirth, at the sight of his big friend going down before the lithe, willowy Shawanoe; "for since he's bound to do what he says, the sooner ye are out of yer suspinse, the sooner ye'll be out of it."

"Be kind enough to attend to your own affairs," said Fred stiffly; "Deerfoot and I are running this show."

"It looks as if Deerfoot had charge of the whole of it," was the comment of Terry, who broke into laughter again; "and whin he is done ye'll agraa with me."

Once more the arms passed over each other's neck. Fred resolved that whatever came, he would not be taken by surprise this time. He was stronger than Terry and he had thrown him more than once. He could not understand, therefore, why he should not at least give the Shawanoe a struggle. He braced his feet, with every muscle strained, and every faculty on the alert.

"I am ready," said he; "do your best."

"On which side shall Deerfoot throw his brother?"

"On my right side, and as hard as you can."

Now, you will see the difficulty of the task, for Fred had his right arm tightly locked over the neck of Deerfoot, so that that side was guarded by the body of the warrior himself. It would seem, that if Fred should fall on either side it could only be on the left. Manifestly if it should be the right, the Shawanoe could not go down with him. He must bring him to the ground and escape from beneath him before he fell.

He did it. For a second or two the contestants stood motionless. Then, like a flash, Deerfoot slipped from the grasp of his friend, dropped down in a stooping posture almost to the earth, holding the right hand of Fred firmly with his left (this was to prevent him using that hand to save himself), and then by a quick dart to the left, he carried both feet of his opponent off the ground, and Fred fell squarely on his right side, his conqueror straightening up as he went down.

"I would be obleeged," said Terry, throwing back his head with laughter, "if yees will be koind enough to till me who is runnin' the show about this time."

Fred was chagrined at the ease with which Deerfoot had overthrown him, and it was not lessened by the honest compliment which the young warrior gave to his skill. Both Fred and Terry had been pretty well jarred, for they were downed with such amazing suddenness that it could not be otherwise; but neither referred to it and they could only praise the wonderful ability of their friend.

"I tell you," said Fred, seating himself on the ground beside the other two, after the flurry was over, "all this proves that skill is worth more than strength. I am quite sure that I am as strong as you, Deerfoot, but I don't believe that Terry and I together could lay you on your back. When I had my arm around your neck, I suspected you would try to slip out, and I squeezed you pretty hard. You slid out so quickly that at the moment you were down at my heels, I thought I had you fast."

"I'm thinkin' that the nixt thing we should try is a race; Fred can outrun me and I'll agraa that he will outrun Deerfoot, that is, if ye'll allow me to make the conditions."

"What would they be?" asked Deerfoot, Looking gravely down upon his friends.

"The race should be for a hundred yards, and Deerfoot must give Fred ninety-five yards start, though to make it sure enough, maybe it ought to be ninety-six or siven."

"Then you would require about ninety-nine, according to the same calculation," said Fred.

"Ye's are right," replied Terry, to whom it seemed that no athletic feat was impossible for the Shawanoe; "nayther yersilf nor mesilf have a right to be mintioned in the same day with him."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAST CAMP-FIRE.

It seemed to strike all three of the friends at the same moment that they had shown a strange forgetfulness of the occasion. A sudden impulse had led them into a test of skill, that had continued fully a quarter of an hour, during which there was no thought on the part of any one of the gravity of their situation.

But a little while before, both Fred Linden and Terry Clark were in distress on account of their friends, while their own position (believing as they did that there were Winnebagos in front as well as in the rear), ought to have driven away all inclination for sport or amusement. One of their strongest desires was the presence of Deerfoot, that they might have his counsel and help. Here he was, and no reference had been made to the subjects uppermost in their minds. Now that he took his seat near them by the camp-fire, as if to invite their confidence, they quickly returned to the all important business. 389

First of all, they asked for his experience since their separation the night before. He gave only a part of it. He told nothing about his conflict with the Wolf and his companion, which resulted in the death of both, but said that he had kept watch of the Winnebagos until morning, when he saw them start for the camp in the mountains. He learned from their signaling that they had other warriors in the neighborhood, and there could be no doubt that an attack was intended upon the Hunters of the Ozark. Nevertheless the Shawanoe kept in their vicinity, until they approached the open prairie of which mention has been made. Then he decided to pass them and join his young friends.

Feeling no doubt that the latter were following the right trail (several examinations which he made satisfied him that they were doing so), he left it altogether, and took a shorter route across the country. He was so familiar with it that he could easily do this. His intention was to strike the main path again at the crossing, where they had such a narrow escape from the cyclone; but he calculated that by nightfall they would be a considerable distance beyond, and he wished to test their watchfulness when left to themselves. So he came back to the trail about half way between that point and the creek which they had crossed by means of the canoe. He saw from an examination of the ground that he was ahead of them, so he sauntered forward, firing off his gun where a turn in the path made it seem to come from one side instead of in front of them. He did this as he explained with a view of warning them to keep their eyes open. It soon began growing dark and he kept on until he reached the stream, where he decided to wait and see what they would do. 390

He was as surprised as they when they brought forth the little canoe and pushed themselves across by means of the pole which Fred Linden himself cut. He followed them, easily wading the stream. After that he indulged in a little diversion with which you are familiar. 391

"Wasn't it strange, Deerfoot," said Fred, "that we should have found that canoe?"

He nodded his head to signify that he thought it was.

"Have you any idea how it got there?"

"He who owned the boat hid it under the bushes."

"But there are no Indian villages within a great many miles of this place—is that not so?"

He gave another affirmative nod.

"Have you any idea of who the owner can be?"

A third affirmative nod followed.

"Who is he?" asked Fred in astonishment.

"Deerfoot."

"What! Does that little canoe belong to *you*?"

"Deerfoot made it and hid it under the bushes: why did not my brothers use the paddle?"

"We hunted all round, but could not find it."

"It was within reach of my brother's hands; it was covered with leaves."

"And so the boat is yer own?" repeated Terry; "why that looks as if ye lived somewhere in this neighborhood; is such the case, owld boy?" 392

The question did not seem to please the Shawanoe. He was sitting directly in front of his young friends, who looked earnestly in his face. He made no answer to Terry's question, but continued looking among the coals, as if he was pondering some other matter that had thus been brought to mind. Fred shook his head at Terry as a warning that he should not repeat his query, and the latter was wise enough not to do so; but the friends concluded from that moment that the wandering young Shawanoe made his home at no great distance from where all three were at that moment sitting in the wilderness. And they were right.

A minute later, Deerfoot raised his head and signified that he wished to know in turn what had

befallen them since they parted company twenty-four hours before. You will admit that each had a stirring story to tell and he told it. The Shawanoe first listened to Terry's account of his ride on the back of the wounded buffalo, and, when it was finished, he quietly remarked to his young friend that he had done well.

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Though he showed no emotion, it was clear to both boys that he felt the most concern in the experience of Fred Linden. He said nothing until the narrator was through, including the account of the cyclone. Deerfoot had heard the noise made by the latter, but he was so far removed from its path that he saw none of its fearful effects, and in fact cared little about it, for he had seen the same thing more than once before.

But that which interested him was the account of Fred Linden's meeting with the Winnebago horse thieves. This was the first knowledge he received that any of their enemies were mounted on animals. Deerfoot had turned off the main trail so early in the day that he missed them altogether. When he came back to the path, near where the three were in camp at that moment, and he examined the ground for signs of the footprints of the boys, there were none that had been made by the hoofs of horses. They had struck the trail further to the north, taking a different course from the camp where they had stolen the animals.

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Fred blushed under the warm compliments of Deerfoot on his coolness, bravery and skill in the presence of the three Winnebagos. You will agree that it was a daring exploit indeed, which would have done credit to a veteran frontiersman. It could not have been otherwise to draw such warm praise from the Shawanoe.

But the compliments could well be deferred to some other season. The fact that three Indians had stolen the same number of horses from the Hunters of the Ozark, and then had ridden leisurely away to meet their friends, showed that they had great confidence in themselves, doubtless caused by the belief that they were safe against any attempt to recover the property.

"Deerfoot," said Fred, after there had been a full exchange of experiences; "we stopped here only because we could not keep to the trail in the darkness. Don't you think it best that we should now go on, since you will not have the same trouble that we did?"

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He shook his head in the negative.

"It is not far to the camp of my brothers; the Winnebagos are a long ways back on the trail; they will not come up with us; my brothers have a chance to sleep; they may have no chance when they reach the cabin; let them sleep now."

The natural inference from this remark was that he believed nothing more was to be apprehended from the Winnebagos, so long as our three friends were on their way to the cabin of the Hunters of the Ozark. The danger would now be transferred to that point.

"Is it not likely that some of the red men are between us and our friends?" asked Fred, as though their guide had not thought of every contingency.

"There is none," was the quiet answer, and then he added the explanation. The Winnebagos, as soon as they had captured the horses, had mounted them and ridden off to meet Black Bear and the rest, so as to combine with them in the attack upon the cabin in the mountains. Being so few in numbers, they did not dare stay in the neighborhood, but were certain to come back with the others.

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The theft of the animals was no part of the original plan of the red men, and was therefore what may be considered poor generalship, since it was likely to draw attention to the presence of hostiles and to put the Hunters of the Ozark on their guard.

Deerfoot made no such remark at the time, but he afterward expressed his regret that he had not joined Fred and Terry earlier in the day, so that he could have been with them when they met the horse thieves. Had he done so, there can be no doubt that they would have recaptured every one of the animals, even if they had had to shoot each thief from the back of his stolen steed. Such a result would have changed the whole course of the events that followed.

Since the Shawanoe advised them to stay where they were until morning, the natural query of the lads was as to the degree of danger they ran. They had thought there was little to be feared from Indians, but after the fire was started, both had misgivings—afterward intensified no doubt by the little trick played upon them by Deerfoot.

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He assured them that there was nothing to be feared from Indians. There was and would be none near them through the night. They were at a safe distance from the trail, so that if any one should pass back or forth he could not possibly catch a glimpse of the camp.

"I never dispute a man's sintimints," said Terry, "unless it happens to disagraa with me own, so I'll say ye are right because we think the same way; but it's within me own ricollection that whin ye enjoyed the honor of our coompany night before last, ye kipt guard all the night; Frederick and meself will now return the coompliment and take charge of the honors oursilves. If ye have any disputation that ye want to inter into, we'll sittle it by maans of a wristling match."

Deerfoot was inclined at first to act as sentinel, just as he had done before, but he had already declared that there was nothing to be feared, and his friends were so in earnest that he could not well refuse their request. He would have preferred that they should gain all the sleep they could, so as to lay up a stock, as may be said, against what was likely to come at the cabin, but he yielded. He agreed to their wishes, and in doing so, indulged in one of his smiles, the depth of whose meaning neither of the youths fully comprehended. In fact it simply meant that he understood their ability in that respect better than they did themselves.

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And so, after reading his Bible, a portion of it aloud, he lay down upon the blanket of Terry, as he did two nights before, and soon fell asleep.

"I'm glad to observe the same," remarked Terry; "for the good lookin' spalpeen must be in naad of slumber. I say, Fred, did ye iver saa the loikes of him? We must git him to run a race and jump and swim and stand on his head and show jist what he can do. I'm glad as I say to observe that he is aslaap, for he must naad the same. I say, Fred, let's stay awake till daylight, so as to fool him."

"I am glad to do that in return for the watch he kept over us the other night; but if you and I undertake to sit up at the same time we shall fail. So I'll lie down and sleep awhile. When you find yourself getting drowsy, wake me up and then I shall be able to keep my eyes open until morning. In that way Deerfoot may have a whole night of rest."

"I'm agraaable to the same."

The plan was carried out, that is, a part of it, Fred Linden soon dropped asleep, and, within an hour, Terry Clark did the same. When Deerfoot threw his blanket off his face and assumed the sitting position, he saw just what he expected to see and he allowed them to slumber peacefully until daylight.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

The awaking of the boys was of the most pleasant character. The sky had cleared and the sunlight penetrated between the branches from which the autumn leaves were fast falling. The crispness which is felt at that season of the year, stirred the young hearts and enlivened the spirits in spite of the serious situation in which all three found themselves.

The odor of broiling fish was snuffed by the lads, and nothing could have been more delicious and appetizing. They were very hungry, and the night before they supposed they would have to wait indefinitely for their morning meal, but they opened their eyes to find that Deerfoot had provided the most toothsome breakfast that could be imagined.

In the early morning light, fully two hours before the sun appeared, Deerfoot crossed the stream in his own canoe, and, taking the trail, ran several miles at the highest speed. While he did not go far enough to see the camp-fire of the main war party of Winnebagos, he did not pause until certain that they had stayed in camp all night and would not cross the stream where the boys lay asleep until the forenoon was half gone. So the Shawanoe hastened back, and dropped a short distance down stream in his canoe, having obtained his paddle, to an eddy where it took but a few minutes for him to coax a half dozen fish from the cool, clear depths, and these were just browning to a turn when the boys opened their eyes.

Fred and Terry looked in each other's faces and laughed. They knew what an absurd failure they had made. They had promised to watch while Deerfoot slept, and then left him to act as sentinel until morning.

"It was your fault," whispered Fred, hunting in his pocket for the package of salt and pepper which survived, despite the wetting it had received; "why didn't you wake me up, as I told you to do?"

"How could I wake ye up when I was aslaap mesilf?" was the pertinent query of Terry; "I think I was only a half minute behind yersilf in beginning me swate dreams."

"Even if you had roused me," said Fred, "I suppose I would have dropped to sleep the same as you; no one can keep awake (unless it is Deerfoot) while sitting on the ground. Well, I am sure I shan't say any thing about it if *he* doesn't."

"Let us shake on that," whispered Terry, stealthily extending his hand.

Deerfoot acted as though unaware that any such lapse had occurred. The browned fish were spread on the green leaves, and Fred sprinkled the seasoning upon the portions to be eaten by himself and Terry; the Shawanoe preferred none on his.

"If nothing unexpected happens," said Fred, "we will arrive at the cabin to-day."

The Shawanoe inclined his head by way of answer.

"When will the Winnebagos that are following us come to this stream?"

Deerfoot pointed to a portion of the sky which the sun would reach in about three hours from that time.

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"The Winnebagos are together; there may be a few coming from different parts of the wood, but Black Bear has most of his warriors with him, and he feels strong enough to destroy the cabin and our brothers who are there."

"There are three there now, and when we join them there will be six. If father and the rest have fair notice of their coming, they ought to be able to put every thing in good shape for a defense. It won't take them long to gather enough food to last for weeks, but how about water?"

"They have no water; our brothers know not why they should have it."

The Shawanoe meant to say that the men, seeing no reason why they should collect any store of water within their primitive structure, never did so. It was at their door, and, when they wished to drink, they had but to stoop down and drink. Believing no such emergency as now threatened could arise, they failed to make any provision against it.

"I've been thinkin'," said Terry, "that bein' as how we started from Greville to j'in the Hunters of the Ozark, with the idaa of spindin' the winter with the same, that from the time we started we were mimbers of the same, but timporarily separated by a wide stritch of woods; what are yer own idaaas?"

"I am not sure that I understand what you are trying to get at, but if you mean to say that we may call ourselves two of the Hunters of the Ozark, I see no objection if we are a few days behind the rest in reaching the beaver runs."

"Oblige me by tistifying to the same," said Terry, rather effusively, shoving his hand toward his friend, who suspended operations with the fish long enough to salute him.

The breakfast was quickly finished, and the boys helped each other with their knapsacks, caught up their guns and followed Deerfoot as he led the way back to the trail. He did not hint any thing about their failure to keep guard for him the night before, though they felt sure that they would hear from him at some time not very far distant.

When they found themselves following the path that had become so familiar, they glanced furtively behind, half expecting to hear the Winnebago war whoop and to see the warriors rushing after them; but not a living soul beside themselves was in sight, and the quiet assurance of their leader very nearly removed all such fear from them.

"Are there any more streams to cross?" asked Fred, a moment after they started along the trail.

"There are none."

"That is good, and since we are several hours in advance of the Indians, we ought to be able to reach the cabin in time to give them warning, that is, if they are in need of it."

"How can they help being in need?" asked Terry.

"The horses were turned loose to look after themselves, and though I can't know for some time how it is, it seems to me that it could well happen that they would not miss the animals for several days and possibly not for a week or two."

The best ground for doubting that the Hunters of the Ozark were aware of the theft of the horses was the fact that there had been no pursuit. Those men, it is safe to say, would not have stayed idle had they known that three vagabond Indians were astride of their property and riding to the northward. With the three fleeter animals at command, they would have been after them in a twinkling: they would not have been obliged to wait till they met Fred Linden before receiving some rifle shots.

Fred was confirmed in this theory by Deerfoot, who declared that such was his explanation of the failure of the hunters to pursue the thieves.

For two hours the trail which they were following steadily ascended, until they were considerably higher than when they left camp in the morning. The undergrowth was abundant, and the wood in some places was so dense that they could see only a short distance on either hand. The trail was sinuous, winding in and out among the rocks in a way that would have bewildered any one not used to such traveling.

At last they reached the ridge of the elevation up which they had been climbing, and found themselves on the margin of a plateau or rather valley, beyond which rose the rugged, precipitous Ozarks. Since the ground sloped away from them, in the direction of the mountains, their view was extended over many square miles of forest, stream and natural clearing, to the mountain walls beyond, looking dim and soft in the distance, with the hazy air between.

"Do my brothers see the gleam of the water yonder?" asked Deerfoot, pointing to a winding stream, large enough to be called a river, though it was half hidden by the woods. Its course was in the main at right angles to the trail which the boys had been following, though, at times it seemed to run straight toward and then away from them.

The youths answered that they could not very well look in the direction indicated by their friend, without seeing the stream to which he directed their attention.

The Shawanoe placed himself so that he stood in front of the two.

"Now," said he, "let my brothers follow Deerfoot's finger and tell me what they see."

Pointing well to the right, he slowly swung his index finger toward the left, until he had described about a quarter of a circle.

Since it was not easy for the two to look exactly at the point meant, at the same time, Terry

Clark first tried it. Removing his cap, he closed one eye and carefully peered along the extended arm of the Shawanoe as though it was a rifle which he was about to aim and fire.

"What is it?" asked Fred, a moment later, with some impatience over the plodding deliberation of his companion.

"I obsarve a big lot of traas, some rocks, some water and a claarin' where ye could raise a big lot of praties, and—and—and—"

"I see what you mean!" exclaimed Fred in some excitement; "right in the middle of the clearing stands a large cabin made of logs."

"It's mesilf that obsarves the same," added Terry, replacing his cap and looking inquiringly at the Shawanoe, who let his extended arm fall as he faced about and said: "That is the home of my brothers; that is the cabin of the Hunters of the Ozark."

"Hurrah!" called out Terry; "we're purty near there."

"But we don't know how matters stand," said Fred; "even Deerfoot can not tell whether they are all alive or dead."

"I know bitter than that," remarked Terry, appealing straight to the Shawanoe, who, without directly answering the question, notified them of an interesting fact: a thin column of smoke was rising from the cabin.

"That shows that some one is in there," said the Irish lad, "but whither he is white or rid, I don't s'pose the Shawanoe, with all his smartness, can tell even at this distance."

"My brother speaks truth," said Deerfoot; "our brothers may be well and they maybe dead and the Winnebagos may have built the fire to lure us to them: we shall soon know."

Here for the present we must pause, for we have already filled the space assigned to us; but we propose soon to tell you all about the adventures of Deerfoot, Fred and Terry, and of their friends the Hunters of the Ozark, whom they were trying to help. The story in which this will be related will appear under the title of

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When I was sixteen years old I belonged to a composition class. It was our custom to go on the recitation seat every day with clean slates, and we were allowed ten minutes to write seventy words on any subject the teacher thought suited to our capacity. One day he gave out "What a Man Would See if He Went to Greenland." My heart was in the matter, and before the ten minutes were up I had one side of my slate filled. The teacher listened to the reading of our compositions, and when they were all over he simply said: "Some of you will make your living by writing one of these days." That gave me something to ponder upon. I did not say so out loud, but I knew that my composition was as good as the best of them. By the way, there was another thing that came in my way just then. I was reading at that time one of Mayne Reid's works which I had drawn from the library, and I pondered upon it as much as I did upon what the teacher said to me. In introducing Swartboy to his readers he made use of this expression: "No visible change was observable in Swartboy's countenance." Now, it occurred to me that if a man of his education could make such a blunder as that and still write a book, I ought to be able to do it, too. I went home that very day and began a story, "The Old Guide's Narrative," which was sent to the *New York Weekly*, and came back, respectfully declined. It was written on both sides of the sheets but I didn't know that this was against the rules. Nothing abashed, I began another, and receiving some instruction, from a friend of mine who was a clerk in a book store, I wrote it on only one side of the paper. But mind you, he didn't know what I was doing. Nobody knew it; but one day, after a hard Saturday's work—the other boys had been out skating on the brick-pond—I shyly broached the subject to my mother. I felt the need of some sympathy. She listened in amazement, and then said: "Why, do you think you could write a book like that?" That settled the matter, and from that day no one knew what I was up to until I sent the first four volumes of Gunboat Series to my father. Was it work? Well, yes; it was hard work, but each week I had the satisfaction of seeing the manuscript grow until the "Young Naturalist" was all complete.

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