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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ON THE KENTUCKY FRONTIER: A STORY OF THE FIGHTING PIONEERS OF THE WEST ***



In a twinkling I was by his side, and there saw that which caused the cold chill of fear to run down my back.—Page 40. *Frontis. On the Kentucky Frontier.*

ON THE
KENTUCKY FRONTIER.

**A STORY OF THE FIGHTING PIONEERS
OF THE WEST.**

By JAMES OTIS



With Six Page Illustrations by J. Watson Davis

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**ON THE KENTUCKY FRONTIER.
By JAMES OTIS.**

PREFACE.

"Poor Simon Kenton experienced the bitter effects of wrong, ingratitude, and neglect. On account of some legal matters concerning his lands in Kentucky, he was imprisoned for twelve months upon the very spot where he built his cabin in 1775. In 1802, beggared by lawsuits and losses, he became landless. Yet he never murmured at the ingratitude which pressed him down, and in 1813 the veteran joined the Kentucky troops under Shelby, and was in the battle of the Thames. In 1824, then seventy years old, he journeyed to Frankfort, in tattered garments and upon a miserable horse, to ask the legislature of Kentucky to release the claims of the State upon some of his mountain lands. He was stared at by the boys, and shunned by the citizens, for none knew him. At length General Thomas Fletcher recognized him, gave him a new suit of clothes, and entertained him kindly. When it was known that Simon Kenton was in town, scores flocked to

see the old hero. He was taken to the Capitol and seated in the Speaker's chair. His lands were released, and afterward Congress gave him a pension of two hundred and forty dollars a year. He died, at the age of eighty-one years, in 1836, at his residence at the head of Mad River, Logan County, Ohio, in sight of the place where, fifty-eight years before, the Indians were about to put him to death."

(Lossing's "Field-Book of the Revolution.")

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SIMON KENTON	1
II. BESIEGED	24
III. THE VENTURE	45
IV. PAUL SAMPSON	68
V. DOWN THE OHIO	91
VI. ASTRAY	114
VII. THE CAPTIVE SCOUT	137
VIII. AT THE RENDEZVOUS	161
IX. KASKASKIA	184
X. CAHOKIA	208
XI. HOMEWARD BOUND	229
XII. A NOVEL BATTLE	251

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
IN A TWINKLING I WAS BY HIS SIDE AND THERE SAW THAT WHICH CAUSED THE COLD CHILL OF FEAR TO RUN DOWN MY BACK	Frontispiece
THE BRUTE FELL, AS THOUGH STRUCK BY LIGHTNING AND A CRY OF TRIUMPH RANG FROM MY LIPS	62
WITHIN FIVE SECONDS I HAD FIRED, USING THE CURL OF VAPOR FOR A TARGET	103
WE ADVANCED FROM ONE PLACE OF SHELTER TO ANOTHER, FIRING RAPIDLY	142
STRAIGHT UP TO THE BIG GATE WE ADVANCED BELIEVING THAT IN THE NEXT SECOND WE SHOULD HEAR THE ALARM GUN	204
FROM OUT OF OUR BARRICADE WHISTLED THREE BULLETS AND EVERY ONE FOUND ITS MARK	258

ON THE KENTUCKY FRONTIER.

CHAPTER I.

SIMON KENTON.

It is my purpose to set down what I saw during such time as Simon Kenton gave me my first lessons in woodcraft and it is well to make the statement in advance in order that others may be deprived of the opportunity of saying what would sound disagreeable:—that the pupil was for a time so dull that one less patient and painstaking than Kenton would have brought the lessons to a speedy close.

That which now seems the most difficult is to decide how I shall begin this story of the little which I did on the Kentucky frontier during the year of grace 1778, and I can hit upon no plan which promises better success than that of copying here what I read in a printed book long years after I, a green lad, set out to do my little share toward bringing peace and a sense of security to the settlers who were striving to make homes for themselves and their families in what was then known as the colony of Virginia.

[Pg 2]

I make use of such a beginning because it appears to me as if the wise man who thus explains the condition of affairs among us at that time, tells in a few lines what I might struggle vainly over many pages of paper to put into form one-half so concise and satisfactory:

"With the single exception of Dunmore's expedition in 1774, hostilities west of the Alleghanies were nothing but a series of border conflicts, each little party acting upon its own responsibility, until 1778, when Major George Rogers Clarke led a regular expedition against the frontier posts of the enemy in the wilderness. Clarke first went toward Kentucky in 1772, when he paddled down the Ohio with the Reverend David Jones, then on his way to preach the Gospel to the Western Indians.

[Pg 3]

"He was at once impressed with the importance of that fertile region, and the necessity of making it a secure place for settlements. His mind was clear and comprehensive; his personal courage of the truest stamp; his energies, physical and mental, always vigorous, and he soon became an oracle among the backwoods-men. During the years 1775 and 1776, he traversed vast regions of the wilderness south of the Ohio, studied the character of the Indians chiefly from the observations of others, and sought to discover a plan by which a tide of emigration might flow unchecked and secure into that paradise of the continent.

"He soon became convinced that the British garrisons at Detroit, Kaskaskia, and Vincennes, were the nests of those vultures who preyed upon the feeble settlements of the west, and deluged the virgin soil with the blood of the pioneers. Virginia, to which province this rich wilderness belonged, was at that time bending all her energies in advancing the cause of independence within her borders east of the Alleghanies, and the settlers west of the mountains were left to their own defense.

[Pg 4]

"Major Clarke, convinced of the necessity of reducing the hostile forts in the Ohio country, submitted a plan for the purpose to the Virginia Legislature, in December, 1777. His scheme was highly approved, and Governor Henry and his council were so warmly interested that Major Clarke received two sets of instructions, one public, ordering him to 'proceed to the defense of Kentucky,' the other private, directing an attack upon the British fort at Kaskaskia. Twelve hundred pounds were appropriated to defray the expenses of the expedition; and the commandant of Fort Pitt was ordered to furnish Clarke with ammunition, boats, and other necessary equipments.

"His force consisted of only four companies, and they were all prime men. Early in the spring they rendezvoused upon Corn Island, at the falls of the Ohio, six hundred and seven miles by water, below Fort Pitt. Here Clarke was joined by Simon Kenton, one of the boldest pioneers of the west, then a young man of twenty-two years. He had been acting as a spy for two years previously; henceforth he was engaged in a more honorable, but not more useful, service."

[Pg 5]

Now that this much has been explained by another, I am still at a loss to know how this poor story should be begun, and after much cudgeling of my weak brain have decided to jump into the matter after the same fashion that the events come into my memory after these many years of peace and idleness.

On a certain morning in February, in the year 1778, I went out to look after my traps, and had thrown myself down on the bank of the Ohio River to decide a question which had been vexing me many days.

Never for a moment did I lose sight of the fact that it was necessary I have my wits about me in case I counted on keeping my hair, for many a scalp had been taken in that vicinity within the six months just passed, and I believed that nothing larger than a squirrel could come within striking distance, save by my own knowledge and consent.

[Pg 6]

Therefore it was I sprang up very suddenly in the greatest alarm when a white man stood before me, having approached so silently that it was almost as if he had come up through the very earth.

It is not to be supposed that Indians were the only beings in form of men we settlers on the Ohio had reason to fear in those days; there were many white men whose hearts were as black as those of the savages, and who would draw bead on one of their kind from sheer love of spilling

blood, if no other reason presented itself.

As I have set down here, I sprang to my feet, rifle in hand, ready for the first threatening movement on the part of the stranger; but he gave little token of being an enemy.

[Pg 7]

His weapon was thrown across the hollow of his arm as he stood looking at me in a friendly manner, and I might easily have shot him down, unless he was quicker with a rifle than any other I had ever met.

A young fellow was this newcomer, hardly more than one and twenty, as it then seemed to me, and there was that in his face which gave token that he might be a close friend or a dangerous enemy, whichever way he was approached.

"Out for fur?" he said rather than asked, glancing down at the traps which lay near at hand.

I nodded; but remained on my guard, determined not to be taken at a disadvantage by soft words.

"It is better to keep movin', than lay 'round where a sneakin' Injun might creep up a bit too near," he said with a smile, as he seated himself near the decaying tree-trunk on which I had left the traps.

[Pg 8]

"I would have sworn neither white nor red could have come upon me in the fashion you did," I said hotly, and thoroughly ashamed of myself for having been so careless.

"I reckon it might have puzzled an Injun to do the trick. If I couldn't beat them at movin' 'round, my head would have been bare these five years."

It sounded much like boasting, his claiming to be able to beat an Indian at woodcraft, for at that time I believed the savages could outwit any settler who ever lived; but before many weeks had passed I came to understand that I had been sadly mistaken.

"Is that your cabin yonder under the big knoll?" he asked, more as if by way of beginning a conversation than from curiosity.

"Yes; have you been there?"

"I looked it over; but didn't try to scrape acquaintance. Does your mother live there?"

"Yes; she and I alone."

[Pg 9]

"What sent her down into this wilderness with no one but a lad like yourself?" he asked, speaking as if he was twice my age, when, unless all signs failed, he was no more than five years my elder.

"Father was with us when we came, last year. He was killed by the murdering savage sneaks nearly two months ago."

"Why did you hold on here?" the stranger asked, eyeing me curiously. "Surely the clearin' isn't so far along that it pays to risk your life for it."

"Mother would have packed off; but I couldn't leave."

"Why?"

"It's a poor kind of a son who won't at least try to wipe off such a score, and I'll hold on here till those who killed the poor old man have found out who I am!"

Tears of mingled rage, grief, and helplessness came into my eyes as I spoke thus hotly, and I wheeled around quickly lest this stranger, seeing them, should set me down for a younger lad than I really was.

[Pg 10]

"It's quite a job you've shouldered," he said after a pause. "The Injuns nearabout here ain't to be caught nappin' every hour in the day, and the chances are your mother may find herself alone on the clearin' before you have made any great headway in settlin' the score."

"Because you crept up on me, there is no reason why the red snakes can do the same thing!" I cried angrily, whereupon he nodded gravely as if agreeing with me, after which he asked:

"How old are you?"

"Must a fellow have seen so many years more or less before he can do the work of a man?" I demanded, giving proof by my petulance that I was yet little more than a child.

"It was not with anything of the kind in my mind that I asked the question. Perhaps I wondered if you'd had the experience that'll be needed before your work is done."

[Pg 11]

"I'm just turned sixteen," I replied, thoroughly ashamed of having displayed an ill-temper.

"Where did you come from?"

"Pennsylvania."

"Was your father a Tory?" he asked.

"Indeed he wasn't!" and now I grew hot again. "He believed we might better our condition by pushing into the wilderness, for when a man's land is overrun by two armies, as ours had been, farming is a poor trade."

Then he questioned me yet more closely until I had come to an end of my short story, which began with the day we set out from the colony founded by William Penn, and ended with that hour when I came across my poor father's mangled body scarce half a mile from our clearing, where the beasts in human form had tortured him.

All this I told the stranger as if he had been, an old friend, for there was something, in his voice and manner which won my heart at once, and when the sad tale was ended I came to understand he had not questioned me idly.

[Pg 12]

"My name is Simon Kenton," he said, after a time of silence, as if he was turning over in mind what I had told him. "The day I was sixteen I took to the wilderness because of—there is no reason why that part of it need be told. It was six years ago, an' in those years I've seen a good bit of life on the frontier, though perhaps it would have been better had I gone east an' taken a hand with those who are fightin' against the king. But a soldier's life would raffle my grain, I reckon, so I've held on out here, nearabout Fort Pitt, where there's been plenty to do."

"Fort Pitt!" I exclaimed. "Why, that's a long distance up the river!"

"Six hundred miles or so."

"Are you down here trapping?" I asked, now questioning him as he had me.

"I'm headin' for Corn Island?"

"Then you haven't much further to go. Its no more than a dozen miles down the river."

[Pg 13]

"So I guessed. I left my canoe over yonder, an' took to the shore partly to find somethin' in the way of meat, and partly to have a look around."

Then it was, and before I could question him further, he told me why he had come, the substance of which I have already set down in the language of another. At that time he did not give me the story complete as it was written by him whose words I quoted at the beginning of this tale; but I understood the settlers were making a move against the British and Indians, and it seemed to me a most noble undertaking, for, had not the king's officers incited the savages to bloody deeds, the frontier might have been a land of peace.

When he was come to an end of the story, and Simon Kenton was not one to use more words than were necessary, I proposed that he go with me to my home, for by this time it was near to noon, and I had suddenly lost all desire to continue the work of setting traps.

[Pg 14]

He agreed right willingly, as if it favored his plans to do so, and we two went back to the clearing, he moving through the thicket more like a shadow than a stoutly built man whose weight seemed against such stealthy traveling. Never had I seen such noiseless progress; a squirrel would have given more token of his presence, and I wondered not that he had been welcomed at Fort Pitt as a scout, spy, or whatever one may please to call his occupation.

My mother made the young man welcome, as she would have done any I might have brought in with me to our home in Pennsylvania, and out here in the wilderness, where we had not seen a strange, yet friendly, face since my poor father was murdered, she was rejoiced to meet one who might give us news of the outside world.

Simon Kenton was not a polished man such as would be met within the eastern colonies; but he gave every token of honest purpose, and it was impossible to remain long in his company without believing him to be one who would be a firm friend at all times.

[Pg 15]

We enjoyed his visit more than can be told, and then without warning he broached that subject which had a great bearing upon all my life from that moment.

"Why do you try to hold your mother here in the wilderness, Louis Nelson?" he asked suddenly. "Surely a lad like yourself cannot hope to make a clearing unaided, and it is but keeping her in great danger of a cruel death."

"What other can I do?" I asked in surprise, having no inkling as to his true meaning.

"Take her where she will at least be able to lie down at night without fear of being aroused by the gleam of the scalping knife, or the flames of her own dwelling," he replied decidedly.

"All we have in the world is here," my mother said half to herself.

"Then it will not be hard to leave it, for a boy of Louis' age should be able to provide you with as good almost anywhere else."

[Pg 16]

I looked at him in open-mouthed astonishment, whereupon he said in such a tone as forced one to believe he spoke only the truth:

"We have every reason to believe there will be bloody scenes hereabout before Major Clarke has finished his work. You cannot hope to hold out against the painted scoundrels who will roam up and down the river in search of white blood that can be spilled. Send your mother back to Fort Pitt by the boats that will soon be returnin', an' join me in this expedition. You can go to her in the fall with money enough to provide another home as good, or better, than this, an' what is of more account, you'll have the satisfaction of knowin' that ate is in safety."

There is no good reason why I should set down here all the arguments Simon Kenton used to persuade me to break up the home my father had established, although in poor shape, at the cost of his life, nor yet speak of his efforts to make my mother believe I would be in less danger with Major Clarke's force than if I remained there struggling to make headway against the encroachments of the wilderness, at the same time that I would be forced to remain on the alert lest a pitiless, savage foe take my life.

[Pg 17]

It is enough if I say that before the shadows of night began to lengthen both my mother and myself were convinced he had given good advice, and were ready to follow it as soon as a new day had dawned.

We decided to leave our poor belongings where they were, and set out with Kenton next morning. Mother should go to Fort Pitt where she would be protected, and I, with the consent of Major Clarke, was to enlist in the troop which it was believed would drive out of the country those unscrupulous British officers who were constantly striving to stir up the savages against such of the settlers as believed the colonists had good cause to rebel against the king.

[Pg 18]

Until a late hour did Simon Kenton sit with us two, telling of the many adventures he had met with since the day he left his home in Fauquier County, Virginia, six years before, and although the stories related to deeds of daring and hairbreadth escapes, there was in his speech nothing of boasting. It was as if he spoke of what some other person had done, and without due cause for praise.

Never once did he speak of his reason for leaving home, and there was a certain something in his manner which prevented me from asking any questions. He told so much of his life story as seemed to him proper, and we were content, believing him to be a young man of proven courage and honest purposes.

Kenton and I slept on the skins in front of the fireplace, where I had ever made my bed, and so little fear had we the enemy might be near, that I never so much as looked out of doors after mother went up the ladder which led to the rough attic she called her chamber.

[Pg 19]

It was the first time since my father's cruel death that I had not circled around the cabin once or more to make certain everything was quiet; the coming of this young man had driven from my mind all thought of possible danger.

Those who live on the frontier sleep lightly, it is true; but they do not waste much time in tossing about on the bed before closing their eyes in slumber—and I was in dreamland within a very few moments after stretching out at full length.

It seemed as if I had but just lost consciousness when I awakened to find a heavy hand covering my mouth, and to hear Simon Kenton whisper:

"There is need for us to turn out. The sneakin' redskins have surrounded the cabin. Are you awake?"

I nodded, for it would have been impossible to speak while his hand was like to shut off my breath, and he rose softly to his feet.

[Pg 20]

It is not necessary for me to say that we on the Ohio in 1778 thought first in the morning of our rifles, and never lay down at night without having the trusty weapons where we could grasp them readily. Thus it was that, when I followed Kenton's example, I rose up ready for a struggle.

Not a sound could I hear, save the sougning of the wind among the trees; but I knew my companion had good cause for giving an alarm, and had probably been on the alert while I was composing myself to sleep.

"Get word to your mother; but do not let her come down here," he whispered when I joined him at the shuttered window, where he stood with his ear to the crevice. "Make no noise, an' it may be we can take the painted snakes by surprise, which will be a fine turnin' of the tables."

I did as he directed, and heard my mother say in a low voice as I turned to descend the ladder:

[Pg 21]

"Be careful, Louis, and do not expose yourself recklessly in order to give our visitor the idea that you can equal him in deeds of daring."

Under almost any other circumstances I could have laughed at the idea that I might even hope to equal such as Simon Kenton in bravery; but with death lurking close at hand one does not give way to mirth, and I hastened to the young man's side as a prayer of thankfulness went up from my heart because it had so chanced he was with us when an experienced head and arm were needed.

It is not my purpose to belittle myself. While looking up to our visitor as an elder and one well versed in such warfare as was before us, I knew full well I should not have acted a stupid part had I been alone. I might fail to hold my own against the savages; but death would not have been invited by my own folly.

[Pg 22]

The door, as well as the window shutters, was loopholed, and here Kenton took his stand, stationing me at that side of the house nearest the knoll, from where we might naturally expect the enemy would come.

My mother appeared before we had made all the arrangements for a fight, and at once set about supplying us with ammunition and food in order that we might not be forced to move from our posts in quest of either.

Then she took up my father's rifle, which was leaning against the side of the hut nearest me, as if to show that it was her purpose to do whatsoever lay in her power toward the defense, whereupon Kenton shook his head disapprovingly, and might have made objection to being aided by a woman; but before he could open his lips to speak the painted fiends were upon us.

With whoops and yells they rose up close under the walls of the cabin, where we might not be able to draw bead upon them, and at the same instant a volley of rifle shots rang out as three bullets came inside between the crevices of the logs.

[Pg 23]

CHAPTER II.

BESIEGED.

This kind of warfare was new to me. Although living on the frontier so far from any other settlement, our cabin had never before been attacked by savages.

My father was killed some distance away from home, and, judging from the signs nearabout the place where he had been tortured to death, it seemed certain that no more than three Indians had captured him.

Most likely it was a party of hunters, who had not really come out for mischief, but seeing an opportunity to take the life of a white man seized upon it. If they had been on the warpath, then beyond a peradventure our cabin would have been attacked.

To Simon Kenton, however, this sort of work was by no means new. He had been besieged many times, as we knew from the stories the young man told us a short time previous; but I ventured to say that never before had he been pitted against the painted foes with so small a force, and in a place where it was not probable any help could come.

[Pg 25]

Our cabin was situated so far back from the river that those passing up or down the stream would not suspect a habitation was near at hand, and, unless well acquainted with the clearing, an hundred men might go back and forth, never thinking that a settler had ventured in this vicinity.

Therefore it was that I, and most likely Simon Kenton also, realized how entirely alone we were. Unless we could beat off this foe which had so suddenly assailed us, within a comparatively short time, the end was near at hand for all, because no preparations had been made for a siege, and our store of provisions and water, even with careful husbanding, must be exhausted within a few days.

[Pg 26]

As all this came into my mind, and I learned that it was possible for the Indians to send their bullets inside, through the chinks between the logs, provided they were sufficiently good marksmen, my heart sank within me. I said to myself that Kenton had come too late to be of service to us, and too soon for his own safety.

As I have said, the savages had crept up under the cover of darkness close beneath the walls of the cabin, and were able to shoot at us with but little danger to themselves. Our only hope lay in dislodging them from their place of vantage, and this much I realized fully even though unexperienced in warfare.

On reading what is here set down one may say that a boy of sixteen, situated as was I at that moment, would not thus calmly weigh the chances for and against a successful defense. In reply to such criticism, I would say that in my opinion any lad of ordinary intelligence must perforce have had much the same thoughts, because of the ample time for reflection.

[Pg 27]

After the first volley, and until perhaps ten minutes had elapsed, the Indians gave no sign of life. All was still as if we three were alone in the wilderness—as if it had been some hideous nightmare which awakened us. During such time, Simon Kenton stood like a statue; but in such attitude as gave me to understand that all his senses were alert. He was an experienced Indian fighter, listening for some token which should give him a clue as to how he might best protect his own life.

My mother remained near one of the loopholes at the rear of the house, also on the alert, and I had not moved from the position taken up when we made our first poor preparations for the defense.

Suddenly, and when I had come to believe that our chances for a successful defense were slight indeed, Simon Kenton moved swiftly, yet noiselessly, to that side of the room opposite where I was standing, thrust the muzzle of his rifle between the logs near to the ground and fired.

[Pg 28]

A cry of pain followed the report of the weapon, and it was as if the noise had but just died away, when the young man had his rifle charged once more, so rapid were his movements.

One, two, three minutes, perhaps, passed in silence, and again, but in another quarter, did Kenton repeat his maneuver, although during this time I had heard nothing whatsoever save my own labored breathing.

A second cry from without told that two of the painted snakes had received a more or less serious dose of lead without having inflicted injury upon us.

I knew that Kenton's acts had been the result of his keen sense of hearing, and said to myself that the man must have been fitted by nature for work like this, since it would be impossible for any person to train his ears to such perfection.

This thought was in my mind when I heard a rustling of the foliage on the outside near where I stood, and that instant I made as if to copy the example of my companion.

[Pg 29]

"It is too late now," he said in a low tone. "The snakes are creepin' off satisfied that they are like to get the worst of such a game. They will hatch up some other plan before troublin' us again."

"But surely we haven't bested them so soon as this," I replied like a stupid, and he laughed as if there was somewhat of humor in my remark.

"They have come here to plunder this cabin, and are not like to draw off so soon. We will have enough of their company within the next four and twenty hours; but for a time I reckon we have got a breathin' spell. This is the way the British king wages war; provokin' the savages against peaceful settlers; but once Major Clarke has broken up the English nests, I'll venture to say the scurvy redcoats will turn their attention to other matters than playin' the part of butchers."

[Pg 30]

"If we had only started to meet Major Clarke's force when you first arrived," I said despondently, whereat Simon Kenton clapped me on the shoulder in a friendly fashion, as he cried:

"This is no time to be thinking of what might have happened, Louis Nelson. Men on the frontier must ever look forward, else by gazing backward their hearts may grow timorous. Until we have driven off these savages it should be to us as if Major Clarke's force had never set out."

Mother had made no attempt to join in the conversation. Her pale face and quivering lips told that she was thinking of that time, only such a short distance in the past, when father had been in the clutches of those who at that moment thirsted for our blood, and grief overshadowed all the fears which the future could present.

Observing her, and knowing full well what terrible memories had come trooping into her mind, I fell silent, striving as best I could to keep back the timorousness which threatened to overcome me as I thus realized what the wretches on the outside would do once our feeble defense was overcome.

[Pg 31]

Simon Kenton moved here and there noiselessly as a cat, intent only upon learning so much of what might be going on outside as his ears could tell him.

While I remained motionless and silent at the post assigned me, he never ceased for an instant his stealthy movements, and the knowledge that he was so keenly on the alert did much toward strengthening my weak heart.

When perhaps an hour had passed thus in silence, a great hope came to me, and foolishly I gave it words.

"The savages, finding that we were prepared for them, have drawn off," I said, whereat Kenton smiled pityingly as one might at the foolish remark of a child.

"We are not rid of them so easily, else are they different from any of the scoundrels I have chanced to come across. Once having made an attack, and blood has been drawn, I warrant you, we must beat them off by sheer force before we can count on their leaving this clearin'."

[Pg 32]

When perhaps another hour had passed, and yet the enemy made no sign, I was grown more courageous, and ate of the corn cake and dried venison which had been set out for our refreshment; but mother remained wrapped in gloomy thought, and Simon Kenton did not even for the slightest space of time relax his vigilance.

It must have been well on toward morning before we heard aught more of those whose great desire was to shed our blood.

Then the first intimation I had of any movement was the report of Kenton's rifle.

"Did you see anything?" I asked in a tremor.

"No; but they are comin' this way with brushwood, havin' an idea to set fire to the cabin."

Even though the danger which beset us was great, I could not repress my curiosity. It seemed almost as if he had made me a foolish answer, for how might a man know, when it was so dark that one could not see three paces from the cabin in either direction, that the savages were making ready for any such attempt, and I asked how he was so positive as to their movements.

[Pg 33]

"I have heard them rippin' off the dry branches with their knives, and, just before I fired, knew from the noise in the thicket that they were draggin' the brushwood this way."

I was almost bewildered by this man's knowledge of woodcraft; but refrained from commenting, contenting myself by saying in a tone of satisfaction:

"They will not make much headway at setting these green logs on fire. It is but two days since the rain came down in such torrents that the outside of the cabin must be sodden with water."

"They may succeed in fillin' the room with smoke; but that counts for little. The flames will give us an opportunity which must not be neglected."

[Pg 34]

It is possible that the savages came to understand all this before carrying out the plan which Kenton believed had been formed, for after he discharged his rifle we heard no more of them, and, finally, when it seemed as if at least eight and forty hours were passed, the gray light came stealing through the thicket, slowly dispelling the darkness, until we had clear range of vision from the loopholes on either hand.

Twenty paces from the front of the house lay a pile of dry brush, telling that Simon Kenton's ears had not deceived him.

There were no signs of our foe. So far as one's eyes might give him information, we were alone in the thicket with none to molest or make afraid.

Kenton set about making a blaze in the fireplace, and such act aroused my mother from her sorrowful memories to a realization of the present. [Pg 35]

All her housewifely instincts took possession of her once more, and she set about preparing breakfast—perhaps the last meal we might ever eat.

"Think you the savages count on starving us out?" I asked, rather for the purpose of starting a conversation than to gain information.

"It may be that all the party are not yet arrived, and those who made the first attack are waitin' for more to come up. If the entire force is here, then certain it is they count on starvin' us, although so far as the villains know, that may prove a long task. Were you and I alone, I should favor tryin' to give 'em the slip after midnight; but it would be folly to attempt anything of the kind while your mother is to be protected."

"You will not find her a coward," I said proudly, whereat he replied with a laugh:

"Of that we have already had good proof; but there would be too much danger in attemptin' to fight our way out while she was with us. After a time——" [Pg 36]

He was interrupted by rifle shots in the distance. First one, then a couple, and, after an interval of four or five seconds, what sounded like a regular volley.

Then came scattering shots, by which I understood that whoever was engaged in deadly combat had succeeded in gaining a shelter, and was firing only when the possibility of hitting a target presented itself.

"Can it be that some of Major Clarke's force have come our way?" I asked as a great hope came into my heart; but Simon Kenton speedily dashed it.

"The major's men are to sail down the river, and would not stop this side of Corn Island, save through dire necessity."

"Then who can the savages have been firing at?"

"Some white man must have ventured this way, as did I, and walked into the very thick of them." [Pg 37]

"But all the while we have lived here you are the first who has come to this clearing by accident," I replied, still bent on believing that some of the major's forces must have gone out of their road, and were thus near enough to lend aid in our time of trouble.

"It is a trapper or, a settler," Kenton said decisively, with the air of one who will not admit himself at fault. "The question in my mind is whether I'm not bound to lend a hand."

"Surely you would never think of leaving the cabin in daylight, when you know beyond a peradventure that the savages are watching it?" my mother said in alarm, and Kenton turned away as if realizing the truth of her words.

It is not possible for me to set down on paper such as will enable another to understand our feelings during this time when we knew white men were struggling for life, and needing the aid which we were powerless to give.

It seemed little short of the veriest cowardice to remain within shelter at such a time, and yet all of us knew full well that speedy death would come to him who should venture out. [Pg 38]

Five minutes after the first report was heard all was silent again, for mayhap half an hour, during which time each of us, even Kenton, had come to hope the Indians were baffled in their effort to murder, and with that hope came into my mind a most intense regret that we had not been able to give warning of our sore need.

I persisted in believing that some of Major Clarke's men had been near at hand, and said to myself we might have escaped all our perils could it have been possible to give an alarm.

When half an hour had passed the firing broke out again, not in volleys, but with a shot at intervals of ten or fifteen seconds, and then we all fancied screams of pain and exultation could be heard.

"The savages have succeeded!" Kenton said curtly. "Whoever blundered this way has already paid for the mistake, or will before the sun rises again." [Pg 39]

Mother, her mind once more in the past, turned pale as death and I trembled like one with an ague, for it seemed at the moment as if this was a token of what our fate would be.

The breakfast which mother had been preparing was neglected until some time later, when Simon Kenton said with an evident effort at cheerfulness:

"We're playin' the fool to stand here as if waitin' for the painted scoundrels to do their will. We have no reason to despair because they have captured some unfortunate; but should be all the more determined to worst them."

Then he deftly finished the work mother had begun, and insisted upon our sharing in the meal, for, according to his belief, there was no reason why we need stand close guard now that the sun had risen.

Under such circumstances it was difficult to eat, at least I found it so; food well-nigh choked me, but I forced it down because of his stern command, and we made at least the semblance of eating breakfast, with as much zest as you can fancy people display under the shadow of the gallows.

When the pretense of a meal had come to an end, Kenton got up from the table and stood at the loophole in the door an instant, giving vent to a low exclamation of surprise or dismay as he peered forth.

In a twinkling I was by his side, and there saw that which caused the cold chill of fear to run down my back.

Directly in front of the cabin, toward the river, beyond range of our rifles, stood a man and a boy, each bound hand and foot to a tree trunk.

It was the report of their guns that we heard, and fortune had been unkind to them, else death would have come during the fight. It had been delayed that it might be accompanied by the keenest torture.

"Are they neighbors of yours?" Kenton asked.

"So far as I know, there are no settlers nearabout."

"Then this man and boy have come lookin' for a place to make a clearin', or are workin' their way eastward from some point below on the river."

This did not seem a reasonable explanation, to my mind, for if the prisoners had been coming up the river they would not have ventured so far away as must have been the case when the Indians discovered them; but my heart was too heavy to admit of making any argument against his assertion, which, as a matter of fact, was of but little consequence now that they were doomed to a cruel death.

And that they were doomed we knew full well. The savages were counting on torturing them where we might have a full view of the horrible spectacle, and we could not hope anything would happen to prevent it.

On the evening previous Simon Kenton had told us the story of a settler who was beset even as we were then, and whose nearest neighbor was tortured at the stake within his range of vision that the helpless man might see what was in store for him when he could no longer make any defense.

While hearing the story it was impossible for me to realize how agonizing must have been the position of the besieged man. Now I understood it keenly, and resolved not to look out from that side of the house again, lest the painted fiends should begin their horrible work before night came.

Mother knew from our conversation what it was we gazed at, and remained nearabout the fireplace striving to choke back the sobs of grief and sympathy which shook her frame.

After gazing upon the helpless captives five minutes or more, as if to picture indelibly upon his mind all the surroundings, Simon Kenton began moving to and fro across the end of the room, not on the alert against the enemy, but apparently plunged in deep thought.

After a time he said curtly to me:

"Keep a lookout on either side, lad, for some of the snakes may grow careless, an' you will get a shot."

Then he fell to pacing to and fro again, and after what seemed a very long time of most painful silence, said to me as if announcing the most commonplace fact:

"I count on lendin' a hand to those poor fellows yonder."

"Lending a hand!" I repeated in amazement. "Haven't you declared it was impossible to leave this house without being shot down?"

"Yes, an' I reckon that comes pretty near being the truth."

"Then how may you give them any assistance?"

"I am not countin' on tryin' to do anything just now. There's like to be plenty of time, for unless something happens to interrupt the curs, they will not torture the prisoners until evening. When the sun goes down I shall creep out."

"And then is the time when the Indians will keep a closer watch," I ventured to say.

"Ay, lad, you are right, and yet we must contrive to outwit them. Instead of openin' the door, I'll make my way through the small window at the rear, which can be the better guarded by you and your mother while the shutter is unfastened."

"I shall go with you," I said, speaking on impulse, and hardly realizing the meaning of the words.

"You'll do nothing of the kind. Your duty is here, and mine there."

CHAPTER III.

THE VENTURE.

I could not believe Simon Kenton would dare to make the venture of which he had spoken, for of a verity it seemed no less than the killing of one's self.

We knew beyond a peradventure that the Indians secreted in the thicket round about us were keeping sharp watch over the cabin, on the alert for a movement of such a kind, and there was not a single chance in a hundred that one of us could even show his head out of either window or door without being shot down.

That being the case, and there seemed no doubt about it, how might one venture forth so far as where the poor captives were lashed to the trees looking forward with almost certainty to all the terrible tortures which these brutes could devise? [Pg 46]

Thinking over the matter after Simon Kenton had declared his purpose, I said to myself that he had spoken out of the fulness of his heart, and not with a belief that he might carry his proposition into execution. I argued, mentally, that his desire to aid the unfortunate creatures had caused him to believe the impossible might be accomplished; but after he should have time to consider the matter thoroughly, he would realize that he could effect nothing more than his own death.

After having said what he would do, Kenton paced to and fro, keeping sharp watch upon the thicket, and saying nothing.

Once I would have spoken concerning the time when Major Clarke's party might be expected at Corn Island; but he motioned me away as if he had no inclination for conversation.

I had promised myself not to look out in the direction where the unhappy captives were to be seen; but it was as if their helplessness fascinated me to such a degree that I could not keep my eyes from them. [Pg 47]

I gazed at short intervals, but for no more than a few seconds at a time, and saw no change, save once when it appeared to me as if the man was speaking earnestly to the boy.

I could readily fancy that the elder was trying to encourage the lad for that terrible time of trial, and the tears overflowed my eyes as I grew faint with horror while thinking of what the evening would bring forth.

There is no good reason why I should try to give the details of our movements or conversation during this wofully long day. We spoke together but little, first because Simon Kenton was buried in his own thoughts or plans, and secondly because my mother's grief had been aroused by sight of the captives to such an extent that her sobs put an end to speech.

Twice did Kenton get a glimpse of a tuft of feathers in the underbrush, and both times he discharged his rifle; once bringing forth a shrill cry of pain, and again evidently missing his aim, which was by no means surprising under the circumstances. [Pg 48]

Late in the afternoon mother cooked another meal, and we went through the form of eating as if from a sense of duty. It was but justice to our bodies for us to do so, since no one could say when we might have another opportunity.

Then the shadows of evening began to lengthen, and I glanced at Simon Kenton from time to time in order to learn how he might draw back after having announced so positively that he should make an effort at aiding the captives.

But he had no idea of drawing back, as I should have known had I been acquainted with him longer.

During the latter part of the afternoon he surveyed the thicket in the rear of the house at frequent intervals; partially opened the shutter two or three times to make certain it could be swung outward noiselessly, and, finally, threw off his hunting shirt lest the garment should hamper his movements. [Pg 49]

"Are you indeed counting on the attempt?" I asked when he had thus put himself in trim for wriggling through the thicket.

"I have already said so," he replied calmly.

"There is too much danger! You must not risk your life when the chances are all against you!" I cried vehemently.

"It will be easier to go than stay here and listen to that fiendish orgy which will begin before many hours have passed!"

"You can hope to do no more than share the poor fellow's fate!" I exclaimed impatiently.

"There is a chance I shall pull through, and the game is well worth the candle. I may not tell the

story to you; but there are good reasons why I, above all others, should risk my life in an effort to save others; or, to put it in other words, why I ought to die trying to help those poor fellows, rather than remain idle."

He spoke in such a solemn tone that I could not have argued further against his going, however much it pained me, and I gazed at him in silence, wondering what might be the meaning of those strange words. [Pg 50]

Now that it appeared positive he would set forth, and equally certain he would be killed, I began to realize what might be our condition after he had left my mother and myself alone to defend the cabin against the painted crew who thirsted for our blood.

It was not probable the poor woman and I could hold out many hours after the brave fellow departed, however good our courage or strong our endurance. The Indians would speedily overpower us, and I knew full well what the end must be unless I was so fortunate as to die fighting.

Therefore it was as if I was assisting in an attempt to take my own life, when I did as Simon Kenton bid.

"You are to stand by the window as I leap out," he said when the evening was nearly come, "and on the first flash of a redskin's rifle shoot at random if you see no target. The smoke will serve to partially hide my movements. Your mother is to take up her station at the front door until she hears you fire, and then she'll shoot over my head as soon as possible. I'm countin' that you can keep the savages back till I've gained a shelter in the thicket. After that the shutter is to be barred quickly, and you will both stand on guard at the front door, unless some danger threatens from the rear. If you hear the cry of an owl repeated three times from any quarter, you can be certain I have succeeded, an' there's no need of sayin' that you're to be on the alert for my coming. It's possible I shall be able to get in here again. If I fail in that, and yet remain free, you may be positive help will soon arrive to raise the siege." [Pg 51]

He had crossed the room while speaking, and was now standing by the side of the window through which he proposed to pass.

I stepped forward to press his hand, for I knew full well he would not linger once everything was ready for the perilous venture. [Pg 52]

It was as if he did not see me—perhaps it did not suit his mood to say good-by. At all events he kept his face from me even after the shutter was unbarred, and then, without turning his head, he whispered:

"Stand ready! Remember what I have said!"

Then, with a quick movement, he flung open the shutter and had leaped through almost before I realized his purpose. His swift bound served to bewilder me, and I stood gazing out, with my rifle raised, not realizing the necessity of closing the opening.

It was mother who flung the shutter into place softly and replaced the bars, and I stood there like a stupid until the house was barricaded once more, when I said stupidly:

"The savages didn't see him!"

"It is God's mercy, Louis," my mother replied devoutly. "Possibly he may be permitted to rescue those poor creatures who must have suffered an hundred deaths already!" [Pg 53]

"It can't be that he will succeed while so many keen eyes are close at hand. It is only reasonable to suppose all the crew are near about the captives, therefore how may one man prevail against them?"

"If it be the Lord's will, there need be no counting the odds," and having said this, mother knelt by the side of the table, while I, somewhat recovered from my fear and bewilderment, went to the loophole in the door that I might keep the captives in view so far as the darkness permitted.

It was not yet night, although the gloom of the forest was so dense that one could not distinguish objects very far away.

Simon Kenton had ventured out at that time when the gray of twilight distorts everything, causing even the most familiar features of the landscape to appear weird, and in so doing he had shown much wisdom. [Pg 54]

An hour later the Indians would have drawn closer to the cabin, suspecting we might make an attempt to escape under cover of darkness, and an hour earlier the light of day cut off any hope of getting out unseen.

Calculating the time to a nicety, moving swiftly as but few could move, he had left the cabin without alarming the wary foe, and thus far his success was so great as to astonish me.

I could yet barely distinguish the forms of the unhappy prisoners, and, moving to and fro near them like evil things, were shadow-like figures which I knew to be Indians.

As a matter of course it was impossible for me to see the faces of these two over whom hovered a most cruel death; but I could well imagine the expression of despair on their faces.

They could not fail to understand that it was worse than vain to hope aid would come in the hour of their extremity, and yet I doubt not they tried to encourage themselves by saying it was possible a party of white men might pass that way before the horrible orgy should be begun. [Pg 55]

While gazing through the loophole, my mother remaining on her knees praying fervently, I said

again and again to myself that Simon Kenton could do nothing single-handed against that mob of murdering brutes. In fact, now he was outside the house all the chances were against my ever seeing him again. It was hardly within the range of probability he could save his own life if he made even the slightest effort to rescue the prisoners.

The shadows of night gathered rapidly, and yet it seemed as if each second was a full minute in length. I was in that agonizing frame of mind where one is raised by hope and buried under despair at the same instant.

Although my ears were strained to catch the lightest sound, I heard nothing save the rustling of the foliage as it was stirred by the gentle night wind. If Simon Kenton was attempting to approach the prisoners, he must have made a detour through the thicket to avoid the savages who undoubtedly kept close watch over the cabin lest we unfortunate ones should give them the slip. [Pg 56]

After a time, and it was impossible for me to decide whether I had remained on watch one hour or two, a tiny gleam of light could be seen in the direction where I knew the prisoners were stationed, and as it increased in size I understood that the brutes were making ready for their horrible sport.

The flame grew brighter and brighter until I could distinguish the forms of the helpless ones, with dark figures flitting between my line of vision and the fire, and I mentally joined my mother in her prayer for the relief of those whom I believed were beyond all earthly aid.

As I knew the savages had done many times before, so they were about to do now—torture us at the same time they inflicted death on their prisoners. [Pg 57]

We were to be shown what would speedily be our own fate.

While I stood there helplessly watching the horrible preparations, a certain frenzy of rage took possession of me, and I no longer gave heed to anything save a desire to bring death upon some of that fiendish crew before they began the work of torture.

"I cannot stay here longer, mother!" I exclaimed suddenly. "If Simon Kenton risks his life to aid those who are strangers to him, why should I not be as brave? Alone he cannot hope to effect a rescue, and will surely perish. With one other to help him, that which now seems impossible may be compassed."

As I think of the scene now, the wonder is that my dear mother did not remind me of what would be her fate if both Kenton and I were captured; but the brave woman gave no heed to herself, nor to her love for me.

Looking up while still remaining on her knees, she said softly: [Pg 58]

"If you believe it your duty, my son, go, and may the good God grant that you come back to me alive!"

These were not exactly the kind of words best calculated to give a lad courage, and I realized that by listening to her many seconds I should become cowardly. Even as I stood by her side my determination grew fainter; in five minutes more timorousness might overcome me.

"I will leave the cabin as he did, mother, and you shall stand at the door ready to give us entrance, if it so be we come back."

Mother rose quickly to her feet; kissed me fervently, and then, without delay, as if understanding that it was not well to prolong the parting, began to unbar the shutter.

In a twinkling I had put on powder horn and pouch; looked well to my rifle, and was ready to follow Simon Kenton in his desperate venture.

The shutter was open. Not daring to look back, I sprang out, believing as I did so that the report of a rifle would be my death knell; but no sound came. [Pg 59]

The savages, thinking we were securely caged, had gathered around the prisoners in readiness to begin the terrible work, and I was free to rush on to my own doom.

While believing there was little chance I should succeed in saving my own life, I was not careless.

Moving onward stealthily; stopping at each yard of distance to learn if one of the foe might be near at hand, I pressed forward in a circle, counting on coming within view of the prisoners at a point midway between the cabin and that fork in the path which led to the riverside.

Each instant I expected to come upon Simon Kenton, and as the moments went by I began to understand that if he heard me approaching from the rear he might leap upon me, believing one of the savages was creeping upon him, and such realization caused me to hope it would be possible to avoid him. [Pg 60]

It was a strange situation, this being equally afraid of friend and foe, and could have been in a certain degree avoided if I had but accompanied the young scout.

Nothing interfered with my progress, however, until I was arrived at the point for which I had been aiming, and saw full before me the preparations for the torture.

Two fires had been built ten or twelve yards distant from the prisoners, evidently for purposes of illumination, and at the feet of the unfortunate ones was heaped a quantity of dry wood, which would be kindled into a flame when the first portion of the terrible work had been concluded.

Now the savages were making ready for the dance around their victims, and I saw fourteen of the painted brutes, hideous in feathers, beads and gaudy coloring.

[Pg 61]

To describe that which followed immediately after I had a view of the scene, would be impossible. The fiends were alternately advancing toward the prisoners, and retreating, moving with a certain measured step, and brandishing weapons in the faces of the two who were helpless.

The lad seemed literally frozen with terror; but the man faced his cruel enemies as if defying them to wring a cry of pain from his compressed lips.

Perhaps five minutes passed while I thus remained motionless in the thicket within half a rifle-shot distance, and then one of the murderous brutes approached the boy knife in hand.

I knew the poor lad was to be maimed in some manner. The same blinding rush of rage which had come upon me while I was in the cabin, overpowered all sense of danger.

[Pg 62]

Giving no heed to my own peril; thinking only to save the frightened lad from immediate pain, I fired point blank at the brute who would have drawn the first blood, and when he fell, as though struck by lightning, a cry of triumph rang from my lips.

What followed I am unable to set down of my own knowledge, for I was become like one in a fever of rage and desperation.

I set about re-charging my rifle without giving heed to the rush which should have followed the shot, and dimly, as if it was something in which I had no concern, I heard the report of another rifle; another cry which seemed but the echo of my own.

Before my feverish brain had taken in all this as a fact, I was ready to shoot again, and never had I aimed with more deliberation. I felt certain this second bullet of mine would find its target, and when it sped on its way I needed not to gaze at the be-feathered brute within range to know that he was dead or disabled.



The brute fell as though struck by lightning, and a cry of triumph rang from my lips.—Page 62. *On the Kentucky Frontier.*

Again came what was like the echo of my own gun, and I saw four of the villains on the ground, while the others had made for the nearest shelter, each seeking some tree trunk that would shelter his worthless body.

[Pg 63]

Now I realized that I had come up nearly opposite where Simon Kenton was stationed, and he it was who had fired immediately after my rifle spoke.

Thus attacked on either hand, the savages must have believed they were beset by a large force, and their only desire was to shelter themselves from the deadly fire.

While loading my rifle I looked for an instant at the boy. His eyes were opened wide; his lips parted as if to cry out, and on his face was an expression of mingled hope and doubt painful in its intensity.

Again I saw a target. Twenty paces away was one of the brutes leaping from tree to tree as if striving to gain the river, and him I stopped on the instant.

Ten seconds later came the report of a rifle from the opposite side of the path, and I knew

[Pg 64]

Simon Kenton had not wasted a bullet.

No less than six of the feathered brutes were out of the fight, and it was only with difficulty that I repressed a cry of triumph, for I knew full well the villains would not linger long against an unseen foe whose aim was so deadly.

Twice more did I fire, and once Kenton's rifle rang out. Then I believed the brutes had taken refuge in flight, for two passed within my line of vision while I was reloading my weapon.

"Kenton!" I shouted, holding the rifle at my shoulder meanwhile, lest by raising my voice I might have brought the foe upon me, and before one could have counted twenty the young scout was by my side.

"Is it indeed you, lad?" he asked as if overcome with astonishment.

"And why not? I have been able to take some part in the rescue?"

"*Some part*, lad? You have made it possible when I believed nothing might be done. But for your attack, yonder poor fellows would even now be in agony, because I could not have fired without bringing the whole gang upon me. A shot from both sides was what caused them to believe we had a large force."

[Pg 65]

"Let us cut those prisoners loose," I cried, waiting to hear no more, and eager to relieve them, from their misery.

"Wait," he whispered, clutching me by the arm. "The snakes may take it into their heads to turn back, and it will be well if I quicken their pace a bit. Stand here, and do not come out from cover till I get back."

He was off like a flash, and with no more noise, while I remained on the alert for an attack; but burning to set free the poor lad, who was seeking here and there with his eyes to learn if those who had saved him from pain were yet near at hand.

Then the man spoke words of hope to the boy, as I could understand, by the expression on both their faces, and I waited with finger on the trigger of the rifle lest the savages should make one desperate effort to accomplish their cruel work.

[Pg 66]

Surely if any of the Indians were near at hand now, some attempt would be made to kill the prisoners, and after waiting perhaps five minutes, I stepped boldly out within the rays of light.

Near at hand were four rifles, where they had been left against a sapling while their owners took part in the dance of death, and I knew we might add the prisoners, well armed, to our force.

The lad gave vent to a low cry of most intense joy as he saw me; but the man said quietly, as if it was quite natural I should be there:

"You came in good time. How many are with you?"

"Only one other, sir, and he is in pursuit of the savages," I replied, wielding my hunting knife to sever the bonds which held both prisoners helpless.

[Pg 67]

I had no more than given the poor fellows freedom, and while they stood chafing their wrists to restore the circulation of blood, Simon Kenton came up swiftly.

"It is well we get back to the cabin; the snakes have halted just under the river bank, and it may be they will turn back to find out how many we can muster. Come on!"

Stopping only sufficiently long to secure the rifles which were near at hand, we four ran to the cabin, the door of which my mother held open; and once we were inside, the dear soul clasped me to her bosom as if I had come back from the dead, as indeed was very nearly the case.

[Pg 68]

CHAPTER IV.

PAUL SAMPSON.

When we were inside the cabin once more, with the door and windows barred and the man and lad whom we had rescued eating ravenously from the store of food my mother set before them, there was in my mind the thought that I had good reason to be proud of the part I had so lately played.

Simon Kenton and I had killed, or driven off, a band of fourteen savages, and surely my portion of the work had not been slight. It seemed to me then, as now, that I did my full share in the business. It is true, except for the fact of our having taken the brutes by surprise, and come upon them in such fashion they had no means of knowing but that we outnumbered them three or four

[Pg 69]

to one, the matter might have come to a different ending; but it was much to our credit that we had been able to surprise those wretches who seldom made an attack unless it can be begun in like manner.

I repeat I was feeling proud of our work, more particularly when I looked at our guests, realizing that but for Simon Kenton and myself they would at that very moment be suffering all the tortures the painted wolves could inflict, and I glanced at the young scout, thinking to read in his face thoughts akin to mine.

In this I was mistaken. Despite what was very nearly a fact—that the Indians had been put to flight—he was standing by the loophole of the door keeping careful watch, and, so far as could be told by the expression on his face, it might have been us white men who were worsted in the encounter.

I failed to see in his bearing anything to betoken that he had but lately faced death in its most horrible form in order to make an effort at saving the lives of strangers, and from that moment I looked up to the young man much as if he had been of a superior race from any I had previously seen. [Pg 70]

It is not to be supposed that I stood idly by dwelling upon such thoughts as are here set down in words, while, for aught we knew, the brutes might be gathering in greater force than before.

I was not so wholly given over to vanity as all that would indicate; but moved here or there looking after our defense in such manner as seemed to me proper, my mind busy all the while, and the vainglorious thoughts dying away as I observed Kenton.

Then, when the young scout had advised that I remain at the further end of the cabin, keeping watch from the loophole in the shutter, I turned my attention to those whom we had saved from the stake.

They were father and son, as I learned from the conversation the elder was holding with my mother, who ministered to their wants at the table. Horace Sampson was the man's name, and he called the lad Paul. [Pg 71]

The two had come from Maryland to locate a homestead, and the only wonder in my mind was that the savages had not taken them captives before they got so far into the wilderness; for neither of them knew as much regarding woodcraft as had I on my tenth birthday.

They had believed it would be possible for them to frighten the Indians by a mere show of weapons, and could not be persuaded by those who had been on the frontier, that it was but little less than suicide to venture in this section of the country alone.

For three weeks they had traveled here and there searching for a likely-looking location, and not until the day previous had the savages shown themselves.

Then that which might have been expected happened in a twinkling, and before either the father or the son had an idea any danger threatened, they were disarmed, and bound within view of our cabin, as I have related. [Pg 72]

Even after having been so near a terrible death, Mr. Sampson believed it might be possible to retrace his steps in safety; but my mother cried out so loudly against any such foolhardy venture, and painted the dangers of the frontier in such vivid colors, that the ignorant man finally came to believe it was hardly safe to trust himself alone amidst foes whose methods of warfare were so entirely a secret to him.

Simon Kenton must have been listening to the conversation even as I had been doing, for he said when mother had ceased her warning:

"The only safe path for you is that which leads to Corn Island. There you will find a goodly company, and I doubt not that before many days have passed you will meet with some who propose to journey on your road."

"But how may we provide for ourselves on this island of which you speak?" the man asked helplessly, and the question in itself was sufficient to prove his ignorance. [Pg 73]

"There will be no lack of helping hands," Simon Kenton replied with a smile. "On the frontier men do not count the value of food and a shelter, as do those who live in town."

Then, as if to show he was pig-headed as well as ignorant, Mr. Sampson argued that he was not willing to accept charity from strangers; that it would be demeaning himself to receive anything for which he was unable to pay.

"You must do that, or take the chances of providin' sport for the painted snakes, as you were like to do a short time ago," Kenton replied curtly, and I understood by the tone that he was losing patience because of the man's stubbornness.

Having thus spoken the young scout turned once more to stand guard at the loophole, and Paul, the lad, his meal ended, came timidly toward where I was stationed.

He appeared to be a boy after my own heart, entirely different in manners and speech from his father, and I decided at once that we should be firm friends so long as he might remain on the frontier. [Pg 74]

I could well understand that he was burning with a desire to ask questions, and did not hesitate to give him encouragement to begin.

He was eager to know how long I had lived in the wilderness; how often I had fought against

the savages, and such like simple questions, all of which I answered until he was come to an end.

Then I asked about his home in Maryland; of his journey to the Ohio River, and, finally, how he felt while bound to the stake.

"The fear in my heart was so great that I did not fully have my senses," he replied with a shudder. "Not until the fires were kindled and the dancing had begun did I dream that those beasts would put us to death. I was like one in a dream until the first shot was fired, and a savage dropped dead almost at my feet."

[Pg 75]

"We didn't open fire any too soon," I said with perhaps a tinge of pride in my tone because I had played my part well, as it seemed to me.

"In another instant the Indian's knife would have been in my body!" he cried. "I could tell by the fierce gleam in his eyes that he counted on taking my life."

"The murdering brutes do not kill their prisoners so quickly or easily. He would have prolonged your life to its utmost limit, in order that you might suffer the more."

Then I told him of my father's cruel death; of what we had found to tell the horrible story, and before I had finished the tears were running down his cheeks.

Simon Kenton must have been listening to our conversation, for he called sharply, when Paul was almost overcome with grief:

"You lads had best get what sleep you can before daylight, for as soon as the sun rises, if it so be the red wolves have drawn off, we must set out for Corn Island."

[Pg 76]

I understood that he was not well pleased because I had frightened the lad who was so lately come from the bustling world, and it shamed me because of giving him, who was so brave, an opportunity for reproof.

My mother spread out the skins near the fireplace, where I had been in the custom of sleeping, and Paul dutifully laid himself down, while his father remained at the table evidently in a brown study.

It was not in my mind to allow Simon Kenton to perform all the labor, and I said stoutly, yet at the same time feeling that my eyes were growing heavy:

"I count on doing my share of the watching this night. It is not right that I should sleep while you remain awake."

"I should not trust you to stand guard alone, and there is no good reason why both of us remain on duty. Take your sleep now, that you may be the better fitted for a long day's tramp."

[Pg 77]

He spoke in such a commanding tone that I could do no less than obey, and when my mother clambered up the ladder to her bed in the loft I lay down by Paul's side, closing my eyes in slumber almost as soon as my body was stretched out at full length.

The day had dawned when a cry from Simon Kenton brought me to my feet in alarm, believing the savages were upon us; but he quieted my fears as he said with a laugh:

"I had a notion of findin' out how long you need to get your eyes open wide. If we two are to join Major Clarke, we should be well acquainted."

"I am not such an idiot as to sleep after being summoned," I replied just a trifle testily, for it seemed much as if he was making sport of me. "I may not be as well up in woodcraft as are you; but I'm no idler."

"Now you are takin' me too seriously," he replied with another laugh which disarmed me of anger. "It was high time you made ready for the tramp, an' I'm pleased to see you so quick at a call. He who finds it hard to shake the sleep from his eyes should remain in towns where he need not hold a rifle ever at hand in order to save his life. Look at yonder would-be settler," he added in a whisper, and I glanced in the direction of his outstretched finger, where was Mr. Sampson, yawning and stretching as if struggling to gather his senses. "Is it strange the painted brutes captured such as he with but little difficulty?"

[Pg 78]

Paul was no such sluggard. He had risen at the same time I did, and now stood near the door on the alert for whatever might come his way.

I could hear my mother moving about in the loft, and knew she would soon be down to cook breakfast, after which, as I understood the plan, we were to begin the journey.

"Have the savages left us?" I asked of the young scout.

[Pg 79]

"Ay, so it seems, though I'm not overly eager to believe it without better proof than that we've heard nothin' from 'em since you went to sleep. Stand you here ready for anything that may turn up, an' I'll have a look round."

He unbarred the door as he spoke, and when he had stolen softly out I stood guard in his place, with Paul close by my side.

Not until the morning meal had been cooked and was spread on the table did Simon Kenton return, and the news which he brought gave me a sense of deepest relief.

"The dose we gave 'em last night was enough," he said, leaning his rifle against the side of the hut as he took a seat at the table without waiting for an invitation. "Now is the time for us to start, for there's no knowin' how soon the brutes may take it into their ugly heads to come back."

"Are we to leave all our belongings here?" I asked, looking around at the scanty store of

[Pg 80]

furniture, the greater portion of which my father had made.

"Better them than your hair," Simon Kenton replied. "If the snakes come this way again they'll make short work of the cabin an' all that's in it, whether you be here to make a show of defendin' it or not. In case they stay away, the stuff will be safe where it is, if we take care to keep out the wild beasts."

There was a look of pain on my mother's face which I knew had been caused by the thought of leaving behind her scanty goods; but she gave no words to her sorrow, joining with the young scout in the conversation concerning the day's tramp.

When the meal had been eaten, and mother tidied up the cabin a bit, we went out into the sunlight, closing door and window shutter behind us, as if counting on returning before nightfall.

Simon Kenton took the lead, and then was begun the long march which did not end until late in the night. [Pg 81]

We made few halts, and then only for a few moments at a time. We ate as we walked, forcing our way through the dense underbrush, and ever on the alert against danger.

Mr. Sampson more than once insisted that the pace was killing him; he declared, when the day was half spent, that it would be impossible for him to walk half a mile farther; but when Kenton quietly suggested that he might halt wheresoever he chose, and follow our trail the next morning, he came to the conclusion that perhaps he might keep his feet a short time longer.

Paul was as cheery a companion as one could desire. Although he was foot-sore and weary, as I knew full well, not a word of complaint came from his lips, and before the day was ended I knew Simon Kenton had begun to love the lad even as I already did, for he whispered once when we were well in advance of the others:

"That boy is worth a dozen such men as his father. He has got true pluck, an' I'll warrant you wouldn't hear him whine even when he'd fallen in his tracks worn out." [Pg 82]

There is no reason why I need say how my mother bore her share of the fatigue. She was a brave, true woman, and when any task, however great, was to be done, went at it with a will and in silence, or with cheery words.

When, at a late hour in the evening, we were come opposite Corn Island, and had found one of Major Clarke's force who was willing to ferry us across the river, I was more astounded than words can express, for it was as if I had suddenly emerged from the wilderness to find myself in a populous town.

No less than twenty families had come down with the volunteers, and were encamped together, nearby where the men had their quarters. Counting men, women and children, there could not have been less than four hundred and fifty people, three times as many as I had ever before seen in one place.

The greater portion of this gathering was asleep; but I could well fancy what bustle and confusion there must be when all were moving about, and the mere idea bewildered me. [Pg 83]

Simon Kenton led us directly to the hut set apart for the use of Major Clarke, and there introduced us to the commander of the expedition, who bid us welcome in such a hearty fashion that even Mr. Sampson must have forgotten what he had said about "accepting charity."

Mother was taken in charge by some of the women, and we four, meaning Simon Kenton, the Sampsons, father and son, and myself, were given the use of a lean-to made of brush—not a substantial shelter; but to me, who had well-nigh come to an end of my endurance, it was most inviting.

Even Kenton himself felt the effects of the long tramp; and we indulged in no conversation that night, each member of the party falling asleep as soon as he was on the ground.

Paul and I were early abroad next morning. To him there was no novelty in such a throng, for he told me solemnly that he had seen in Maryland many more people bent on merrymaking than could be found on Corn Island, and I was forced to believe the lad, although it hardly seemed possible. [Pg 84]

As I have said, there were no less than twenty families who had come down with the major's force to find homes in the wilderness, and, learning in some way, I know not how, that I was the son of a settler, many of them gathered around to learn how we had fared on our clearing.

There was more than one pale face among the women and younger children when I told of my father's death, and I dare say but few would have remained to build homes nearabout the Ohio River if it had been possible for them to get back to the settlement they had just left.

Mr. Sampson appeared like a different man now that he was with a throng of people. He no longer seemed to think it necessary he should return to Maryland, where a wife and two children awaited his coming; but declared that he would join his fortunes with those who counted on building up a village on the frontier. [Pg 85]

Paul kept close by my side as I talked with the men concerning the expedition on which Major Clarke was to lead them, and when, late on that first day in camp, I told him of my intention to join the force as a volunteer, he declared that nothing would please him better than to be my comrade.

"If my father is willing, I shall go," he said quietly; but in a tone which told me that he was one with a will of his own, and not likely to be led by the nose against his own desire or inclination.

At the first opportunity I sought out Simon Kenton to tell him of Paul's plans, and the young scout said heartily:

"I like the lad, and will be glad to have him with us, although for a time he may cost us some trouble."

"He is quick to learn, I fancy, and by observing those around him, will soon be able to get about in a proper fashion," I replied confidently, whereupon the scout surprised me by saying:

[Pg 86]

"There will be none save you an' me for him to see."

"What then will have become of all this gathering?" I asked in astonishment.

"They will be far behind us, lad. Was it in your mind that I would march in line like a soldier?"

"What else can you do?"

"Remain in advance to make certain no danger threatens. You and I will act as scouts; I reckon there may be others, but I have been hired to conduct all this party, first to the British outpost at Kaskaskia, and then to Cahokia."

"You alone?" I cried, overwhelmed to learn that this young fellow was of so much importance in the eyes of a soldier like Major Clarke.

"Not alone, for I count on takin' one Louis Nelson with me, an' he has it in mind that Paul Sampson will make the third."

[Pg 87]

"But I am far too ignorant to share such an important duty!"

"The lad who is willin' to face a gang of painted wolves such as besieged your cabin, and to do so almost single-handed, gives promise of bein' a comrade to my likin'. We'll lead the men, Louis, an' I dare venture to say there'll be no ambush we shan't scent out before the murderin' redskins succeed in doing any mischief."

"And are you willing to take Paul Sampson?" I asked, still in a maze of bewilderment.

"Aye, that I am, an' venture to say he'll turn out to be your equal after a little experience."

I could hardly contain myself for joy at the thought that mine was to be a man's work; but ran off at full speed to make my mother acquainted with what I believed was rare good fortune.

She, kind soul, was saddened because such an opportunity had presented itself to me, and although she spoke not a word against the enterprise, I understood what was in her heart, and said quickly, even though it cost me a pang to utter the words:

[Pg 88]

"You are not pleased, mother, and I had thought it would make you glad because Simon Kenton had so much of faith in me. I will tell him I cannot go, and you may forget I have spoken of it."

The tears were very near her eyelids as she drew me closer and said softly, hardly daring to trust her voice:

"I would not keep you, my son, even though the parting give me great pain. On the frontier boys must speedily learn to be men, and it may be best for you to go. Perhaps we will join these settlers who intend to build up a town nearby, when you come back covered with glory."

"Now you are making sport of me, mother," I replied reproachfully. "There is no glory to be gained in fighting savages."

[Pg 89]

"To my mind you gained very much, Louis, when you ventured your life to save Mr. Sampson and Paul."

I was at a loss to understand exactly what she meant, nor did I try very hard, for the look of pain was gone from her face, and I wanted to repeat the good news to Paul.

I found him on the shore of the island, gazing across the water as if he saw in the muddy stream some wonderful vision, and instead of being surprised or elated when I told what proud position we were to occupy in the expedition, he said with a sigh:

"It is enough if I am to be with you, Louis."

"And your father? Will he give his consent?"

"He is laying plans for the new settlement which is to be made, and when I told him it would give me pleasure to go with you and Simon Kenton, he said he had other things of which to think."

[Pg 90]

"Does that mean you are free to go?"

"Now that he has companions there will be no thought of me. We will go, Louis; but do you think we will come back?"

The question almost frightened me. I had thought only of being a scout for such a brave party as was here encamped, and had given no heed to the possible danger which awaited us, until reminded of it by Paul's words.

[Pg 91]

CHAPTER V.

DOWN THE OHIO.

Paul's question as to whether we would ever come back caused me to be attacked by timorousness, the first sensation of the kind I had experienced since the venture was proposed.

Now the matter had been brought home to me in such an innocent way, I began to realize all that this journey might mean. I had not spent my life on the frontier without having heard of Major Clarke, and knew full well he would not turn his back because of danger; in fact, should he chance to lead his men into a place where their lives were imperiled, the major's first thought would be as to how he might get the best of the foe—not as to how he and his following could escape.

In addition to this, only a single glance was needed to show that the work would be hot, once the force had come within striking distance of the enemy. Major Clarke had enlisted none save old frontiersmen, each one of whom had battled for his life against the painted wolves a dozen times over, and I question if there was a man in the forest who had not some private wrongs to avenge upon both savages and Britishers. [Pg 92]

Knowing all this, one need be a simple who did not understand how sharp would be the efforts to strike a telling blow once the company was in the vicinity of the enemy, whether that enemy was a red-coated soldier, or a half-naked, feather-bedecked brute such as had lived a life of murdering and plundering since the first day the white men came into that section of the country.

And Paul and I were to act, as best we might, the part of scouts in advance of such a force as was this which followed Major Clarke! We who, because of our ignorance, should have remained in the rear, would lead the way, taking perforce the hottest of the fights because of being the first to encounter the foe. [Pg 93]

It is little wonder that I was overwhelmed with timorousness on realizing for the first time what I had taken upon myself; but Paul, who never dreamed of all we might seek out, remained calm and placid as if ours was to be the most innocent of pleasure excursions.

The lad was surprised at finding me silent when he had done no more than repeat what I had said to him a dozen times over, and asked solicitously if I was ill.

It would have been little more than the truth had I told him I was sick with fear; but such words would have shamed me, and I held my peace, allowing him to believe that I who had never known a day's sickness, had suddenly been overcome in some womanish fashion.

It was Simon Kenton who broke in upon our not overly pleasant conversation, by saying gleefully, as one might who had just come into some good fortune. [Pg 94]

"If you lads have settled all your business, we'll be off 'twixt now an' sunset, for I'm countin' on gettin' a good view of the river before we make a halt."

"Are the men ready to move?" I asked in surprise.

"They will follow twenty-four hours later, provided we learn of nothin' to prevent the movement. It's our task to spy out the land, an' we're bound to keep well in advance."

I glanced quickly at Paul in order to see how the news affected him; but not so much as a tremor of the eyelids followed this information. Perhaps if he had known all the danger as well as did I, he might have presented a different appearance.

It would have been shameful had I shown fear when this lad who knew nothing of life on the frontier remained unmoved, and I stiffened my lip as best I might, resolved that neither he nor Simon Kenton should guess of that which was in my heart. [Pg 95]

Not only did the scout intend to set forth on this day; but I understood from his movements that he was eager to begin the work as soon as possible, despite the fact of his having spoken as if an hour earlier or later could make no difference to him, and I said with so much of calmness as might be forced into my voice:

"If it so be you are minded to go at once, I can make ready within five minutes."

"It would please me to be rid of this place. A crowd of people is not to my likin' an' by settin' out now there will be no call for any great haste, whereas the same cannot be said in case we are but a few hours ahead of the volunteers."

"I wish only to have a word with my mother, and then we cannot leave the island too soon to please me," I replied, and added on observing in Paul's face what I fancied was a wistful look, as if he was saying to himself that it would be a consolation to have some one bid him God speed, "will you come with me, lad? I dare venture to say she will treat us both alike." [Pg 96]

He sprang forward eagerly, with the moisture of a coming tear in his eyes, and we went toward that portion of the encampment where were the women, all of whom found ample occupation in cooking for the volunteers.

Perhaps it is as well if I set down nothing regarding the parting with my mother; it was painful

to me, and cannot deeply interest any who reads these lines, if peradventure they really have a reader.

It is enough if I say that both us lads, for she gave Paul the same show of affection as was bestowed upon me, promised to be as careful of our lives as one could who had set about such work as ours might prove, and in less than half an hour from the moment Simon Kenton announced his intention of leaving the island, we were standing by the water's edge awaiting his commands. [Pg 97]

The young scout did not delay once we were ready. A canoe such as is known by the name of "dugout," was moored to a tree, and in her had been loaded our scanty outfit.

A supply of ammunition, pepper, salt, a few potatoes and three loaves of corn bread made up the list of our belongings such as we could not carry in the pockets of our hunting shirts. As a matter of course each had a knife and a rifle, which last would serve to provide us with more food, and we really needed nothing else.

Paul had made an attempt to speak with his father before leaving; but Mr. Sampson was so deeply engaged in laying plans for the future village which was to spring up on the banks of the Ohio, that he had no time to spend on his son.

Major Clarke was the only member of all that company who knew we were to set out at this time, and he remained in close conversation with Simon Kenton a good half hour after Paul and I had taken our places in the dugout. Then, seeing that the scout was eager to be off, he stepped back, saying to us lads: [Pg 98]

"See to it that you follow closely the instructions given by Kenton; your lives may depend upon obedience, for the work you have undertaken is in the highest degree dangerous."

He might have spared himself that much breath, so far as I was concerned, for there was in my mind a very good idea of the perils we would be called upon to face, and I had little relish for such a reminder, because my courage at this moment was none of the best.

"So long as we remain in advance you may count on it that there is nothin' to fear," Kenton said as he unmoored the boat and sent her moving out into the current with a single stroke of the paddle. "We shall give you fair warnin' if we come across anything worth knowin', unless——"

He did not finish the sentence; but I knew full well how to conclude it. "Unless we are taken by surprise and all killed," is what he would have said but for the fear of alarming Paul and me. [Pg 99]

Before we were half a mile from the island I came to realize that I was playing the part of a fool by allowing my mind to dwell upon the possibilities of the future, and, forcing thought into a different channel, I began to speak of the village which it was proposed to build on the bank of the river, little dreaming that it would one day be a great city known as Louisville, as if named for me.

During ten minutes or more, not a word was spoken, and then as if talking to himself, Kenton said:

"The volunteers will set out sometime to-morrow, an' should move along as fast as we can."

"Are all the men coming down the river?" Paul said:

"Some will be left behind to look after the women and children; but the remainder are to set off in the flat boats that were moored at the other side of the island." [Pg 100]

"If they are to come in boats, I do not understand why we push on ahead," I said stupidly, whereupon Kenton replied:

"It's our business to know if the painted snakes are nearabout the river in any great force."

"And how may we learn that, unless we tramp along the shore?"

"The chances are that the snakes would fire at us, not countin' on the main force bein' so near."

"In which case we should gain the information by being shot—perhaps killed."

"I reckon one of us would come out alive, an' he could get back to give the news," Kenton said quietly, as if the possibility of our losing our lives was as nothing so long as the volunteers were warned. "But there's a good chance we'd all slip through without a scratch, even though the reptiles had gathered in full force, for they're not the best marksmen to be found hereabout, an' by keepin' well in the middle of the stream it should be safe sailin'. Now I'm thinkin' we'd better keep our tongues quiet, and set our eyes at work, else there's a show of slippin' by what we've been sent to find. If you see the least auspicious looking thing, sing out, and we'll know what it means before goin' any further." [Pg 101]

Paul listened to these words as if they had no especial concern for him, and I was near to being vexed with the lad because of his seeming indifference when life was in danger; but checked myself with the thought that he would put on a different look if he fully understood the situation.

By this time Simon Kenton was keeping his eyes at work as he labored at the paddle, refusing my proffer of assistance, and I question if a single bent twig or broken bough escaped his notice. It was as if he saw both sides of the river at the same instant, listening as eagerly as he gazed, and it can be fancied that I did not dare attempt anything in the way of conversation. [Pg 102]

It is needless for me to explain at length in what fashion we rounded this point, or skirted that cove half hidden by the overhanging foliage, for all know full well how voyagers on the Ohio in the days of the revolution guarded against ambush or sudden attack.

To my mind we might as well have remained with the volunteers during this portion of the journey, for in case we came upon any considerable body of savages there was little chance either of us would succeed in carrying back the news to those who virtually placed their lives in our keeping.



Within five seconds I had fired, using the curl of vapor for a target.—Page 108. *On The Kentucky Frontier.*

We had been sailing three hours or more; the sun was low in the heavens, and the shadows were already so dense on the western bank that a hundred painted brutes might have been concealed beneath the low hanging branches without our being any the wiser.

[Pg 103]

To me it seemed foolish to continue on any further, if our only purpose was to scan both sides of the river carefully, and I was on the point of saying as much to Kenton when a tiny puff of smoke darted out from amid the foliage to the right of us, hardly more than fifty yards away; a sharp report like unto the crack of a whip could be heard, while the splinters flew from the paddle in the scout's hand.

It goes without saying that I was startled; but not to such an extent as to deprive me of my wits.

I knew full well none but a savage would have fired at us, and the knowledge that the villainous enemy was so near served to make me forget the fear which had beset me a short time previous.

Within five seconds from the instant the tiny puff of smoke darted out like the tongue of a snake, I had fired, using the curl of vapor for a target, and Simon Kenton said approvingly, but with no trace of excitement in his tone:

[Pg 104]

"That was well done! A lad who is so quick with a shot should not be taken at a disadvantage, whatever turns up."

He had forced the bow of the dugout from the shore even before I fired, and, bending low, was paddling with all his strength as if the one idea of escape was all that occupied his mind.

Paul had neither spoken nor moved; at the moment his back was toward me, a fact which I regretted because I could not see his face to learn if he changed color.

We were no more than in mid-stream before a second shot was heard, this time coming from a point lower down the river; but the bullet flew harmlessly over our heads.

I made no effort to return the shot, for the very good reason that there was no chance I could do any execution at such a distance, even though he who had fired remained motionless, which was hardly to be expected.

Kenton pulled around the next bend, hugging the eastern shore closely, and when we were come to a small creek he forced the canoe up the tiny water course until it was completely hidden by the foliage.

[Pg 105]

"We might have gone on without fear," I said in a whisper, surprised by this manœuvre, "We were traveling faster than the savages could walk, and might easily have outstripped them."

"Which is exactly what we don't count on doin'," he said quietly, speaking in an ordinary tone, and thus showing he had no thought of danger while we remained on this side the river.

"Why not?" Paul asked mildly.

"Because it's our business to know how many of the reptiles are on yonder bank."

"But how will you find out?"

"Go back there, an' have a look at 'em. In less than an hour we can do the trick in fine style."

Paul and I looked at each other in mingled fear and amazement while one might have counted ten, and then I turned my eyes away, understanding by this time that to gather such information was the only reason why we had come down the river ahead of the volunteers. [Pg 106]

Kenton sat like a statue in the center of the canoe, we lads being at either end, and it seemed to me as if a full hour passed before a word was spoken.

Then the night was so near upon us that, save directly in the middle of the river, it was impossible to distinguish objects twenty paces distant.

"I reckon we may as well get to work," and Kenton cautiously forced the canoe out from amid the tangle of foliage until the current carried her down stream.

He did not use the paddle save to keep her from running afoul of dry brush or logs on the bank, and we had drifted two miles, perhaps, when he suddenly bent to his work, sending the light craft across the river at a speed I had never before seen equaled, even by my father. [Pg 107]

I fully expected to hear the report of a rifle, or feel the sting of a bullet when we were in the middle of the stream where a sharp-eyed savage might see us; but nothing occurred to check our progress, and in a marvelously short space of time we were once more screened from view; but now on the same side of the river where we knew the painted snakes lurked.

"You are to stay in the dugout," Simon Kenton whispered to me as he raised his rifle. "If it so chances that I'm not back here by sunrise, you must work your way up stream to warn Major Clarke."

Had he given me the opportunity I should have urged that he take us with him, or wait till near morning before undertaking so dangerous a venture; but the words had no more than been spoken when he was gone.

At one instant he was speaking with me, and at the next he had vanished as completely and silently as if the waters had covered him. No Indian who ever lived could have equaled him in swiftness and noiselessness. [Pg 108]

Paul was mystified when he turned and failed to see Kenton, and I felt forced to explain in whispers what had happened, else I believe of a verity the lad would have cried out in his bewilderment.

It is not possible for those who have always lived in large settlements or towns to realize the desolateness of such a position as was ours while we waited for the return of the scout.

He had ventured into the forest where we knew to a certainty were bloodthirsty enemies, and that he realized all the possibilities had been shown by the order for us to work our way up-stream to warn the on-coming boats, in case he failed to return by sunrise.

My heart was almost in my mouth as I sat there holding Paul's hand, starting at the lightest sound, and hearing even in the rippling of the water some token of the savages. My tongue was parched; I could not have uttered a single word had it been necessary to speak, and only with the greatest difficulty did I prevent my hand from trembling, thus exposing to my companion that I was wofully afraid. [Pg 109]

When perhaps an hour had passed it seemed to me as if we had been there a full night, and then came that sound which I had at the same time been expecting and fearing to hear.

From the distance, half a mile away, I guessed, came the crack of a rifle; then another and another, and after that the same deathly silence as before.

"Think you any harm has come to him?" Paul whispered tremulously, and I replied as I believed truly:

"Not unless he met with an accident before that first shot was fired. If there had been a large number of savages nearabout, he would have used every effort to return without loss of time, that we might go to warn the volunteers. There may have been only a few, with, perhaps, a captive, and he has attempted a rescue." [Pg 110]

I was heartened by my own words, which sounded plausible, and remained on the alert ten minutes or more, expecting each instant to see Kenton appear as silently as he had vanished.

When that length of time had elapsed, however, and he yet remained absent, fear crept over me, and I imagined the worst.

After half an hour went by, and I kept note of time by counting, there was no longer any hope in my heart.

After firing a shot Kenton would, had he been able, come back to us at once; for even though he had not learned all which seemed necessary, he must have understood that he would no longer be able to spy upon the foe.

I tried to decide what should be done; but my brain was in a whirl. I could hardly have defended myself if one of the painted brutes had shown himself close at hand.

It was Paul who aroused me from what was little less than the stupefaction of despair, by whispering in my ear: [Pg 111]

"He did not say that we should go up the river until sunrise. Why may it not be possible for us

to help him?"

I shook my head, believing it was too late for us to effect anything in his behalf; but the suggestion, coming from a lad who was ignorant of all this wretched business, awakened me to a realization of my own folly.

"I am the one to go," I said decidedly "You shall stay here, in case he comes back."

"By so doing I could be of no assistance. We will go together."

Even now I fail to understand why my wits had so completely deserted me. I had no thought of what might be the result if we two made off into the forest in the darkness; but before we met Simon Kenton again I realized my folly most keenly.

Without trying to persuade him to remain, as I should have done even in my foolishness, I whispered: [Pg 112]

"You must move softly and keep close behind me, lest we be separated in the thicket where it might mean death to cry out. Follow my every motion, for I shall take the lead."

He grasped his rifle in a manner which told he at least was no coward, and clutched my hunting shirt to make certain of obeying the command I had given.

I stepped over the side of the canoe into the water; but not as silently as Simon Kenton had done, and we two waded ashore with no heed as to where this rash move was likely to lead us.

Ashamed though I am to confess it, I took no heed as to the location of the boat we were leaving—made no attempt to seek out what would serve as a guide when we returned, if in deed we ever did; but had only in mind the idea of proceeding up-stream toward where the reports of the weapons had come from.

And into the blackness of the forest we plunged, I claiming to be better versed, in woodcraft than my companion, yet doing that which the most ignorant townsman would never have dreamed of attempting. [Pg 113]

It was the act of a fool, and I was to receive the punishment due my folly.

[Pg 114]

CHAPTER VI.

ASTRAY.

It seemed to me that the noise of the firearms had come from a point about half a mile from the shore, and less than a third of this distance up-stream, therefore I bent my way in that direction, heeding nothing save the terrible fear that Simon Kenton had been taken prisoner, or killed outright.

Could I have learned that he was dead my heart might have been somewhat lighter, for I knew full well how terrible would be the torture inflicted upon him once the savages understood who he was.

In such case, Paul and I were bound to carry the sad news back to the volunteers without delay; but while there was a chance of our being able to give him succor, I held that it was our duty to make every effort in such direction. [Pg 115]

When I was older grown, and had seen more of warfare, I came to understand that the life of one man counts for but little when compared with the general good, and had such fact been impressed upon my mind at this time, I would never have set out on the foolhardy errand which bid fair to lead Paul Sampson and me to our death.

The lad whom Simon Kenton and I had saved from the stake was an apt pupil, as he showed on this night when he followed close in my footsteps, betraying no signs of fear when he might well have been excused for betraying timorousness, and moving with the utmost caution.

It is not for me to say that we advanced as silently as the young scout could have done; but I was satisfied that we were not moving in a clumsy fashion, and began to feel a certain pride in thus showing Paul how we of the frontier followed on the trail of our enemies.

During perhaps half an hour we two went steadily but cautiously forward, and then it seemed to me as if we should have arrived at the spot from which the shots had come. [Pg 116]

I halted and listened intently. Not a sound could be heard save the souging of the wind among the foliage, or the countless faint noises of the night which tell of life when the world is supposed to be sleeping.

For the first time a sense of distrust in my own ability found lodgment in my mind. It seemed positive we had either traveled in the wrong direction, or the savages had left the vicinity where the encounter had taken place. Surely we ought to have come across Kenton, unless he made a wider detour than at first seemed probable, or, as I feared, had been taken prisoners.

A certain numbness as of despair took possession of me; I pressed forward with less heed than before to the direction I was taking, and again stood still to listen.

When we made this second halt I believed we were no less than two miles from where the canoe lay, and it was positive the enemy had not been so far away when the weapons were discharged. [Pg 117]

Paul pressed my arm in token that he wanted to say something; but I clapped my hand over his mouth. The fact that I had made a most grievous mistake was beginning to find lodgment in my dull brain, and a nervous fear was creeping over me.

The thought that he, a lad from the east who knew nothing of woodcraft, had good reason to distrust my ability, angered me, and like a fool I advanced once more, this time at right angles with the course we had been pursuing, even though I should have known that such traveling at random was not calculated to produce the desired results.

When we had forced our way through the underbrush for a distance of perhaps another mile, we were halted by a swamp.

It was not possible that either the Indians or Simon Kenton had attempted to cross such a place where one must flounder around with noise enough to proclaim his every movement, and I leaned against the trunk of a tree fully realizing all the mischief I had wrought. [Pg 118]

Again Paul gave token of wishing to speak, and I no longer attempted to check him.

"If we are to hunt for Kenton, or count on learning what has become of him, would it not be better that we went back to the canoe, and waited for the coming of day?"

"Then it is our duty to push up stream to warn the volunteers," I replied moodily.

"We cannot hope to find him while it is dark, and it may be that we shall lose our way," he suggested mildly, whereupon, and without reason, I turned upon him angrily.

"We have lost it already!"

"Can you not retrace your steps to the river?" he asked mildly, and without show of fear.

"We should be able to strike the stream; but, having done so, I could not say whether we were above or below the canoe, and we might travel for hours in the wrong direction." [Pg 119]

"We would be able to learn our course by the current, and if it be not possible to find the boat, then must we go up the river to warn the volunteers."

"And leave Simon Kenton in the hands of the savage brutes?" I asked angrily, grown unreasoning in my nervous fears and the knowledge that I had made a fool of myself.

"We are not leaving Kenton, because we have never found him, and since, as seems true, we only wander about aimlessly, would it not be wisest to think of the others, who rely upon us to point out the danger which may await them?"

Paul Sampson was speaking like a sensible lad, and I realized it fully. He, the boy ignorant of woodcraft, should have been the leader, and I wished most devoutly I had consulted with him before setting out on this wild-geese chase. [Pg 120]

While one might have counted twenty I stood unwilling to acknowledge my helplessness, and then something like a gleam of common sense came into my mind. I stood ready to confess that I had acted like a simple, and he must have understood something of the truth, when I said:

"It shall be as you propose, Paul, and we'll make for the river; but this time I am not counting on taking the lead, having already shown that I have no right to direct our movements."

"If you despair like this, then are we lost indeed," he said mildly. "Remember that I know nothing whatever of such work. Go on as before, using your best efforts to lead us to the river. Then we should aim to meet the volunteers, so it seems to me, forgetting poor Kenton because of the many others who need to know exactly what has happened here."

Without attempting an argument, even had I been able to find one which would warrant our traveling to and fro as we had done, I acted upon his suggestion. [Pg 121]

Either we had traveled in a southerly direction to where the river took a sharp bend, or were much deeper in the forest than had at first seemed possible to me, for a full hour was spent making our way through the tangled underbrush, now slowly because of the necessity for silence, and again pressing forward as rapidly as we deemed safe, and not until such a length of time had elapsed did we come to the bank of the stream.

That I had allowed myself to be completely turned around was proven by the current of the river, for without such evidence I would have gone toward the south, believing I was making my way northward.

"The canoe must be above us," Paul said as we halted, "and by following the shore it should be possible to come upon it."

This seemed no more than reasonable, and hope once more filled my heart as I led the way along the bank, now moving with greater caution because it was more probable we might come [Pg 122]

upon the enemy.

One place looked much like another in the darkness, and yet before midnight we arrived at a spot where I firmly believed the dugout had been left.

Paul was of the same opinion, even going so far as to declare that he had noted on coming ashore the gum tree which we were standing near while holding the consultation.

I was disposed to believe as he did, but yet the fact that the canoe could not be found caused me to think both of us were mistaken.

"Surely this can't be the place," I argued, "for none save Simon Kenton could have come upon the canoe in the darkness, and, on failing to find us, he would wait a certain time for our return."

"You can't say that positively," Paul replied, "for the scout realizes that the safety of the volunteers depends upon him in a measure, and would count our lives as of but little value compared with so many as are coming down the river."

[Pg 123]

"Then you think he has been here and gone away in the boat?" I asked.

"That I do, for the gum tree is as familiar to my eyes as anything can be on so dark a night as this."

I was overcome by the possibility. If what Paul declared with such assurance was true, then were we two lads left alone upon the banks of the river amid a savage foe, to make our way back to Corn Island, or, what would be a far more difficult and dangerous task, to continue on to the mouth of the Tennessee River.

By going back we should proclaim the fact of my folly, and prove me to be a lad whose ignorance was near to crime; while to advance seemed little less than the sacrifice of our own lives.

Somewhat of this I said to Paul, and he replied like the true-hearted, brave lad he was:

[Pg 124]

"It is better to acknowledge one's ignorance than try to purchase secrecy at the expense of life. If we have made a mistake, why not admit it?"

I, who had plumed myself upon the fact that Simon Kenton was willing to take me with him as a scout, felt that almost anything was better than returning, and yet I knew it was my duty to push on up the stream to warn those who were descending, because we were not yet positive that the scout had taken away the boat.

Kenton might be a prisoner in the hands of the savages, and in such case it was of the utmost importance Major Clarke and his volunteers should know the facts.

Not without a severe mental struggle did I decide to smother my pride and follow Paul's advice; but once having settled upon a course of action, I was eager to pursue it.

Prudence dictated that we should wait until daybreak; but I believe of a verity it would have made me wild to remain in that spot inactive, thinking only of my folly, and now, as when we left the canoe, I pressed on with but one idea in mind; but, fortunately, yet retaining so much of common sense as to understand that we must be on the alert to gain such information as was possible during the journey.

[Pg 125]

The further we continued on up the river, the more firmly did I become convinced that our last halting place was at the spot where the canoe had been left, for we saw no other such familiar indentation on the shore, and now the important question in my mind was as to whether Simon Kenton had embarked in the dugout, or if the Indians had carried her away. This last proposition appeared to me so improbable that I hardly gave it a place in my thoughts.

On, on, we went, traveling at the rate of no more than two miles an hour, because of being forced to move silently and at the same time carrying out the plan of learning if there might be enemies in the vicinity, and it was nearabout daybreak when, as I believed, we had been advancing for no less than three hours, our progress was checked as we came suddenly upon a party of savages, the greater number of whom were asleep.

[Pg 126]

It was accident, rather than wisdom, which prevented our tumbling directly in upon them, and thereby insuring our own captivity or death.

I was in the lead, as Paul had insisted should be the case, and my thoughts were occupied with speculations concerning Simon Kenton rather than the work which lay before me, when a noise as of some one snoring arrested my footsteps.

I had come to a halt within a dozen paces of the savages, and could see, where the underbrush was thinnest, the form of a feather-bedecked brute leaning against a tree evidently on guard.

A dozen steps more and we had been directly upon them.

Turning quickly, I clasped my hand over Paul's mouth, lest he should speak, although the lad had shown himself to be a better frontiersman than I, and this movement of mine told him of the danger so near at hand.

[Pg 127]

During twenty seconds, perhaps, we two stood peering into the gloom, able only to learn that there could not be less than twenty Indians here encamped, and then silently as shadows, for our lives depended upon the movement, we turned about, retracing our steps until thirty yards or more lay between us and the sleeping murderers.

Then I whispered in my comrade's ear:

"We must make a detour here lest those brutes come to know of our whereabouts, so keep well in mind the direction of the river."

"Do you count on going forward without learning if Simon Kenton may be among the savages?" he asked, and a flood of shame came over me as I thus realized that my own danger had caused me to forget the scout at a time when his possible fate should have been uppermost in mind.

[Pg 128]

Of a verity Paul Sampson ought to have been the leader, and I his humble follower.

So abased was I by his thoughtfulness and my own stupidity, that I would have suggested he reconnoiter the camp, but an instant later, realizing that such dangerous work should be performed by me if for no other reason than that I might atone for my past folly, I whispered:

"Stay here, while I go forward."

"Why should I not follow? If it so be Kenton is not there, we may continue on, and thus save the time you would spend in returning to find me."

Again he was right, and again was I stupid.

Well, we did as he suggested, and no lad on the frontier could have done better work than this same Paul, who was so lately come from the east.

Skirting around the sleeping scoundrels so silently that the quick-eared watchers failed to take alarm, we got such view of the brutes as could be had in the darkness, and when half an hour or more was spent in the work, I could say of a truth that Simon Kenton had not been made prisoner by this band.

[Pg 129]

It was a great relief of mind, and yet only served to increase my shame, for now did I begin to believe that the scout had taken away the canoe, going up the river, or down, as might seem to him best, regardless of us two who had committed such a fault as was ours.

The gray light was filtering through the foliage when we were clear of the foe and could with some degree of safety continue the journey.

I pushed on at a swift pace that we might put the greatest possible distance between them and us before the day should have fully come; and the sun was rising when we halted for a breathing spell.

Now I found that Paul had much the same idea as I regarding Kenton's whereabouts, save that he contended the scout had continued on down the river, believing a band of twenty would hardly attempt to lay an ambush for three or four boats heavily laden with armed men.

[Pg 130]

"A party like that might do great mischief firing upon the boats from the thicket," I said, "and if Simon Kenton saw them, I make certain he has gone back. If not, we may gain some little credit, although hardly enough to counterbalance the shame, by returning."

We knew the volunteers would begin the journey as soon as day broke, therefore within an hour, if we traveled at our best pace, it should be possible to hail the foremost craft.

The Indians might also move in the same direction, therefore it stood us in hand to advance as rapidly as possible, and I led the way once more at my best pace.

Lest it may seem that I set down too much concerning what we did, and too little regarding the brave men who were about to risk their lives in order that the settlers on the frontier might be more safe, this account shall be cut short with no further mention of ourselves until we saw, far in the distance, the first of the flat-boats.

[Pg 131]

Making our way with all speed to the outermost portion of the point on which we were standing at the moment, we waved our arms vigorously, not daring to shout, and the craft was yet a quarter of a mile away when we saw by the commotion aboard that our signals had been seen and understood.

Then two men set out in a canoe, paddling in advance of the unwieldy flat-boat in order that there might be no necessity of her rounding-to, and within a comparatively short time we were ferried out to the larger craft, on which was Major Clarke, eager to learn why we were returning.

I had no desire to shield myself, although knowing full well that in the minds of such men as listened to the story I had committed almost a crime in deserting the canoe while Simon Kenton was ashore. The entire tale was told without reserve, and then was I gladdened by the major's words:

[Pg 132]

"It may be fortunate that you acted the part of a foolish lad, for certain it is that Simon Kenton would not have disregarded such a company as you saw on shore. It must be that he either failed to find them, or came across another band. It stands us in hand to look after the party of reptiles lest they be on their way to Corn Island, there to fall upon the women and children."

Having said this he gave certain orders to the men, and without delay the long sweeps were worked until the heavy craft was forced close into the western bank, where she was made fast.

Then thirty or more were ordered ashore, the major going with them after he had given us lads permission to follow.

"That we will do, sir," I said, "if we are needed to lead the way."

"We would be poor frontiersmen if we failed to follow your trail, lads," Major Clarke said with a smile. "You shall do as you please."

[Pg 133]

Now it would have suited me better to remain in safety aboard the flat-boat, yet there was a

chance that now I might show my desire to repair the wrong committed, and I replied as if my heart was full of courage:

"We may not be of much assistance, sir; but I should like it better if we had a hand in the work."

Whereupon Paul stepped closely to my side as if to say I had but spoken the thoughts which were in his mind.

Thus it was that we two followed the volunteers, knowing full well we might fall into an ambush, and certain we would soon be battling with our enemies.

Among these men led by Major Clarke, there was not one ignorant of how the work before him should be accomplished. No orders, were necessary.

The volunteers moved ten or twelve paces apart, stretching far up from the river until they were what would be called by military men a "skirmish line," and then began the advance, while the flat-boat remained moored to the bank and two settlers were paddling at full speed up-stream to warn the other craft.

[Pg 134]

Save for the bungling movements of Paul and myself, not a sound could be heard as we pressed forward, keenly on the alert for the enemy, and ready for an immediate attack.

It was as if a company of shadows flitted here and there amid the underbrush, so far as might be told from sound, and although the advance was noiseless, it was made swiftly.

Paul and I were left somewhat in the rear because of not being able to keep the pace silently, and during more than half of the hour which passed, I failed to see a single man ahead of us.

Then suddenly, although we knew full well it must soon come, the report of a rifle rang out on the still air; after this another and another, until there could be no question but that the foremost of the party had come upon those of whom we gave warning.

[Pg 135]

My timorousness was forgotten on the instant—cast out of mind by the knowledge that our lives must be defended, and Paul, whom I believe of a verity had never been timid, pressed forward so rapidly to take part in the struggle that I laid hold of him lest he should unnecessarily run into danger.

We advanced three hundred paces or more before coming to where our men were sheltered behind trees, trying to pick off the foe who were in similar positions, and I heard Major Clarke say in a sharp, low tone:

"Get to cover, lads! The reptiles are close upon us, and you are giving them fair targets."

I leaped behind a gum tree, giving no heed to Paul's movements, and had but just gained this shelter when a bullet cut the bark within an inch of my face.

The Indians were ready for battle, although I had often heard it said they would never stand up in a fair fight, and there came into my mind the fear that Paul and I might have seen only a portion of their force—that possibly we were confronting a large body led by British officers.

[Pg 136]

[Pg 137]

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTIVE SCOUT.

To you who have read of, and perhaps taken part in, battles between two armies, this encounter on the banks of the Ohio may seem trifling, and devoid of interest, because there is no thrilling account of this gallant charge, or that stubborn holding of a position.

Since the day when thirty men under command of Major Clarke confronted an unknown number of Indians on the banks of the Ohio, driving them back in such fashion that there was no longer spirit enough left in them to carry out the murderous plan which they had formed for attacking the defenseless ones on Corn Island—since that day, I say, this country has seen much of warfare, and what was to Paul Sampson and myself like a veritable battle has, even while I write, passed into history as something too insignificant to be worthy of any extended mention.

[Pg 138]

To us lads, however, who stood there in the long, scattered line, knowing that our lives depended upon our own exertions; knowing that the least incautious movement—a single instant wasted when the trigger of a rifle should have been pressed, might mean death, it was an engagement as heavy and important as any that has been waged since the world began, and with good reason, because our own safety hung in the balance.

In this world one is prone to give importance to, or detract from, an event in such measure as it

concerns himself alone, and, therefore, Paul and I may well be excused for holding high in our memory this conflict which meant everything to those people who on Corn Island awaited our movements before they should begin to build that settlement which has since become known as Louisville.

[Pg 139]

Of it I can tell no more than that which I saw, and I dare venture to say that my experience was the same as that of every other in the line, for no man could give attention save to what lay directly before him.

It was in fact nothing more, this battle, than standing behind gum or pine tree, as the case might be, peering intently ahead and on either side for a distance of twenty or thirty paces, hoping to catch a glimpse of a tuft of feathers which would tell where a bullet might be sent with deadly effect, or cowering back whenever a movement of the foliage told that a rifle barrel was being thrust out so that the holder might take deadly aim.

Commonplace enough it sounds when set down in words; but if he who chances to read can imagine himself in such a position, his only effort being to save his own life or take that of another, some little idea may be had of the thrilling excitement which overcame me like unto a fever.

[Pg 140]

Now and then from different points could be heard voices shouting words of encouragement to those in that line of brave men who might perchance be for the moment faint-hearted. Again, and all too often, came the cry of pain or an exclamation of anger when the bullet of a savage had bitten the flesh, and meanwhile Major Clarke was calling out to this man or to that as he leaped from one point of vantage to the other, animating every one by his words as well as his example.

In such a situation the combatants do not give heed to the passage of time. There are intervals when each second is as a dozen minutes, and then again, when the minutes flit by apparently more quickly than one could count.

Once, when having turned my back to the tree, knowing that my body was fully sheltered while I reloaded my rifle, I observed Paul, calm and collected as the mightiest hunter among us. If perchance his aim was less true than some of the others, it was not because of nervousness or anxiety concerning himself. He stood his ground like a man—a man who fights to protect others, rather than for his own honor or to preserve his own life.

[Pg 141]

On that morning Paul Sampson gave good proof that he was worthy to be numbered among the defenders of the frontier, and showed that in him could be found none of his father's fickle-mindedness.

The report of his rifle rang out as often as did that of the most eager or most experienced in the line, and how much execution he might have done I know not; but this is certain, that I saw no less than two tufts of feathers rise convulsively and then sink suddenly out of sight when his weapon had been discharged at them.

I say it is impossible to tell at such a time how long one faces his foe; but it was afterwards told that the Indians stood up to the battle for near an hour, and then came the word from Major Clarke that they were falling back.

[Pg 142]

This information was in the nature of a command for us to advance, and advance we did, leaping from one place of shelter to another, while hastening the faint-hearted foe by bullets sent whithersoever the swaying of the foliage told us one of the brutes was making his way onward.

When we had advanced in such halting fashion for the distance of forty or fifty paces, I was come to where the painted crew had made their stand, and there saw good evidence of what we had accomplished.

No less than four bodies were stretched on the ground lifeless, and my timorousness returned in a measure as I realized that near at hand, perhaps making ready to take aim at me, might be some savage, so badly wounded that he could not join his fellows in what had become little less than a flight.



We advanced from one place of shelter to another, firing rapidly,—Page 142. *On the Kentucky Frontier.*

At that moment we were in more danger of such of the savages than from those who were yet sound in body; but as the time passed and I felt neither the sting of a bullet nor the burning cut of a knife, my courage came back again before those around me noted the fact of my having been near to cowardice.

[Pg 143]

We advanced, leaping from one sheltered spot to another, until the word was passed along the line that the remnant of the foe had taken to flight, no longer trying to shelter themselves, and the battle was over, save for those eager white men who pursued in the hope of shedding yet more Indian blood.

Major Clarke gave the word for his force to fall back to the boat. He told off four men to search the thicket for bodies of the savages in order that we might know how many had fallen, and the remainder of the party, save two or three who were so far in advance as not to have heard the command, returned to where the flat-boat was moored.

It was in my mind to congratulate Paul upon his having been in action and come out unscathed, believing a lad like him, who had stood up against the enemy for the first time in his life, would be ready to hear words of praise, or, at least, discuss the exciting events.

[Pg 144]

But the boy whom I had looked upon as ignorant because of never having lived on the frontier, was now shaming me by his actions.

Instead of spending his time in useless words, Paul began cleaning his heated rifle, and otherwise putting himself into condition to do a like service if the occasion should suddenly require it.

Abashed by his calm and manly behavior, I held my peace, following his example, and when the last of the pursuers had returned to the flat-boat we two lads were ready to take part in another encounter.

Those who had been detailed to learn how much injury we inflicted upon the foe, reported that fourteen killed or grievously wounded lay in the thicket, and once more Major Clarke questioned us as to the probable number we had seen in the encampment.

[Pg 145]

I was positive, as also was Paul, that there could not have been upward of thirty, while it was more reasonable to believe the band numbered less than twenty, and the major claimed that we might rest assured there was no longer any danger to be feared from this particular band of brutes.

While we were fighting in the thicket the other flat-boats had come down the stream, rounded-to, and made fast alongside the first craft; but not a man had gone on shore to take part in the battle because of the orders left by our leader.

Now we were ready to continue the journey, and the major said to Paul and me when we were on board once more, drifting with the current:

"I allow that it was a fortunate mishap for you lads to have lost sight of Simon Kenton, otherwise we should have been called upon to bury a certain number of dead from among the force, instead of having to count only four slightly wounded. Had that party of reptiles fired on us from the thicket as we drifted by, much loss of life must have followed. Therefore I hold to it that

[Pg 146]

you have done us, at the very beginning of the journey, good service."

"But where can Simon Kenton be?" I asked.

"Pushing on down the river most like, believing you were captured while he was spying upon the other members of that gang. We shall come across him before many days have passed, unless it so be that he finds it necessary to come back for the purpose of warning us."

If the major had intimated that Simon Kenton might at that moment be a prisoner among the savages, I should have felt the keenest anxiety for his safety; but here was a man who had had more experience on the frontier than the eldest among us, speaking of the scout as if it was not possible any danger could have come to him, and whatever fears might have been in my mind prior to this time were speedily allayed. [Pg 147]

Now I began to enjoy the journey down the river. We had nothing to do save sit at our ease while the swift, strong current bore us onward toward our destination, and such traveling was exceedingly pleasant, more particularly since I no longer thought it necessary to blame myself for having left the canoe when I should have remained by her.

Simon Kenton himself would censure me for having done as I did; but after knowing how much good had resulted from it, his words of blame could not be severe.

It was with such thoughts I comforted myself, and finally gave no heed to anything save that which was pleasurable.

When noon came Paul and I shared the provisions of our companions, and, after the meal was come to an end, lay stretched at full length in the after part of the boat watching the panorama spread out before us.

It must not be supposed that while the boats drifted on in this lazy fashion the men neglected to give due heed to possible danger. [Pg 148]

Strict watch was kept on either bank, and when it became necessary to round a point or pass some tiny cove fringed with trees wherein the enemy might lurk to send a shower of bullets among us, the heavy craft were forced to the greatest possible distance from the place of danger, while every man stood, rifle in hand, ready to check an attack or return a volley.

It was not permitted that we should hold converse in voices louder than a whisper, and those who worked the heavy sweeps were careful to do so in the most noiseless fashion, for we knew full well that the enemy lurked on either shore, and every care was taken to avoid giving notice of our approach.

When the day was near to an end the boats were allowed to come closer together, and finally, when night was so near at hand that the shadows on the shore grew dense, Major Clarke gave a signal, by gestures, that we were to haul up till morning. [Pg 149]

"Are we to lay by the bank over night?" Paul asked, and I, unable to reply, appealed for information to the man nearest, who said much as if believing the question a foolish one:

"I reckon there won't be any boatin' done after sunset, unless there's some great need. Those who drift down this river just now had best do so when it is possible to have a good view of either bank, and Major Clarke is not the man to take needless chances."

"The savages can do no more mischief in the dark than when the sun shines," Paul said quietly.

"That is where I'm not agreein' with you, my lad. In the light we can give as good as they send; but after dark, when there's no chance of seein' the reptiles, they have the upper hands. Howsomever, our opinion on the matter won't have any very great weight with the major, and you'll find that along about this time each day we'll be looking for a place to halt." [Pg 150]

The boat in which we sailed was the foremost of the fleet, and while the man was yet speaking the crew worked the sweeps until she rounded to under the bank, followed by the others, and in less than half an hour we were moored for the night.

This done, the first duty was to learn whether there might be any of the enemy in the vicinity, and scouts were sent out at once, while the remainder of the company set about getting supper, or, perhaps I should say, eating it, for such food as we carried at that time was already cooked.

There was no thought of immediate danger in my mind; as a matter of course I realized that we were surrounded by enemies, but after the battle of the morning I was confident the enemy had been driven to a respectful distance.

I had ceased to think of Simon Kenton, save as pushing on down the river at his best pace, scolding because we were not with him to share in the labor, and I counted on spending the night in rest. [Pg 151]

It so chanced that Major Clarke was seated very near Paul and I when the first of the scouts returned, and the information he brought was sufficient to drive from the minds of every man on board all thought of idling.

It appeared from the story we heard, that this scout, seeing a faint glow as of a light on the opposite side of the river, a mile below where we were lying, had taken a canoe from the nearest flat-boat and paddled across.

There, after having landed, he crept noiselessly through the foliage an hundred yards or more from the bank until he saw that which explained to me, at least, why Paul and I failed to find the dugout when we returned after our foolish tramp.

A party of fifty Indians, most likely a portion of the same band we whipped that morning, had halted for the purpose of torturing a prisoner to death, and that prisoner, so the man declared, was none other than Simon Kenton.

[Pg 152]

He also had been rash and foolish when going ashore in search of information, and at about the time we heard the reports of the firearms he must have been made a prisoner.

Even as I shuddered at the possibility that those who would go to the rescue might arrive too late, I thought with a certain sense of relief that now he could not find fault with us for having abandoned our post.

Had we remained in the canoe, as we should have done, then beyond a peradventure we had been captives with him, and the flat-boats, not having been delayed by the battle, might at this time be too far down stream for their occupants to render any aid.

It goes without saying that instantly this news was told preparations were made for the rescue, and while the men were being told off, for Major Clarke did not intend to take with him more than half a company, Paul said to me quietly, as if there was nothing to excite or alarm:

[Pg 153]

"Of course it is our right to aid in the rescue of the scout."

"There are many others here who could do better service than we," I replied, not relishing a second encounter.

If Paul and I had been alone in the thicket, and were the only ones who could give assistance to Simon Kenton, then never for an instant would I have dreamed of holding back; but here were near to four hundred men, all of them with more experience in such bloody business than either he or I, and it was only a question of desire that would carry us into the conflict.

"We set out from Corn Island with him, and should be the first to go to his relief," Paul said, as if the matter was already settled in his mind, and I understood on the instant that he would apply to Major Clarke for permission to join the force, whether I was disposed to accompany him or not.

It would have shamed me wofully had Simon Kenton been alive when the party reached him, and failed to see me with my comrade, therefore I leaped up at once as if eager for another battle, and together we approached the commander.

[Pg 154]

"It is our desire, sir, to take part in the rescue," Paul said modestly, "We were his comrades, and should be the first to go to his relief."

Then it was Major Clarke made much the same answer as had I, replying that it would be better the older men take the brunt of the affair; but Paul held grimly to his purpose, by repeating:

"It is our duty, sir, and I believe it to be our right."

I was not disposed that he should be the only one to display courage and a desire to aid Simon Kenton, therefore I said, throwing such of desire into my tones as was possible:

"I pray you, sir, that we be allowed to join the party, if for no other reason than because the scout was our comrade."

[Pg 155]

"It shall be as you say, lads," Major Clarke replied; "but I warn you against being too eager for such frays. An attack in the night, while it may sometimes be less dangerous than in the daytime, is likely to prove far more hazardous."

The major might have convinced me that it was my duty to remain aboard the flat-boat; but Paul Sampson was as headstrong once he had resolved, as he was quiet in manner, and I understood, without the necessity for words, that he would not be turned from his purpose.

It can well be supposed that after this word was brought in every man gave due heed to silence, for should the savages who were making ready to torture the prisoner, discover that we were near at hand, Simon Kenton's death would speedily follow.

To make any attempt to gain the opposite shore with one of the large flat-boats would be folly, therefore all the dugouts which we towed, or carried aboard, were brought into line, and those men selected for the enterprise clambered into them, Paul and I among the others.

[Pg 156]

Now to my surprise, instead of putting directly across the river, the boats were allowed to drift down on the same side where the heavy craft were moored, keeping well within the shadow of the trees, and not until we were a mile or more below where it was said the Indians had halted, was any effort made to cross.

By the time the opposite side was gained we were fully two miles down stream, and even a greater distance from the place it would be necessary to gain in order to rescue Kenton.

Here we landed, Major Clarke and one of the older men taking the lead, while the remainder followed in single file.

Paul and I were midway of the line, and because strict orders had been given that no word should be spoken, he pressed my arm from time to time as if to convey by such means the thoughts that came into his mind.

[Pg 157]

I could not divine of what he might be thinking; but I knew it was a very disagreeable fact that at any moment we might fall into an ambush, for no man could say with certainty that the Indians had failed to note our coming.

I suffered more during that tramp of two miles in the utter darkness, than on the previous night when it had seemed as if Paul's fate and mine was sealed.

When we were come so near to the place of torture that the light of the fires kindled around the tree to which the captive was bound could be plainly seen, but were screened from view of the river by the foliage, my heart beat and thumped until it seemed, so nervous had I become, as if the noise must give warning to the painted crew who were dancing around their intended victim.

In whispers Major Clarke gave orders that the men should separate and creep forward, each at a distance of six paces from the other, until we had half encircled the murderous band, and then each was to be on the alert, ready to fire when the first report of the commander's rifle was heard.

[Pg 158]

By such means was it believed that a full half of the savages would be slain at the first fire, and, thus taken by surprise, the remainder would seek safety in flight.

When Paul and I, keeping nearer together than the orders permitted, had come as close to the savages as might be done with safety, we had a full view of the unfortunate Kenton.

I had no doubt but that the Indians recognized him as one who had worked them no little harm in the past, for they were preparing to prolong his tortures to the utmost. Sharp splinters of wood were being made ready for use after the fashion of spears, lest knives should produce death too quickly, and the painted crew were already circling close around him, when, as I knew from what had been told me by the others, before the fires were lighted which should burn his flesh, he would be cut and mangled with a thousand superficial wounds.

[Pg 159]

A brave man was Simon Kenton, and so he showed himself at this moment when there could have been no hope in his mind that help was near.

Stripped nearly naked in order that the murderous wolves might see where to strike without inflicting too serious an injury, he faced them with what was very like a smile on his face, while the blood was already flowing down his body from tiny gashes, and I understood that however much of anguish might come to him, never a cry of pain could be rung from his lips.

Paul crept nearer to grasp my arm with a convulsive clutch, and I knew the lad was feeling most keenly for the prisoner, being able to understand full well what must have been the captive's thoughts, for had he not occupied the same position?

I had leveled my rifle, aiming at the Indian who stood nearest Simon Kenton, determined that the ball should find its billet, when the sharp crack of Major Clarke's weapon rang out, and a dancing savage fell to the ground with a shriek of pain and defiance.

[Pg 160]

Instantly half an hundred rifles were discharged, and it seemed to me as if every feathered head went down, after which the scene was obscured from view by clouds of sulphurous smoke.

[Pg 161]

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE RENDEZVOUS.

Even before the smoke had cleared away sufficiently for me to see the captives, our people rushed forward, all reloading as they ran, and during two or three minutes the confusion was so great that I could not make out what might be going on.

Paul and I had dashed forward with the rest, and, instinctively, so far as I was concerned, we directed our steps toward the prisoner, who was bound hand and foot in such a manner that I question if he could have moved either of his limbs by so much as a hair's breadth.

The effect of the fire was not so deadly as I had at first supposed. More than one of the savages must have dropped to the ground to disconcert our aim, as I now understood on seeing that no more than five lay stretched out on the ground near the captive.

[Pg 162]

The remainder had taken to cover a short distance away, and two of our men dropped as they ran forward, while I saw bloodstains on the shirts of two others.

"We must get to shelter!" I shouted to Paul, swerving aside from the course we had been pursuing as I spoke, and clutching his arm in order that he should be forced to do the same.

The brave little lad had no idea of leaving Simon Kenton at the mercy of the painted brutes, however. It was reasonable to suppose they would shoot him rather than allow a rescue, and Paul was bent on saving him at the hazard of his own life.

Wrenching his arm from my grasp, and almost at the same instant drawing his hunting knife, he dashed on toward the tree to which the scout was bound, and involuntarily I followed; but no

[Pg 163]

credit should be given me for the act, because I was hardly conscious of my own movements.

Here, there and everywhere around us, as it seemed to me, rang out the reports of rifles, and every weapon was held with deadly aim.

It was as if the air was full of death-dealing missiles, and yet no one of them touched us as we sped across what was now an open space, both white men and savages having retreated to the nearest shelter.

Paul was the first to reach the captive, and with an exultant shout he began hacking at the deer-hide thongs with which the poor fellow was bound.

"You're lads after my own heart!" Simon Kenton cried, his voice ringing out clear and distinct even above the yells of the combatants and the rattle of the rifles. "If I live it may be possible to pay you two for this night's work!"

His words drove the timorousness from my heart, and before he ceased speaking I was aiding Paul in severing the thongs with as much eagerness as if it had been my idea rather than his to perform such perilous work. [Pg 164]

The savages began to shoot at us in the hope of preventing our purpose, and, perhaps, to kill the prisoner at the same time, whereupon our people opened such rapid and murderous fire that not a be-feathered head dared to show itself, and in a comparatively short space of time Simon Kenton was running stiffly toward the nearest shelter.

He had been bound in one position so long that his limbs were nearly helpless; but he managed to get over the ground nearly as fast as could we two lads, and picked up a rifle that had fallen from a dead Indian's hand even as he ran.

It was to me as if the fight had hardly more than begun when we three were in a place of comparative safety once more, and on the alert to pick off a foe.

Paul and I had a sufficient amount of ammunition to provide the scout with what he needed in order to continue his portion of the fight, and as he stood behind a big gum tree watching keenly for an opportunity to avenge the insults he had endured, we carried on quite a friendly conversation. [Pg 165]

"What did you do when mornin' came an' I failed to show up?" Kenton asked, whereupon I replied quickly, thinking that the present was by far the best time I would ever have in which to acknowledge my fault.

"We went in search of you after an hour had passed, and failed to find the canoe on our return."

Then Paul, most like, understanding that I would have the story told in a manner favorable to myself, gave a hurried account of our adventures from that time until we learned of the scout's trouble.

"I ran straight into the arms of four snakes who had heard me coming, and showed myself to be the biggest idiot that ever made a try of goin' down the Ohio River," Kenton said bitterly, and I rejoiced at the tone, for it told that he would not be likely to inquire very closely into my folly. [Pg 166]

He had been bound to the tree where we found him, since early morning, and during such time the savages had given him a slight foretaste of what was to come, by cutting his body here and there until the blood flowed in tiny streams.

At the moment it struck me as strange that we three should be talking of the past in this leisurely fashion, interrupting ourselves now and then to discharge our rifles when a tuft of feathers could be seen; but I afterward came to know that in times of greatest danger Simon Kenton appeared to be occupied with the most trifling affairs.

I asked him once, when the conversation lagged, if he had thought Major Clarke's force might come to his relief, and he replied emphatically:

"I had no idea, lad, but that they were many miles below here. You can be certain that I turned the matter over and over again in my mind. There was ample time for reflection, and I could see no way but for me to go into the other world as cheerfully as possible. I was determined those sneaks shouldn't bring a cry of pain to my lips. But for you two, for I'm countin' that some of the reptiles would have shot me before this if you hadn't come up like little men, riskin' the bullets, to set me free, I'd taken no more part in this 'ere trip of Major Clarke's. If either of you ever get into a tight place, you can count on my standin' close alongside while the breath stays in my body." [Pg 167]

This was the moment when I should have confessed that but for Paul, he, Simon Kenton, would yet be bound to the tree; but the words were not spoken, and I have never ceased to regret that I did not make the explanation due my comrade.

As I read over what is here set down it seems much as if I had made it appear that we were giving little heed to whatever might be passing around us, when, as a matter of fact, we were keenly alive to all that went on, and lost no opportunity of dealing the painted fiends a deadly blow. [Pg 168]

Nor were the other members of our party at all backward in doing their duty. As when we faced the savages further up the river, every man did his best, and this display of courage was not to the liking of such sneaks as had counted on shedding Simon Kenton's blood.

Within half an hour from the time the scout was set free, they began to draw back, and we pressed our advantage until such a blow had been dealt as must have taught them a lesson.

Then was heard Major Clarke's voice ordering the men back to the canoes, and within a few moments we were being ferried across to the flat-boat, where the other members of the expedition were waiting anxiously to learn the result of the venture.

There was no longer any urgent reason why we should remain silent, for the noise of the conflict had alarmed every painted snake within sound of the rifles, and our men discussed the situation without taking the precaution to speak in whispers. [Pg 169]

The general belief appeared to be that these two parties whom we had fought since daybreak, were one and the same. Our first meeting was with those who were pushing on up the river in advance to spy out the land, and it was the main body that had made of Kenton a prisoner.

All that had happened was for the best. But for my folly many men might have been slain, and that folly would not have been committed but for the fact of the scout's having been taking prisoner.

Clearly the good God had interposed in our favor, and we were come out of the fights with nothing more serious than wounds which, if properly cared for, would soon heal.

Within half an hour from the time we stepped on board the flat-boat after having released Kenton, he insisted that Paul and I should lay down to sleep, and at the moment I believed this display of care for us arose from our efforts to release him at a time when death was looking into his face. [Pg 170]

Having had no sleep the night before, we were only too glad to act upon his suggestion, and in a short time both of us lads were sleeping soundly as only tired boys can.

At midnight we came to understand why Kenton had been so solicitous for our welfare.

Then he aroused us, saying as we opened our eyes:

"I reckon you lads don't want to stay here any longer, an' it's time we were movin'?"

"Where are you going?" I asked sleepily.

"Ahead of the flat-boats. Unless we start now there's little chance we can do the party much good, an' I'm countin' on makin' a better job than was the first one."

It was not to my liking, this setting out in the middle of the night to drift through a country infested, as we had by this time every reason to believe, with savage enemies, and I failed to understand how we could be of benefit to the volunteers by sailing down the river in the darkness when we might pass an hundred bands of reptiles without having any suspicion they were near. [Pg 171]

This much I said to Kenton, and he replied with a laugh:

"I reckon we can count on the river's bein' clear for the next thirty miles, an' after we've gone that far it'll be a case of layin' alongside the bank to wait for daylight, or takin' a quiet little scout ashore."

"As you did last night," I said quietly, giving but little heed to the words, and a second later I could have bitten my tongue for having made such a slip, for the scout said grimly:

"Perhaps it'll be as well if we don't talk much about last night. The lad who leaves a canoe to search for a comrade who's out scoutin', not havin' left any word as to where he might be goin', ain't in good trim to cast up old scores at others." [Pg 172]

Now it was I understood why Simon Kenton had refrained from making any disagreeable remark when Paul told of our movements. He realized that we had done a reckless thing, but was not minded to say what might have hurt our feelings at a time when we had just aided in saving his life.

But for my quick tongue I should never have known that he realized fully all my folly.

It can well be fancied that, after this reminder that I was not to be trusted in time of danger, my lips remained closed, and in silence I set about making ready for the journey.

The dugout which Kenton had decided to take was lying alongside, and in her had already been placed such a supply of provisions as we might need.

There was little for Paul and I to do save get our sleepy eyes wide open, and clamber over the side of the flat-boat, a task which we performed in silence. [Pg 173]

Major Clarke was awake to give us his final instructions, and after he had held a private conversation with Kenton, the latter came into the canoe, casting off the hawser as he said in answer to a whispered remark of the commander's:

"Never fear but that I know full well what may happen, an' you can count on my bein' more careful than before."

I had an idea that these words might have reference to my foolishness of the night previous, and did not seek to learn what Major Clarke had been warning him against.

We pushed off into the darkness, our light craft moved quickly away by the rapid current, and almost immediately it seemed as if we were wholly alone in the wilderness once more. [Pg 174]

Save to keep the canoe in mid-stream, Kenton made no effort to direct her movements, and we floated down the river in silence, keeping sharp watch on either bank while I promised myself never again to be guilty of giving way to fear.

Paul, brave lad that he was, held his peace. Thus far he had covered himself with the glory

which can be gained when one is pitted against such enemies as were ours, and the fact that I had not given him full credit when there was an opportunity for so doing, only caused me to feel the more keenly that he was my superior even though having had no previous experience.

I guessed that the current carried us a good five miles an hour. The distance from Corn Island to the rendezvous at the mouth of the Tennessee River was said to be considerably more than three hundred miles, and at the rate of progress made by the heavy boats, lying by during the night as they did, it would require full six days in which to make the journey.

We in the canoe could not look forward to less than five days of this drifting on the river, in case we met with no delay, and while I thought of my mother it seemed as if we were going to the other side of the world. I wondered whether I might ever see her again, and it appeared much as if the chances were against our meeting, judging from the dangers into which we had already run when the voyage was hardly more than well begun. [Pg 175]

By this dwelling upon the possibilities I soon worked myself into a most cowardly frame of mind, from which I did not awaken until we were come to a long stretch of sandy land either side of the river, where there was no fear our enemies could find a hiding-place.

Then it was that Simon Kenton started a conversation, as if knowing I needed cheering, and he did not bring it to a close until we were near the wooded portion of the shores again.

When daylight came we had seen nothing to cause alarm, although all knew full well that we might have passed scores of savages without being aware of the fact, and the scout paddled the boat toward the western shore, as he said in a low tone: [Pg 176]

"I'm countin' on havin' a look around, lads, an' this time you'll stay quietly aboard till I come back, or the flat-boats heave in sight."

Paul, understanding that these words were somewhat in the nature of a reproof to me, said boldly:

"It was well for you, Simon Kenton, that Louis insisted on going ashore, else the sun had never risen again for your eyes."

"All that I know right well, lad, an' I'd be a brute if I didn't give the fact due weight; but I'm not willin' you should put your own lives in peril for me. You've got people who love you, while I——"

He ceased speaking suddenly as if having said more than he intended, and again my tongue was an unruly member.

"Haven't you any kin who would mourn because of your absence?" I asked, and Simon Kenton's face grew pale, bronzed though it was by the weather. [Pg 177]

"The less that's said about me the better," he replied curtly, and then, the canoe being alongside the bank, he sprang out to make her fast, thus putting an end to further words.

He was absent no more than half an hour, during which time Paul and I sat motionless and silent, hidden by the foliage, from the view of any who might pass either by land or water.

When he returned we knew he had seen no signs of danger, although not a word was spoken until we were a mile or more from the halting place. Then he said quietly:

"I reckon we've already met all the reptiles who are roamin' hereabout, an' that we shan't run our noses into any more fights this side of the Tennessee River. We'll keep a sharp lookout just the same, though, an' pull up to-night so's not to get too far ahead of the volunteers."

As he said so we did. During the day we drifted with the current seeing naught of danger, and at nightfall pulled the canoe up under the overhanging foliage to enjoy a good night's rest. [Pg 178]

The story of this day's journey was that of the days which followed until we were come to the rendezvous, arriving, as we believed, not more than four and twenty hours in advance of Major Clarke's force.

Since the day when Simon Kenton was made prisoner we had seen no signs of the foe, and it seemed certain that then we had come upon the only warlike band outside the British outposts.

When we stepped from the canoe at the mouth of the Tennessee River I drew in a long breath of relief, for at that moment I was nearer exhaustion than I ever believed would be possible when one has done nothing more than remain inactive.

To sit in a narrow boat like our dugout day after day, not daring to move lest she should be upset, is real labor. I had never had much experience in such traveling, and felt that I really needed no more. [Pg 179]

We made camp by building a lean-to of light stuff, and while Simon Kenton went back into the thicket to search for game of some kind, Paul Sampson and I lounged lazily about, enjoying to the utmost the possibility of stretching our limbs at full length.

The scout was yet absent when we saw emerge cautiously from the foliage four white men, and but for the fact that they carried a goodly supply of meat, thus showing they had been out hunting, I might have suspected them to be British spies.

As it was, I did not feel at liberty to give any especial information concerning ourselves, and warned Paul to be on his guard against speaking of the flat-boats; but rather to let them believe we were simply journeying down the river in search of a homestead location.

As a matter of course the sharp-eyed hunters saw our lean-to immediately they emerged, from [Pg 180]

amid the underbrush, and came directly toward us.

In the wilderness men are either enemies or friends; there is no half-way ground as amid townspeople, and I at once decided in my mind that these newcomers might be depended upon, although I wished most heartily for Simon Kenton, who could, take the responsibility of receiving them.

Their first question was as to whether we were alone, and on being told who was our companion and leader, one of the party expressed the greatest pleasure at meeting him once more.

"I've scouted an' trapped with young Kenton," the hunter said warmly, "an' a better friend I never hope to have. Where are you headin', lads?"

I stammered, not willing to give much information until we knew more regarding the strangers, and yet hesitating to refuse an answer to a simple question, when Paul said quickly, relieving me of my embarrassment:

"If you know Simon Kenton, sir, you can well understand that it does not become us boys to speak of his purpose. He has gone in search of meat, and will soon return to answer for himself."

"Well, said, lad. You have a cautious tongue, an' it's needed hereabouts, because some of us have white enemies as well as red. We can wait for Kenton, an' meanwhile there'll be no great harm done if we set to work cookin' a bit of this 'ere game."

Then the men took possession of our poor camp, and the odor of meat cooking was soon rising on the evening air, sharpening our appetites until, but for the shame of it, I would have begged some of the food before it had more than been browned by the flames.

The meal was not yet prepared when Simon Kenton appeared, and I was rejoiced to see him greet the hunters as if they had been old friends, for it told that during this night at least we had nothing to fear.

Without hesitation he explained the purpose of our coming, and told of the flat-boats with their loads of volunteers which might be expected on the morrow, whereupon the strangers seemed highly gratified.

It appeared, as I soon learned by the conversation, that these men had come from Kaskaskia; but were by no means on friendly terms with the commander of the British post there.

They were in sympathy with the efforts of the colonists to shake off the yoke which the king had put upon them, and declared their purpose to join Major Clarke's force, if that officer should be willing to receive them.

"I'll answer for it that the major gives you a hearty welcome," Kenton said in a tone of satisfaction, "an' by your aid we shall be able to surprise the outpost."

Then the conversation ceased in order that all hands might partake of the meal, which by this time was prepared, and we two lads felt that the most dangerous portion of the enterprise was over, although at least two British garrisons were yet to be captured.

[Pg 181]

[Pg 182]

[Pg 183]

[Pg 184]

CHAPTER IX.

KASKASKIA.

During this evening and the following day we gained all the information concerning Kaskaskia which it was necessary Major Clarke should know.

These men who had come upon us so opportunely, were, as I have said, trappers from that outpost, and eager to do whatsoever they might toward overthrowing the rule of the Britishers on our frontier.

Such desire was only natural, as may be believed when I say that the king's officers pursued the policy of stimulating the Indians against the settlers, in order that such as were not willing to own allegiance to the king should be killed or driven from the country.

Monsieur Rocheblave, a Frenchman, had command of the British forces roundabout Kaskaskia, and the hunters reported him to be an exceedingly vigilant officer, who kept a large number of spies continually on the alert to guard against the approach of people from Kentucky who were known to have taken sides with the eastern colonists in the struggle for liberty.

There were eighty British soldiers in the garrison, and all the redskins nearabout were in the pay of the commandant, therefore it might be said that the force at this point was exceeding

[Pg 185]

strong; but Simon Kenton's friends believed it might be taken by surprise, providing we could capture the spies sent out by Rocheblave.

Once our people appeared before the garrison, when the Indians were not there to lend their aid, the post must of a necessity surrender, and thus the work set for us to do might be accomplished without bloodshed.

That this renegade Frenchman was exerting himself to stir up the Indiana against the settlers there could be no question; in fact one of these hunters had good proof that such was the case, he having been present when the king's officer offered a certain reward in the shape of ammunition and blankets if the savages would surprise and massacre a number of families who had made a clearing on the banks of the Mississippi River. [Pg 186]

Kaskaskia was founded, as I have read, after the visit of La Salle to the Mississippi in 1683, by Father Gravier, Catholic missionary among the Illinois Indians, and was the capital and chief town of the Illinois country so far as the French continued in possession of it. In 1763, it was ceded by the French to Great Britain, and such of the French officers as held possession were continued in the pay of the English king.

With the exception of fifteen or twenty, such as the hunters whom we met, all the settlers in that vicinity were of French descent.

The day following our arrival at the mouth of the Tennessee River was spent in idleness. We had a plentiful supply of meat, and the hunters were unwilling to talk or think of anything save the possible capture of the outpost from whence had been sent so many murdering bands of savages to shed blood simply that the king's hold upon this fair country might be the stronger. [Pg 187]

Therefore it was we remained idle, wasting our time, as I thought, until an hour past noon, when Paul and I had wandered a short distance up the river in company with Simon Kenton and the hunter whom he had greeted as a friend, and then were spoken those words which lifted from Simon Kenton's heart the greatest burden man can bear.

Several times since he so suddenly appeared to me on the bank of the Ohio River, having come at a time when he could render my mother and myself the greatest possible service, had he commenced a sentence regarding himself, and suddenly stopped, as if fearing to betray somewhat of his own life which others should not know. [Pg 188]

Such behavior, together with the fact that he refused to say anything concerning his early life, or why he was serving as a scout when it would seem as if nature had fitted him for some noble purpose, convinced me, boy though I was, that there was a painful secret which had sent him out from among those whom he loved.

On this day of which I speak, while we were strolling aimlessly up the river, the hunter said carelessly, giving no particular weight to his words:

"I met Donnelly at Cahokia a short time ago, and we spoke of you, Simon."

Kenton stopped suddenly as does a man when a bullet reaches a vital spot in his body. His face turned pale as I had seen it once before, and he trembled as if in an ague fit, striving to speak, but in vain, and the hunter, alarmed by this show of weakness, would have sprung forward to prevent the scout from falling, but the latter waved him aside as he asked in a tremulous whisper: [Pg 189]

"Which Donnelly did you meet?"

"He whom you have reason to know; perhaps it would have been better if I said that Donnelly who has good cause to remember you."

"Do you mean Martin?" Simon Kenton asked with an effort, and showing yet greater evidence of being disturbed in mind.

"Ay, lad, Martin Donnelly, and why should you, above all others, show fear at his name?"

"Tell me!" and Kenton leaned forward eagerly, as if his very life depended upon the answer. "Do you mean to say you spoke with that Martin Donnelly who lived some time ago in Fauquier County, in the colony of Virginia?"

"Ay, Simon, the same. He whom you flogged until the breath had-well nigh left his body."

"And he lives?" Kenton asked with a long indrawing of the breath, straightening himself up as does one who has been suddenly relieved of a heavy burden. [Pg 190]

"He was alive when I met him in Cahokia, and counted on settling down in the Illinois country, if it so chanced everything was favorable. He left his family in Virginia so I understood; but reckoned on going after them some time this fall."

Kenton leaned against a tree, his face hidden in his arm, and we three stood gazing at him in silence and astonishment until perhaps ten minutes had passed, when he turned to face us with an expression such as I shall never forget.

"If you have made no mistake, John Lucas," he said, speaking slowly, and with a ring of joy in his tone, "if you have spoken truly, there is taken from me that which I believed I must carry to my grave, and from there to the presence of my God. If Martin Donnelly be alive, I am a free man once more——"

"I tell you, Simon, I saw and talked with Martin Donnelly," Lucas exclaimed impatiently. "What is the meaning of your words? Why have you not always been a free man, save perchance when [Pg 191]

the savages had you in their clutches, as these lads here have told?"

"Here is the story of a man who came on the frontier believing himself a murderer, and doing whatsoever he might to atone for a supposed crime committed at a moment when anger held possession of him. As you know, I was born in Fauquier County in 1755, where my father, an Irishman, had won for himself by hard labor such a home and such a plantation as a poor man could survey with pride. Up to the time I was sixteen years old there came no thought into my mind save to be a planter, and continue the work my father had begun. Then I loved a girl, the daughter of our nearest neighbor, and counted, with the consent of her parents as well as mine, on marrying her in due course of time. Martin Donnelly came into the district, and by unfair means, as I did and still claim, won her from me. I met him the day after he was married. He taunted me with what he had done; claimed that an Irish planter in Virginia was of so little consequence that the first newcomer could take from him whatsoever he had that was to be won by fair words, and continued in such strain until rage overpowered me. I leaped upon him like a panther, using no weapons; and with my bare hands pommeled him until he lay like one dead. Fear took the place of anger; I tried to rouse him; but he lay as does a corpse, and I, believing myself a murderer, fled, pursued only by my own conscience, across the Alleghanies, where I joined those who were pushing forward on the extreme frontier. Since that day have I shunned the abode of all men save those who live remote from any settlement. How often I have yearned to see my father and mother, there is no need for me to say. I dared not go back, believing I would be seized and executed as a murderer; but now I am free to do whatsoever I will, and save for the fact that my word binds me to remain as scout with Major Clarke until the expedition comes to an end with the capture of Vincennes, I would set off this hour for the home I have dreamed of, but never expected again to see."

[Pg 192]

[Pg 193]

Having thus spoken Simon Kenton walked rapidly away up stream, and we three, awed by his story, and knowing that at such a time it would be best to leave him alone, returned to the camp, I for one feeling that however great a failure might be Major Clarke's expedition so far as concerned the British outposts, it was wondrously successful, inasmuch as through it there had been lifted from one man the shadow of a great crime.

Not until nearly nightfall did the scout rejoin us, and then all traces of his emotion had vanished. He was much the same person as before, and yet entirely different, if I may use so contradictory an expression. I mean that there was no change in his manner so far as could be seen when we spoke of the purpose of our journey, or of that which was to be done in the future; but when talking with Paul and me there was a gladsome ring in his voice—a certain freedom of manner which struck me forcibly, and yet might not have been evident to one who was unacquainted with all the facts.

[Pg 194]

More than once during the evening he referred to the day when he was to go back to Virginia, and during the remainder of the journey it was as if all his future actions were marked out with especial reference to that visit, only lately become possible.

Not until noon of the following day did the first of the flat-boats come in sight, and it was the advice of these hunters from Kaskaskia that we set out on the march up the Mississippi without delay, lest Monsieur Rocheblave's spies should give that officer timely warning of our coming.

Immediately Major Clarke came on shore Simon Kenton informed him of what we had learned, and the four hunters announced their desire to accompany the expedition from this point as guides.

[Pg 195]

Nothing could have been more favorable to the enterprise, and, as may be readily supposed, the major did not hesitate to accept their services.

The volunteers, all good men and tried, were speedily acquainted with the facts of the case, for in such an enterprise as this the commander made no effort to conceal his intentions from those who accompanied him, and it was believed by every one that no time should be wasted at this point on the river.

When the last boat had rounded-to and made fast in front of our camp, we were as well prepared for the march, in fact, better, than we should be twenty-four hours later, and the halt was prolonged only until it could be decided by all the members of the party how we might best set out.

After a consultation it was decided that the boats should be dropped about six miles further down the river to such point as would afford concealment for them, after which our party would begin the march across the wilderness, and the last craft had not been made fast half an hour before we were under way again, Simon Kenton, Paul and I paddling ahead to select a spot where we might leave the unwieldy boats with some degree of assurance that they would remain undiscovered.

[Pg 196]

In order that I should be able to tell the story of all we two lads did while we were with Simon Kenton, it is necessary that much of the detail be omitted, else would this poor story run to such length that he who attempted to read might grow weary in the task.

Therefore it is that nothing shall be set down regarding the march across the wilderness, during which we met with no other adventure than the capture of one of Rocheblave's spies, whom we met the second day after leaving the river.

It chanced to be the good fortune of us three—meaning Simon Kenton, Paul and myself—to come across the fellow while he was cooking a fat turkey, and although it was by no means to his liking, we forced him to go back with us to Major Clarke. He claimed to be an honest settler of

[Pg 197]

Kaskaskia, whose sympathies were with the struggling colonists; but John Lucas had told us that there were few in the settlement thus disposed, and Simon Kenton believed it safer to hold him for a certain time, than run the chances of letting him go whithersoever he would.

The hunters from the outposts soon settled his fate, for they recognized in him one who had been most active in inciting the Indians against the settlers of Kentucky, and but for Major Clarke's bold stand he would have been put out of the world in the quickest possible manner, as indeed he should have been, for I counted him a more deliberate murderer even than the savages, and equally culpable.

However, we held him close prisoner by tying him between two of the strongest men, and I venture to say that during the remainder of our tramp through the wilderness he got a reasonably good idea of how innocent women and children fare when they are forced to accompany savage captors.

[Pg 198]

Our progress was reasonably rapid, and yet no precautions were spared to prevent surprise.

Twenty of the party, among whom were Simon Kenton, Paul and myself, remained two miles or more in advance of the main body, spreading out in what nowadays would be called a skirmish line, and taking exceeding good care that nothing escaped our attention.

It was on the afternoon of the fourth day of July when we arrived within a mile of the outpost, having every reason to believe that thus far Monsieur Rocheblave was ignorant that we proposed to deprive him of his command.

Had it not been for the opportune meeting with the four hunters, I question if we should have been able to advance secretly thus near; but they, acquainted with all the approaches to the settlement, and knowing where we would be less likely to attract attention, led us safely on until we were in a good position to begin the work on hand.

[Pg 199]

Although there were more than four hundred in the party, we remained five hours hidden almost beside the garrison, and yet no suspicion of our presence was aroused.

None other, save men familiar with frontier life, could have accomplished what at this time seems to me almost impossible, even though I know full well it was done.

We remained hidden in the thicket, from which point we could see the people of the settlement as they moved to and fro intent on their daily tasks, and yet one might have passed within an hundred yards of us without being suspicious that so many armed men were in the vicinity.

It was believed, at least by Paul and me, that a battle must be fought before we could gain possession of the outpost, and perhaps there is no need why I should set down here the fact that once more was my heart filled with timorousness, for by this time it should well be understood that whenever danger threatened I grew cowardly.

[Pg 200]

It was one thing to fight against the Indians in the forest where we could find as good shelter as they, and quite another to advance in the open against a garrison of men equally skilful with ourselves in handling a rifle, and protected by a stockade.

I believed, and with good cause, that many of us would be sent into another world before the sun rose again, and, unless I was willing to show my companions how much of a coward I had become, I must take my chances of death with the others.

It was by no means cheerful, lying there in the thicket, not daring to speak or move lest an alarm should be given, and looking forward to that struggle which must speedily ensue.

Had it been possible to hold converse with Paul, then might some subject have been brought up which would have changed the current of my thoughts; but I was forbidden even to whisper, and it seemed to me then as if between us and that stockade so short a distance away, death stalked to and fro, awaiting our approach.

[Pg 201]

It is the coward, and only the coward, who reaches out into the future in search of danger. The sensible man waits until confronted by the peril before giving way to fear, and this was proven to me before many hours had passed. I suffered ten times more than if we had advanced and been severely beaten, and yet, as we speedily understood, I had no reason whatsoever to thus torture myself.

When the night came it seemed to me as if Major Clarke had forgotten for what purpose we were there.

Peering out from amid the thicket we could see that the inhabitants of the settlement had gone to their rest. Two hours after the sunset, the garrison was quiet, and yet our commander gave no signal.

[Pg 202]

Looking forward to wounds, and perhaps death, as I did, the moments went by exceedingly slow, and I came to believe that almost any danger would be preferable to this stealthy waiting for the signal which should precipitate the action.

Paul, who lay close by my side, seemingly gave no heed to the passage of time. Like the brave lad I had come to understand him to be, he remained apparently indifferent to what the future might hold in store for us, gaining the repose which would serve him in good stead when violent action was required.

It seemed to me as if the night was more than half spent when I observed Major Clarke rising to his feet, and, as I afterwards learned, it was no more than nine o'clock.

The decisive moment had come. If now we failed to capture Kaskaskia, then was the expedition

[Pg 203]

a dire failure, and those who did not fall beneath the bullets might expect to find themselves prisoners in the hands of captors who would show but little less mercy than the savages.

Before we had arrived at this hiding-place it was decided that the party should be divided into five sections, each of which would make the attack from a different point, and now that the signal had been given the men formed themselves into detachments, moving silently away in the darkness as had been previously agreed upon.

Simon Kenton, Paul and myself, were among those who were to march straight toward the stockade from where we lay, and therefore we made no movement until those who were to approach from the opposite side had been given time to get into position. Major Clarke himself was to lead our division, and although he counted on taking the garrison by surprise, I believe it was in his mind that if a victory was to be secured, we would pay dearly for it in blood.

[Pg 204]

Well, I am giving over many words to what was in itself but a most trifling affair. It only required that we should march up and take the garrison, as if all the king's soldiers there were waiting with open arms to receive us in friendly fashion.

When the word to advance was given, our portion of the company could see in the gloom far away on either hand the different detachments closing in upon the stockade, and yet not a sound came from those valiant soldiers of the king, who instead of guarding the outpost were spending their time in slumber.

Nearer and nearer we advanced, believing all the while that in the next second would be heard the report of an alarm gun; but the minutes went by, and the silence within the stockade was as profound as if none save the dead held possession.



Straight up to the big gate we advanced, believing that in the next second we should hear the alarm gun.—Page 204. *On the Kentucky Frontier.*

Straight up to the big gate we advanced, and so secure did the garrison feel in the friendship of the savages, who thirsted for the blood of such white people as were not in the king's favor, that the barrier was not so much as closed.

[Pg 205]

We entered and had surrounded the commandant's quarters before any one of the enemy was aware of our presence, and then came the alarm.

A gun was fired at the instant Major Clarke stood before the door of Monsieur Rocheblave's house, and the echo of the report had hardly died away before he, followed by a score of men, entered the building.

Standing close by Paul's side, directly behind Simon Kenton, I awaited the beginning of that battle which seemed imminent; yet grown somewhat bolder because of the fact that we were within the stockade.

While I remained on the alert, my rifle half upraised, there came the word, I know not from where, that the commandant had surrendered, and, turning toward us, Simon Kenton said much as if he was dissatisfied with this peaceful ending of what had promised to be a most difficult undertaking.

[Pg 206]

"Well, lads, the first of the outposts we counted on capturing is ours, and we have not been put to the expense of a single charge of ammunition."

"Do you mean to say that there will be no fighting?" I asked in surprise.

"How can there be since Monsieur Rocheblave has surrendered?"

"But we were told there were eighty men here to hold the garrison in the king's name?"

"Ay, lad; but the commander having decided that we shall enter into peaceful possession, deprives them of a right to make objections. Kaskaskia is ours, and it will be a long day before the king's flag be hoisted again. But how is this? One would say you were disappointed."

"I hardly know whether to laugh or cry."

"Why should you cry, lad?"

[Pg 207]

"Because during this five hours past have I lain in the thicket trembling lest death would be my share in this engagement, and he who makes of himself such a simple should weep because he is so feeble-minded."

[Pg 208]

CHAPTER X.

CAHOKIA.

While we could not rightfully take much praise to ourselves for having captured a post where no resistance was made, the members of Major Clarke's force, including even Paul and myself, looked with triumph upon the exploit, bloodless though it had proven to be.

Surely the king would not have thus lost possession of his outpost had we, meaning the entire company, remained at home, and, therefore, might we claim that the garrison was now held in the name of the province of Virginia solely through our efforts.

As we learned next day from those to whom Major Clarke had confided the facts, many of Monsieur Rocheblave's papers had been destroyed by his wife after he was made prisoner, for our people did not consider it necessary to make a woman captive. She was allowed to retain possession of the house until morning, and during that time burned many papers which should have come into our keeping.

[Pg 209]

There was not time, however, for her to destroy all Monsieur's correspondence, and enough was found to prove beyond a doubt that he, acting under instructions from England, had been inciting the Indians to hostilities against such of the settlers as dared believe the rebellious colonists were in the right.

I believe of a verity our men would have wreaked speedy vengeance upon this Frenchman who had caused the death and torture of so many of our countrymen, but for Major Clarke's presence of mind.

Immediately after learning that the members of the force were aware of the Frenchman's guilt, he detailed twenty of the most reliable men—those whom he could trust to carry out his orders to the letter, and sent them in charge of Monsieur Rocheblave and his wife to Williamsburg in Virginia, that the wicked man might be tried for the crimes he had committed against defenseless women and children.

[Pg 210]

The party set off before noon of the day following our capture of the garrison, at a time when our people were occupied in other directions, and thus no act was committed which might have brought shame upon us, although I hold even now that it would not have been wrong had we wiped out Monsieur Rocheblave's crime with his own life, regardless of the fact that he, being a prisoner, was entitled to our protection.

He had entertained no such notions of honor when he set the savages upon the defenseless settlers, knowing full well how much of horrible suffering would be caused.

He left with a whole skin, however, as I know full well, since Paul and I aided in making ready the boat which was to carry the party to the mouth of the Ohio River, from which point they would strike across the country to Williamsburg.

[Pg 211]

The Frenchman's wife went with him, as a matter of course, and I have since tried to learn what became of the scoundrel, but without success. He deserved hanging, if ever any man did, although many people claimed that he was not really guilty, since he had but carried out the orders given by his superiors.

Had any of those who pleaded so eloquently for his release known what it was to have a father tortured to death, as I knew, there would have been less said in favor of such a wretch.

However, that has nothing to do with the story of what Paul Sampson and I did and saw while

we scouted in company with Simon Kenton.

When our people learned that Monsieur Rocheblave had been sent away with a whole skin, for, as I have said, all the preparations for his departure were made with the utmost secrecy and he and his wife smuggled on board the boat, there was something very like mutiny in the camp, and Major Clarke had quite as big a job to quiet the men as he could well handle; but the volunteers soon settled down quietly, promising themselves that the time would come when they might have more voice in deciding the fate of the Frenchman.

[Pg 212]

Having seized the outpost, it was as if Major Clarke counted on loitering in Kaskaskia without making any further effort toward capturing the other possessions of the king's on the Mississippi River.

During three days we remained quietly in the settlement, amusing ourselves as best we might, and many of the company indulged in much grumbling because of the inactivity.

We had come to open the river for our own people, they said, and it was little short of a crime to loiter when there were so many garrisons near at hand which should come into our possession.

Before the three days were passed, however, we came to understand our commander's purpose. He had not disturbed the French settlers whom we found in Kaskaskia; but, on the contrary, showed his intention of protecting them as he would those who were bound to us by ties of blood, and the result was that the people began to realize how much had been gained by this change of governors.

[Pg 213]

The savages were no longer welcome to hold their hideous pow-wows there, and the soldiers could not rob the settlers as had been done when Monsieur Rocheblave was in command. In every respect the people were the gainers by our coming, and fully appreciated the fact.

The next British outpost up the river above Kaskaskia, was Cahokia, a settlement where considerable trade was carried on, and a depository of British arms for distribution among the savages.

It had been occupied by the Caoquias, a tribe of Illinois Indians, long before the discovery of the Mississippi. The French settled there shortly after La Salle descended the river, and it was said to contain not less than forty families in addition to the garrison of about sixty soldiers.

[Pg 214]

This was the post Major Clarke had counted on capturing when he left Corn Island, and we soon came to know that he had not changed his intentions, but was busily engaged perfecting his plans at the very time when some of us accused him of spending the days in idleness.

Between these two outposts were three small villages which the king claimed as his own, and these it would be necessary to capture before arriving at the larger settlements.

When all his arrangements were completed, Major Clarke announced that Captain Joseph Bowman, the commander of one of the companies, was to lead the expedition to Cahokia, which would consist of about two hundred men, while he, Major Clarke, with the remainder of the force, was to remain at Kaskaskia, and at the same time be prepared to keep in check such of the Indians nearabout as might take into their ugly heads to make trouble for us.

[Pg 215]

Now was seen the wisdom of the major's proceedings during such time as we had remained in the captured garrison.

The inhabitants of Kaskaskia had had time to realize that they were much better off under the rule of the colonists than that of the king, and once this was brought fully home to them, they became eager that the other outposts on the river should experience the same change of government.

Therefore, instead of secretly sending scouts ahead to warn these villages through which we must pass, the people of the post begged permission to accompany the volunteers, claiming that by relating what had occurred in their own settlement they could quickly bring the others to terms, thereby preventing bloodshed, and doing a favor to their neighbors at the same time they benefited themselves.

As Simon Kenton put it: "Once they knew that the Americans were prepared to take possession of America—or such portion of it as came in their way—the one desire was that the rule of the king might be wiped out speedily, which was good sense, inasmuch as both parties could not hold portions of the river without coming to blows."

[Pg 216]

If these people whose settlements we had taken without striking a blow could have had their way, every outpost now garrisoned by men who gave allegiance to the king would be speedily in our possession, and while the temper of the people was at this point, the proper time had come to push the advantage.

When it was announced that among those who would set out under command of Captain Bowman would be the scout Kenton and his two companions, I had no misgivings.

The anguish of mind that had been mine with so little cause just before we surprised the Kaskaskia garrison had taught me a lesson, and, in addition, I believed that we would continue our march in the same bloodless, triumphant fashion as it had been begun.

[Pg 217]

And in this I was not mistaken.

Lest I draw out this story to too great length, setting down facts which strangers may think are of no importance in the history of our taking possession of the Mississippi River, I shall go straight ahead toward the end without stopping here to relate what at the time seemed to us of

considerable importance, or to explain how Paul and I acted or felt under certain trying and disagreeable circumstances.

Simon Kenton was to have charge of the advance portion of the force which Captain Bowman led. That is to say, if we were speaking of such maneuvers at this day, we should say that Simon Kenton was in command of the skirmishers, and, as a matter of course, Paul Sampson and I played the part, however poorly, of his assistants.

We, and I am now speaking not only of us three who called ourselves scouts, but twelve or fifteen more who were ordered to join us, set out from Kaskaskia on the morning of the 8th of July, about two hours in advance of the main force, with the understanding that it was our duty to capture such spies as might be met, or to fall back in case we were confronted by any considerable number of savages.

[Pg 218]

Well, we began the sixty-mile tramp in good spirits, and when, late on that same day we were come within hailing distance of the first small settlement that lay on the road, our march had been no more than a pleasure excursion.

Neither spy nor Indian had we seen, and I believe that eighteen or twenty men could have taken possession of this village belonging to the king, by force of arms, had it been necessary, without any very serious trouble.

But the orders were for us to halt until the main body should come up, and this we did, whereupon those settlers from the captured post advanced to hold a parley with the occupants of this clearing.

[Pg 219]

It was not a lengthy conference. After those who had so lately recognized Monsieur Rocheblave as their governor, explained to these other settlers the advantages to be gained, the village was ours.

We had simply to walk in as honored guests, and the American flag was hoisted in token that they no longer held themselves as subjects of the king.

And the story of our successful advance thus far was the same as must be told from this point.

We marched into two other villages, our allies from Kaskaskia going ahead to pave the way, and left the settlers, while we continued on up the river, as brothers rather than enemies.

Three villages hoisted our flag in token of their sympathy with and desire to aid the colonists, and then we were come, at the close of the third day, near to Cahokia, the post, as I have said, of no mean importance, and garrisoned by sixty soldiers.

[Pg 220]

Here at least did Paul Sampson and I believe our entrance would be opposed; but as before, Captain Bowman sent our allies ahead, and we came into the trading village where the king had deposited large quantities of arms for barter with the Indians, having met with no opposition, and being received right generously.

The people greeted us with huzzas when we marched into the stockade, behind our allies, and were equally as enthusiastic on being told by Captain Bowman that they must take the oath of allegiance to the colony of Virginia.

The purpose for which our force had left Corn Island was accomplished in the capture of Cahokia, for this post was really the last which Major Clarke had claimed it might be possible to reduce.

It is true he had mentioned Vincennes in his plans to the authorities of Virginia; but, as we understood from Simon Kenton while we laid here at Cahokia, the garrison on the Wabash River was not to be attacked unless it might be done with reasonable assurance of success.

[Pg 221]

Now this outpost of Vincennes was one of the first settlements formed in the valley of the Mississippi. It was occupied by the French emigrants as early as 1735, and called post St. Vincent. In 1745, the name of Vincennes was given to it in honor of F. M. de Vincennes, a gallant and much respected French officer who was killed in the battle with the Chickasaws in 1736.

It was the most important post in the valley, but whether it was to be attacked, we who were at Cahokia could not even so much as guess.

Simon Kenton believed our portion of the work would end here, arguing that Major Clarke must leave a garrison both at Kaskaskia and Cahokia in order to hold the stockades, and by so doing his little army would be greatly weakened; so that he could hardly hope for a victory if it chanced that we were obliged to resort to force in order to gain possession.

[Pg 222]

"Accordin' to my way of thinkin', lads, our work is done," the scout said, late on that night after we took possession of Cahokia. "There's naught left us to do save retrace our steps, for I should guess that you were not minded to remain in either of these settlements as members of the garrison."

"Indeed we are not," I replied promptly. "My mother awaits me at Corn Island, and unless she decides to go back to the land which my father cleared, I must set about making a home for her."

"I have no wish to remain," Paul added. "It may not be that my father needs me; but I have a mother in Maryland, and service in a garrison is not pleasing. If, as you believe, the work laid out for Major Clarke has been accomplished, Louis Nelson and I will return with you, if it so be you are going back."

"Indeed I am, my boy," Simon Kenton replied with the air of one who anticipates much pleasure in the future. "Now that there is no longer a shadow over me, I am as eager to find my father and

[Pg 223]

my mother as are you lads to meet yours."

"When shall we return?" I asked, for now that the homeward journey was being considered, I, who really had no home, was eager to begin it.

"It was understood between Major Clarke and myself that I might be at liberty to turn back whenever Captain Bowman should state he no longer required my services, and I reckon, lads, that the time has come. Wait you here until I learn what he has to say regardin' the matter."

Within an hour it was decided that we three were to carry Captain Bowman's report to Major Clarke, and when I lay down to sleep that night it was with the knowledge that at the first light of dawn we would begin the sixty-mile journey, counting on making it within four-and-twenty hours with but little labor, since from this point we could proceed in a canoe, aided by the swiftly running current. [Pg 224]

We set out as had been decided upon, one of the settlers in Cahokia willingly lending us a dugout, with the understanding that we should leave it at Kaskaskia to be returned whenever opportunity offered, and before midnight Simon Kenton was giving to Major Clarke the account of our successes.

We remained three days longer at this post; but all that happened which concerned us three may be told in few words.

It was decided that all save those who chose to remain to man the garrisons might return whenever it pleased them, and, knowing that fifty or more who had left relatives on Corn Island were counting on going back soon, we three waited for them in order that our force might be so large as to deter the savages who were possibly lurking about the banks of the Ohio River, from making an attack.

When three days had passed, however, we found that none of the men were disposed to begin quite so soon what would doubtless prove an arduous undertaking, and Simon Kenton laid the matter before us by saying: [Pg 225]

"Lads, I am eager to get back into Fauquier County. If it so be you have no stomach for layin' around here eatin' the bread of idleness suppose we start to-morrow mornin'? There is nothin' to keep us, and much to incline our hearts toward the journey."

Unless I have utterly failed in making it appear here that I had a great affection for my mother, it can readily be understood how we answered the scout, and without delay we set about the few necessary preparations for the voyage, determined to leave Kaskaskia before daylight next morning.

And now at this point let me copy what I read many years later regarding Vincennes:

"The stronger and more important post of Vincennes, situate on the east bank of the Wabash River, one hundred miles above its entrance into the Ohio, was yet unsubdued, and Major Clarke felt that the object of his mission would be but half accomplished if he did not gain possession of that place. It was necessary to garrison Kaskaskia and Cahokia in order to retain them, and to do this would so weaken his little army that he could, scarcely hope for victory in an attack upon Vincennes, unless he should be as successful in effecting a surprise as he had in capturing the posts already in his possession. While thus perplexed and doubting which course to pursue, he communicated his desires to Father Gabault, a French priest, who agreed to bring those inhabitants of Vincennes over whom he had pastoral charge, to the support of the American cause. The influence of the priest was successful; the inhabitants arose in the night and cast off their allegiance to the British, expelled the garrison from the fort, and pulled down the English standard. The American flag floated in triumph over the ramparts in the morning." [Pg 226]

All this was done before we three were come again to Corn Island, and I question if the British king ever lost more territory at a less cost in blood, either on the part of those who made the capture or the hirelings who should have held the garrisons, than in this expedition of Major Clarke's into the valley of Mississippi. [Pg 227]

I am now come to be an old man, and yet since that time have heard but little spoken concerning the achievements of Major Clarke and his force of four hundred, when the most fertile portion of the Mississippi River was taken from the Britishers and made a portion of the American colonies.

We had done our work well, as it seemed to me then and does now, although in the telling of it there is none of that clash of arms and cheers of triumph which have accompanied far smaller achievements.

And here would my story properly end but for the fact that we three must make the journey down the Mississippi to the Ohio, following the course of this last noble river on foot, because we could not well stem the current in a canoe, through a country infested by savage enemies, who would use every effort to take our lives. [Pg 228]

CHAPTER XI.

HOMeward BOUND.

We spent no time in leave-taking after once having made ready for the journey. It was as if we three formed a separate command, and had no comrades among the main body of the volunteers, therefore it was not necessary we should say good-by.

Simon Kenton was to carry up the Ohio certain papers with which Major Clarke had entrusted him, and once these were in his possession there was nothing to detain us at Kaskaskia.

We took our departure from the post a full half hour before daybreak, when none save the sentinels were there to see us push off from the shore, and allowed the canoe to drift down the river until we were come to the Ohio.

It would be more laborious to paddle the dugout against the swift current than to walk, and we had already decided to make our way through the wilderness on foot, ever keeping within a short distance of the river, where we might expect to get the earliest information if the savages were moving about bent on mischief. [Pg 230]

We came to a halt at a point where we waited for the flat-boats on the journey down, and here a day was spent in procuring and cooking meat, for Simon Kenton had decided that once the long tramp was really begun we would push forward at the best possible pace. It was reasonable to believe that in a short time we would have arrived at that portion of the country where it might not be well to discharge a rifle simply for the purpose of killing game.

We did not expect to make the journey without some danger of coming across small parties of the painted brutes who thirsted for the blood of white people; but it was not in our thoughts that we should encounter any serious dangers. The worst of the tramp, so we believed, might be the labor of pushing on through the underbrush until the many miles which lay between us and Corn Island had been traversed. [Pg 231]

Simon Kenton was in particularly good humor on that morning when, all our preparations completed, we left the camping place with our faces turned toward the north, and I was exceedingly happy, for at the end of the journey my mother was waiting to greet me.

During two full days we pressed steadily onward, seeing nothing to cause alarm, and making reasonably good progress, and then came that which threatened a fatal ending to what had been a most successful journey.

We encamped on the second night in a small thicket of scrub where the foliage was so dense that the chill night wind was shut out as completely as if we had been within four walls of stout logs, and felt so secure that Simon Kenton himself had proposed we build a light blaze to cook a turkey we had just killed.

The meat was roasted, and we ate such a supper as can be enjoyed only by those who have performed a full day's labor, and after the meal was come to an end Paul and I fell asleep even as we sat before the fire. [Pg 232]

How long we were thus unconscious I am unable to say; but it seemed to me as if I had no more than crossed the borders of dreamland before I was awakened by the pressure of a heavy hand over my mouth.

In the forest one becomes accustomed to awakening quickly, and without starting up.

When the eyes are open the first thought is as to the reason for thus being aroused, and due heed is given to all the surroundings before any movement is made.

Therefore it was I understood at once that Simon Kenton's hand was covering my mouth, and that he was hurriedly burying the light embers with ashes.

Pressing his arm to let him know I was thoroughly aroused, I rose to a sitting posture.

No sound brake the stillness of the night, for, sheltered as we were by the scrub, even the moaning of the wind failed to reach our ears. [Pg 233]

Kenton was awakening Paul, and he, brave lad, made as little disturbance on thus being aroused as if all his life had been spent on the frontier.

It was to my mind a certainty that the scout had heard or seen savages, and I drew up my rifle to assure myself it was in proper working order.

It is by no means soothing to the nerves to be thus aroused and forced to remain on the alert in ignorance of what threatens. I know of no situation more trying, and while I inwardly trembled with apprehension, my eyes sought out Paul in the gloom to learn how he was bearing up under what many old, experienced hunters have told me was, in their opinion, the most trying of all border warfare.

The lad sat silent and motionless, his rifle in hand, and though it was impossible to distinguish his features, I knew full well he was as calm and placid as when we remained concealed in the thicket just beyond the stockade at Kaskaskia, when I believed a desperate battle was before us. [Pg 234]

During perhaps half an hour we three remained in the same position as when first having been awakened, and then Simon Kenton began to creep cautiously out through the underbrush, having

first motioned for us to remain quiet.

He was bent on learning what had alarmed him, and but for advertising myself as a coward, I would have insisted, as well as I might by gestures, upon his remaining with us, for to me, almost anything was preferable to separation.

I checked the impulse, however, but moved closer to Paul, and he, dear lad, pressed my hand as if to give me courage.

That he, whom I had at the outset considered the weakest of the party, should be the one to encourage, shamed me, and I threw off his hand as if in anger, when in reality it was nothing save nervous fear which prompted the movement. [Pg 235]

As nearly as I could judge, Simon Kenton had been absent ten minutes before we heard anything whatsoever, and then the report of a musket, followed by a scream of pain, caused the blood to bound in my veins.

Instinctively I leaped to my feet when I should have remained motionless, and Paul laid hold of the skirt of my hunting-shirt as if fearing I might be counting on rushing out.

One, two, three minutes passed, during which time the most absolute silence reigned, and then a slight rustling of the branches told that the scout was returning.

I breathed more freely, knowing he was not the one who had given vent to that cry of pain, and stepped forward to learn how serious was the danger which threatened.

"We have run across thirty or more reptiles—most likely the same that were met while coming down the river," he whispered in my ear as I bent forward eager for information. [Pg 236]

"Why did you fire?" I asked, believing for the moment that by such act he had told them where we lay concealed.

"They had learned where we were, and now completely surround us. It's a case of fightin' our way out, lad, if we count on gainin' Corn Island. It is better to make a move at once, than wait till they are ready to close in on us."

I understood by these words that Kenton believed the situation to be most dangerous, otherwise he would not have suggested we make a move in the night when the savages would have a great advantage over us, and, as usual in such cases, my heart grew cowardly once more.

While I stood there undecided the scout hurriedly repeated to Paul that which he had told me, and I saw the lad rise to his feet without hesitation. He was even then, as he has since many times proven himself, my superior in all that goes to make up a frontiersman.

"Follow me," Kenton whispered, "and when you are forced to fire, see to it there be no delay in re-loadin' your rifle. Accordin' to my way of thinkin' we'll have to fight ourselves through this gang, an' the more we disable 'twixt now an' night the easier will be our work to-morrow." [Pg 237]

There was in my mind the thought that we were now where we must keep up a running fight until one party or the other was shot down, and, considering the fact that they outnumbered us at least ten to one, it seemed most likely ours would be the side that went under.

When danger comes close upon me I forget my cowardice, as a rule, and so it was now. There seemed little chance we could fight our way through where were so many to oppose us, and the odds were all in favor of the savages.

Realizing this fully, as I believe Simon Kenton did also, I ceased to think of the cause I had for fear, but set my teeth hard, resolving to give the painted wolves good reason to remember me after they had shot us down.

Simon Kenton was not disposed to linger; he understood of what advantage in a fight is the first blow, and was eager to deal it. [Pg 238]

He waited only long enough to assure himself we two lads were ready for the hot work before us, and then turned to leave the hiding-place which, as he had said, was already surrounded.

Paul would have brought up the rear, but that I held the position as belonging to me. Surely a lad who had always lived in towns could not reasonably expect to be allowed such a post of danger when there were others with a right to claim it.

That the savages were keeping a keen watch we knew instantly Simon Kenton stepped outside the dense thicket, for then came the report of a rifle, and a bullet whistled past my head so near that I could feel the "wind" of its flight.

It was a queer act, when the darkness was so intense that one could not distinguish an object twenty paces away, yet instinctively we three darted behind the nearest trees for shelter, and there stood straining our eyes in the hope of being able to discover a living target. [Pg 239]

It was like looking into a deep well, to peer ahead, and all three of us must have understood at the same instant that it was little less than folly to remain there with any hope of sending a bullet home, for Paul had just turned to continue the flight when Simon Kenton whispered to me:

"We cannot benefit ourselves by remainin' here. The best plan is to continue on up river, makin' as many miles as possible before daylight."

Having said this he darted forward, forcing Paul to fall into line behind him, and I came close at the latter's heels.

Now was begun the oddest fight ever seen on the Ohio River.

We three were pressing forward as if it would advantage us much to gain a few extra miles before morning, and the savages followed cautiously, firing at random now and then, although they could not hope a single bullet would take effect.

[Pg 240]

Several times we halted in the hope that the reptiles, thinking only of overtaking us, might come up within shooting distance; but they were too wary to be caught by any trick of that kind.

Whenever we came to a full stop it was as if all nature ceased breathing, for we could not hear the lightest whisper amid the foliage, and when the flight had continued in such fashion for an hour or more, Simon Kenton said as we stood side by side listening intently for some token of the villains:

"We won't get a fair shot at them until daylight, an' then they'll have the same chance at us. I reckon we'd better make all the distance we can while it is dark, an' then lay by when the sun rises."

To my mind it could benefit us but little if we approached a few miles nearer our destination, for unless these wretches could be beaten back within a reasonably short time, they would succeed in killing us before we could come within fifty miles of the point we most desired to gain.

[Pg 241]

However, while holding death at bay for a few hours more or less we might as well have our faces turned in the right direction, and I was ready to do whatsoever the scout suggested, for, as I have said, fear had fled from me now that our position was so desperate.

We alternately drove ahead at full speed, and stopped to take breath. The Indians fired at random now and then, hoping that the sound of our footsteps might serve as guide; but they inflicted no more injury on us by shooting, than we did on them while we refrained from discharging our weapons.

In such manner was the night passed. We had not fired a shot, while the painted crew in pursuit had wasted twenty bullets or more.

Having walked all day, this severe exertion throughout the night wearied me excessively, and when the first gray light of coming dawn filtered through the foliage, it seemed to me as if I was on the verge of exhaustion.

[Pg 242]

The labor had told even on Simon Kenton, and Paul was keeping the pace only through sheer force of will-power.

It was a wondrous relief to me when the scout pointed ahead to what appeared to be a dense growth of bushes, through which ran a tiny stream, as he said:

"I reckon we'll find no better place in which to make a stand, than there."

"Almost anything will please me so that we come to a halt speedily, for I'm well-nigh winded," I replied, speaking with difficulty because of my heavy breathing, and in another instant we three stood facing each other in the thicket, where as yet the light of a new day had not penetrated.

The savages might not approach very near during the darkness without taking more risks than such reptiles fancied, and during a certain time we need not fear molestation.

[Pg 243]

Paul and I flung ourselves at full length on the ground, for in no other position did it seem possible to recover from the exhaustion which beset us; but Simon Kenton remained standing at a spot from where he could have a view of some portion of our surroundings when the sun had dispelled the gloom.

"I suppose there is good reason to believe the Indians will kill us before we can arrive at Corn Island?" Paul said in a tone of one asking a question, after he had recovered his breath sufficiently to speak, and Simon Kenton replied quietly.

"Two or three such races as we have had this night should give them good cause for discouragement."

"It is a question whether they or we are getting the worst of this business," I added, trying to speak calmly, as had my comrades; but making a bad job of it.

"Twenty-four hours is a long stretch," Paul said thoughtfully, "and it's all I can do to keep my eyes open."

[Pg 244]

"Go to sleep, lad," Kenton cried. "We must contrive to get some rest 'twixt now an' night, an' if you two take a nap at once I'll have a chance later."

It may seem strange that boys should be able to sleep under such circumstances as these, and yet the permission had no sooner been given by the scout than I was stretched out at full length, my eyes closing despite all efforts to keep them open.

The report of a rifle, discharged near at hand, awakened me, and I looked around to see the scout reloading his rifle.

"Did you wing your bird?" I asked sleepily.

"I hope never to use this 'ere piece again if I didn't. The sneak has been wrigglin' his way toward us for the last ten minutes, an' I only waited to let him believe he was keepin' his red carcass out of sight, although I marked it plainly from the instant he started."

[Pg 245]

"Have you seen the others?"

"Yes, now an' then through the bushes; but not in such a fashion as I wanted in order to get a good aim. They've camped down somewhere near that big gum tree yonder, needin' rest as much

as we did, I reckon."

"How long have I been asleep?"

"Three hours or more."

"Then it's time you took a turn at it," and I rose to my feet, Paul rising up at the same time.

Simon Kenton insisted that we lie down again; but it was to me as if the repose had been sufficiently long, so thoroughly was I awakened, and after a short discussion he did as I suggested.

It is needless for me to set down all that was done or said during the remainder of this long day.

Kenton slept a full four hours, and during that time we had fired twice at the skulking reptiles as they flitted from one tree to another, feeling certain that some of the bullets had taken effect. [Pg 246]

Then the scout ordered us to get more sleep, nor would he listen to my assertions that I was fully recovered from the fatigue which had beset me so sorely.

"You have another long race before you, an' stand in need of more sleep if you count on holdin' such a pace as I shall set from the goin' down of the sun till it rises again."

"How long do you expect bein' able to keep up such a flight?" Paul asked quietly, as if it was a matter in which he had no great interest.

"So far we seem to be doin' rather better than holdin' our own, an' I reckon we'd best keep up the game. At least three of the painted snakes are feelin' the worse for havin' begun this little chase, an' we're as sound as ever."

It was on my tongue's end to say that we could not hope for the same good fortune during another night of racing through the forest when it was too dark to distinguish anything not directly in our path; but I checked myself in time, for no good could come of speaking dispiriting words while we were in such a desperate situation. [Pg 247]

We two lads lay down again to sleep, in accordance with Kenton's command; but were aroused for a few moments when the scout discharged his rifle, and I heard him mutter to himself:

"That makes the fourth to-day, an' if we can keep up this play two nights more, they may come to believe that the game is not worth the candle."

Sleepily I thought we might find before many hours had passed that all the shooting was not to be done by us; but the idea was no more than in mind when my eyes closed again, and I was not conscious of the surroundings until Kenton shook me roughly.

"It's time we pushed ahead once more," he said in a whisper as I seized my rifle, believing the savages were about to make a determined attack, and he added with a low laugh, "There's no more danger threatenin' than when you was last awake, lad; but the night is well on us, an' we should be movin'." [Pg 248]

He awakened Paul, and the little lad rose to his feet ready for any emergency; but speaking not a word.

We had yet some portion of our meat, and from this a hurried meal was made, after which Simon Kenton showed himself ready to set out once more on what I believed was a fruitless journey, for it did not seem possible we would live to finish it.

It was like a nightmare, that race through the thicket with the murderous fiends close on our trail, shooting now and then when in the gloom the waving branches told of our course.

Kenton kept his word, so far as setting a rapid pace was concerned. Never before nor since have I strained every muscle and nerve for so many hours on a stretch.

There were times when we pressed on as if running a foot-race, and more than once did one or the other of us come full against a tree with such force that we were hurled backward at full length on the ground. [Pg 249]

There was no time to attend to bruises, however severe, for close in our rear came the relentless brutes, hoping, most likely, for just such a mishap when they could lessen our number by one.

I believe they fired at us fifty times before we halted for a day's rest which must be spent in defending ourselves, and by the mercy of God no bullet came nigh us.

I watched eagerly for the first signs of dawn; my breath was coming thick and fast, and I feared lest I might fall and not find myself able to rise again.

Paul had kept close at Kenton's heels without betraying fatigue or distress; but just at the moment when it seemed as if I must halt, whatever might be the consequences, he cried sharply:

"I can go no further. You two must keep on without me! It is better that I be left behind than for all to perish!" [Pg 250]

"We'll all come out of it with whole skins, or fall together," Simon Kenton said sharply. "Try to hold the pace, lad, till we find a place in which we can defend ourselves."

Even as he spoke we had arrived at a spot where half a dozen large trees had been overthrown by the wind, forming exactly the kind of a fortification needed by those sorely beset as were we.

Kenton helped Paul over the logs into the very center, and I followed with many a stumble,

CHAPTER XII.

A NOVEL BATTLE.

It was yet so dark in the forest that one must needs strain his eyes to distinguish objects ten paces in advance, therefore it can be readily understood how near to us were the howling wolves, when I say that they set up a shout of mingled triumph and menace as we thus brought the race to a close.

It was evident they believed we were now in their power, and indeed there was much the same thought in my mind when I had aroused from the stupor of exhaustion sufficiently to take note of our surroundings.

Simon Kenton had led us into the midst of a pile of fallen timber overgrown with vines and young bushes, which covered a space of perhaps an hundred square feet. It was a place of refuge which stood in a partially cleared spot, and might readily be surrounded, while, to make our way out, it would be necessary to offer one's body as a target to whomsoever might be on watch.

[Pg 252]

In the gloom of the morning it had appeared to be a better place for defense than really was the case, and I question if the scout would have halted here had he understood what it really was.

While we remained in the very center of the mass we were screened from view, and could see a goodly portion of all that might be going on around us; but when that has been said all the advantages of the place have been described.

In order to get out of it, once we were inside, it would be necessary, as I have already said, to expose ourselves to the fire of the enemy, and before many hours should elapse we would be forced to take to our heels unless we were minded to die of hunger or thirst.

We no longer had any food with us, and there was not a drop of water nearer than the river. Already it seemed as if my mouth was parched to the point of swelling, and because it was beyond my reach, I longed most intensely for something to quench thirst.

[Pg 253]

The knowledge of our situation, as I have set it down here, came upon me immediately after I recovered slightly from the effects of the fatigue caused by the swift race, and, looking into Simon Kenton's face, I knew full well he had become aware of our disagreeable situation.

Little Paul Sampson, plucky lad that he had proven himself to be, was the only one who appeared indifferent to the danger.

When it was possible for him to sit upright, for he had been more nearly exhausted than I was, instead of trying to discover all the disadvantages of the place, he began to do his share toward the defense by crawling beneath the fallen timber until he could command a good view of that portion of the forest from which we had come, and at the same time screen his own body from those who were most likely searching with their keen eyes for a living target.

[Pg 254]

I believe Simon Kenton read from my face the thoughts which were in my mind, for he said slowly, as if weighing well each word:

"It must be a battle rather than simply a time of defense. We can hold our position without any great sufferin' for four-an'-twenty hours; but at the end of that time there's bound to be a change if we count on seein' Corn Island again."

"How will you bring about a battle unless the savages are disposed to give us the chance?" I asked petulantly. "They can remain under cover any length of time, and yet keep us in view. It isn't a case of starvation with them."

"A man is never beaten until he loses hope," the scout replied cheerily, and the words were no more than spoken before Paul's rifle rang out sharply.

"There's one the less!" the lad cried triumphantly. "They're creeping up to get a shot at us, an' we've only to keep our eyes open in order to lessen their number greatly 'twixt now and sunrise."

[Pg 255]

These brave words brought me out of my fit of despondency in a twinkling, and with a sense of shame that this lad from the east should show himself more of a man than myself, I crept down to the edge of our barricade.

Now we three lay where could be had a view of all our surroundings, and during the next hour, at the end of which time the sun was sending long shafts of light through the openings in the forest, we succeeded in sending five of the scoundrels to their happy hunting-grounds, or back under cover disabled by serious wounds.

Such a beginning gave me great courage, until I came to realize that it was not probable the reptiles would expose themselves so readily after having received such a sharp lesson.

Simon Kenton had evidently made up his mind to some course of action which promised success, for he said cheerily when it was certain the red snakes had withdrawn to a safe distance:

[Pg 256]

"You two lads are to bottle up some sleep now, for unless I'm mistaken we shall make a change of quarters by sunset."

"There's little hope they'll let us go out of here with our lives," I replied despondently, and the scout added sharply:

"Thus far we have no reason to complain, an' we won't prove ourselves fools by lookin' into the future for trouble. Get to sleep, lads, for at noon I shall claim the same privilege."

Weary as we were, it was not a difficult task to close our eyes in slumber, and within five minutes from the giving of the order we were sleeping soundly, not to awaken until the sun was directly overhead, when the scout shook us into wakefulness.

"You've had a good six hours of rest, an' I'm countin' on scoopin' in only three. Keep a sharp watch till the afternoon is half spent, an' then rouse me."

[Pg 257]

"Why should you not sleep as long as we have?" I asked as Paul crept through the logs to where he could best have a view of our surroundings.

"Because then will have come the time when we must make ready for such a battle as will satisfy yonder brutes that it is not safe to run down three white men with the idea of cornerin' them in a forest like this."

Without explaining what he proposed to do, Simon Kenton betook himself to his well-earned rest, and we lads stood guard to the best of our ability.

Three hours passed in silence, and during that time we had not seen even a tuft of feathers to betoken the whereabouts of an enemy.

By allowing my mind to dwell upon the disagreeable fact that we were without food or water, I was suffering intensely from both hunger and thirst, and because of thus yielding free rein to imagination, I was dispirited and hopeless.

[Pg 258]

Paul took it upon himself to arouse the scout, and once Kenton's eyes were open he set about bringing on the battle of which he had spoken.

A few moments' work with our knives sufficed to provide each of us with a long pole, and then he explained his plan.

According to his orders, we were to lie on the ground with our rifles ready for use, and with the poles make such a rustling of the foliage as would cause the enemy to believe we were creeping out.

It would be but natural the savages should fire whenever they saw a swaying of the bushes or branches; but, because of the length of the poles, we would not be near enough to the point of disturbance to run any great chance of being hit by the bullets.



From out of our barricade whistled three bullets, and every one found its mark. Page 259. *On the Kentucky Frontier.*

Kenton had given the name of "battle" to this maneuver of his; but it was neither more nor less than a trick, and such an one as the savages themselves most delighted in.

[Pg 259]

They had no good cause to be joyous over this one, however, for it worked as Kenton had counted on, and before the painted wolves understood the game, they had received a lesson such as I warrant they never forgot.

When the three of us were in position Simon Kenton gave the signal, and we prodded vigorously with the poles.

In a twinkling half a dozen rifles were discharged from different points amid the foliage, thus showing that the enemy was keeping sharp watch, and we each had a target.

From, out of our barricade whistled three bullets, and every one found its mark!

It was only with difficulty that I repressed a cry of triumph, for now I began to understand that we might soon clear a way for ourselves, unless this band of reptiles had more real courage than their race usually displayed when pitted against white men.

After an interval of five minutes or more we repeated the maneuver, receiving a similar reply as before, and were able to deal death or wounds to another trio.

[Pg 260]

"Six wiped out or disabled in as many minutes!" Simon Kenton said in a low tone of triumph. "What do you think now of my battle, lads?"

"If they will fall into the trap twice more, we can count on having this bank of the river to ourselves," I replied incautiously loud, and the scout said warningly:

"Have a care, Louis, have a care. If they suspect what kind of a game we are playin' there'll be little chance of their doin' as we wish."

Well, lest I draw this poor tale out to such length as to weary him who may read, it is enough if I say that three times more did we succeed in finding targets for our rifles by using the poles vigorously, and I was certain that from the moment the scout was awakened until the savages refused to come out at our bidding, we had sent bullets into no less than thirteen of them.

[Pg 261]

Considering the fact that their number could not have exceeded forty, judging from what we had seen and heard, this work of ours was well calculated to discourage them.

They had poured into the pile of logs no less than an hundred bullets, and yet we had not received a scratch!

I almost forgot that I was hungry or thirsty, for the fever of killing was upon me, and my one hope was that we might draw them two or three times more in order to give the villainous brutes such a lesson in blood-letting as they had never learned before.

In this I was disappointed, however, for the snakes had either come to understand our game, or were drawn off to nurse their wounds, and we saw no more of them.

At nightfall we stole cautiously out from among the fallen timber, and not a shot was sent after us.

A mile or more from the scene of our greatest triumph we made a halt that we might quench our thirst from the river, and during the night our march was less hurried than when we began the race.

[Pg 262]

We stopped for breakfast next morning, after shooting a turkey, and by this time it was certain that the painted reptiles who had relied on spilling our blood, no longer retained such desire at the price we set upon it.

After this we pushed forward at a leisurely pace, and in comparative security, until we arrived at Corn Island, where my mother greeted Paul and me as if we were come from the dead.

What we did there, or what further adventures befell Simon Kenton before he was able to revisit his home in Virginia, is not for me to set down here, since it forms a tale by itself. Neither can I relate how I made a home for my mother in that new settlement which came to be known by the name of Louisville; but it seems necessary I should copy from what another has written, the story of how Major Clarke succeeded in wresting the valley of the Mississippi from the clutches of the British, and with such account I bring this writing to an end, hoping others may find as much pleasure in the reading as I have in the writing of it.

[Pg 263]

"On the twenty-ninth of January, 1779, intelligence was received that Governor Hamilton had marched an expedition against Vincennes, from Detroit, nearly a month previously, and that the town was again in possession of the enemy. It was also said that another and more formidable expedition was to be sent out in the spring to recapture Kaskaskia, and to assail the various posts on the Kentucky frontier. With his usual promptness and energy Colonel Clarke (the Virginia legislature had recently promoted him) prepared to anticipate the enemy, and strike the first blow.

"He planned an expedition against Vincennes, and on the seventh of February commenced his march through the wilderness, with one hundred and seventy-five men. He had previously despatched Captain Rogers and forty men, two four-pounders, and a boat, with orders to force their way up the Wabash to a point near the mouth of White River, and there wait for further orders.

[Pg 264]

"For a whole week Colonel Clarke's party traversed the drowned lands of Illinois, suffering

every privation from wet, cold and hunger. When they arrived at the Little Wabash, at a point where the forks of the stream are three miles apart, they found the intervening space covered with water to a depth of three feet. The points of dry land were five miles apart, and all that distance those hardy soldiers waded the cold snow-flood, sometimes armpit deep.

"On the evening of the eighteenth they halted a little distance from the mouth of Embarrass Creek, and so near Vincennes that they could hear the booming of the evening gun. Here they encamped for the night, and the next morning at dawn, with their faces blackened with gunpowder to make themselves appear hideous, they crossed the river in a boat they had secured, and pushed on through the floods toward the town. [Pg 265]

"Just as they reached dry land, in sight of Vincennes, they captured a resident, and sent him into the town with a letter demanding the immediate surrender of the place and fort. The people, taken by surprise, were greatly alarmed, and believed the expedition to be from Kentucky, composed of the fierce and strong of that advancing commonwealth. Had armed men dropped in their midst from the clouds, they could not have been more astonished, for it seemed impossible for this little band to have traversed the deluged country. The people were disposed to comply with the demand, but Governor Hamilton, who commanded in person, would not allow it.

"A siege commenced, and for fourteen hours a furious conflict continued. The next day the town and fort were surrendered, and the garrison were made prisoners of war. The stars and stripes took the place of the red cross of St. George; a round of thirteen guns proclaimed the victory, and that night the exhausted troops of Colonel Clarke reposed in comfort." [Pg 266]

THE END

A.L. BURT'S PUBLICATIONS

For Young People

BY POPULAR WRITERS.

52-58 Duane Street, New York.

Bonnie Prince Charlie: A Tale of Fontenoy and Culloden. By G. A. HENTY. With 12 full-page Illustrations by GORDON BROWNE. 12mo, cloth, price \$1.00.

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In this story the author gives an account of the fierce struggle between Saxon and Dane for supremacy in England, and presents a vivid picture of the misery and ruin to which the country was reduced by the ravages of the sea-wolves. The hero, a young Saxon thane, taken part in all the battles fought by King Alfred. He is driven from his home, takes to the sea and resists the Danes on their own element, and being pursued by them up the Seine, is present at the long and desperate siege of Paris.

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Boys reading the history of the Punic Wars have seldom a keen appreciation of the merits of the contest. That it was at first a struggle for empire, and afterward for existence on the part of Carthage, that Hannibal was a great and skillful general, that he defeated the Romans at Trebia, Lake Trasimenus, and Cannæ, and all but took Rome, represents pretty nearly the sum total of their knowledge. To let them know more about this momentous struggle for the empire of the world Mr. Henty has written this story, which not only gives in graphic style a brilliant description of a most interesting period of history, but is a tale of exciting adventure sure to secure the interest of the reader.

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Transcriber's Note

Typographical errors corrected in the text:

Page 9 begining changed to beginning
Page 31 towards changed to toward
Page 50 trange changed to strange
Page 69 fight changed to flight
Page 118 It changed to If
Page 144 us changed to as
Page 215 heady changed to heads
Page 218 of changed to or

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ON THE KENTUCKY FRONTIER: A STORY OF THE FIGHTING PIONEERS OF THE WEST ***

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