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Won: A Tale of Wolfe and Quebec, by F. S.
Brereton

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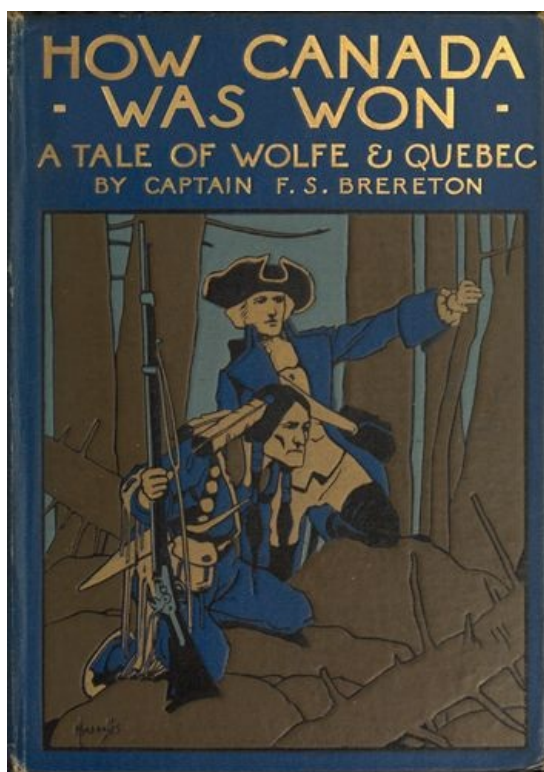
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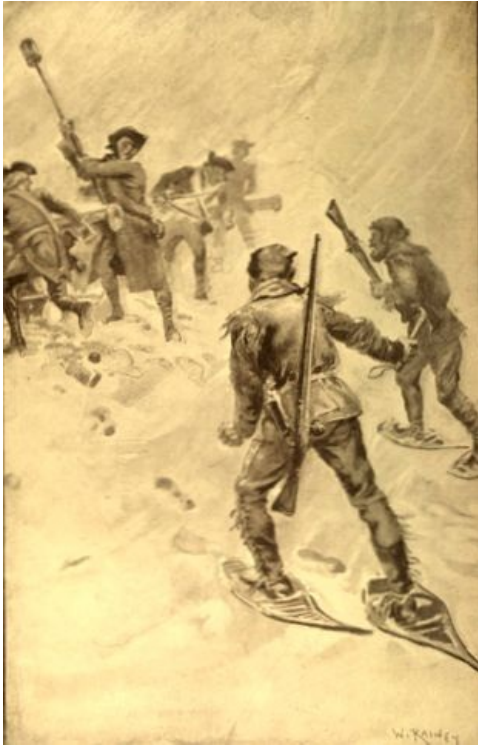
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STEVE AND MAC CAPTURING THE FRENCH GUNS

How Canada was Won

A Tale of Wolfe and Quebec

BY
CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON

Author of "With Wolseley to Kumasi" "Jones of the 64th"
"With Roberts to Candahar" "A Soldier of Japan"
"Roger the Bold" &c. &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I.

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Chapter I

The Camp on the River

"Waal? What did yer see? Clear, I reckon."

Jim Hardman looked up swiftly as a couple of tall figures came silently into the clearing in the centre of which the camp fire burned, and he paused for a moment in the task which occupied him. He was squatting on his heels, after the fashion of the Indians and of all backwoodsmen, and was engaged in cleaning the long barrel of his musket, turning the weapon over with loving care, as if it were a child to whom he was devoted. Indeed Jim had no more faithful friend or servant. For this long musket had been his companion on many and many a hunting and prospecting expedition during the past twenty years. He scarcely ever laid it down, but carried it the day long, usually ready in his hands, or when the times were peaceful and quiet, slung across his slender shoulders. Jim could tell tales of how this faithful weapon had brought down buffalo and deer and many another animal, and had helped him to gather the stores of skins in exchange for which he obtained those few luxuries which his simple nature needed. In his more communicative moods he could narrate how the bullets which he had moulded with the aid of a hot camp fire and a supply of lead had been directed against men, against the fierce Indian inhabitants of this Ohio valley, who for years past had waged a ceaseless and pitiless warfare against all white invaders of their old hunting grounds.

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Indeed, "Hunting" Jim, as he was styled and known by all the backwoodsmen in those parts, had need to care for his weapon, for without it he would be lost, and his life would be at the mercy of the first redskin who crossed his path.

"Waal?" he repeated, in his backwoods drawl, as he vigorously rubbed at the shining barrel. "Reckon we're through 'em. There ain't a one in sight. Ef there is, Steve and Silver Fox'll know all about 'em."

He looked with approval at his weapon, and getting to his feet he slung it across his shoulders. Then he stepped softly across to the fire, and bending over it, pushed the long ramrod suspended over the embers a little farther on to the forked sticks which held it. A couple of pieces of bear meat were skewered upon the rod, and had been frizzling there for the past quarter of an hour. Now, as they were placed right over the heat they set up a low-voiced but merry tune, while an appetizing odour assailed the nostrils of the two who had come to the camp. One of these two was without doubt a Red Indian, for he was decked elaborately after the custom of his race; his face was freely daubed with paint, which gave him a hideous and cruel appearance that a feathered head-dress served to increase. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with long, sinewy arms and legs, and gave one the impression that he was in perfect condition and trained to stand the utmost hardship. He nodded to Jim, and took his place in front of the fire, squatted on his heels, and stared silently at the embers. A minute later he opened his lips and spoke in the Indian tongue, his gaze still fixed on the fire.

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"My brothers can sleep and eat in peace and contentment," he said, in tones which were dignified and not unmusical. "Silver Fox and the pale-face youth whom you call Steve, but known to us as Hawk, for his eyes are keen, keener even than are mine or my brother's,— have been through the forest and have watched the river. Our enemies have gone, vanished into the woods. We know this for certain, for we came upon their track. They were journeying towards the head waters of the river."

It was a long speech for Silver Fox, and having delivered it, he felt for the buckskin bag in which he carried his precious store of tobacco, filled his pipe and set fire to the weed by taking one of the burning sticks in his long, thin fingers and lifting it to the bowl.

Meanwhile his companion, who had emerged with him from the thick forest which surrounded the camp, advanced to the fire, sniffed appreciatively, and glanced at the meat which frizzled over the flames, in a manner which showed that the sight was a pleasant

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one. Then he slipped his musket from his shoulders, and stood for a moment to his full height, thoughtfully regarding Silver Fox and Hunting Jim. He, too, was tall and lissom. From the top of his coon-skin cap to the bottom of his soft moccasins he measured a good six feet. He was dressed in a leather shirt elaborately fringed, as was the habit with all hunters, while his legs were encased in fringed leather leggings and in soft moccasins, all of which he had manufactured from skins he himself had obtained. Stephen Mainwaring looked a typical backwoodsman, and as the sun struck upon his well-developed figure, upon his open face, all tanned with long exposure to the wind and the weather, and upon his strong brown arms and hands, even his bitterest enemy would have been forced to admit that he was a fine young fellow, that there was as much strength in his face, in that square, resolute chin, and in those steady, fearless-looking eyes as could well be found, and that his whole appearance gave promise of honesty, a sterling good nature, and a temper which was not to be easily ruffled. Had there been any doubt on the last point Steve's joviality on this fine summer's morning would soon have set the matter at rest. He might only that moment have risen from his blanket, so fresh and gay was he, and no one would have dreamed that he and Silver Fox had been tramping the forest since night had fallen, scouting for an enemy whom they and their comrades had good cause to fear. He sat down suddenly, dragged off his soaked moccasins, and his coon-skin hat, which glistened with the heavy dew that had fallen upon it, and placed them close to the embers. Then he turned a jovial face to Jim.

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"Waal, I reckon you can smoke that ere pipe of yours with ease and comfort, Jim," he sang out, imitating exactly the drawl of the huntsman. "Reckon Silver Fox and I can eat jest all we're able to get our fingers on, and can then put in a bit of sleep. There ain't no Injuns this side of forty mile away."

He laughed merrily as Jim looked severely at him, and taking the ramrod in his hand, turned it so as to expose the farther side of the meat to the heat.

"All's clear," he went on suddenly, in his natural tones, speaking in a manner which showed that though he looked a typical backwoodsman he had had an education, and as regards his conversation, was fit to mix with the gentry of New York, or those of Boston or Charlestown, or even with those of London itself.

"That's a lad for yer, Judge," said Jim, scowling playfully at Steve, and then turning to one of the other figures standing or sitting about the camp. "This Hawk gets born out in the settlements and gets took straight away right into the backwoods. He larns to sit a scrawny pony when he's no higher than a dozen piled-up dollars, and to shoot a gun when he ain't got the strength to stand up to the jar one of these muskets gives. Reckon I've seen him knocked endways with the kick many and many a time."

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He looked for an answer, and waited while the broad-shouldered backwoodsman whom he addressed sat up and stared thoughtfully back at him and then at Steve, who squatted by the fire. "Judge" Mainwaring, as he was usually styled, was a big-boned, burly man, bearded and as rugged as the oaks which grew in the wood. His eyes were deep-set and thoughtful, and he had the air of a man who reflects, who says little, and that only after due consideration. Indeed Judge Mainwaring had a reputation for wisdom in the backwoods. No man was more respected in the neighbourhood of the Mohawk country, and there was no more skilful hunter, no more courageous Indian tracker than this big man. He spoke seldom, and then always to the point, and in a manner which proved that he had at one time been very different from these rough, honest fellows of the backwoods with whom he now spent his days. Jim and his comrades had had a talk about Tom Mainwaring or the Judge, many and many a time, and had even endeavoured to worm some of his history from him. But always without success.

"Reckon we'd better shut up," said Jim, after one of these many conversations, when he and Judge and some five others had been gathered at Tom Mainwaring's log hut in the backwoods. "He don't mean to tell whar he's from, nor what he was, and small blame to him. He's here, stout and plucky, a good shot, and jest the fiercest hater I knows of them varmint of redskins. Reckon that's enough."

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"And need he's had to hate them too," another had added. "Reckon Judge don't care for much after the boy, than to get even with them

varmint."

That was indeed the case. No one knew Tom Mainwaring's history, or could even conjecture where he came from, what calling he had followed or what his fortunes had been. To the many questions with which he had at first been bombarded he had replied shortly and with perfect good temper, but in such a manner that none of those who were so curious were any the wiser. Yes, he knew Boston, and New York, and London. He had lived in all three, and he knew France. That was as far as he could or would go, and the settlers who had picked their holdings in the Ohio valley, to the south of the giant lakes of Erie and Ontario, had to be content. He had come to them one fine spring time, a silent man, bringing a wife and a young son on the back of the one horse which he led. He had set up his log hut like the rest, and had fished and shot, and exchanged his pelts for the few necessaries required by these pioneers of the American forests beyond the Alleghany Mountains. His wife was French, that they knew for a fact; while Judge, and in due course Steve also, could speak the language fluently. But where he came from, why this educated man, who lacked nothing, not even dollars, for it was an open secret that he had abundant means,—should come to the backwoods and there bury himself and his wife and boy none could imagine. But it was apparent that, whatever the reason was, Tom Mainwaring had no need to be ashamed of it. His honest dealings with others, his high principles, and the manner in which he had devoted himself to the education of his boy had proved over and over again that whatever the mystery, there was nothing about it that could call a blush of shame to his cheeks.

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As to his undying hate of the Indians, that was easily explained. After all, he did not differ very much in that from the few neighbours who surrounded him. But he had undoubtedly more cause for hatred. That same mystery which was for ever a source of wondering curiosity to these rough pioneers of the forest, took Tom Mainwaring over the Alleghany mountains once in a while in the direction of the American coast. Perhaps he went to New York, perhaps to Boston, and it was even possible, seeing that on occasion he had been absent for six months, that he had been to England—wherever he went, one of these journeys had caused him to leave his wife and child in the care of friendly neighbours, and during his absence these unhappy people had been raided by the relentless Indians, the women of the party had been killed, while Steve and one other who happened to be picking berries in the forest, had alone escaped.

"Reckon that air enough to set any man who is a man agin the varmint," Jim had said long ago. "Judge ain't been the same sence he come back to find the boy alone, and the wife killed and scalped. He's got kinder hard and fierce, and don't them Injuns know it! And now that Steve's got big and grown, and able to look for hisself, the log hut ain't no more use to Judge. Reckon he's happier on the trail."

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"There's a lad for yer, Judge," repeated Jim. "Listen to his sauce. He ain't no respect for his betters now that he's got the knack of shootin'."

"It's his spirit, Jim," replied Tom Mainwaring, looking with kindling eye at Steve, and relaxing so far as to smile. "He can use his tongue as well as he can shoot. So all is clear, Steve?"

"Yes, all clear, father. Silver Fox and I trailed round the camp far out, and never came upon a track till early. That hunting tribe that got on to our trace yesterday has given the matter up, and there's no one to harm us anywhere near. We struck a party of Mohawks up the river. They're watching the borders."

"And good need they'll have, too," said Tom with emphasis. "I think there was never such a time as this for raids and murders. We have to thank the French and their Indians for that."

There was silence for a while in the camp, Steve nodding to Silver Fox and chatting in low tones as soon as the meat was cooked, while Jim and Tom stared at the embers, both engrossed with their own thoughts. And while the two at the fire discuss their breakfast of bear's meat, and the two sturdy backwoodsmen stare at the embers and think, let us take a closer look at the camp to which we have already been introduced, and at its surroundings.

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It was pitched in a small natural clearing on the Mohawk river, a little before its junction with the Hudson, at the mouth of which

New York is situated. Not the New York of to-day, with its regular streets and avenues, its towering buildings, well-named "sky-scrapers," its gigantic hotels, its tenement dwellings and its mansions where millionaires hide from the inquisitive eyes of the people; but the New York of the year 1756, with many Dutch among the inhabitants, who still clung to the city which had once been theirs, but at that time belonged to the English. New York with its smaller and, compared with modern days, unpretentious dwellings above which the only thing that towered was the steeple of the church. South and west of the camp where Steve and his comrades rested was Albany, an up-country Dutch settlement, which boasted many wealthy and aristocratic Dutch, and offered always a means whereby the hunters and trappers of English descent could barter the pelts which they had collected during the previous winter. It was whispered, too, that here, in this quiet Albany, tenanted by Puritan Dutch, French *voyageurs*, and *coureurs de bois*, the backwoodsmen and trappers of that portion of Northern America then owned by France, and now known as Canada, were able to sell the loot obtained from the numerous English settlements which they and their Indian helpers had attacked and captured.

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For there was war between the colonial French and the colonial English, and for some little time now the two nations had been engaged in a cruel frontier struggle. In Europe, however, France and England were outwardly at peace, so far as those in America knew, though the spring of the year above mentioned saw England's patience at last destroyed, and a formal declaration of war made. Still, these backwoodsmen had no notion of that, nor had the numerous French *voyageurs* and soldiers who had come across Lake Erie and had marched down into the valley of the Ohio. That was the disputed ground, where the bold English pioneers had settled their log huts and taken up holdings, believing themselves to be on British soil. And now hordes of French, accompanied by their priests and by thousands of Indians, were pushing south and west, were expelling the British colonists, and too often were exterminating them.

No wonder Hunting Jim and Judge Mainwaring and their comrades took precautions against surprise. They were in a country which was overrun by enemies, and since they had set out from their settlement ten days before, they had observed the greatest caution. The huge birch bark canoe in which they had paddled down the Mohawk had never left the centre of that stream, save when night had fallen, and always two of the party had had their eyes glued on the tree-covered banks. In rear of them, piled high in a second canoe, which was attached to the one they paddled, were their pelts, a big store of valuable skins, for which they hoped to obtain a good exchange. It was guarded by one of the two Mohawk Indians who accompanied them, and who sat at the stern, musket in hand.

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And so for ten days they had travelled, their camp settled in some clearing at night, sometimes without a fire, for the smoke or the glare would have brought a host about them, and always with two of their number out in the woods keeping careful guard. But now they were safe. It was seldom that French *voyageurs* had penetrated into the English settlements as far as this, while their Indian allies stood in fear of the six united tribes of redskins situated hereabouts, and known as the Iroquois.

About the camp trees clustered thickly, pines and oaks, maple and birch, while scattered here and there amongst the trunks were whortleberry and cranberry bushes, honeysuckle, wild rose trees and bracken. In many and many a spot the scarlet tupelo and the sumac grew bright against the green, with purple asters and balm, and the delicate blue flower of the gentian to keep them company.

A narrow exit led to the Mohawk river, glistening in the sun, and reflecting the deep green of its forest boundaries in deep pools, where the stream ran sluggishly, and where the surface was broken every now and again by the sudden rising of a fish. Wild rice grew in banks at the water's edge, while clusters of the resin plant and of wild lilies could be seen by those who cared to look for them. No wonder that Steve Mainwaring looked fresh and jolly, for these were the surroundings in which he had passed his seventeen years, without a care, save the loss of his mother, which he was too young at the time to realize, and with that spice of danger about him which has drawn men of every race and creed to such parts. Steve knew

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the forest by heart, could tell the difference between the sharp call of the chickadee and the blue bird, and the howl of fox or wolf. No Indian was more conversant with the secrets of nature than he, and none was more at home in the heart of these forest wildernesses. It was, indeed, his home, and he was never happier than when on the trail.

"Reckon ef we get away within an hour we'll fetch up at Albany before the dark comes," said Jim at length, as he watched Steve and Silver Fox eating. "We'll give yer that time for a smoke, young feller, and then strike camp. Jest raise Mac and that 'ere Talkin' Baar."

He nodded across the camp to the far corner where two figures lay beneath blankets, sleeping lightly. That they were easily roused was clear, for as Steve and his companion had come into the clearing they sat up, only to snuggle under their blankets again. But as Jim called out the name of Talking Bear, one of the figures started into a sitting position, followed by the second.

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"We'll be on the road in an hour," explained Jim. "Reckon you two have had a sleep, and ken help me and Judge to get the canoes afloat and the pelts packed into 'em. Rouse yerself, Mac. Never did see such a man for sleep."

"And, faith, niver did Oi set eyes on a man what spoke so much. Sleep did ye say? Sure it's these last two hours Oi've been lyin' alongside of Talking Bear, wid me eyes tight shut, thrying to get off and drame. But ye talk so much, Huntin' Jim. Ye'd kape a regimint awhake, so ye would."

The Irishman roused himself with a growl, and throwing off his blanket, strode over to Jim and shook his fist in his face, a broad grin setting his lips wide asunder, and showing a set of strong teeth which were somewhat blackened with constant use of his pipe. He was short and sturdy, and in spite of the severeness of his hunting dress, which was identical with those worn by his comrades, he presented a comical appearance. His skin cap had fallen off, and showed a shock head of very brilliant red hair, continuing down his cheeks to his chin, where it ended in a straggling beard of the same vivid colour. Indeed, Mac was not good-looking, but he had a pair of genial, kindly eyes, and was a merry fellow, whose jests and laughter kept the spirits of his fellows from falling. Once upon a time he had worn a uniform, and had fought for his country. Then he had come to America, and by degrees had drifted to the Alleghany settlements, from which his fondness for danger and adventure had attracted him to the backwoods. And here he was, boon companion to Jim and the Judge, a staunch man in the fight, as merry and as light-hearted as a child.

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"Will ye niver larn to keep yer tongue in betwixt yer teeth, Huntin' Jim?" he asked, severely, shaking his fist within an inch of the black bowl which Jim held between his teeth. "Begorra! Take a lisson from the Judge. Reckon he's that silent folks can sleep and take their rest. Git up wid yerself and lind a hand."

He made a sudden dive at Jim's shoulder, and swung him to his feet, for Mac was very powerful. Then, still shaking his fist at the grinning backwoodsman, he hustled him down to the banks of the river. And from there their laughter and their shouts came back to the camp, while Steve watched their antics. Then Silver Fox handed him his tobacco, and soon they were smoking and staring at the embers, now and again exchanging words in the Mohawk language. Presently a shout from Mac told that the canoes were laden, and at the summons Silver Fox and his brother, a painted and bedecked Indian like himself, gathered their blankets about their shoulders, took up their muskets, and trailed off down to the bank, leaving Steve and his father to stamp out the fire, to look round for any forgotten trifle, and then to follow.

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"Talkin' Baar's turn for the canoe with the pelts," said Jim, taking the lead. "Me and you'll paddle, Judge, while this 'ere critter of yours and Silver Fox keeps an eye on the banks. Hop in easy thar. Mac, I quite forgot you war there. Slip in in front of me. Now, off we go."

They pushed out into the river, and took to their paddles. That evening, just before darkness fell, they pulled into the shore where the township of Albany was situated, and having found a suitable spot, made for the land. A fire was soon blazing, and within a little while they were eating. When the moon got up that night and rode

high in the heavens above them, it looked down upon a silent camp, upon the dying embers of a fire, and upon five silent figures stretched on the ground and hidden beneath their blankets. Within a few feet of their heads stood one solitary figure, erect and motionless, swathed in a blanket. The long barrel of a musket stood up stark against the moon, while the brilliant light showed up the features of Talking Bear, alert and watchful, as careful here of the safety of his pale-face brothers as he would have been in the heart of a hostile country.

Chapter II

French Outlaws and Robbers

"We won't waste no time in gettin' rid of them pelts," said Hunting Jim, early on the following morning, as the little party sat about their fire, which was close to the bank of the Hudson river and within a few yards of the nearest house. "I don't reckon Albany's much of a place fer us jest now. There's the French up by Lake George, and a Dutchman I struck at sunrise, a chap as round as a barrel; guessed that they or their Injuns might hop in here any time. What do yer say, Judge?"

"We need not fear them," was the calm answer, given after more than a minute's silence. "They will hardly dare to raid this place, for at the present time they are doing their utmost to conciliate the Dutch and win them over to their own side. The same may be said of the Indians. You see, boys, we colonists are far more numerous than the French, though they are far better led and organised. Our people seem to devote all their time to squabbling amongst themselves."

"While the poor white critters out in the woods gets scalped by fifties and hundreds. Reckon that's a shame," growled Jim. "But about these pelts."

"Lave it to Steve," burst in Mac, putting his strong fingers through his shock head of tousled hair. "He's our shopman, so he is, and faith he'll get as big a price as any. Bigger, me bhoy, so lave it to him."

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"You're right, Mac. Steve's the boy," Jim agreed, with a nod, while Tom Mainwaring smiled approvingly as his son's name was mentioned. "Yer see, that thar feller Schiller's as hard as a stone I reckon, and when it comes to a deal with me, or you, Mac, he jest twists us kinder round his finger. He knows we ain't got no other market, and so he jest offers what'd be a fair price for a dozen of the skins. Then, if we looks disgusted, as like as not he'll put a little extry to his price as a kind of bait. Reckon he's 'cute. He knows we've got to take his stuff or well nigh starve before we reach another settlement. I've felt often that I was being robbed by the skunk, but what air a man to do? Refuse did yer say, Mac?"

"That's so, me bhoy. Indade ye wouldn't be giving the pelts away, so ye wouldn't."

"Then jest you try that 'ere game," exclaimed Jim, somewhat hotly. "That chap Schiller's got the broadest back and the coolest temper I ever saw. It's what he offers or nothing. If you ain't pleased, he jest gets up from his chair and starts to walk into his house. Reckon a fellow can't stand that. He's got to soften and give way. But Steve's the boy. Steve, will yer trade with this 'ere Schiller?"

"Ready and willing, Jim," was the tall lad's eager answer. "I did it last time, and I'll try again on this occasion. But mind you, you must back me up."

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"We'll do that," sang out Jim. "Then bring them pelts along."

They went to the pile of skins, and each taking a load, marched into the town of Albany, leaving Tom Mainwaring and the Indians to guard the camp. And a strange procession they made as they came along the wide street, past the prosperous Dutch houses and the well-dressed and comfortable-looking owners. Not that they attracted much attention, for hunters and trappers were a common sight in the streets of Albany in those days, and pelts often exchanged hands there.

To the trapper, the tough and hardy woodsman who had been scouring the forest during the winter and late summer before, hunting game and caring for the skins, this visit to Albany was one of no small importance. This expedition and the stores he would obtain were a source of interest and expectation during the long cold months, and the trade he could do was of no small importance. For each skin meant so much in the way of powder, so much lead, or perhaps a new musket. With the goods he obtained he went back to his log hut, and by dint of great care managed to eke them out over the winter. As for the trader who took the pelts, he found an eager

market for them in New York, and made a huge profit over the transaction.

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Bearing their pelts on their shoulders, with their muskets in full evidence, and the blades of their keen tomahawks glittering beneath their belts, the three trappers marched down the street sturdily, their heads in the air, looking what they were, a thoroughly independent and hardy trio. And presently they came to Hans Schiller's house, and saw the negro servants of the trader bustling about the place. Dropping their pelts on the stone flagging of the *stoep*, Steve and his comrades squatted down on the steps.

"Hi, there, my black lady," sang out Jim, "reckon we want that Dutch master o' yours. Fetch the boy along."

The negro servant giggled, stared with open admiration in her big eyes at the sturdy backwoodsman, and then departed into the house. They heard her call out in broken Dutch, and soon a heavy tread within showed that someone was coming.

"Now, Steve, reckon you've got to best this 'ere Schiller," said Jim in a warning voice. "Yer did the trade for us last year, and there ain't a doubt as he was more liberal than ever before. See what yer can do this time. H-hush! it's the old gal. He's trying the same old game."

As he spoke an exceedingly fat and unwieldy woman waddled to the open door of the house and pushed her head out. She looked calmly, almost contemptuously at the trio seated on the *stoep*, and then called out in very broken English.

"Hans Schiller," she called, "there's mens here." Then turning again to the trappers she cried, "Vot for yo vant?"

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Steve tapped the piled-up skins. "Pelts for exchange, madam," he said, with a little bow. "We are waiting to see Hans Schiller. Ah, here he is. Fill up your pipes, boys."

Steve had been to Hans Schiller before, and had gone all through the excitement of trading with him. He remembered that on the last occasion he was constantly interrupted by Jim or by Mac, and thought that a pipe might help them to remain silent.

"That's the sort, boys," he said. "And just remember, a man can trade best when he's left to himself. Keep a hold on your tongues. Howd'y Mr. Schiller? It's a fine summer."

The Dutchman, who had just emerged from the doorway, thrust out a hot and very fat hand, and allowed Steve to grip it, wincing as the strong fingers squeezed him.

"Stop! These men are wild beasts," he exclaimed beneath his breath, and in somewhat better English than his wife boasted. "He squeeze my hand so last time, and the others always the same. Good day, gentlemens. You vant me? Ah, you have some skins. That is sad, ver sad."

He cast a swift look at the piled-up pelts as he exchanged a handshake with Jim and Mac; and Steve, who watched him carefully, noticed that a covetous look came over his fat face. But Hans was quick to smother it.

"Ver sad indeet," he repeated, shaking his bald head. "You come to Albany ver late. All the trapper come and gone perhaps month ago. I hab bought many skin this summer."

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"Then we'll not trouble you, Mr. Schiller," said Steve quickly, giving Jim a knowing wink. "We came straight to you because we have always been here. But if you've already bought as much as you want—why, mates, we'll get on further."

It was ludicrous to watch the expression on the various faces. Mac, with the quick wit of his race, grasped Steve's meaning and intention in an instant, and puffing clouds of smoke from his pipe, rose to his feet and shouldered one of the bales. But Jim possessed a somewhat slower intelligence in such matters. He was no trader, and knew nothing of the subtleties of bargaining. His mouth opened wide in his consternation.

"Thunder!" he began. "Blest ef the lad——"

"Jim, what are you waiting for?" asked Steve suddenly. "Can't you hear? Mr. Schiller's bought all he wants, and now we're off down the town to the other folks. Bustle up. We want to get out of this as soon as possible."

"Not so quick, frens," exclaimed Hans, putting a restraining hand on Steve's shoulder and speaking in somewhat anxious tones. "I can buy more if they are good. Sit down and let me see them. Gretchen!"

The three trappers returned to their seats, and the trading was begun. Steve had a very good notion of the value of the skins, and he knew that high prices were to be obtained for them in New York. He was also aware that the trapper as a rule bore all the fatigue and risk of getting the pelts, and was miserably rewarded. He was not avaricious, but at the same time he knew the needs of his comrades, and, unlike them, had the courage to face a possible failure in the negotiations.

"I shall be ruint! Indeet, you will take all that I hab," grumbled Hans, when all the skins were displayed, and Steve had demanded more than double the amount of powder, lead, and other commodities which the Dutchman offered. "I shall be ruint! Nod anoder dollar's worth do you hab. Dat is all. De last cent."

Steve smiled one of his easiest smiles and looked coaxingly at the trader.

"Come, Mr. Schiller," he said pleasantly, "don't let it be said that you lost such a chance. This is the finest lot of skins that you have seen, that you admit. A pity if you let it go to the others farther down the street. Come now, make another offer."

Not for one moment did he become flurried or lose that air of confident assurance which he had worn from the very first. And after a little while the deal was settled and the trio rose to go.

"Reckon you're the 'cutest feller as ever I set eyes on," said Jim, as they trudged back to the camp, half a dozen of the Dutchman's negro servants in their wake bearing sundry bales and boxes. "That 'ere deal war the finest as ever I listened to, and, shucks! ain't you a cool 'un! I didn't jest dare to look at yer too often, nor at Mac nor Hans. I jest sat and smoked, gripping at me pipe ter keep meself from splitting with laughter. Reckon it war better nor an Injun palaver, and that 'ere Hans knew he was beat. Yer watched him give a gasp when you was for movin'?"

"I did," answered Steve. "You can be sure that Hans Schiller lives and grows fat on his earnings. He need never stir out of his house till late in the summer. Then he floats down the Hudson in a flat-bottomed boat, and trades his skins at New York for dollars. A few of those buy the stuff he needs for trading with the trappers, and back he comes, with a sack and more of dollars, and with nothing to do but smoke his pipe all through the winter."

"We've had some friends enquiring after us," said Steve's father when the three had returned to the camp. "A couple of Indians have been questioning Silver Fox and Talking Bear. See them over there."

They swung round, and looking in the direction he indicated, caught sight of a couple of feathered heads peeping from behind the trees.

"I don't like them fellers," said Jim quickly, staring at the heads till they were withdrawn. "What air they after?"

"What do they and their sort generally want?" was Tom's rejoinder.

"Scalps and lead, and sich things as we've jest brought here," Jim answered swiftly. "Reckon we'll have to keep an eye round for them varmint. What do yer say, Silver Fox?"

He suddenly broke into the Mohawk tongue, which all understood, and for a little while all joined in an earnest and low-toned conversation.

"They ain't after no good, I'll swear," said Jim, with emphasis.

"Reckon we'll have to go careful, mates."

"Then I vote that we give it out that we are staying here till to-morrow or the next day," broke in Steve. "That will make them keep a careless watch upon us perhaps, and to-night we can slip away unseen."

It was a good suggestion, and brought a grunt of approval from Jim.

"It air a good idea, young feller," he said, as he smoked his pipe.

"Jest get out something to eat and pass it round. After that we'll put in a sleep, as if we was fixed to stay here best part of a week. Ef any one comes axin' questions, jest tell 'em what we've arranged."

At such a time all knew well that they could not be too careful, for

though a large number of French and their Indian allies would not have ventured to Albany, seeing that this was undoubted British territory, and the Dutch were partisans of the colonists, still the sleepy little trading town was just the place where a roving band of small dimensions might take up its quarters, or rather in its immediate neighbourhood, sending some of their scouts into the town to gather information. And a small band, such as Steve and his friends comprised, with their store of powder and other trade goods, would be a very valuable capture. They could not therefore be too careful, and in order to make it appear as if they were intending to stay for a day or more, Steve and Silver Fox lay down to sleep, while Tom and the others lounged about the camp.

"Reckon I'll stroll along the houses," said Jim, after a while. "Maybe I'll see some more of these 'ere fellows."

He rose to his feet without another word, and was on the point of leaving the camp when Steve sat up.

"I'll come too, Jim," he cried out. "I can't sleep, and a little exercise will do me good."

"Then hop along, young 'un. One of these days, when you've grown older and ha' got more larnin', you'll find it's a wise man who puts in sleep when he's the chance. Pick up that 'ere gun. Yer never knows when a bullet won't be useful."

They left their friends lolling about the camp, and strolled into the town. There were one or two stores to be found, and they hung about these for a little while, staring with all a backwoodsman's curiosity at the goods displayed for sale.

Then they strolled on again till they reached the far end of the street.

"Reckon ther's one of them skunks a watchin'," said Jim, suddenly stopping and calmly filling his pipe. "Jest you walk on, Steve, while I get a light. It'll give me a chanst to turn round."

He sought for his tinder and steel, and began to strike the flint, turning his back to the wind and to his young companion, who strolled on. Two minutes later he had come up to Steve again.

"Jest stroll on as we air, easy like," he said in low tones. "I war right. One of them redskin varmint's got his eyes on us."

"Then we'll slip into the wood up here, as if for a stroll, and when we're hidden we'll turn and watch. What do you say, Jim?"

"That's the ticket, lad. Easy does it."

A little while later the two were making their way through the wood, which grew densely close up to the houses at this end of Albany. They threaded their way in amongst the trees in single file, each unslinging his musket as he stepped out of sight of the road. When they had gone a quarter of a mile Jim came to a sudden halt.

"Jest take cover, Steve," he said softly. "I'll get ahead, so as to let that Injun guess we're still movin'. When he comes along, stand up in his way. That'll put a stop to his little game for to-day at any rate, and'll let him see as we're awake."

A moment later the crash of brushwood being swept aside told that Jim was pushing on into the wood, making far more noise than he would otherwise have done. Steve took his stand in a dense mass of bush, and stepping on to the trunk of a fallen tree, kept a careful watch on the track which they had just covered. And very soon he caught a fleeting glimpse of a feathered head, and of the tip of a barrel. Within three minutes a painted redskin suddenly came into full view, his eyes glued on the track. He was stepping along at a rapid pace, his nostrils distended, his feet making not a sound as he trod, and all his senses engaged in tracking those who had preceded him. As he came opposite the bush, Steve stepped out without so much as a rustle and confronted the man, causing him to come to a sudden stop. For once the coolness of an Indian was upset. He gave a low grunt of astonishment, and in a twinkling his musket was presented at Steve's head. For just one brief instant our hero stared into the barrel, and then, quick as thought, he ducked. There was a loud report, a tongue of flame and smoke spurted almost into his face, and his coon-skin cap was lifted from his head and carried into the bush behind. Then, long before he could use his own weapon, the Indian was upon him, his keen tomahawk gleaming in his hand. Lucky it was for Steve that the stock of his musket caught the blade

of the Indian's weapon, for had it not done so, his head would have been crushed by the blow. But though taken unawares, fortune was on his side, and an involuntary movement warded off the blow. Then he dropped his musket, grasped the Indian's arm, and in an instant they were rolling on the ground in a death struggle, the redskin making frantic efforts to strike with his tomahawk, while Steve gripped the red-painted throat with his fingers, and clung there with all his strength. Not a cry did either give. It was one of those silent and desperate contests which the backwoods had often seen, and nothing but the gasping breaths of the combatants told what was happening.



"THE INDIAN WAS UPON HIM, HIS KEEN TOMAHAWK GLEAMING IN HIS HAND"

"Reckon that war a close shave, young 'un," said Jim, in his quiet voice, some few minutes later, staring at Steve as he lay breathing heavily on the ground. "That 'ere varmint was out to kill, and didn't reckon as you'd get a grip of his throat so early. Take a word from Jim. When you've got the best of an Injun, never feel safe till he's dead. There ain't nothing in this world to touch 'em for cunnin'. He knew you was holding his tomahawk arm, and in another half minute he'd have been strangled. So he dropped his blade and used his two hands to shake yer off. Lucky I come along."

Jim had indeed arrived just in the nick of time, and it was well for Steve that his tomahawk had put a sudden end to the contest.

"Reckon it'll be a case of walk quick," said Jim, after a few moments' silence. "We can hide this here critter for a few hours, maybe a day or more. But they'll find him sure enough, and then there'll be a howl. Best get back to the camp." He then picked the dead man up, and stepping some yards away into the thickest bush, placed the body beside a fallen trunk.

"They'd find that as easy as walk," he said, as he returned, "but we'll put 'em off the trail. Come along, young 'un. We'll get back to the camp."

"And what about the other Indian?" said Steve suddenly. "He's watching there, isn't he?"

"Reckon that's so, Steve."

"Do you think that he and this man were alone, Jim?" asked our hero.

"You ain't so 'cute by half as I thought yer," was the answer.

"Reckon there's a band of 'em that has made Albany their station. Like as not they've wiped out a power of small trading trappers. These here chaps air their scouts."

"Then let's find the band and take a look at them. Look here, Jim, we'll make through the wood till close to the camp, and pick up the tracks of these scouts. Then we'll——"

It was comical to watch Jim as he grasped his young companion's intentions. He swept his skin cap from his head, and darted a keen look at him.

"That air 'cute," he said. "Reckon I withdraws what I've said. That air the movement for us."

Without further conversation they struck off into the forest, Steve following closely in the wake of the hunter, and neither making so much as a sound. Presently, when they judged that they were approaching their own camp, they came to a halt.

"I've been thinkin' of that 'ere gun shot," said Jim. "But these trees has made it safe. Reckon no one at this end has heard the sound. Let's divide."

A quarter of an hour later, when they came together at the same spot, Steve was able to report that he had come upon a trail in the forest, and that the marks showed plainly that it had been used by two men at least, and probably by half a dozen.

"It's been in use for a couple of months, I should say, Jim, and I think that quite a number must have been along it. There are fresh marks of two moccasined feet."

"Then we'll strike along it and see where it takes us, young feller," was the answer. "We've dropped upon somethin' as may save our scalps. Jest strike off for it. I seed that other varmint keepin' watch on the camp. He ain't got a thought that his brother has gone to the happy huntin' grounds. That 'ere shot never come to his ears, or else he'd have been looking into the matter by now. Reckon the strong wind and the trees drowned it."

They stood for a few moments preparing their muskets, each powdering the pan afresh, and looking to the flint, for a misfire might have disastrous consequences. Then Steve led the way, and in a little while they had struck into the trail which he had found. An hour's fast walking took them some six miles into the forest, when, seeing that the trail still went on, they broke into a dog trot, which both were well able to keep up for hours at a time. As it happened, however, another hour took them to some rising ground, where the forest grew as thick as ever, and where other tracks, many of them quite fresh ones too, told them that they were in the immediate neighbourhood of a camp.

"That air the whiff of terbacca," said Jim, raising his voice barely to a whisper, and sniffing at the air like a dog. "We're makin' up wind, Steve, and ef I ain't right, why——"

"It's smoke," answered Steve with conviction. "Let's get on."

Stealing forward with their bodies close to the ground, it was not long before the two came in sight of the camp. It was similar to any other trapper's camp in its surroundings. There was a fire in the centre of a narrow clearing, and three or four rough skin shelters were erected under the shadow of the trees. Lounging round the fire were some twenty redskins, while a squaw was busily engaged in tending some cooking pots which swung over the flames.

"This air a find," whispered Jim, squeezing Steve's arm. "These here critters has come to stay, and I reckon there ain't any other redskins within miles, or else this camp would ha' been discovered long ago. A hul tribe might camp under the noses of these fat Dutchmen without a one bein' the wiser."

"And just look at their stores," whispered Steve, pointing to a number of barrels and sacks and bales piled up beneath one of the skin shelters.

"The critters!" growled Jim. "That air the trade of many a small band of trappers same as us. Reckon them chaps has plenty of scalps. Look thar!"

This time there was an unusual amount of emphasis in his words, while his long brown hand shot out, and a finger pointed to the other side of the camp, where one solitary figure was seated. Steve followed his finger, saw the man and watched with dilating eyes as he rose and turned towards them. He was a pale face, a white man like themselves, tanned and weather-beaten, and some twenty-five

years of age. He was decked as an Indian, and resembled them exactly, save for the fact that his face was not painted.

An exclamation of dismay burst from Steve. He crouched still lower in the bushes, and then silently withdrew, fearful lest this white man should see him. Jim, too, slid silently away, and very soon the two were speeding back to their own camp at a fast trot, their senses fully alert and their thoughts occupied with the white man and the band of Indians whom they had just discovered. A little later they turned to the left, crept undetected into the town, and strolled in the most casual way into the camp. No one looked up as they entered, but all had been anxiously awaiting them, that was evident, for the eyes of their comrades stole across in their direction, their long absence having roused the fears of the others.

"Air dinner ready?" asked Jim casually. "Then suppose we set down to it."

"We're in a muss," he said some little while later, as all squatted about the fire. "One of them critters that was watchin' followed us through the town and into the wood. It war almost a case with Steve. But we dropped the man. After that we struck the track at the back of this camp, and come upon the band. Boys, there air twenty of 'em at least, and wuss than all there's a Frenchman leadin'. It's that 'ere Jules from over the water."

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An exclamation of amazement and dismay burst from the listeners, for Jules Lapon had won an unenviable reputation during the past three years. During that period hundreds of peaceful settlers and backwoods people had been butchered by the Red Indians, hounded on by the French, and in many cases French colonists and regular soldiers had been with them. Bands of desperadoes had ranged the forests, and of these there was none more cruel, more successful and more feared than that of Jules Lapon, a young Frenchman who had settled some years before within a few miles of Tom Mainwaring's quarters. No wonder that the small band of trappers stared aghast at Jim for some few minutes. Then they found their voices, and began to discuss their future movements.

"Reckon there ain't any doubt as to what's to be done," said Jim. "Ef we stay here till the winter falls, they'll still be waitin'. These here Dutchmen can't give no protection, so we're bound to look to ourselves. We'll have to git, and the sooner the better."

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Chapter III

Flight by Night

As the dusk came and settled down upon the peaceful town of Albany, it found the little band of trappers seated about their camp fire, smoking heavily and discussing the question of their flight in earnest and low-pitched tones. They had already taken their evening meal, and were ready to set out at any moment. But so far there was not a sign of preparation. To the casual or the curious onlooker, the little party seemed to have every intention of remaining overnight, more particularly as the sky was overcast, and the rude leather shanty which they had been busily erecting showed that they expected rain, and had prepared a shelter.

"You wouldn't think that there was a question of danger or of our clearing out, boys," said Judge Mainwaring, as he stared round at his comrades. "This town of Albany looks as peaceful as possible, and yet——"

"And yet the facts are clear," burst in Steve. "I suppose that if Albany were filled with Englishmen it would be a different matter."

"That it would, young 'un," chimed in Jim, taking the stem of his black pipe from between his teeth. "And there ain't no sayin' that these Dutchmen wouldn't help us ef we went to 'em. But they ain't here to fight. Reckon they're fer trade. Ef it was our own people, why we'd get 'em together, and them varmint out in the woods would soon be scattered."

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"As it is there is no chance of doing that," said Tom Mainwaring quietly. "I've been thinking this out, boys. If we went to the Dutch I doubt very much that they would move to help us. They are traders, as Jim says, and though I believe they are certainly on our side and opposed to the French and their Indians, yet at the present time even that is not too certain. We've got to depend on ourselves. We might wait here for a week, but this rascal Lapon will wait also, and he will watch us like a hawk. We must move, and this very night too, for at present they think no doubt that we do not know of the existence of this band. If we wait they may suspect us——"

"There's the scout we killed," ventured Steve.

"True, there is the scout. They will find him by to-morrow morning, and then they will watch us all the closer. It will rain soon, and we must move."

"Hold hard," said Jim suddenly. "We've got to git, that's as clear as this fire, but thar's that 'ere redskin watchin'. It 'ud take him an hour perhaps to get back to his camp and then the hull lot 'ud be down on us."

That was a point which none had considered, and for a little while they sat staring into the embers, doubtful how to act. In these days of peace, when the neighbourhood of Albany is as secure as that of New York or of London, and when the banks of the Hudson and the Mohawk and the country adjacent are comparatively thickly populated, it is hard to believe that a party of trappers could be in danger of attack. But in the year 1756 it was very different. Thick forest spread over the land, with very few settlements, and still fewer log huts. In time past many and many a pioneer and trapper had forced his way far on into the valley of the Ohio, that promised land, and had there erected his rough shelter. But there were competitors in the field. France was not content with that huge stretch of America to the north of the St. Lawrence and the great lakes. She was pushing south, building forts and peopling the land. For some years, as the reader will have already gathered, these hardy French soldiers and *voyageurs*, with their fierce Indians, had been pressing south and west, exterminating the helpless British colonists. The man who dared to step outside the towns and plunge into the forests took his life in his hands. Bands of desperadoes wandered hither and thither, and the old calling of the trapper was almost extinct. It was therefore not so wonderful to find danger threatening Steve and his friends on the very outskirts of Albany.

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"Oi'd loike to hear what Silver Fox and Talkin' Bear has to say," sang out Mac, thrusting his red head into the full light of the fire. "They have sat there loike two logs of wood, and sure they've not yit

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opened their mouths. Let them speak and we'll listen."

"Then what shall we do, Fox?" demanded Jim, breaking into the Mohawk. "You know what's happening."

"It will rain to-night, my brothers," was the answer, "and we must go. But this scout must die before we venture from the camp. Talking Bear and Silver Fox will see to this matter."

He glanced round at each one of the party, grunted and nodded to his countryman.

"It is well spoken, brother. He must die," was the short answer.

"Then we'll turn in," said Jim.

One by one the white men of the party stood up, looked about them and then crept into the "shanty," for rain had already begun to fall. And soon Silver Fox joined them, while outside, swathed in his blanket, motionless, stood Talking Bear, guarding the camp during the first hours of the night. His figure was hardly distinguishable even against the dull light of the fire, but all knew that the Indian watcher had his eyes on him. And so two hours passed, till the embers were drenched, and the night was very dark. Not till then was there a movement in the tiny shanty. Steve sat up beside Silver Fox, returned the pressure of his hand and slipped from the cover. Crawling across the camp he touched Talking Bear, and in an instant they had changed places. Steve was now the sentry, swathed in a blanket, tall and erect. Almost at the same instant there was the hoot of an owl away in the forest.

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"Them 'ere critters has jest the finest eyes," growled Jim. "Reckon though that they heard somethin'. There goes Silver Fox. We'll give him an hour."

But less than half an hour had passed before the silence of their camp was disturbed. First came the loud hoot of an owl, and then away in the forest was heard the sound of a conflict. Branches snapped, there was a dull thud, and then silence again.

"We have failed. The scalp of this scout who watched the camp hangs at my belt, but he had two others with him. They are gone."

Silver Fox had made not so much as a sound on his return, and his voice was the first thing that warned the occupants of his presence. They sat up with a start while various exclamations burst from them.

"There is not a moment to be lost," said Tom, with decision. "We must pack and paddle for our lives. That band will never rest till they have the scalps of every one of this party."

There was unusual bustle in the camp at once, the members of the party going about their work with method and in perfect silence. Mac and Steve soon had the leather shelter stripped and folded, and by the time they had carried it down to the canoes, the others had placed all their goods in the smaller one. Then they took their places, and at a word from Tom they pushed out from the bank, Steve sitting in the second canoe, his musket across his thighs and his eyes glued on the bank. The five in the leading canoe grasped their paddles and used them with a will, Tom setting the time, and pushing the water back with lusty arms which aided not a little in their progress. They swung up the centre of the stream, turned to their left and entered the Mohawk. Morning found them many miles on their way, still paddling steadily up the centre of the river.

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"It were well to consider, my brothers," said Silver Fox, speaking for the first time since they had left Albany. "The sky is clearer, and the rain no longer falls. At present the mist hides us, but in a little while the warmth will suck it up and then we shall be seen."

"And yer think them critters is after us?" demanded Jim.

"They left their camp within the hour of our departure," was the slow answer. "They are now well on their way."

Jim had had no need to ask that simple question. As an old and experienced trapper he knew well enough that the alarm must have reached the camp of the enemy within a very little while of their own departure, and it needed no consideration to tell him that they would make up the Mohawk river.

"They kin tell as we ain't got no business towards New York," he growled, "and this here route air the only one that's left. Reckon the

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varmint air well on the road. They'll have canoes hid somewhere's within reach, and it won't be long afore they're out on the river. Boys, we've got to choose between holdin' on to those paddles or takin' to the woods."

"Lose all our stores!" demanded Mac, indignantly. "Sure if we take to the forest we'll have to lave these canoes and the things, and for what is the use of that? Arrah! Lit's kape to the paddles, and if they follow we'll use our guns."

"You forget one thing," said Tom Mainwaring, in his quiet and judicial tones. "We have paddled through the night. These rascals have been walking and running. Their arms will be unwearied. They will certainly overhaul us. There is nothing for it, I fear, but to strike across to the south bank, hide our canoes and stores as well as we are able, and then take to the trail."

There was, indeed, little else to be suggested, and it was with sad hearts therefore that the little party turned the bows of the canoe towards the far bank. It was lighter now, though the mist still hid them, an occasional gust of wind blowing a portion of it away, for all the world as if it were a curtain, and disclosing something of their whereabouts, the surface of the silent river, the far bank, or the forest on that side for which they were making.

"Steady a minute. Stop!"

It was Steve's voice which broke the silence, and as they craned their necks to look back at him, they saw the long figure of the young trapper stretched in the small canoe, his musket still across his thighs and one hand upon it. The other shaded his eyes, as if the mist worried him.

"Stop!" he called again in the lowest tone. "Wait while I come up with you."

There was a paddle beside him, placed there to enable him to steer if occasion should make that necessary, and while his friends backed water, he drove his paddle into the river and swung his canoe round till it lay alongside the other. To have endeavoured to bring it up directly would have been useless, for a short tow rope connected the two.

"You said that they would have canoes somewhere within reach," he said. "I overheard it, and I believe I have seen the very spot. The wind blew the mist aside suddenly, and I saw a tiny inlet. It is blocked with weeds and osiers, and they too were disturbed by the wind. I am sure that I got a glimpse of the bow of a canoe."

"Jupiter! That's a find," burst out Jim, while Tom and Mac nodded approvingly. "Reckon we'll git across to them boats and break 'em up. Boys, that air our ticket."

He plunged his paddle into the water, followed by the others, and would have swung the canoe round had not Steve still clung to the side.

"One moment, Jim," he said easily and quietly, for he had inherited his father's quiet and judicial manner. "Supposing you smash their canoes. What then?"

Jim gasped. "What then! Why, they're fixed, young 'un. Thought you was 'cute. They ain't got no way left of followin', unless they runs like dogs along the bank, and for that we don't care nothin'."

"That is, supposing they have no other canoes," answered Steve quickly. "But is that likely. They know that if their boats are discovered they are helpless. It seems to me that they may very well have divided them. That's what we should do. In that case they would still have a chance of reaching us."

"That 'ere lad air doin' his best to get even with the Judge," exclaimed Jim with a shake of his head. "Reckon, boys, that what he says air true as gospel. Them critters will never have put all their boats in one place. We'd best make for the forest straight."

Once more he would have swung the canoe away from Steve, but the lad still clung to the side.

"We might try a surprise," he said eagerly. "These men will follow us right away to the settlement, for Jules Lapon lives near there. We can't go on like this for the next ten days, and if we don't stop them they will be close to us before to-day is past. Let us wait and have it out with the rascals."

This time there was no attempt to break away from him. All stared eagerly into his sun-tanned face, while an exclamation burst from Jim.

"The boy has an idea," said Tom. "Out with it, Steve."

There was no time to waste, for even as they had hung in the stream, drifting with the current, the mist had lifted still further. The sun would be up very soon, and at any moment it might be clear from shore to shore. Steve leaned over the side of his canoe and spoke swiftly and in little more than a whisper.

"I've been thinking it over as we came along," he said. "We've no chance unless we can stop them now, for they are many, and will follow closely, and never give us a moment's rest. We shall be shot down and scalped one after another. I thought of their bows and what we might do. Then I suddenly caught sight of the bows of the one of which I spoke. Listen! This wind and the rustling of the leaves will have drowned the sound of our paddles. Even if the redskins are now on the far bank I doubt whether they have heard us. But they are not there. We have come faster than a man can walk, and you must remember that they will have had to make their way through the forest. Let us get over to their boats, slip ashore without leaving tracks, and hide up under cover. Once we're there one of us can slip back to this bank with our canoes, and can hide them, just leaving the bows of one to show, as if by accident."

"Thunder! The lad's got it, Judge. Reckon you ain't in it with Steve. Boys, he's told us what to do."

Jim sat up stiffly in his astonishment, while Silver Fox, who could understand English, gave a grunt of assent.

"He was always a calculating, thoughtful youngster," said Tom, a note of triumph in his voice. "The lad has suggested a brilliant plan."

Trappers were in the habit of making up their minds in a rapid manner. Often enough there was no opportunity for discussion, and even when there was they were not over talkative. Jim was perhaps the exception. But now there was no need for chatter, and little time for delay. The paddles plunged into the stream again, Steve pushed out from the large canoe, and in a trice they were surging through the stream in the direction of the opposite bank. A little later they were in sight of it, and were paddling along beneath the overhanging trees.

"Jest about here?" asked Jim, his voice hardly a whisper, while his hand pointed to the bank.

Steve stood up carefully in his frail support. His eyes were glued on the bank and for some minutes he remained without movement, while the canoes slid along through the water. Then, suddenly, his hand went up. There was a bank of reeds and osiers, with a patch of wild rice clinging to the edge, and a gust of wind happening to blow across the water at that moment all saw the nose of an Indian canoe. Standing still higher Steve was able to get a better view than his comrades, and caught sight of four other canoes, all nestling in the osiers.

"We can't land here," he sang out softly. "The bank is bare of brush and all trampled. Backwater and strike higher up the river."

Round swung the canoes and paddles sent the water frothing alongside the frail vessels, for excitement was high, and all were eager to get under cover.

"Them 'ere varmint might come along any time," said Jim impatiently. "Reckon this air a find!"

"We can land there," whispered Tom, pointing to the bank. "There is a rock, and perhaps deep water beside it."

A few strokes of the paddles settled the question. There were quite three feet of water beside the rock, which was bare and brown. It ran up on to the bank for some ten feet, and then gave place to dense forest.

"Step ashore," said Jim, huskily. "Gently. Don't let the canoe strike agin the rock, nor a paddle splash it. Them varmint'd spot it in a jiffy. Talkin' Baar, reckon you're the one to git over to the other bank."

In rapid tones he explained the movement required of him to the silent Indian, speaking in the Mohawk tongue. There was a nod of

approval, and without a word the feathered redskin took up his paddle again and, pushing out from the rock, made off across the river, the smaller canoe with its load of stores trailing after him. In a little while he was lost in the mist, while none could hear the dip of his paddle. But presently, as the sun rose and sucked up the vapours lying like a pall over forest and river, Steve and his comrades could see just the tip of a canoe protruding from a thick mass of bush which clothed the opposite bank.

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"Reckon a baby Injun'd spot that," said Jim. "To look at it you'd say as the wind or the wash of the water had shook it loose from the mud and floated it out. These critters will see it right off, and will try to slip over without a sound, so as to fall upon our party. Reckon there'll be a surprise. Now, what's the ticket?"

"Let the boy tell us," whispered Tom, looking proudly at Steve. "We owe this movement to him, and I think we all agree that he has had good experience of the forest and of these Indians. Now, lad, where are we to take up our stations?"

For answer Steve placed his musket on the rock, and, stepping softly across it, swung himself into a tree, a branch of which overhung their position. They watched him as he clambered up still higher and waited patiently for him to descend.

"I vote that we divide," he said, as he dropped on to the rock again. "When the enemy arrive and see the canoe over yonder they will be all keenness to cross. They will think that we are lying hid in the forest, and will guess that once they are out in the river they will be seen. But remember that our canoes are supposed to be hidden away. If we were over yonder, lying up in the bushes, we should keep under cover and watch, hoping to escape discovery. These Indians will reckon that, and I think will paddle down the far side, staring into the bank. As soon as they get opposite our canoes, they will paddle in with a rush."

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"The air reason," exclaimed Jim. "What then?"

"My argument proves that they will be careful to get aboard on this side without making too much noise. They will try to let it appear that they have not seen our canoe. They will enter their own and push out stealthily, for they are cunning."

"Cunnin'!" Jim clenched a huge brown fist, and would have growled out something more had not Tom's warning hand restrained him.

"That will be our time. The bank of osiers is big, and they have hidden up their canoes almost in the centre. So there will be room for one gun in that direction. Then this tree commands their boats, and has the advantage of being very thick. Supposing we divide forces, two going into the reeds, and three into the tree? The three can swing themselves up without leaving a trace, while the two who make for the reeds can wade through the water."

"The boy is right. Even you or I could not have made better suggestions," exclaimed Tom. "Let us get into our places."

At any moment now the enemy might put in an appearance, and fearful of being discovered the whole party went to their places at once, Steve swinging himself into the tree after his father and Silver Fox, while Jim and Mac lowered themselves very silently into the river, which came to their waists, and wading along entered the reeds. There they took up a position which enabled them to command the canoes, while they could see, and be seen by, their friends. And as they crouched in their lairs the sun rose higher and higher, while the heat grew greater. The air over forest and river became motionless, what breeze there had been dying down entirely. Not a leaf stirred, while the hundreds of birds which had heralded the morning with their bright song seemed to have gone to roost again.

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"Hist! That bird flew from down stream," whispered Tom, suddenly, as a pigeon darted over the water and flew past their hiding place. "We can expect the enemy. Watch the banks carefully."

But half an hour passed without another disturbance, and though all strained their ears nothing could be heard. From his leafy perch Steve saw Jim crouching in the osiers, and noticed that the cunning backwoodsman turned towards the far bank, leaning in that direction in a listening attitude. But evidently he heard nothing, for within a minute he was engaged with the near bank, his eyes

peering between the osiers and the reeds. This was not the first time that Steve had been pursued by the redskins, and his adventurous life in the woods had taught him to maintain his coolness. But on this occasion, do what he would, his heart would thump heavily against his ribs, while his pulse throbbed in an unusual and disturbing manner. He stood in the lowest fork of the tree, his back supported by the trunk, his musket in his hands, and his eye roaming hither and thither. His lips were slightly parted, and there was a determined look on his sun-browned features. He felt no actual fear, only unusual excitement, and a vague wonder as to what would be the end of this conflict. All through the night as he lay in the canoe he had been thinking the matter out. He and all his comrades were well aware of the evil reputation of Jules Lapon's band, and to Steve it had become abundantly clear that, strive as they might, they could not hope to reach their journey's end without molestation. The enemy were too many. They travelled light, while he and his friends carried stores, to which they were absolutely bound to cling, for without them they could not exist through the winter. Then surely it would be better to meet this band of rascals now, while they too were fresh, and do their best to beat them.

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"I am sure it is the right movement," he said to himself. "We have a good chance of taking them by surprise, and an ambush is just the thing to upset these redskins. If we can kill a few the rest may give up the attempt. What is that?"

He started and leaned forward to look at Jim. The old trapper had turned right round and was again staring at the far bank. Steve saw him grip his musket barrel, and then signal to those in the tree. A second later he had swung round once more, and was looking to the opposite bank. Then Steve saw something of what was happening. A minute earlier the tip of the bows of their own canoe was alone showing, a bait to catch the enemy. But now the whole canoe was in sight, and there was Talking Bear, stripped of his blanket, his paddle in his hand, pushing out into the river with all his strength. And after him floated the canoe laden with the precious possessions for which they were being hunted.

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Steve was dumfounded. He stared with wide-open eyes at the redskin, and then swung round to Jim. The trapper crouched in the osiers like a wild cat, and as Steve looked he signalled with his hand to those in the tree. His long finger shot out, and for a few seconds he pointed to the forest on their own side, warning them as well as he could by means of sundry waves and nods to be in full readiness. Then he turned to the river and repeated the signals.

"They're both sides of the Mohawk," gasped Tom. "Look there."

Stealing through the forest, and making for the canoes as rapidly as was possible were four painted redskins, while away on the far side a hurried glance shewed Steve the hideous heads of two more of their enemies. Had there been any doubt on the matter it was set at rest within a very few seconds, for the peace of the river was suddenly startled by a sharp and loud report, which sent the birds soaring from the branches. A bullet flew from the far side of the river and long before the report had died down Talking Bear crumpled up as if he had been struck on the head with an enormous hammer, and sprawled out in the bottom of the canoe. Then the war whoop of the redskins burst from the trees, that whoop which had set hundreds of white men and women trembling. Some twenty heads burst from the trees on the farther bank, and in a trice one of the painted warriors had leaped into the water and struck out for the drifting canoes.

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"He will get aboard and row them back," thought Steve, the meaning of it all flashing across his brain. "Then they will embark, and no matter how many of the men on this side are killed, the others will be able to reach us."

It was clear, in fact, that on the possession of those two helpless canoes depended the result of this momentous engagement. If they were taken the little band of trappers would have the whole howling band about them within a very few minutes, and then what chance would they stand?

Steve did not hesitate. There was a stout twig growing close by his hand, and in an instant his musket dangled from it by means of the sling. His tomahawk flew from his belt to his mouth, where he gripped it between his teeth. Then, light and active as a cat, he

dropped on to the rock beneath, his moccasins making not a sound,
and ere his father could gather his intentions the gallant young
fellow had entered the water.

Chapter IV

Steve makes a Suggestion

Two strides from the rocky bank took Steve into deep water, where he struck out for the drifting canoes, his long and powerful strokes cleaving a path for him through the river. Behind him he left his father and Silver Fox dumfounded at his sudden action, and almost inclined to follow. But they had another matter to occupy their attention, for Steve had been very wary. He had soon realised that the enemy were in two parties, and guessed that the four redskins making for the hidden canoes were unaware of the presence of the trappers. It was important that they should still remain in ignorance, and, mindful of this, the young fellow had made not a sound as he departed. The bush and the thick leaves of the tree had hidden him from the keen eyes of the enemy, while his presence in the water was hidden by the thick bank of osiers. So careful had he been, in fact, that the redskins had no suspicions, and as their brothers on the far bank set up their hideous war-whoop, the four who were stealing towards the canoes sent back answering whoops, and thinking that longer caution was unnecessary, they dashed towards the bank of reeds.

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Crash! They were met with a volley, aimed from the tree and the reeds, and hardly had the reports died down when Jim's voice was heard.

"Two of the varmint's down," he bellowed. "After the others."

Like a hound let loose from the leash this active trapper threw down his musket and dashed through the reeds, his tomahawk in his hand, while Mac went bounding after him, his coon-skin cap fallen from his head, and his red hair blowing out behind him.

"Aftther thim, the blackguards!" he cried, waving to Jim.

"Steady! Take the man to the right," shouted Tom suddenly, swinging his smoking musket over his shoulder and reaching out for the weapon which Steve had suspended to the tree. Up went the heavy stock to his shoulder, the barrel poked out through the leaves and for one brief second followed the crouching figure of one of the redskins, who was making off through the forest. A loud report startled the silence, and as Tom dropped the barrel the Indian leaped into the air, a discordant shriek burst from his lips, and in a second he was rolling over and over in the long grass and brambles for all the world like a rabbit which has been shot when bolting.

"My brother has the eye of a hawk, even as has his son," said Silver Fox, busily ramming down a fresh charge and powdering the pan of his long musket. "Three of our number picked out one of these enemies, and he died at once. Another was struck by a single bullet, and he lies there, close to the reeds. The fourth will be slain within a little while. Listen, my brother, there is noise on the far side of the river."

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There was indeed a commotion. For a little while the twenty or more warriors over there had kept up their awful whooping, and as their comrades on the near side had responded, the shouts and whoops became even greater. But now that the rifles of the trappers had spoken so suddenly and unexpectedly, the babel became even worse. Painted redskins showed up openly on the bank, frantically waving their muskets, while two stood in the water ready to reinforce the man who was swimming out to the drifting canoes.

"They are as much startled and taken aback as are we," said Tom Mainwaring. "Keep steady here, Silver Fox, and let us see what we can do for the young hawk. My son will reach the canoes almost at the same time as that redskin, and a bullet from us might help. Ah, they are firing." While he spoke he rammed fresh charges into the two muskets with feverish energy, his eyes all the time roaming from the surface of the river to the figures on the far bank. As he had said, it seemed more than likely that Steve would reach the canoes as soon as the redskin, for his long powerful strokes were taking him through the water at a rapid pace, and as if fortune had decided to help him a slight breeze which had since got up came sweeping along the river and drifted the two craft towards him.

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"Stay here, my brother," whispered Silver Fox suddenly. "There are

others who are attempting to reach the canoes. Silver Fox will help the young Hawk."

He dropped from the tree as light as a feather, and when Tom looked down there was the Indian stealing along through the trees, his musket trailing and one hand busily engaged in sweeping the ground before him. This redskin had not lived the life of his race for nothing. He knew that even in the excitement of all that was occurring there would be ears on the far side of the river listening for sounds of an enemy, and he was well aware that a broken branch, the crushing of some piece of brittle drift wood, would give the enemy on the far shore an inkling of what was happening. To him it was as simple as playing to creep through the forest like a snake. Even Tom, who knew his intentions and the direction he had taken, could not follow his track. There was not even a swaying branch to show where he was.

Meanwhile Steve had made good progress, and was within a few strokes of the canoes. Could he reach the one in which Talking Bear lay before the Indian came up with it? No! There was a commotion in the water on the far side of the frail craft, a red hand gripped the gunwale, and as he looked the hideous painted face of the Indian came into full view. His leg was thrown over the edge, and in a twinkling he had taken his place, panting with his exertions, the water dripping from his body and streaming from his scalp-lock and his feathered headdress.

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"COME NEARER THAT I MAY KILL YOU EASILY," HE SAID

"Come nearer that I may kill you easily," he said, gripping his tomahawk and leaning towards Steve. "Come nearer, pale face, for if you would flee I will dive in after you."

Steve made no answer, and indeed took little notice of the man. Without pausing in his course, he surged nearer to the canoe, and then suddenly dived beneath the water as if he were making for the farther side. And very fortunately for him the rain of the previous night had coloured the river a deep brown, so that it was almost impossible to detect the whereabouts of anyone beneath the surface. The Indian stood upright for a moment, staring into the water. Then he leaned one hand on the far side of the canoe, and waited, his keen tomahawk poised in the air, ready to strike the instant the pale face appeared.

"He will come up just beneath me," he said in guttural tones. "I will see how far I can cleave this pale face. Pah! who but a pale face would attempt such a manoeuvre? By taking his eyes from me for even a second he throws his life away. His scalp is mine and shall hang from my belt ere his comrades have time to fire at me. Ah! That was one of their bullets."

A look of scorn passed across his ferocious features as a missile sent from Silver Fox's weapon screamed past his ear. A miss was a miss to this redskin warrior. He had no time for sentiment, for consideration as to how near he had been to losing his life.

"Surely the pale face will rise," he exclaimed, his equanimity somewhat upset by the fact that Steve had not yet appeared. "It is long since he dived. His breath cannot last much longer. Ah! Perhaps he turned back towards the bank when under the water."

He swung round to the other side, his dragged feathers and hair swishing a cascade of water on to the surface of the river. But there was no sign of Steve, nothing to tell where he had got to, nothing but the frantic calls of his comrades on the bank.

"Look behind you. Look to the smaller canoe," they bellowed, for their keen eyes had been watching the contest, and not a movement had escaped them. "Dive! Leave the canoe!"

The Indian started, swung his head round, and then stood as if transfixed. For the cunning of a redskin had for once been outmatched by the astuteness and coolness of a pale face. Steve knew well enough that the man who reached the canoe first would have the game in his hands, and realised that were he to venture to the surface on either side of the craft taken possession of by the Indian he would be immediately tomahawked. An instant before he plunged beneath the water a better plan had flashed across his brain.

"There is a spare musket in the store canoe," he said to himself. "If I can only reach it."

Two strokes beneath the surface took him under the larger canoe and away to the stern of the smaller one. He rose silently to the surface, and as the redskin peered into the river, expecting him to rise at any instant, our hero gripped the gunwale, lifted his head and shoulders clear of the stream and groped with one hand for the musket. It was there, just where he had left it, and in a very little while he had it to his shoulder. It was not the place he would have chosen for a shot, for it is no easy matter to hang to a frail canoe with the gunwale tucked as it were beneath one arm, and lift a heavy musket to the shoulder. However, Steve was not the lad to miss such an opportunity, particularly when the safety and lives of his companions depended on his success. He steadied himself with an effort, brought the barrel in a line with the Indian, and as the latter threw his hands over his head and leaped for the water, he took a steady pull on the trigger. Instantly a frantic cheer burst from the near bank, while Steve slid from the store canoe and clambered into the other.

"Well done, boy! Bravely done, Steve. Look out for those other redskins. Paddle in if you can."

"Git yer fire iron filled," bellowed Jim. "Yer can't paddle away from the critters. Ram in a charge."

But the backwoodsman had forgotten that Steve had been under the water. Everything on him was thoroughly drenched, and no doubt some moisture had leaked into his powder horn. He looked down at it, saw that it was useless to reload, and then plunged a paddle into the water.

"Cover me with your guns," he shouted. "If they come up I will club them with the butt. My powder is saturated. Ah, here come the bullets."

Something screeched past his nose, and as he listened he heard the mass of lead thud with a dull and heavy sound against a tree on the bank. Then followed a dozen shots, one of which penetrated the side of the canoe, while a second chipped a big corner from the end of his paddle. A third lodged on the rock by which he and his comrades had disembarked, and, ricocheting from it, flew off into the forest with a scream which was even more disconcerting than was the sound made by the bullets which had been so near to striking him.

"Bend low! Keep under as much as you can," shouted Tom. "Now, boys, pick off some of those rascals."

The burly backwoodsman had taken his stand beside a small tree, keeping the trunk between himself and the enemy, and now his musket shot up to his shoulder; he took a steady aim at one of the figures on the far bank and calmly pulled the trigger; for Judge

Mainwaring was not the man to lose his accustomed coolness, even though his only son was in danger. Jim and Mac followed his example, while Silver Fox stared for a moment at the foremost of the two redskins swimming towards Steve. He dropped his musket suddenly, fell on his face and slid down the steep bank into the water. None of those on the far side saw his figure as he carried out the movement, and the wary native gave them no opportunity after that till he had covered many yards. Then as his head popped up from the surface the enemy on the farther side set up a deafening howl, shouting warnings to their brother.

"Keep up the firing," said Tom, coolly. "Silver Fox will settle that fellow and Steve will get clear. Hah! I doubt whether they are in time to warn the rascal."

"They ain't," responded Jim, shortly. "He don't hear. The water's in his ears and I reckon he ain't a notion what's happening."

It appeared indeed that this was actually the fact, for in spite of the bellows of the redskins on the far bank their comrade still forced his way through the water, evidently unaware that he would soon have a second opponent to deal with. Suddenly the water swirled in front of him, a hand shot out of the muddy depths and the fingers closed about the tomahawk which the man carried between his teeth. Then, as the draggled feathers of Silver Fox's head-dress emerged from the water, a blade gleamed in the air. There was a dull crash, a shrill cry and the contest was over. Silver Fox was swimming back to his friends, the third Indian having meanwhile retreated to the other bank.

"Jest keep on pepperin' the varmint," sang out Jim. "They've given us a good chance, and I reckon we've made a few of the critters sit up. Keep at it, boys, so that they can't fire too strong at Steve and Fox."

Five minutes later Steve steered the leading canoe into the gap made in the big bed of osiers, and having pulled in the second, with its precious store of trade goods, leaped lightly ashore.

"I rather fancy we have had the best of that little action," he said with a smile. "Talking Bear is the only one who has suffered. He was hit in the head, and must have been killed instantaneously."

"That's one to them 'ere varmint, then," growled Jim. "How many air we to put down on our side?"

"The two who swam out, and three others on the far bank, that makes five," said Tom, counting them on his fingers.

"Sure, have ye forgotten the others?" asked Mac. "There was two kilt by the first volley, and one that Tom fetched over with Steve's gun."

"There was that," admitted Jim, grimly. "Then there was the other fellow. He skipped through the forest at a powerful rate, and I doubt that we should ha' got him ef it hadn't been for this here Mac. Tell 'em how you worked it, lad."

Thus called upon, the short and sturdy Irishman pulled his cap from his head and flushed as red as his own hair.

"Sure, Oi've a way of runnin'," he said. "Whin this redskin took off through the forest Oi wint afther him as quick as Oi was able."

"And?" questioned Tom.

"And that's all. Sure Oi was up wid him before ye could wink, and thin we rushed at one another. Thrust an Oirishman to pick up a bhith of sthick whin a row's in the air. Oi caught holt of a fallen branch as Oi ran, and when he jumped at me wid his tomahawk, faith I laid him flat with the branch. He's kilt."

Very carefully did the little band check off the number of the slain, their pleasure damped by the thought that only nine had fallen. For the reader must recollect that these constant conflicts between pale face and redskin were waged without mercy. To expect it from any of the unfriendly tribes was to expect something which no redskin had ever possessed. These inhabitants of the forest wildernesses were trained to ferocity. The history of their tribal wars, of their contests with French and English colonists, is one long tale of atrocities, of frightful cruelties, of sudden attacks upon absolutely defenceless settlements, of merciless butchery of women and children, and of unheard of tortures practised on any who might

happen to be spared for a while. Was it wonderful that the white man, with his natural inclination to peace and goodwill, and his abhorrence of unfair fighting and of torture, should be driven in time to fight as did these redskin fiends? Mercy on their part to a fallen enemy was a mistaken virtue. Clemency was rewarded in the majority of cases by the foulest treachery. The redskin who was set free to return to his tribe after an unsuccessful attack too often would turn upon his deliverer when danger was unsuspected, and within an hour of receiving kindness from him, would murder him and his defenceless family, and make off through the woods, triumphant at the thought of scalps so easily obtained.

No. This was always war to the death. A wounded man was as good as dead, for no quarter was asked for or given. Every additional man brought to the ground was an advantage to the weaker side, and a greater inducement to those who had lost him to wreak vengeance on those who had brought about his downfall. Such was the barbarous nature of forest warfare when Steve went on the trail.

"Jest nine of the skunks," said Jim, staring across at the farther bank. "That leaves the critters jest about twenty. Reckon we ain't out of this here muss yet."

"But we are better off by far," cried Tom. "Supposing the division of these redskins had been the other way. Supposing there had been some twenty-five on this side, and only four on the other."

"We hadn't a chance. Reckon we should ha' been wiped clean out by this," said Jim, with emphasis. "Yer can't shoot down twenty-five, however well yer may be posted. They'd have rushed us, most likely, and then it would have been all up. As it air we're well out so far, and I say as we owe it to this here Steve and to Silver Fox. Ef this young feller hadn't slipped into the river and swum to the canoes, them varmint would have been over here by now. I reckon it war a 'cute idea to get a hold of that musket and shoot. How'd yer come to do it, Steve?"

"Well, I didn't see a chance of getting possession of the canoes in any other way," said Steve modestly. "If I had come up alongside after diving, he would have killed me."

"As easy as you'd kill a fly," cried Jim. "You may take that as sartin."

"Then I thought of the gun, and struck out under the water in the direction of the smaller canoe."

"There was never a more astonished Indian," interrupted Tom.

"Steve, you've done well. All here agree with what I say. I'm glad you've shown such 'cuteness. It does credit to my teaching, and I've done my best to let you learn the life of a backwoodsman. But let us talk of something else. We are not cut of the mess yet, by a long way. But we have a litt'e time in which to breathe and look round. What will those rascals do now, and how are we to get away up the river?"

He turned to Jim, as the most experienced of the hunters, and waited patiently for him to answer. It was, indeed, a question which required consideration, and even an experienced hunter and trapper, such as Hunting Jim undoubtedly was, could not come to an instant decision.

"Reckon it air one of them points as wants a deal of figuring," he said, as he scratched his head and stared across the river. "Yer may bet as them critters is watchin'. They've got under cover, 'cos they found as our firin' was better'n they thought. But they're thar. Them bushes covers the hul crowd of 'em. Suppose we get to work at their canoes first of all, and that'll give me a chanst to think out this here matter."

Setting Silver Fox to watch the opposite side of the river, the four trappers crossed to the osiers, taking good care to keep well out of sight. They found the five canoes lying side by side, and at once drew their tomahawks with a view to cutting holes in the sides and bottoms. In fact, they were about to commence on the work when Steve gave a sudden exclamation.

"Suppose we wait a little, father," he said eagerly.

"Wait! Supposin' them critters cross higher up?"

It was the wily Jim who asked the question, staring at Steve with a grim smile on his lips. "Ah. Them varmint wants to make us think they're stayin' over yonder. Them bullets came close."

Three reports rang out from the far bank as he spoke, and the shots flew through the osiers, stripping a shower of flat leaves from the reeds.

"Perhaps they guess we are about to destroy their canoes," whispered Tom. "But I admit that they are likely to attempt to swim across unseen, and come down upon us. We should make nothing of such a crossing, and you may be sure that they would not. They would cut down a few reeds to carry their muskets and their powder, and would soon get to this side. If they try that game, we must slip away at once, and we can rely on Silver Fox to give us a warning. Look for yourselves. The river runs without a bend for a very long way, and our look-out would detect any such movement."

"That air right. Reckon you've put it square, Judge," said Jim. "What's this young Steve got to say? You was supposin'."

"I suggested that we should leave these canoes for a time. At any moment we can destroy them, for a few slashes with a tomahawk will do all that is required."

"That air so. What then?"

"One moment," answered Steve. "Supposing we were to get aboard our canoes and put out into the river, what would happen?"

"Happen? Reckon you'd soon hear from them ere critters. Ef yer think of doin' a thing like that, Steve Mainwarin', why you ain't the son of Judge here. Ef yer want to get killed so badly, best paddle clean across an' invite them fellers to wipe the hul party out properly. It ain't in reason," he went on, hotly. "Ef we was aboard, all packed together, they'd pick us off like birds."

"If they could see us," ventured Steve, smiling at Jim's excitement.

"Ef they could see us! Thunder! Do yer think there's a redskin as wouldn't be able, even at night. 'Sides, the moon'll be up soon after the night comes, and with the light they'd have, shootin' would be easier. Jest shake yerself, Steve."

He looked severely at the young trapper, and then turned as Tom broke in upon the silence which had followed the old backwoodsman's words.

"You wait a little, Jim," said the burly Englishman. "Steve has given us a hint more than once in the past twenty-four hours. Try him again. I'll be bound he's got something under that hunting cap of his. He's a regular young conspirator. What is it, Steve?"

"Just this. We are stranded here I take it. We cannot move into the river, for the Indians would shoot us down. They cannot easily cross, for we have their canoes, and I am sure that they have no others hidden along the river. That is why they sent four men along this side, with instructions to paddle the whole lot across. Until the night comes they can do very little. But once it is dark they will send half their number over, and then we shall be in danger of attack. So it comes to this. They can afford to wait, and, in fact, must do so. We cannot. If we wait they will be across before the night is an hour old, and then with a party on either side, even though they have no canoes, they will have us."

Tom nodded emphatically, while Jim scratched amongst the osiers with the soft toe of his moccasin.

"That air so," he drawled. "Then what's the ticket?"

"We must move. I thought that with these canoes to help us we might manage to get away. Now, Jim, don't open your mouth as if you would like to swallow me. Do you think these reeds would keep out a bullet if piled fairly close together?"

For a second the trapper looked closely at the osiers, feeling them with his hand. He tore one out by the roots, and then gripped it between his teeth.

"They're soft and pulpy inside," he said, a light gathering on his face. "Reckon, as they stand, a bullet would rip through 'em as if they was only cotton. See that! Ain't I right?"

Another series of reports had suddenly rung out from the far side, and again the leaden messengers tore through the osiers.

"Jest as ef they was cotton," he repeated. "But ef yer was to pile 'em close together, then I reckon a bullet would find it hard to get through. Steve, you ain't such a duffer as I thought, not by a long

way. What're yer after?"

"Just this," laughed Steve, for his nimble brain had hit upon a plan which might help the whole party. "We have five canoes here. We can break up two of them, and by jamming the sides into two of the others can raise the gunwales from the water. Then we can pack them with reeds. They'll take a lot without sinking, for these stalks are very light and buoyant. Once we're ready we can float them out between us and the redskins, and then they can fire till they're tired."

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Jim threw his cap in the air, and, unmindful of the fact that the action immediately brought a shower of bullets, danced and capered in the reeds. He was a queer and light-hearted trapper. For all his sagacity and cunning, he was but a boy, and behaved like one when anything out of the way happened.

"Cap'n," he cried, gripping Steve by the hand. "I ain't fit to lead this party no longer. Reckon you've won the place. Boys, we air goin' ter do as Steve says, and get the laugh on them critters."

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Chapter V

Jules Lapon is Disappointed

Steve Mainwaring had suddenly leaped higher in the estimation of his comrades, and even Tom Mainwaring, who was apt to look upon his son with the proud eye of an indulgent father, now regarded him with eyes which shone with strange enthusiasm. For Steve had done well. Even when he was only a little mite he had shown courage, and as he grew bigger and stronger, and mastered the ways of the backwoodsmen and the habits of the Indians, amongst some of whom he was often thrown, his elders had seen that he was a promising pupil, while the redskins themselves had christened him the Hawk, no small compliment from such a race. Then Steve had a great advantage. While learning the ways of the backwoods, he had had an excellent education from his father, which added something to his astuteness. And now, little by little, these grizzled veterans of the forest were beginning to discover his worth. They had already found in him a lad who could barter their pelts far better than they could. Hitherto they had been always able to rely upon his sagacity, his courage, and his shooting, and now——

"Cap'n," repeated Jim again, pushing his coon-skin cap back from his bald head and gripping Steve's hand. "That 'ere plan air 'cute. Thunder! One of these here redskin skunks wouldn't ha' thought of it, and when they see us come out from the bank, why——"

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The thought was too much for the old hunter. He stood staring into Steve's face, taking closer stock of the lad perhaps than he had ever done before, for familiarity with a person often makes us slow to discover virtues, which, after all, are only buried beneath the surface. Good points, which are hardly skin deep, and which have escaped our notice hitherto, only become apparent when some unusual incident brings them prominently before our eyes.

"That air a lad to be proud of, Judge," he said, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "Reckon he's lain quiet up to this, or else we should ha' found him out. He's got a bit of your way of stayin' quiet, and openin' his mouth only when he's axed a question or when there's need for a lawyer or a cap'n. It's sartin he's got the hang of this matter, and I votes that he leads till we're home agin. 'Twon't do no harm to us. What do yer say, red head?"

Mac doubled an enormous fist, shook it in Jim's face and grinned, a grin which set his lips back from his teeth, and exposed a cavity reaching almost from ear to ear. It was the grin of a man who has suddenly heard good news, and who has had a load taken from his mind.

"Red head! Bedad, 'tis meself as will choke the loife out of ye, Huntin' Jim. 'Twould be aisier for ye to stand out there and ax some of thim varmint to put a bullet into ye, so it would. Red head!"

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The knuckles of his tanned and brawny fist rested against Jim's nose, but provoked not a movement.

"Waal, what do yer say?" Jim growled, his eyes flashing.

"Say? Sure that Oi'll be onaisy if Steve don't take over the place. Faith, 'tis his idea, and a man should have the chanst of carryin' it out."

"It is an honour, and one which the boy will appreciate," said Tom, solemnly. "Steve, we appoint you the captain. Give your orders."

"Yes, give the orders, lad," cried Jim, his kindly features lighting up with real pleasure, while he continued to stare at this tall young hunter, noticing his good looks, his fearless and alert appearance, and the good temper which lurked in every line of his sun-tanned face. "You've settled about them canoes. Git along with the job."

Steve was somewhat overcome at the turn events had taken, but a glance at his father and at his old companions soon assured him that they were in earnest, and would support him.

"I feel too young for the task," he said, "but I grant the experience will be a fine one, and may some day be of the utmost use to me. Then we'll set to work. Take your hunting knives and slit two of the canoes down through the centre of the bow and stern. Mac, get

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along and cut a few vine tendrils, and keep that red head down. The redskins couldn't miss you."

There was a roar at that, a hearty laugh which showed that Steve's plan had encouraged the whole party, and had shown them a method by which they might extricate themselves from a very awkward and serious predicament. And to hear this young fellow commence his command by a little good-humoured banter delighted them.

"Arrah, now, Masther Steve. Is that the way ye'd reward me?" cried the jovial Mac, as he powdered the pan of his heavy musket. "Have a care, me bhoy. 'Tis yerself as will be howlin' for mercy if Mac gets a holt of ye."

Steve waved him away, and while the Irishman went to get the tendrils, he and the others splashed through the oozy bed of the river, pushing their way through the reeds till they came to the canoes hidden there by their pursuers. Every now and again a report rang out on the far side of the river, and a bullet whistled through the reeds, but fortunately without hitting any of them, though some came very near. Indeed, on one occasion they were in the greatest danger, for one of the enemy, suspecting that they were amidst the reeds, crept higher up the far bank, till he could get a full view of the nose of the canoe which had first caught Steve's eye. He reckoned that if the pale faces were there they would be in amongst the craft, and levelling his barrel to what he thought must be the correct position, he fired.

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"Thunder!" exclaimed Jim, as Tom's skin cap leaped into the air, spun round, and flew in amongst the reeds. "Them 'ere varmint kin shoot. Jest a moment while I talk to that critter. Get out of these reeds."

They crept to the bank and lay down under the bushes, while the active trapper clambered into a tree and stared across the river. Presently they saw his barrel come to the horizontal position, where he held it till something caught his eye. Then the stock went to his shoulder, his brown cheek fell closer to it, and his eye squinted along the sights. There was a sharp crack on the far side, a spurt of flame and smoke issued from the bushes, while a bullet ploughed into the reeds, and thudded heavily against the bank. At the same instant Jim's piece spoke, and as his comrades looked they saw the barrel of a gun suddenly emerge from the cover opposite. It seemed to leap into the air, and after it came the painted face and then the body of an Indian. He stood stock still for an instant, staring at the reeds, and then with a hideous yell fell face foremost into the river, his death bringing loud whoops from his friends.

"Reckon that'll make 'em a bit careful," said Jim, clambering down and reloading. "Them skunks had got to think that we couldn't shoot. They'll see now that some of us know the business-end of a musket. Them orders, Steve?"

"Let us tackle the canoes and make ready."

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Once more they crept into the reeds, their hunting knives in their hands. A few slashes cut through the strong sinews with which the ends of the craft were sewn, while Steve divided the huge strip of birch back along the centre. Another canoe was served in the same manner, when they found themselves in possession of four pieces as long as their own canoe, or almost so. And now they threw themselves on a third canoe, erecting their strips along the side, and pegging them in position with pieces cut from a tree, while Mac made all secure by piercing the strips and lashing them firmly with vine tendrils. The work came happily to their hands, for backwoodsmen were skilled in the manufacture of canoes.

"That 'ere ship air ready," said Jim at length. "We can fill her till the water comes above the gunwale of the canoe, and she won't sink."

"And if we care to carry out the same work with these other two, we can have two ships floating side by side, and they at least should keep out the bullets," said Steve. "What do you think?"

"Think! Ain't you the cap'n?"

"Then we'll do it. Let's get along with the job."

While Steve and Jim began to construct a second craft which would hold a pile of reeds, Mac and Tom crept through the osiers, cutting bundles away with their hunting knives. They kept steadily at the

work till they had cut down the greater part of the bed, leaving a thick outer fringe to hide them from the enemy. The leaves were then lopped off, and the stems piled into the first of the special craft constructed, till they reached to a point above the high sides provided.

"Float her now and see whether she is top heavy," said Steve. "That was a good idea of Mac's to put a few rocks at the bottom."

Very carefully they pushed the strange craft into the water till she floated close beside their own canoe. Then they tested her stability by pressing the load over to either side.

"As steady as you could wish," said Steve. "Her gunwale is a couple of inches above the water, so she will ship very little. Now for the second."

Within an hour they were ready, the two craft laden with reeds being lashed firmly together and floated to the far side of their own canoe. There was still a little to do. At Tom's suggestion Mac cut a couple of stout boughs, and these were attached to the stem and stern of the nearest craft, and the other ends to the stem and stern of the canoe in which they would take their places.

"If a bullet does happen to come through, it will drop in the water," he said. "Again, we might find it convenient to set fire to the reeds in the outer one, and make use of the smoke as a covering. The wind is blowing right across to the far side of the river, and the reeds happen to be well soaked after last night's rain. There would be little danger of the covering being burned too soon."

"A grand idea," cried Steve. "What do you say, Jim?"

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"That Tom and Steve air mighty 'cute, and don't want no teachin'. Judge, I guessed as yer had somethin' in that big head of yours. That 'ere idea air almost better'n Steve's. Set fire to the reeds we will, and a fine smoke them Injuns'll see. Reckon they'll be choked."

He went off chuckling to bring in Silver Fox, the latter having meanwhile kept an eagle eye on the far bank.

"They have moved a little," he said slowly. "The enemy have spread up and down the bank, and watch us like hawks. Do my brothers think to paddle away? Surely there will be few of us to whom a bullet will not come."

"And supposing we wait till it is dark?" asked Steve.

"Then our scalps will hang at their belts. A little sooner will make no difference. Silver Fox is ready."

"And supposing again that we move off now and have some cover, for instance, this, and set fire to the reeds in the outer canoe?"

Steve pointed to the strange craft which they had prepared, and waited eagerly for the answer, for Silver Fox was a cunning Mohawk, and if a thing could pass his eyes and meet with approval, then it was good. He strode towards the growing reeds, tore one up by the roots and bit it, just as Jim had done. Then he turned gravely to the party.

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"The pale faces are great and brave foes," he said. "They press on and on into the forests, which were the hunting grounds of the Indian, and they forget the defeat they have suffered, the dead they have left. Nothing can or will stop them. They die like buffalo, fighting for their lives. Their cunning is at first as nothing to the cunning of the Shawnees and other foes, and so their scalps hang in many and many a wigwam. But death and loss have taught them. They have become men of the river and forests themselves, and their cunning is great. Surely the Great Father must have aided them, for how else could they have thought of such a device. Silver Fox has spoken and is ready."

He walked to the tree at the foot of which Steve and Tom had reverently laid the body of poor Talking Bear, and looked closely into his face. Then he stooped, took the belt, the tomahawk, and the bullet pouch of the fallen redskin, and strode down the bank.

"Farewell, my brother," he said. "You have been a faithful friend, a kind companion, and a mighty fighter. The wigwam will know you no more, and the men of the war parties will miss your strong arm. These I take so that all may keep your memory."

It was a very simple little ceremony, but affecting for all that, and

caused Steve to gulp down something which seemed to fill his throat. For the lad, though a skilful hunter, was not hardened to the ways of the Indians and the pioneers of the forest. A life was a life, a friend a friend to be mourned after his death and thought of often.

And so they turned away from the silent figure, leaving the still form of the painted warrior lying there in his blanket, shaded by the foliage of a mighty tree, which has long since been felled to make way for the iron road which now bears the rapid conveyance of this bustling century. Who of those thousands who pass along the line and look out of the windows at the fascinating scenery of the Mohawk think of the days of which we write, or ever paint in their own minds the birch canoes which then were paddled over the silent waters, and the painted faces which stole through the forests, hunting the pale faces, the sturdy fathers of a sturdy race which now fills the land of promise?

"Ready?" asked Steve, taking the lead. "Then, father, show us the way, please, and take the paddle right astern. I will take that in the bows, while Mac can use the one in the centre. Jim, we'll pile the muskets just in front of father, and you will get in a shot if there is an opportunity. One moment. Break up those spare paddles, Mac."

All stepped quietly into their places, while Steve waded into the water and steadied the canoe, pushing the one which held their stores well behind him. When all was in readiness, he waded still farther in and sprinkled a little powder on the reeds which filled the strange craft farthest away. A few strokes of his steel against the flint set the powder fizzling, and in a minute one of the reeds, which happened to be drier than the others, was well alight. Using this as a match, he went all along the load, firing it at close intervals. Then he came back to the stern and made ready to push the canoes out. And meanwhile the flames had done their work. Licking round the portions of the outside layer of reeds, which happened to be dry, they soon set them ablaze, and then began to ignite the damper portions. A cloud of dense black smoke rose above the reeds, and, caught by the wind, went billowing out across the river. Almost at once fierce whoops came from the far shore, and there was a commotion amidst the forest cover.

"Shout and dance, me beauties," laughed Jim grimly. "Set to at one of yer war dances, if that'll do yer good. Reckon them 'ere varmint has a notion we're burnin' their canoes. That's what all the rustle's about."

"They will slay us with the torture should it chance that we fall into their hands," said Silver Fox gravely. "This is a sore blow to our enemies."

"Then they have worse to follow," chimed in Steve. "I fancy that when they see us floating away up the river they'll be more than a trifle angry. Paddles out. Ready? Then, here we go."

He pushed slowly till there was way on the canoes, and then with one vigorous push sent the whole lot surging against the barrier of reeds which hid the party from the enemy. And as he pushed for the last time, he leaned his full weight on the sides of the canoe, and with a dexterous movement clambered aboard.

"Get hold of the paddle and make ready to swing round," sang out Tom.

"We come out bows on, remember that, and shall have to face their fire. There goes the first musket."

They were out. The canoes had burst through the reeds into the open river, and for a minute perhaps Steve looked at the opposite bank. He saw a figure suddenly stand erect and emerge from behind a tree, and watched as the barrel of a musket was levelled at him. There was a loud report, a bullet whisked over his head, and smoke gushed from the forest. Then there was a deafening explosion just behind him, and for a few seconds he experienced the deafness and pain which are felt when a weapon is discharged close to one's ear. But his eyes held to the far bank, and once more he had need to praise Jim's shooting.

"That 'ere redskin ain't too careful," growled the trapper. "Ef he'd put his iron jest a bit lower, he'd have plugged Huntin' Jim as sure as I'm standin'. Reckon he ain't fit to try again."

It was true. The unerring eye of the trapper had fastened upon the

Indian as he levelled his musket, and Jim seldom made a mistake. He was one of the hardy pioneers versed in Indian warfare who had learned that it is better to hold one's fire and keep one's finger from the trigger rather than send a bullet wide of the mark.

"Yer can't afford to miss, Steve," he had often remarked, when the young trapper was out on some excursion with him. "Some of these days yer may run into a crowd of them redskins, and then you'll know that the man as can shoot has a chance of keepin' his scalp. Reckon the chap as don't know how ain't fit to wear haar."

"Round with her. Paddle!" shouted Steve. "That's better. Now they can fire till they are tired of the game. Whew! Doesn't it sound queer to hear the bullets striking."

Indeed it did. As the paddlers forced the strange craft up the river, their course was followed by frantic whoops and by a perfect hail of bullets. As fast as twenty men could fire and load again the muskets sent their contents at the floating target, and time and again the leaden messengers crashed into the reeds, many passing through the outer pile and lodging in the centre of the second one, proving that Steve's suggestion was a good one. Occasionally a bullet would hit the mark somewhere near the top, and a shower of shredded reed would be scattered over the party. Then, too, numbers of missiles flew astern and ahead, for the smoke upset the aim of the enemy.

And so for an hour Steve and his friends paddled up the river, confident now of their security from bullets. As they progressed the howling band ran abreast of them on the bank, and one or two of the redskins actually entered the water in their frantic eagerness to come up with the pale faces. But Jim put a stop to that. The smoke hid him entirely from the sight of the enemy, while he himself had a good view of the bank, and was well protected by the reeds. He stood in the canoe, a pile of muskets at his feet, and just the top of his head showing above the barrier. Then, every now and again, he straightened himself a little more, his weapon went to his shoulder, and a shriek told that the eye of the trapper had not erred. Indeed his good shooting, the pace at which they paddled, and perhaps a failure in ammunition soon resulted in a lull in the contest. Only an occasional bullet now plunged into the reeds.

"We can say good-bye to them very soon," said Steve suddenly, craning his head round the barrier. "A couple of miles up, Swan creek runs into the stream, and that should stop them. They will have to swim or climb, and in either case we can draw away from them. When I give the word, cut away the canoes and upset them. A few blows with a tomahawk will make them useless, and send them to the bottom. Is that right, father?"

He appealed to Tom, for as yet this position of leader was strange to him, and he felt somewhat abashed and modest, considering the age and experience of his comrades. However, he had nothing to fear, for Tom nodded energetically, while the garrulous Jim burst forth with a reply.

"Jest you recollect as you're the cap'n," he laughed. "When yer give an order, why, let it be an order. No hankey pankey, lad. If Mac don't set to and follow your words, why, pass him along to me. I'll make short work of the feller."

"Bedad!" growled the Irishman. "Huntin' Jim, there'll be trouble for ye sooner than ye expect. Will ye be quiet and listen to what the cap'n's sayin'?"

They were a merry party now. Merry and light-hearted, as in truth they had a right to be, for every minute lightened their danger. Indeed, hardly an hour had passed when they came abreast of the creek of which Steve had spoken. It was wide and shallow, and cut into a big, sweeping hollow formed in the side of a long rocky ridge.

"There ain't a redskin as would attempt to swim it," said Jim with decision, "and ef they make round behind the cliff, why, Steve, you and me and Tom and Mac'll be at home long before they come out on the far side. Reckon they'll give it up and get back to their huntin' grounds. Boys, when we're back at the settlement we'll send the news round, and there won't be another party making this side of the fall for Albany. Murderin' cut-throats like them ought to be hounded down, and ef they was our way——"

"We should root them out," said Tom, quietly, "No body of self-

respecting settlers would put up with such a state of things. Against such a band we of the settlement are secure. But it will not be always so."

He shook his head dubiously, while Jim and Mac nodded in agreement.

"Reckon the thirteen States has got to put aside their baby squabbles and put their backs to this work ef we air to stay at the settlement," exclaimed Jim. "Trappers ain't powerful enough to stop the journeys of the French and Injuns."

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How true his words were likely to prove the reader will be able to learn. For the time had come long since for concerted action. France had set a covetous eye on the valley of the Ohio, on the smiling forest country lying to the west of the Alleghany Mountains, and resistlessly, unchecked as yet, she had poured into the land. There had been no concerted movement to check her. The thirteen States which then constituted our American colonies made no combined movement against the enemy. For the most part they were absolutely apathetic. And while they sat at their ease, surrounded by comfort and security, hundreds and hundreds of the log huts and settlements of their brothers were being ravaged by the French and their relentless Indians. The guns and the courage of thousands of trappers and hardy backwoodsmen were insufficient now to stem the torrent.

"The times are bad. There is trouble ahead," said Tom, thoughtfully. "Let us hope it will pass by and leave our settlement undisturbed. But I fear that that is too much to hope for. There is Jules Lapon."

Yes. There was Jules Lapon, leader of the most reckless and cruel bands of Indians, and a near neighbour now of Tom and his friends.

"Well, we won't think of him and the troubles now," sang out Steve cheerily. "We're well out of shot, and can cut the canoes adrift. Let us get free of them and push on towards home."

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They hacked through the creepers which bound the ends of the boughs to their own canoe, and then cut holes in the two craft which they had so deftly prepared, ripping the sides and throwing the reeds out into the river. A few minutes later the canoes which had proved so useful were sweeping along, hopelessly injured, and long before Steve and his friends had turned round the bend of the cliff they had disappeared under the water.

They dug their paddles into the stream now with a vengeance, and sent their craft surging up the Mohawk, the echo of discordant yells and whoops still coming to their ears. But they were secure from pursuit, and never even troubled to look behind them. Turn and turn about they struggled at the paddles, and in the course of seven days found themselves at the end of their river journey. They had reached the lake which emptied into the river, and their coming was greeted by a tribe of Mohawk Indians. Then for two days they trudged through the forest, the Mohawks helping to carry their stores. Above their heads the branches grew in one long, continuous arch, hiding the sun. Steve led the way, his record with this tribe of hardy warriors now vastly increased after his recent exploits. His eye followed the numerous blazes on the trees, slashes cut with Jim's tomahawk, and the trappers' sure method of marking a path.

"The last stage, I think," said Tom, on the evening of the second day, when they came in sight of water.

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That evening there was a serious palaver round the camp fire, and Silver Fox and his friends were rewarded with a portion of the stores. On the following day when Steve and his friends stepped into a canoe which had been hidden in the forest and pushed out on to this new strip of water, the Mohawks waved a farewell to them from the bank.

"Health and strength go with you, our brothers," cried Silver Fox, his features wearing their usual impassiveness. "Call should there be danger, and Silver Fox and his friends will surely come."

Steve watched them as they dived into the forest, and then stared down the river. They were on the Alleghany now, and a strong stream was bearing them down to their own beloved settlement. Indeed, the following day was hardly three hours old when all gave a shout of recognition.

"Thar's the place. And thar's Jimmy!"

It was Jim who waved his cap and shouted, while a faint huzza came back from the shore. They put the nose of the canoe towards a break in the forest, and very soon Jim and Mac were greeting their wives, while Tom and Steve looked on in silence. They unpacked the canoes, pulled them up, and separated, Steve and his father making for their own humble but comfortable log cabin.

Chapter VI

Left in Charge

"Marse Steve, Marse Steve, I'se that glad to see you. I'se prayed and prayed offen, and sometimes I think you never come home agin. Och, honey, I'se glad you'se back agin."

The black boy who acted as Tom's housekeeper wept with joy as the two sturdy trappers stepped into the hut. He was busy superintending the roasting of a wild turkey which hung to a string dangling over the cabin fire, and the return of his masters was entirely unexpected.

"I'se that glad, Marse Mainwaring and Marse Steve. Sammy wonder and wonder when yo gwine to come to de log cab'n agin. Sholy yo stay here now fo' ever."

The faithful fellow looked up at them through his tears while he still gripped both by the hand.

"There, there, Sammy," said Tom at length, touched by the warm welcome which the honest fellow had given them. "Let us have something to eat, and afterwards we'll lie down and take the best rest we have had for many a long day. We've been hunted, lad. Hunted by redskins."

Sammy's mouth opened wide at that, and he stared still harder at his master. Then he let his hand fall, and began to bustle about the table, chattering as he prepared a meal for them.

"Yo's sit down and eat and rest, Marse Mainwaring and Marse Steve," he said, giggling between the words. "Den yo'se lie down, and Sammy watch to seen no Red Injun come near to hurt yo. Marse Steve?"

"Well, Sammy."

"To'morrer p'raps yo sit outside'r the door and speak to Sammy? P'raps yo tell us all what's happ'nd?"

"Perhaps," answered Steve. "Now, hurry up with that turkey. Father and I have not had a peaceful meal for many a day. As for sleep, I fancy we have seldom had both eyes closed."

It was wonderful the way in which they settled down at the log hut which Tom had made his home. As if he had not been away from the place for even an hour, Tom strode across to the fireplace, and, taking his musket in his hand, spilled the powder from the pan, and blew the last of the grains away. Then he laid the weapon across the buck horns nailed to the logs, stringing the powder horn to one of the antlers, and the bag of bullets opposite. His coon-skin cap went still higher, while his damp moccasins were placed a few inches from the embers. Steve followed suit, and very soon the two were discussing the wild turkey.

Some three weeks later, as Steve and Sammy were engaged in manufacturing maple sugar, Tom came and sat on a log close by and watched them carefully. They had three large iron cauldrons dangling over log fires, while a fourth, a smaller one, hung over a separate fire placed some yards from the others. And here they were making a store of sugar to last them throughout the winter. Very early that day Sammy and Steve had been out in the forest, and having blazed certain of the maples, had set their jars beneath the slashes to catch the sap. And now they were boiling the latter down, throwing fresh sap into the larger cauldrons as the bubbling mass threatened to overflow the sides. It was a long process, and for some hours now they had been engaged in the task. They had boiled and boiled the mass till their store of sap was reduced to a third of its former volume, and now that third was placed in the smaller cauldron. Tom watched as they lifted the latter from its iron support and poured its contents into stone vessels to crystallise and cool.

"Steve," he called out. "Steve, I'm going away. I'll be back in a couple of months if nothing turns up to stop me."

Steve was not surprised. His father had gone away from the settlement on some business on several occasions before, while he had remained to keep house.

"Very well, father," he said. "I'll stay here and look out for your return. It will be winter almost by the time you come back."

"Almost, lad. About the Indian summer, I fancy, Steve."

He looked closely at his son as he called him again.

"Steve, my lad, these are uncertain times, and—and I might not have a chance of coming back. If I should not, there is a lot that you should learn in the next few years. Things you have never dreamed of. If I am not back in a year, if anything happens to me, just go to this address and hand in this letter. There it is. Now, I'm going."

It was not the backwoods fashion to take long in preparing for a journey, and so it happened that Tom Mainwaring set out for the Alleghany within half an hour of his conversation with Steve. They parted some ten miles from the log hut, Tom turning his face for the coast, while our hero stepped back to the settlement. And there for a little more than a month he went on quietly with the usual routine. He fished and shot and laid in a store of corn and dried bear's meat for the coming winter, the grinning Sammy looking after the log hut when he was away. Now and again, too, Mac and Jim would come over and spend an evening with him, while Steve would return the visit. For within ten miles of the hut there were some fifteen families, and it was the custom for all to visit one another.

And so the days passed uneventfully till one bright morning in late September, when there was a crispness in the air which denoted the coming winter. A shout from Sammy brought Steve to the door of the log hut.

"Marse Steve," he cried. "There's people sure on the water. They's comin' dis way."

Two canoes were being paddled down the river, and as Steve looked they turned towards the bank, with the evident intention of putting in at the rough landing stage where his own canoes lay.

"They are strangers," said Steve at once, shading his eyes from the slanting rays of the sun. "There are three white men in the first canoe, and three Indians in the second. I think that they have come from the French settlements."

He went to the buck horns over which his gun was suspended, and slung the weapon across his shoulders. Then he took his bullet pouch, his powder horn and tomahawk, and issued from the hut. By this time the strangers had landed, and as Steve walked down towards them the three white men moved towards a giant tree which grew within a few paces of the bank, a tree which stood alone amidst a host of blackened stumps; for when Tom had first come to the place virgin forest covered the land, and he had expended much labour in clearing it.

"What can they be doing?" wondered Steve, seeing the three halt at the foot of the tree and lift an object against the trunk. "They seem to be nailing something to the tree."

A few minutes later he arrived within a couple of yards of the group, and at once unslung his rifle, for with a start he recognised one of the strangers. It was Jules Lapon, dressed now in the hunting costume worn by French and English backwoodsmen alike.

"Bon jour, monsieur," said Jules, swinging round and greeting Steve with a cool and satirical smile. "I wish you a fine day and prosperity. You will be pleased to look at this notice, and afterwards you will take steps to move."

He pointed to the tree and stood aside, watching Steve with an expression which boded little good, and which seemed to combine malice and triumph. Our hero stepped closer and stared at the strip of tin which the Frenchman had pointed out. It was nailed to the bark of the tree, and bore in high relief the arms of France, while beneath, stamped on to the metal, were the following words, in the English language:

"In the name of Louis XV., King of France and of the Continent beyond the sea, we, Louis Joseph, Marquis de Montcalm-Gozon de Saint-Véran, Captain-General of the Forces in North America, and others of the King's servants, renew our possession of this land. We warn all who are not good and faithful subjects of France to depart peacefully and without delay."

There was a date and a rough signature underneath, while at the

foot of the tree lay a leaden disc, with a somewhat similar inscription, destined to be buried there so that there might not be wanting evidence in the future to prove the aims and aspirations of France and her king. Nor was this the first time that Steve had looked at such a disc. Some while before he had come upon another, nearer the great lakes, and he had heard that the French had placed many more in different parts.

"You will observe his Majesty's wishes," said Jules Lapon, with an irritating smile of triumph which brought a flush of anger to Steve's cheek. "The orders are that you depart peacefully and without delay. You will go this evening. To-morrow I and my Indians will come to your hut and the place will be France. Comprenez vous? Bien!"

Steve could have struck the rascally Frenchman, so great was his anger. Moreover, when he recollected that it was this same ruffianly foreigner who but a few weeks before had hunted himself and his friends with his band of cut-throats, he felt that he would be almost justified in shooting him where he stood. Then, too, there was this preposterous demand. For three miles on either hand the land belonged to Tom Mainwaring. He had paid dues for it to a land company, and he had settled the place. His labour had cleared the forest till there was sufficient open space to grow corn. The hut was his, the bank of the river, and a stretch on the far side lying opposite the hut. Steve's gorge rose at the thought that a Frenchman should order him to give up his own belongings, and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself. He bit his lip, stared at the tin placard, and then swung round on the Frenchman, a cool smile on his lips.

"You are joking," he said in French, causing Jules to start backwards in surprise. "Surely you are playing with me, just as you and your band of Indians played with our hunting party in the neighbourhood of Albany. That was a sad joke, monsieur. I fear that we were too much in earnest."

It was Steve's turn to laugh, for there was no doubt that the Frenchman was utterly taken aback. He staggered, flushed to the roots of his hair, and gripped at his tomahawk.

"You lie," he gasped. "I lead a band of redskins near Albany! You lie, I say!"

"You say so, monsieur," replied Steve calmly, with a smile which maddened Jules. "Yes, it is you who say that, and I hear. But my eyes are good. I know that you led that band. It was I who saw you in the camp which you had hidden in the forest."

"You saw the camp, and I was in it? And you say that it was near Albany? Monsieur is mad, or he does not know how to tell the truth."

Jules mastered his rage and mortification and made a bold attempt to deceive the young colonist. After all, he thought, it was more than possible that this Steve might have seen him there. But then Frenchmen were much alike, and the glimpse he had obtained could have been but a glimpse after all: and besides, Jules reflected, at that time he was dressed as an Indian.

"Does monsieur think that I am a bird?" he demanded brazenly. "I have lands to look to across the river, and how can I be there and at Albany?"

"I hardly think you could be in two places so far apart, at one and the same time," answered Steve, his temper well in hand now.

"After all, it is sufficient for me to know that you were in that camp in the woods at Albany, where Hunting Jim and I saw you distinctly. That was a long chase, Monsieur Jules, and I fancy it must have been somewhat of a surprise to you and your men to come across so small a band prepared to make a fight of it. Your men must have been discontented. I believe we killed ten at least."

This time he left no doubt in the Frenchman's mind that his rascality was discovered, and as Steve looked down at him he saw a gleam of malice light up the eyes of the ruffian, a gleam which seemed to say, "I will kill you at the first opportunity, Steve Mainwaring." Then Jules Lapon suddenly changed his intentions, a smile of triumph wreathed his face, and he pointed to the placard on the tree.

"After all, monsieur, it is not a question of men who have been killed, or of my presence at Albany," he said easily. "It is a question of this notice. You have read it?"

"I have."

"Then you will obey?"

"If I do not? Supposing I stay?"

"Monsieur, you see this whistle?" Jules took a whistle, made of horn, from his belt, and held it before Steve's eyes. "You observe that little toy, monsieur? Ah. Now I will tell you. Supposing you are so rash as to stay, I shall blow that whistle, and within an hour the far shore of the river will be darkened by the boats of my friends."

"Cut-throat Indians, monsieur," said Steve.

"You will be careful to describe my friends properly," cried Jules, making an obvious effort to control his anger. "I was saying that the Indians would come. They would hound you and your friends out of this settlement, and, after that, who can keep a check upon them?"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked significantly at his two comrades.

"Only the men with the guns," answered Steve. "I know your Indians, monsieur, and I know also that they have ravaged our settlements cruelly. But for all your threats, I will not give up my father's property. He was here long before the French had advanced south of Lake Erie. He paid for this land, and he has expended labour upon it. It is his. No king of France or his servants shall demand it of him or of me."

Steve looked the three Frenchmen calmly in the eyes, and then stepped up to the tree. Plunging his hunting knife under the sheet of tin, he levered it from the bark, and, tearing it free of the nail, threw it into the river.

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"That is what I think of your demand and of your placard, Jules Lapon," he said, "and I promise that if you come with your Indians and drive me away, I and my father will hound you off the place. For a time we English may be beaten back. But, mark my words, we shall regain our own again, and you will be defeated."

There was a shout as he went to the tree and tossed the inscription into the water. Then no sooner had he spoken than Jules sprang at him with an oath.

"You defy us. You defy me!" he shouted. "Then listen to this, you Englishman. Go now. I will give you a minute. If you are not then out of sight I will shoot you. Yes, I will shoot you as I had hoped to do up on the Mohawk. And after that I shall live in your cabin."

He threw all secrecy to the winds, and lifting his musket presented it at Steve's head. Indeed, for an instant or two it looked as if he would have shot him down on the spot.

"You see that I am ready," he shouted, as he looked along the sights. "Run for your life."

Steve was cornered. To turn and obey the command given him was the most natural thing under the circumstances, and it may be wondered that he did not do so. But he knew the methods of the backwoods, and was well acquainted with the reputation of this Frenchman.

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"He will shoot me as I walk," he thought. "I will stay and face him. After all, one can dodge a bullet sometimes if one keeps one's eye on the weapon. Monsieur, I will stay here. Get into your canoe and retire," he said sternly. "I also will shoot you if you do not lower that musket."

There was a shout of surprise and anger from the two who accompanied Jules, and they at once sprang forward and lifted their muskets, levelling the barrels at Steve's head. And there for a moment they stood, Steve holding his ground stubbornly, while the Frenchmen looked along their sights as if they were about to shoot at the defenceless figure standing before them. Then the scene was unexpectedly interrupted.

"That air enough. Put them shootin' irons down. Do yer hear?" A gruff voice suddenly burst from the edge of the forest, some twenty paces away, and the tall gaunt figure of Hunting Jim appeared amidst the leaves, the autumn tints matching strangely with the colour of his hunting shirt and his leggings. "Drop yer guns, and git!"

No wonder that the Frenchmen started, that Steve swung round

with a cry of delight. For not a sound had warned the disputants of the approach of the trapper. He stood there, outlined grimly amidst the leaves, for all the world as if he had sprung out of the ground. His musket was gripped in his hands, while the long shining barrels of two other weapons protruded from the trees on either hand.

"Yer see, we ain't quite alone," he said hoarsely, "and ef them guns ain't down in a jiffy—ah! that air well for yer. Now Jules Lapon, murderer and robber, I reckon you can git, you and the hul crowd. Ef we had shot yer down as yer stood, we'd have done what was right, and p'raps we'd have saved a hangman a bad job one of these days. Git, that's the order!"

The tables were suddenly turned with a vengeance. Steve, standing there bravely with three barrels presented at him, suddenly found himself looking into three very startled faces. The Frenchmen stepped backward involuntarily, and lowered their weapons as Jim began to speak. Then, unable to face the guns which were directed at them, they glanced at one another swiftly, turned, and made off at a run to their canoe.

"Stop! Jest drop them muskets. That air the ticket. Now put yer knives and tomahawks down, and Jules Lapon, you as wanted to get our scalps over by Albany, jest hook that ere whistle out'er yer belt. Now yer can go, and jest remember this. When we meet again there won't be no warnin'. It'll be shoot at sight. Don't ax fer nor expect no favors."

Jim watched with a grim smile of triumph as the three disconsolate Frenchmen put down their weapons and embarked. Then he and his comrades emerged and took up their stations beside Steve, staring out at the canoe as it stole away from the bank. More than a minute passed before Steve turned to look at those who had come so opportunely to his help. Beside the lanky form of Jim was Mac, his beard flaming in the sun, his broad hand gripping the stock of his musket, and a look of bitterness on his usually jolly features. On the other side, impassive as was his custom and the habit of his race, his head thrown forward and the feathers of his head-dress trailing down over his shoulders, was Silver Fox, alert and vigilant, his eye following every movement of the Frenchmen.

"Bad cess to the blackguards," cried Mac, a note of unusual bitterness in his tones. "They kin hunt me and you, Jim, and young Steve here too if they like, but faith whin they come to huntin' the women and childer it makes me blood boil. For why can't they lave us alone? What have we done to the bastes to set thim agin the whole of us?"

"You've got land," answered Jim shortly. "That's what you've got. You've gone and put yer broad carcass in the way of this here King of France. Steve, reckon this placard air worth keepin'."

He stepped to the bank of the river, waded in a little way and recovered the plaque, the sun glancing from the bright tin having made its position clear to those standing on the shore.

"Best keep it, lad," he went on. "It'll mind yer of a time when yer was precious near to death, and of the pluck as a youngster kin show. Reckon you stood up to them 'ere skunks as well as any man could ha done."

There was a murmur of approval from the others, while Steve shook his head.

"I wasn't going to be frightened by a canoe full of Frenchmen," he said doggedly. "This place is ours, and if this king wants it let him come and take it. The best man will hold it in the end. But I suspect it is not his Majesty of France. Louis XV. can have no great use for our little holding. But Jules Lapon has. He owns the ground on the far side next to father's, and with ours thrown in he'd have the whole of the river banks for three miles either way."

"You've hit it, Steve. It air that skunk as brought this bit of tin along, and it air him as wants the place," cried Jim, staring out across the river at the fast-retreating canoes. "What is more, lad, he's goin' to have it for a time. Me and Mac and Silver Fox guessed as there was somethin' up, and ever since daylight we've had our eyes on the varmint. There was a lot too much movement amongst the Injuns, and we reckoned it didn't mean good to us. Them critters has nailed their bits of tin at three other places along this bank, and they air going to take the land whether we want it or not."

"Do you actually mean that they will drive us out of the place?" asked Steve.

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"That air so. There's news comin' slowly through that the French and their Injuns is movin' on and drivin' the British before 'em. There's tales of settlements attacked and taken, men and women scalped, and children carried off by them redskin devils. We've heard the same before, and I don't know how it is that we along here at this settlement have escaped so long. But reckon these fellers is out on the war-path agin, and, lad, we've got to git."

Go! They must leave the place where Steve had lived ever since he was a tiny little fellow. The log cabin which was his home must be given up to these Frenchmen and their allies! The thought was a cruel one, and it is not to be wondered at that an exclamation of bitterness escaped him.

"Faith, Steve, me lad, it's hard to think on, so it is," said Mac, coming to him and placing a sympathetic hand on his shoulder. "Hasn't Mac and the loikes of him settled peaceful here? hasn't the wives and the childer made homes for all of us, so they have? But ye've to choose what's the best. To see these thavin' damons here in our very own places, or to see ivery mother's son of us, and the women and childer too—God bless the darlints!—scalped and kilt by these fellers. Sure, Steve, better to see the settlements burn, to put fires to ivery roof and watch 'em flare, than have them fellers settin' in our doorways, or scalpin' all of us. Och, but it's a sore time for us, a sore time, and we'll have to foight before we get back what's our own. Bedad! Ye'll know soon, Steve, darlint. 'Tis you and me, and Jim and Silver Fox, and ivery one of us, as'll take our muskets and go out to foight the blackguards."

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"Mac's jest talkin' sense. Reckon it air as he says, Steve," cried Jim. "Yer was near bein' wiped clean out jest now, and if yer wait it'll be a case with yer. Best get back to the hut and take what yer want. You've a bit of a pony, and I fancy you'll be able to take most of yer things. Then set fire to the place. We'll cross to the Alleghanies, and then we'll take service with the regiments which are bein' formed."

Steve stood looking at his rough but honest-hearted friends for some few minutes, and then his eyes roamed across the peaceful stretch of the river to the far bank, under the shade of which Jules Lapon and his comrades were paddling. Then the whistle which the French leader had dropped caught his attention, and he stared at that, too, for a little while.

"Father would do the same," he said aloud, but addressing no one in particular. "Yes, he would go, after firing the hut. There is no other course open. We have often talked over the possible coming of the French, and decided that we should have to retire unless supported by troops. But they are nowhere here. We have only ourselves to rely on. We must go."

He led the way to the log cabin, and at once set about packing the most valuable of his and Tom's possessions. Sammy led out the old pony which was usually employed in dragging timber, and roped the articles to his back, big tears welling up in his eyes as he did so. When all was ready Steve took a brand from the fire, looked once more upon his old home, the cabin in which he had lived sixteen happy years, and then fired the shingles. There was an air of resolution on his face as he did so, and he stood to windward watching the flames as they caught hold and licked round the logs with the same expression. Then, as the roof fell in and huge tongues of flame flared up into the air, he turned away with a smile.

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"I will help to build a mansion where that happy home was," he said. "Come Jim and Mac, and you too, Silver Fox, old friends, we will go where we can be of use to our country, and one of these days we will settle again in these parts, when the French have been driven into Canada."

"When they have been sent neck and crop out of North America," growled Jim. "Pick up yer traps, Steve. The other folks air waitin' for us way up there back of the rise."

Sammy took the rope bridle of the laden animal, and the trappers and their Indian friend fell in behind. And thus did Steve leave his home, not to return again till many an adventure had befallen him, and not till many and many a man had fallen in the contest which was about to break out with a ferocity which was almost

unexampled.

Chapter VII

The Alleghany Raiders

Sad and heavy of heart were the settlers whom Steve and his friends met at the top of the divide which ran between the valley in which they had lived and the forest region beyond, stretching right away to the Alleghany mountains; for each one of the forty or more persons of whom the party consisted had just lost home and belongings. Men, women, and children had been forced to turn out of their log cabins and take to the woods.

"It air a shame and no mistake," said Jim as the men of the party gathered about Steve's pony and discussed the matter. "But there's jest one thing that makes it easy so to speak."

"Easy! Yer don't call it an easy thing to have to fire the hut that took so long to build, do yer, Huntin' Jim?" cried one of the trappers, Pete Jarvis by name, his brows contracting as his bitterness increased.

"Yer don't say as it's an easy thing fer a man what's fifty and more to turn his back on what he's given years of his life to make, to steal like a skunk out'er these woods, where he's trapped and shot, and with his wife and children take the trail back to the west. Yer don't think that, Huntin' Jim. It's hard enough to break a man's heart."

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"It air all that and more, chum," was Jim's consoling answer.

"Neither me nor you, nor Mac, nor Steve, the young Hawk as he's known hereabouts, likes havin' to git at the word of them 'ere Frenchies. But fer all that I'm right. Ef it war winter where should we be?"

"'Tis then the poor childer would suffer, so they would," burst in Mac. "Sure, 'twould be the death of many a one, the poor darlints. Jim's right, so he is, Pete. We're lucky afther all."

Pete scratched his head at that, for the matter had never crossed his mind before. He had looked at this sudden exodus from a different point of view, and he was filled with bitterness and wrath. Still, now that he came to review the case, he saw that Jim was right.

"That air true," he admitted. "We've got a heap to be thankful for, and now that you've put it before me, why I'm downright glad that the time has come now, and not later. Still, boys, it air hard."

"It is, more than hard," agreed Steve. "But we still have something to be thankful for. We've been hearing tales of other settlements, and they have not even been able to leave. The Indians gave no warning. The French did not trouble to come along with their ridiculous bits of tin, but raided the places, burnt the huts, and massacred the poor settlers."

"And why ain't they done it here?" demanded Jim eagerly, clenching a big brown fist. "I'll tell yer, Steve, and you too Pete. It's 'cos that feller Jules Lapon air in these parts. Reckon he wanted them huts and crops. He don't want to walk in and find the hul place burnt by his Injuns. So he sends along and gives us the warnin' to quit, knowin' that once we've took the trail he can send the hul crowd of his Injun varmint after us. Waal. He ain't a goin' to get the huts, 'cos we've put fire to 'em, and the crops got served the same way. Ef we look after ourselves reckon he and them ugly red critters won't have such an easy time of it. We'd best get the business settled up."

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There was, indeed, little doubt that the danger which had suddenly burst about the heads of the settlers was a real one, and that now that the Indians had risen in those parts, the party might be followed and attacked. For the past four or five months tales of massacres of English colonists had come to the ears of Steve and his friends. All along the border-line huts and settlements had been raided, too often suddenly and without any warning, and hundreds of unfortunate men, women, and children had been killed and scalped. An Indian war of the most ferocious description had been raging here and there on the eastern slopes of the Alleghany mountains, and in many places the enemy had burst over that range and had annihilated settlements on the far side. Marching with the Indians, egging them on, and sometimes vying with them in their cruel practices, were scores of French *voyageurs* and settlers, and even many young officers from the regular forces; whilst behind these leaders, stimulating them with promises of land, and aiding

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them with money, guns, and powder, were the authorities living in Quebec. It was really a matter for wonder that Steve and his friends had not been disturbed before, for they had carved out from the virgin forests a most valuable settlement, and one which may be said to have stood in the direct line of the French advance. It may have been that they owed their security from interference so far to the fact that the land nearest to them was owned by Jules Lapon, and he happened to be away in other parts murdering and slaying, and taking stores from any party of trappers who happened to stumble across his path. Or this ruffian may have purposely kept his Indian allies away, having determined to obtain possession of such a valuable clearing. Whatever the cause, it happened that this particular settlement had escaped till now, and had been left so long without interference that many who lived there were beginning to hope that the impending storm might after all pass over their heads. And now, with scarcely any warning, the cloud had burst. They had been ordered to quit, and to leave all that they possessed. It was more than hard. It was cruel to think that these hardy trappers, the pioneers of the land, had no one to look to for help, and must needs pack up hastily and fly for their lives at the bidding of a French monarch whose name had barely come to their ears.

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"It does not help us to look upon the hardship of our case, boys," said Steve, as the men stood about him, dressed in their hunting shirts, their coon-skin caps, their fringed leggings and moccasins. "We ought to feel glad that we and the women and children are alive, and our business now is to make arrangements for our journey. Which way do we make?"

"Due west," answered Jim, with an emphatic wag of his head. "Up there somewheres on the Alleghanies we'll hit upon colonial troops. There ain't many of 'em, but they'll be enough to keep these redskin skunks away, and any of us as has a mind to can take on service with 'em. Ef we was to make north and west, up towards Albany —"

"Reckon that air out of the question," interrupted Pete. "I'm farthest over in that direction, and Silver Fox here can tell you that an army could not get through. West air our only way."

This was, in fact, the only direction in which the little party could make, for Silver Fox had brought information that roving bands of Indians were on the war-path between the settlement and Albany.

"Then we will turn west," said Steve. "We have got to protect ourselves, and I should say that the best way would be to send the women and children and half the men ahead, while we others wait and cover the retreat. I suppose we shall make for the old trail?"

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"That air what we'll do," replied Jim. "Now, as we're all here, supposin' we pick out those who air to stay. Married men goes in advance ef possible. Mac, guess you'll lead. You're a good trapper and woodsman, and yer know that it'll want a 'cute man to see that the way's clear. Me and Steve and a few others'll take the rear."

With such matter-of-fact individuals, accustomed to acting swiftly and in sudden emergencies, it took only a few minutes to arrange the details of their flight, and very soon the party chosen to go in advance had moved off through the forest, Mac leading and searching closely for the blazings on the trees which would tell him that he had come across the trail which led to the mountains. After him went the married men, with their wives and children. The ponies, upon the backs of which the children and some of the women were mounted, were placed in line, and, being thoroughly well trained to work in the forest, stepped one after another along the track. Their rear was brought up by Sammy, leading the lanky pony upon which all Tom's and Steve's possessions were packed.

"Guess we'll give 'em a good hour's start," said Steve. "Jim, I'll make back and keep an eye on the river with Silver Fox. If all is right I'll strike once on the trunk of a tree. If they are following you will hear two blows."

He and the Indian slipped away from the little band of backwoodsmen, and within an hour were looking down upon the river which they had so recently left. It was black with canoes which were passing to and fro, while a number were drawn up in front of the bank where Steve had had his encounter with Jules Lapon. Above the tops of the trees hung a dense pall of smoke, a dozen other columns shewing where the settlers had fired their huts.

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"They will follow to-morrow, Hawk," said Silver Fox, when he had looked at the scene for some little while. "They think that they will easily come up with us. In two days they will surround our party and we shall have to fight. It would be well to ambush them."

That set Steve thinking, and for an hour he lay there in the bracken staring down at the river. Then he got to his feet, picked up a fallen branch and struck the trunk of a massive tree a heavy blow, repeating the blow again some two minutes later.

"They will hear that," he said. "Now we will return, Silver Fox. Have you ever been on this trail?"

"Once, Hawk," was the answer.

"Do you remember the hills lying a day's march from this? There is a gap."

The Indian suddenly came to a stop, for they were returning by now, and stared into Steve's face. "The Hawk is sharp," he said, with a flash of his keen eyes. "Silver Fox remembers that gap. There we will lay an ambush."

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They trudged on through the forest and presently came up with Jim and his comrades. Then, with two men scouting in the woods on either side, and the same number in rear and in front, the tiny little party of stern men strode on after the fugitives in advance. And when the morning of the second day broke they struggled up to the rising ground which Steve had mentioned to Silver Fox. It was a rugged and precipitous ridge, with trees growing thickly up to its foot, and thick, long scrub running to its summit. As Steve clambered to the top he saw that it stretched for some miles on either hand, and he knew that to cross it at any other spot would be a difficult task, for he and his father had often hunted in the district.

"It is just the place for us," he said to Jim, as the trapper and some of his comrades gathered about him. "From the forest down below the Indians who are pursuing will be able to get a glimpse of our party after it has climbed over this ridge, for the land rises again, and you can see for yourself that it towers above this place. Now what do you say to this? We send on the best of the horses, with all the women and children, and instruct them to get ahead to that piece of open country to which I am pointing. Meanwhile, we will lie here and prepare a nice little ambush."

"While the women and children draw the varmint into it," cried Jim, with every sign of satisfaction. "Steve, you air 'cute. I 'lowed that many a day ago, but here yer air agin. Boys, that air a plan that's worth workin'."

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The spot was, in fact, an ideal one for an ambush, and Steve had had it in his mind's eye the whole of the previous two days, for he was well acquainted with the district. As he had said, this steep rocky ridge cut across the course of the fugitives, running for many miles on either hand. In many places it was almost unclimbable, and at this point it happened to be less severe, so much so that many a colonist making east into the promised land, the valley of the Ohio, had followed the blaze marks of those who had gone before him, and had clambered over the rise where others had found a road. It was the most natural thing, therefore, for this party of fugitives to take the same track, and indeed it was the only course that they could take. The Indians would know this, so Steve argued, and there was little doubt that by now they were within a few miles of the ridge. What would happen when they came up to it?

"They will climb over and wipe the whole lot of us out," our hero had said to himself. "We must stop them here if at all."

Then, as he tramped through the forest on the previous day, he had recollected that in approaching the ridge from the Ohio valley one caught a glimpse every now and again of the track far in advance, for the country to the west rose again, less sharply to be sure, but to a greater elevation. A party making their way over that second rise in the land would be instantly detected by the Indian pursuers, who would imagine that all their pale face enemies were there.

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"It is our only chance," said Steve, as the men gathered about him. "Our scouts in rear have not yet signalled, so we know that the enemy are not yet up with us, though they were on our trail last night. Then we have plenty of time. In an hour the ponies, with the women and children, will be on the high ground beyond, and when

the Indians see them——"

"They'll come streamin' up this ridge like hounds," growled Jim.
"This air the place to stop 'em. You place the boys, my lad."

Very rapidly and coolly Steve told the trappers off to their posts, cautioning them that there was not to be a sound till he fired his musket. Then he himself took cover close to the edge of the track and waited. Presently two slim figures appeared down below, flitting between the trees, and the trappers left behind as scouts began to climb the ridge.

"A hundred of the varmint full on the trail," whispered one as he lay down beside Steve. "We watched 'em till half an hour ago, and then me and Stubbs come along at a dog trot. They'll be in sight in less than no time. Reckon they'll spot the rest of our party. They air right up there on the high ground beyond, and yer can sight 'em ploddin' along beside the ponies."



"STEVE RESTED HIS BARREL IN THE FORK OF A DWARFED TREE"

"Hist! That air one of the skunks."

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Jim, who happened to be next to Steve, lifted a warning finger and then pointed below. A painted redskin, hideous in his feathered war-gear, slipped like a shadow from the trees and stood in the open, staring up over the ridge to the high land beyond. They saw him turn and call softly, and then, one by one, some hundred of his comrades flitted up to his side and stood staring at the white fugitives beyond. Some danced with joy and brandished their tomahawks, while one of their number turned and addressed them.

"My children, these pale faces are ours," he said. "Within the hour their scalps shall hang at our belts. Climb the rise and enter the trees. Do not make a sound till they are enclosed by us. Then rush upon them and slay."

He pointed to the ridge, and, leaping forward, led the way up the steep ascent. And as the whole party followed, their eyes fixed upon their leader or upon the summit of the rise, some twenty ponderous muskets went to as many stout shoulders, and sights were levelled upon the redskin demons clambering up the track. Steve rested his muzzle in the fork of a dwarfed tree and aligned the sights on the feathered chief who led the party. And there he waited, his cheek well down on the stock, his eye glued to the sights, and his finger pressing ever so gently on the trigger. He was as steady as the fork in which his weapon rested, for Steve was a hardened fighter by now, and he knew that the lives of all the women and children depended on the coolness and courage of himself and his comrades. He allowed nothing to frighten him, and where many would have pulled the trigger out of sheer excitement and inability to put up

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with the suspense any longer, he crouched there waiting, waiting.

"About thirty yards I make it," he said to himself at last. "I'll give him another two seconds. That will get the others up a little closer. We want our bullets to strike more than one of the ruffians."

Suddenly there was a loud report, a spurt of flame lit up the shadow in which he lay, while the leader of the Indians threw his hands into the air, howled in the most diabolical manner, and then fell backwards, to go sliding and bumping down the track till a fallen tree arrested further progress. A second later a volley came from the surrounding bushes, from behind rocks and boulders, while a storm of bullets plunged into the very centre of the huddled enemy. When the smoke blew away, Steve and his friends looked down upon an almost deserted track, cleared of Indians save for the bodies which lay prone on the hill-side or which rolled and slid down towards the bottom. Here and there in amongst the bushes on either hand the crash of a bough told that the enemy was there, but those sounds lasted only a few seconds, and presently figures flitted in amongst the trees down below.

"Them critters won't come to a stop till they've reached the river," laughed Jim, his face lighting up with joy. "Reckon they'll run till they've come back to that 'ere Jules Lapon of theirs. Steve, reckon you've jest saved us."

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He stepped over to the young trapper and gripped him by the hand. "It war your idea agin what brought us through," he said, "and it air you as'll lead us out of this country. Boys, you've heard tell of our trip up to Albany, and of how young Steve got on to the idea of them boats and reeds. Waal, this here notion of an ambush air his. Ain't he fit ter lead us?"

There was a shout of approval.

"He air all that," shouted Pete. "Hawk has made his name, and air real keen and 'cute. Reckon I don't want no better leader, no more do any of the others."

"Then, cap'n, you'll take on the command as before," said Jim easily. "We air out of the muss with them 'ere beggars. What air we to do now?"

"Push on as fast as we are able," was our hero's answer, when he had recovered from his embarrassment. "We will march with scouts out behind and in front and on either side. I am hoping to reach the mountains in four days."

The party pressed on after those in advance, and in due time came up with them. And thus, taking the utmost precaution against attack from the Indians, they marched through the forest in the direction of the Alleghany mountains. Now and again they came upon an open space, where the blackened logs spoke of a settlement which had been fired. And often enough there were signs of the struggle which had taken place. The bodies of murdered colonists lay among the grass, while such relics of the former inhabitants as a tiny shoe, a rag doll, or a wooden horse, caught the eyes of the men of the party and caused them to grind their teeth and clench their fists. Men swore into their beards, and in low tones vowed that they would repay the authors of these massacres.

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And so in time they came to the mountains, climbed the long and weary foot hills, and at length struggled to the top, still surrounded by the ever-present forest.

"We ain't far from white folks, cap'n," said Jim as the party began to descend the far slopes. "Pete reports as he's dropped on fresh fires, where the embers air quite warm; and there's been a hul lot of men about stampin' the ground with hard-soled boots."

"Reckon there's men up there," suddenly exclaimed one of the trappers, pointing to a high peak distinguishable above the forest trees. "They've been watchin' us, and the sooner we let 'em know who we air the better it'll be. They might be shootin' into us."

Steve at once sent off a couple of the backwoodsmen to speak to the strangers, and in a little while his messengers came back with four trappers similar to themselves. They were hardy-looking men, bearded and bronzed, and dressed in the customary hunting shirt and leggings.

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"Reckon you air lucky folk," said one, addressing Steve. "There's been few come through safely since the French set them Injuns on."

Have yer had a muss with 'em?"

"We beat them back at the range," answered our hero. "We set a trap for them, and they walked into it. That's the last we saw of them. But we have passed many a ruined and burnt-out settlement."

"Ay, there's many of 'em, more's the shame. Ef we up here get news of the comin' of the Injuns, why, we goes down and does what we can. But it ain't often like that. They come down upon the settlements like a hawk, and every one's wiped out. There ain't many settlements left. They say as all the backwoods huts air fired and men scalped, and that the bigger settlements just near the Alleghany range have also been fired. Then some of the varmint have been over the range, and they've wiped out big farms and hul villages. It makes a man swear to hear it all, and to know that we can do nothing to prevent the murders. But what can you expect when George has only a thousand men, same as us, to look after four hundred miles of frontier? Why, there's Injuns out all along the line from Western New York State right away down to North Carolina."

Steve and his friends were indeed amazed at this statement. They knew that an Indian war had been raging along the frontiers of the thirteen States, but having been so cut off in the forests, little news had come to their ears. They had learned that various expeditions had been sent against the French and their allies, and that these had for the most part been defeated or had failed to effect their object. They knew too that massacres had taken place here and there. But this was indeed news. It was terrible to learn that all along this frontier, extending over some four hundred miles, farms and settlements had been exterminated, that bands of Indians had ravaged the possessions of the colonists, and had even carried their war over the Alleghanies, wiping out the huts of the pioneers, which may be called the first line of defences, then firing the settlements which were not so far advanced, and which formed a second line, and finally, throwing themselves upon a third and final line, that formed by the more prosperous and more settled villagers on the eastern slopes of the Alleghanies.

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"But how have they been allowed to do all this?" demanded Steve, indignantly. "Surely there are men in the colonies! Why, if this sort of thing is allowed, the Indians will reach the coast, and will massacre at Charlestown and other places."

He swung round on his companion, his face flushed and his eyes flashing with indignation. Then he suddenly observed that a fifth stranger, dressed as a hunter like the rest, but with something about him which attracted more than usual attention, had joined the group, slipping up to it unheard and unseen from the forest. He was tall and lithe, some twenty-four years of age, and his keen blue eyes fixed themselves on Steve's figure.

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"Excuse me," he said, speaking with the voice of a man who had been brought up in a town, "excuse me, sir, but what you say is hardly likely to occur now. A year ago it seemed more than possible. But perhaps you have not heard. At last the English Government is tired of this massacre and this bullying. War has been declared, and troops are coming to help us. You may ask why the colonies have not done more. Pooh! They call a blush of shame to the cheek of every honest and patriotic colonist. While the shrieks of these unhappy settlers ring almost in their ears and almost within hearing of the coast towns, these comfortable stay-at-home planters and traders and country gentlemen sit in their council rooms and squabble. They set aside all thought of assisting their hapless brothers and sisters, while they heckle their unfortunate governors. But I must apologise again. You must understand that I feel the position bitterly, for I have had a hand in these troubles since the very commencement. Allow me to introduce myself. I am George Washington, colonel commanding the irregulars who have been given the task of defending four hundred miles of frontier."

So this young and determined-looking man was George Washington, of whom every trapper and hunter had heard. Steve regarded him with open admiration, and then, stepping up to him, shook hands eagerly.

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"It is a lucky day for us, then, Colonel," he said. "I am Steve Mainwaring."

"Cap'n Steve, known as the Hawk amongst the Injuns," burst in Jim,

stretching out a big brown paw to grip that of the colonel. "Cap'n Steve, Colonel, and as sharp and 'cute a fighter as ever I see. How'dy?"

"I am glad to meet you, gentlemen," said the young colonial officer. "You will come to our camp, where we will endeavour to make you comfortable."

He took Steve by the arm and led the way through the forest. And very soon the fugitives were in the middle of the hutted encampment where George Washington and his men had their quarters. Huts were allotted to the various families, while the colonel took Steve to his own log house.

"Come with me, Steve," he said with a friendly smile. "I am rather lonely, and it will be nice to have a companion to chat with. Besides, I want to hear all about the backwoods and the troubles you have had with the French and the Indians."

He led the way to an unpretentious hut, and very soon Steve was stretched on a rough wooden form, staring at the embers and chatting quietly with George Washington, even then a hero, and destined to become one of the greatest of American citizens.

Chapter VIII

A Question of Territory

"Never before has this fine country seen such troubles," said Colonel George Washington, as he sat puffing at his pipe and looking across the wooden flooring of his hut at Steve's long and active figure. "You have had fighting, you tell me. You will see more. We are only just entering upon the struggle. Tell me, Steve, what do you propose to do?"

That was a question which our hero found some difficulty in answering. But at length he rolled over on the form and sat up to look at his host.

"What do you advise?" he asked. "I have a letter here which I wish to deliver at Charlestown, and I should like to find out what has happened to my father. After that I shall join some band of scouts, and fight the French and their Indians. I suppose they mean to drive us all out of the country, and take it for themselves?"

There was an emphatic nod in answer to his question, and then for a while the two sat staring at the fire, each busy with his thoughts.

For who could doubt that the total extermination of the British colonists was intended? The French were rapidly pushing south and east, and in front of them ran a swarm of their Indians, massacring and slaying, and steadily pushing back the British settlers. To understand the position of affairs, and the facts which had led up to the moment when Steve and his friends arrived at the camp where George Washington and his small army had settled themselves on the Alleghany Mountains, it would be well for the reader to study a map of North America, and trace for himself the possessions held by the French and the English. For it must be remembered that these two nations, each jealous of the other, and often at war with each other, had sent their settlers and pioneers to this huge continent of North America. To describe how the first of those settlers landed, how they fought their way from the coast and conquered the forests, would be to enter upon a subject which would need abundant space and more attention than can be given here. But the history of those days is filled to repletion with tales of gallant deeds, of perseverance against great suffering and difficulty, and of final and glorious success. It will be sufficient perhaps if we say, when dealing with the British colonies, that Quakers and Puritans, together with others from England and Wales, also Scotchmen and Irishmen, found their way to the eastern shores of North America, and having dealt with the Indians, finally founded states, thirteen in number, stretching from New England in the north to infant Georgia in the south.

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Let the reader glance down the eastern coast of the map, and he will trace these thirteen States without difficulty, and will notice that, while each has easy access to the sea, where the coast naturally limits further extension in that direction, to the west there is a huge sweep of country running right across to the Pacific coast, but broken here and there by mountain and river and vast inland lakes. Then let him take those States in their order from the north, and ascertain what reason there was why each one should not extend to the west till her people flooded the whole continent.

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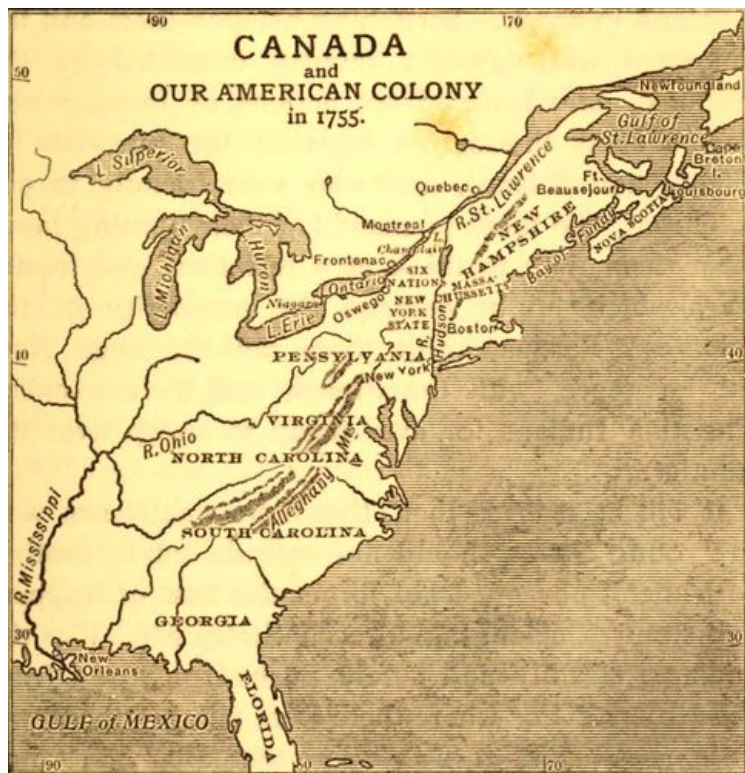
It may be admitted at once that abundance of time was one of the main requirements for bringing about such a state of affairs, for colonies do not grow in a day, and putting aside all natural barriers, and those erected by the hostility of the old inhabitants, whom the colonists will in course of time drive from their own country, many, many years must pass before the tide of immigrants flows across the land. For those who come first naturally select suitable places nearest the coast, while those who come later settle within reach of their friends, exchanging commodities with them. Later arrivals are forced farther and farther away, till in time the settlements are found miles and miles from the coast. Look at North America to-day. She has added many states to those thirteen which existed in the days when Steve sat in the log hut with George Washington. Her people have overflowed the country, they have pushed the Red Indian back steadily, and to-day they swarm in almost every part. The virgin forest of that day, the haunt of the buffalo and the

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hunting grounds of the Indian, now resound to the clang of the hammer, to the crash of the train, and to the hum and roar of a thriving population. Thousands come to the land every year to swell the throng, and paucity of population is no longer a source of anxious thought for the governments of the various States.

But it was in the year 1756. All told, the colonists of those thirteen States did not exceed a million and a half, while each one of the States may be said to have been of the size of England. It will be realised at once that it was all that such a population could do to colonise the neighbourhood of the coast, and that if the western border was to extend, thousands must come out to the country. As a matter of fact, however, few though the colonists were, their farms extended a considerable distance from the coast, and save in the towns, where they lived close together, the settlers were separated by wide intervals. They placed their huts for the most part in the fertile valleys, clinging to the rivers, thus having at hand the means of getting their corn and produce to the coast. And slowly, as the land was taken up, settlers took their farms farther and farther away, till some barrier arrested further progress. Such a barrier existed, and a glance at the map will show the position of the Alleghany Mountains, extending from Pennsylvania down to Georgia. It was not, of course, an obstacle which could not be surmounted, but it was for all that an obstacle which turned the would-be farmer back, for the simple reason that, with such a range stretching between him and the coast, there was no possibility of his getting his produce to market. Moreover, on the far side of that range Indians inhabited the forests, and they were an enemy to be reckoned with and feared.

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CANADA and OUR AMERICAN COLONY in 1755.

Thus it happened that from Pennsylvania south to Georgia there was every inducement to the young colonies to be satisfied with what land they already possessed, while to the north, where the natural barrier of the Alleghany Mountains did not exist, there were other barriers, none the less formidable, which held the State of New York and those of New England in check. Stretching between them and the unknown west lay the country inhabited by the Iroquois, consisting of six nations of Indians who had banded themselves together for purposes of offence and defence, and who were friendly to our colonists. To think of snatching their hunting lands from them, was to think of a relentless and fearful war, which might damage the prosperity of the colonies. Farther north there ran the huge river St. Lawrence, with the French and their so-called Christian Indians for ever ready to sweep over the frontier.

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It will be realized then, that there was reason why the young States should not extend, but in dealing with them, one must not forget the

host of trappers and hunters belonging to each State, who, like the Indians, steadily and surely pushed on away from the settlers. For where there were villages there was little game, and it was upon the latter that they depended for a livelihood. And so it happened that, while the colonies proper came to an end at the slopes of the Alleghany mountains, the trappers clambered over the range, and descended into the country beyond. And in course of time, when their numbers had increased and they had driven the Indians back after many a battle, they too formed settlements, adventurous farmers joined them, cleared the forest, and lived the dual life of farmer and trapper. Then the restless spirit of the hunters took them on again, till the forests west of the mountains harboured many and many a gallant trapper, till their solitary log huts were seen in the valley of the Ohio, on the banks of the Monongahela, the Alleghany, and the Kenawha.

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Those were the men who knew that Indians still existed, who hunted the bison and the bear, and fought the bloodthirsty native of the forests in his own manner and with bitter determination. It was these hardy fellows, men of Tom Mainwaring's stamp, trappers such as Jim and Mac and Pete, who carried old England's banner into new lands, and who were the very first to come in contact with the French and their Indians. Their occupation of this valley of the Ohio won claims for England which France could not deny and which we could not repudiate, and though up to this date the various States had for the most part stood aside, apathetically watching while these honest and brave pioneers were driven back, their huts fired and their people massacred, yet the time was now come when they and the Government in England were to recall the fact that this valley of the Ohio was ours by right of conquest, that it had been won by the toil and blood of the trappers.

There remains but one other point to explain with regard to the colonies. It may be asked why these million and a half souls looked on so calmly while the unfortunate pioneers and trappers were hunted and massacred, why they sat at home while the Indians swarmed to the western slopes of the Alleghanies and over the crest, slaughtering and destroying the settlements? It must be a matter for marvel that they remained for the most part inert and unshaken, even while the third line of defences was ravaged, and the bloody war brought to their very farms and mansions.

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There were many reasons for this state of affairs, and it may be said of the Southern States that it was so long now since their fathers and their grandfathers had driven the redskins over the Alleghany Mountains that they had forgotten that the Indians existed. There were no longer raids in their direction, and no fear of massacre. Then again, those who managed the affairs of the scattered population of these various States were more than inclined to sink patriotism and all thought of their fellow-States in acrimonious discussions amongst themselves, in petty squabbles over some matter which was of the smallest actual importance, and in for ever harassing their governor. They fought amongst themselves, squabbled with their neighbours as to boundary lines, and wrangled while their countrymen were being massacred, and even their own security threatened.

In the north it was entirely different. The States of New York and New England had French and French Indians on their borders, and they had never forgotten the bitterness of former wars, nor did the ever-present fear of an incursion help to dull their memories. We shall see that it was to these Northern States in particular that we are indebted for men and money, and for the initiative which first roused the States to a sense of their duty, and the home Government to the need for a leader and active opposition to the aims of France.

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Having given some idea of the thirteen States and their condition in and about the year 1756, let us turn to France and her possessions in North America. And perhaps it will be of interest to go as fully into this part as into that concerning our own colony. Let the reader run his finger from the northernmost tip of the island of Newfoundland along the northern shore of the St. Lawrence, and he will pass over the route which the gallant Jacques Cartier, of St. Malo, followed in the years 1535-36, when on a voyage commissioned by Francis I. This bold sailor was the first known European to ascend the mighty St. Lawrence river, a river which is

of huge proportions, and which is fed by the most gigantic reservoirs. Look at the five huge lakes, Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario, which cover a space larger than that covered by the whole of Great Britain, and consider that these five drain steadily into this St. Lawrence river, and you will perhaps have some idea of the vastness of this gigantic waterway.

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This Jacques Cartier cast anchor off the Isle of Orleans, which he named the Isle of Bacchus, for it was well covered with vines, and lay near the river St. Croix, within sight of the position where the city of Quebec now stands. He met with a friendly reception from the natives, and afterwards sailed up the river to Montreal, where an Indian town was then situated. Having done more than any other white man was known to have done, he erected a cross at St. Croix, claimed the land for his master and for France, and duly returned home, having completed his second voyage to these parts, a voyage commissioned, as has been said, by Francis I., with the object of discovering a short route to the Indies and new countries not yet discovered and appropriated by the Spanish or the Portuguese.

Monsieur Roberval was the first lieutenant to take up his residence in the newly-found country. It is quite unnecessary to follow his unimportant doings there, or the fate of the immigrants who went to join him. But it may be stated that progress was exceptionally slow, that colonists were few and far between, and that for many years the French population of New France was extremely small. Sometimes the new possessions met with favour from the French court, and for a while a new impetus was given to colonising. And gradually the interior of the country was opened up, or rather, some superficial knowledge of it was gained from the reports of discoverers and hunters. For here, as in the Ohio valley, the chief inducement to the hardy pioneers to push on was the desire to obtain furs, for which there was always a ready sale.

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But it must not be thought that their journeys took them so far that nothing more was left to discover. Other men of the same venturesome turn of mind were to appear upon the scene, Champlain amongst the most noteworthy. Then, too, we must direct our attention to Nova Scotia, the French Acadie, which attracted the eyes of the colonists in 1604. We find that expeditions landed here and founded settlements, and later we hear of gentlemen adventurers coming to this fertile Acadie, there to seek their fortunes. In course of time, too, to be precise, in the year 1625, Jesuit missionaries sailed for New France, and we find them hereafter dominating the affairs of the colony, ever pushing forward and boldly entering the country of the Indians. Indeed, the history of Canada is filled with accounts of these gallant missionaries, who struggled often alone into the forests, who were murdered and tortured by the redskins, and who yet pressed on, endeavouring always to bring the heathen Indian under the influence of their religion.

Cardinal Richelieu also appears upon the scene, the great Richelieu who dominated France, and we find him forming a trading company and arranging to send out artisans.

It is interesting at this time to remember that England had colonists at Massachusetts Bay, and that this country was ambitious of obtaining more lands, and even of ousting the French. Indeed, in the year 1628 Kirk appeared in the St. Lawrence off Quebec, and though he did not take the place, Champlain, then the governor, had the mortification of hearing that, in his descent of the river he had captured four armed vessels and eighteen transports, which were conveying those artisans whom the great Richelieu had selected. This was a serious set back to the colonists, and was increased tenfold in the following year, for Kirk again appeared upon the scene, and summoned Champlain to surrender. That was the first occasion when the broad banner of England floated over the fort of St. Louis, and the site whereon the city of Quebec now stands. However, on returning home, Kirk discovered that the war with France was at an end, and as a result the treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye was signed, and Charles I. handed back to France her possessions on the St. Lawrence, and Port Royal, in Acadie.

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During all these years the progress of New France had been slow, and on the mighty St. Lawrence her colonists were lost in the immensity of their new possessions. In Acadie they had fared little better, and though Port Royal was handed back to them and they

enjoyed peaceful possession of the country, it was not for a great number of years, for our fleets captured the province in 1654, and in our hands it remained till 1667, when Charles II. gave it back to Louis XIV.

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We pass over those years in Canada with the mention of few events, amongst the most important of which was the danger which the colonists now encountered from the Iroquois. They had a deadly feud with these men from France, and we hear of their canoes ascending the Richelieu and lying off Quebec itself, taunting the small garrison. These uneventful times, however, produced scores of gallant men desirous of pushing on into the mysterious west, and the names of Etienne Brulé and of Nicolet loom large in the list. For a while the invasion of the Iroquois kept these spirits close to the forts at Montreal and Quebec, but when the Indian trouble had subsided, the Mohawks having been dispersed, these gallant men pushed on again. They were found on the great lakes, and to north and south of them. Hunters pushed into the wilderness in search of skins, *coureurs de bois*, often the younger sons of men of position in France, blazed their tracks through the forests, intent upon discovery. And with one or other were to be found the ubiquitous priest, bolder and more persevering than any perhaps. The tales of these wanderers fill one with wonder and admiration, and the history of these years of discovery teach us that the French were wonderful hunters and explorers. They took to the forests as a duck does to water. Often enough they associated with wandering bands of Indians, learned their language and lived with them for months and even years at a time, dressing in their hunting costumes. The fascination of the wilderness cast such a spell over the colonists that at this period, when men were sorely needed in the settlements, when the hold which France had on her fine possessions was none of the securest, scarcely a young colonist, be he habitant or the son of a man of consequence, could be persuaded to remain. Threats of severe punishment could not keep them. They broke from home ties, took their ponderous muskets, their bullet and their powder pouches, and went off into the forests, content to hunt and wander into a country which was entirely strange, and to indulge in a life of freedom and adventure, where hardship was the order of the day, and where only the strongest and boldest survived.

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But it must not be supposed that the governing powers at Quebec, in their endeavours to retain these young men, entirely muzzled the desire to make fresh discoveries. They fostered the idea, selected suitable men, and equipped expeditions. Frontenac, whose name has secured an honoured place in the history of Canada, sent Jolliet to find that great water of which the French had heard, though it had been but vaguely mentioned. This intrepid explorer finally launched his canoe on the waters of the giant Missipi (as it was then spelled), and with Marquette, a bold Jesuit, paddled down the stream. René Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle, completed this important work of exploration, and with Tonty and Father Membré sailed down the long stretches of the Mississippi till he reached the Gulf of Mexico. This momentous voyage opened the eyes of the French very wide indeed, for the travellers could tell of fertile lands stretching from the great lakes to the gulf in the south, and of a huge expanse of country which would give refuge one of these days to millions of wanderers pressed out of their own native lands by the overcrowding there. However, beyond building a few forts, nothing more of consequence was done till we arrive at a period in which New France, now generally styled Canada, made rapid strides under the able leadership of her governors and the careful attention of Louis Quatorze.

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There were perhaps three thousand souls in the colony prior to this period, and it was obvious that many more were required if France was to retain her rights there. The astute young king was the first to recognise this, and we find him sending emigrants in large numbers, emigrants who had been carefully selected. They consisted of young men of the peasant class, called *habitants*, and of officers and younger sons, for the most part unmarried. Then ship loads of peasant girls and demoiselles were dispatched to the colony, and every inducement offered to these men and women to marry and settle down. Indeed, young men who failed to take notice of these inducements were harried and taxed till they fell in with the wishes of their king. In addition to these emigrants, men of some family were persuaded to go to the colony, and from these smaller

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"gentilhommes" a Canadian noblesse was formed, seigneurs were selected from amongst them, and a form of feudal life commenced in the backwoods. The seigneur had a huge grant of uncleared forest, he built his log hut or cabin, and a rough fort to protect him against the Indians. And about this fort gathered his *habitants*, tilling the land he allotted them, and paying their rent in kind, a portion of corn, a few bear skins, fresh salmon from the lake, or other commodities. Allegiance they gave to their seigneur for the simple reason that these seigneuries were scattered and widely separated, and self-support was their only policy, for otherwise they would have fallen victims to the first redskin marauders.

And thus we find the possessions of France slowly being peopled, till in the year when Steve and his friends reached the Alleghanies, the colonists numbered some 60,000 souls, exclusive of some ten thousand living in Acadie, once French but now English, though the *habitant* who had filled that smiling land was French by birth and intensely French in thought and sympathy. We find Cape Breton, an island just north of Nova Scotia, a possession of France, with the formidable fortress of Louisbourg situated upon it, and its ramparts bristling with cannon. Hunters and *coureurs de bois* had sailed across the lakes, and knew every foot of their shores, while soldiers and agents of France had built forts and trading posts in numerous places, had erected stockades at certain points on the Mississippi, and were slowly progressing in a scheme which promised soon to allow the men descending this mighty Mississippi to join hands with men of their blood at New Orleans, settled some time ago by the French.

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Look again at the map for a moment, and see what such a line of forts meant. It cut the northern continent into two unequal parts, leaving France the major portion lying to the west, as well as that wide tract between the Mississippi and the Alleghanies. It was this portion, commencing with the valley of the Ohio, which they determined to occupy, despite the fact that our hunters and pioneers had penetrated its forests years before, and it was this same valley in which their own Indians were now camping, having harried and massacred far and wide, and set fire to all the settlements not only in the valley, but as far as and beyond the Alleghany range.

History repeats itself, and it is strange to consider that the constant forward movement of these persevering French was copied years afterwards by those gallant men who opened up the great west of North America to the thirteen colonies, that the work of exploration carried on in Canada by hunters, by *coureurs de bois*, and by the restless and bold spirits of the young noblesse was repeated on the far side of the Alleghanies. Not that our trappers, even at this date, when the French were doing their utmost to oust the British from the Ohio valley, had been backward. They had done much, and a glance at the map will show the reader that they had a station on Lake Ontario, Oswego by name, which was well in advance of their own frontiers, and which, in fact, was a bitter thorn in the side of the French. But adventurous though our trappers were, they had not penetrated so far perhaps into the wilderness as had the French, for the simple reason no doubt that ways of communication were less frequent and difficult to come across. A French trapper might enter his canoe at Quebec, and there was water to take him hundreds of miles into the heart of the country, to the farthest bays and creeks of the giant lakes. True, there were mighty falls, as witness those of Niagara, but a canoe could be carried. There were "portages" where canoes must be taken from the water, the stores piled upon the backs of willing Indians, and the whole outfit carried to some point above the falls. But these did not altogether bar the great waterways, and on this account prospecting and exploration was easier for the French. And thus we find them at the period of this impending conflict masters of the St. Lawrence, with strong places at Quebec, Montreal, Niagara, and Frontenac, not to mention the huge and elaborately defended fortress at Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island. We hear of their soldiers and trappers, with thousands of Indians south of the great lakes, of their forts on the Mississippi and on the river Richelieu and on Lake Champlain. In fact, these energetic men, in spite of their paucity of numbers, were swiftly surrounding the British, cutting off the thirteen States from the smiling interior of America, and aiming no doubt at their final extermination. We shall see, however, that even an apathetic people

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may at last see their danger, and that England was not to be so easily driven from a colony which had been founded by her hardy sons.

Chapter IX

George Washington speaks

George Washington, the young colonel of colonial troops, was one of the few men who may truly be said to have taken an active and patriotic interest in the thirteen States as a whole in those eventful months when Steve and his friends fought Jules Lapon and his Indians in the forest, or hunted and trapped along the river at the risk of losing their lives. Young though he was, this courtly colonial gentleman, whose name at this day is held in honoured memory by Americans and Englishmen alike, had already taken an active part in the events which had slowly and insensibly led up to a conflict between the French and the English. Steve looked at him as he lolled on the rough wooden form, and could scarce credit the fact that he was speaking with George Washington, openly spoken of at that period as the colony's chief champion, and well known to be one of the first to have crossed swords with the enemy.

"What do you advise me to do, Colonel?" he asked, as he refilled his wooden pipe. "I must work, of course, or else I shall starve, and the work I want is something in connection with scouting. Then there is my father. I do not fear that anything has happened to him, but am naturally anxious that he should learn that I have crossed the Alleghanies."

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"You have a letter for Charlestown; is that not the case?" asked the Colonel. "I can have that delivered for you, and I will make a point of warning all the men stationed at the crossings over this range that they are to stop your father and tell him what has happened. If you consent to that, then I have work for you."

He pulled at his pipe and stared across at the young trapper between half-closed lids.

"He is just the lad we want," he was saying to himself. "He is called the Hawk, and I know that no Indian would give him such a title if he were not worthy of it. He has friends, too, who will help him. Yes, he has come in the nick of time. Well," he went on, speaking aloud, "what do you say to this proposition? I will take care that your father is warned, and I have work for you, work which is of the utmost importance, and which every patriotic man would eagerly undertake."

"Then you may put my name down for it, Colonel," said Steve quickly. "I have seen enough of these Frenchmen to make me sure that every trapper will have to fight if he wishes to get back his possessions. They have robbed us all in the most barefaced manner, and I for one mean to get back what they have taken. Then, they say that these enemies are determined to drive us altogether out of the country. That means that England is in danger of losing her colony, and every man, or lad for the matter of that, should take a hand in defending the country."

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"Would that all would think in the same way," sighed the Colonel. "I am surrounded by apathetic people, by farmers who are still almost ignorant of the turn affairs have taken, by planters and traders whose relatives have been massacred by the Indians, and who yet are content to continue planting and trading without a thought or care for the unhappy people who have sought a home on the far side of this mountain range. Excuses are everywhere. Men will not turn out to fight because they have crops to look to, because they have wives and a home, or with better reason, because they have lost all sense of patriotism, and the national danger does not alarm them. It is maddening to think that there are hundreds and thousands who could help us, whose fathers were patriotic to the backbone, and who would have responded at the first call. I can only think that prosperity has killed all thought of the nation, and that they will not be roused till the French are at their doors. There, Steve Mainwaring, you have my opinion of the southern States. They are mostly apathetic, though the men could fight, ay, and would fight if only they could be brought to the point. Look at Pennsylvania, too. Her council will not move a step to help the colony, simply for the reason that they are for the most part Quakers, and hostile to even the thought of war. Would they fight, do you think, if they heard the war whoop of the Indians?"

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He looked across at Steve, and flushed red with indignation.

"If they did not they would have little chance afterwards," was our hero's scathing answer. "They would be cowards if they did not do all that was possible."

"And yet they are not that," said George Washington slowly. "It is simply apathy which keeps them at home. They seem to have no interest in the struggle. Now, look at the north. There are men, if you like! They are Puritans for the most part, but they do not forget the Indians, and they have already helped with men and money. There have been stirring times, I tell you, Steve, and there is stern fighting before us. I'll let you know how we stand at the present moment, and what has happened in the past, for I expect that you are fairly ignorant. News does not travel far or fast in the backwoods."

Steve and his friends had, in fact, only a superficial knowledge of the events which had led up to the then position of affairs, and he listened with interest as George Washington told of how the French had commenced upon a course of intrigue and invasion which was destined to despoil the thirteen States. It was De la Galissonière who had first cast covetous eyes on that no-man's land in the valley of the Ohio, and who in 1749 had sent an expedition to the valley with instructions to nail up proclamations stamped in tin, claiming the land for France. He argued that once this had been done he could pour settlers into the country, who would quickly oust the British, for it must be remembered that the latter were few in number, and for the most part very scattered, preferring to pitch their farms alone, and not to live, as did the French, always in communities. And while this process of filling the debatable and coveted land was in course of completion, agents were engaged with the *habitants* in Acadia (Nova Scotia), undermining their loyalty to King George of England, and preparing them for revolution. This was perhaps one of the most disgraceful events of this period, for these humble and hitherto contented people were dominated by these agents, who gained an ascendancy over them by detestable means.

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It was Shirley of Massachusetts and Dinwiddie of Virginia, both far-seeing governors, who first bestirred themselves in the matter. They realised the schemes of the French, and the patriotic and energetic young colonel who sat opposite to Steve, the famous George Washington, was sent on a mission to the commander of Fort Le Boeuf, which the French had erected some twenty miles south of Lake Erie. That was in the year 1753, and when George Washington, after a most arduous journey, returned to Williamsburg, he brought no satisfactory answer with him. He had met with politeness. That was all. The French would not retire, and showed every disposition to remain in the country south of Lake Erie. Dinwiddie, who was at this time the moving spirit, had in the meanwhile obtained the sanction of the English Government to oppose force by force, and to do his utmost to arrest the invasion of the French.

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It is interesting at this time to remember that France and England were at peace in Europe, for after the war of the Austrian succession, and the battles of Dettingen and Fontenoy, the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle was solemnly signed. And yet we find our Government giving its sanction to a movement in America destined to drive the French out of the country, while we know that France, in spite of the peace, was steadily, if not feverishly, pressing her colonists into the valley of the Ohio, and flagrantly abusing the peace which existed between the nations. However, such conduct on our part was certainly to be commended, for we were not the invading party, and were merely attempting to protect our own interests. We were not desirous of an open rupture with France, our hereditary enemy, for the simple reason that we were not ready. Our Government was weak, its colonial policy vacillating, while its chief minister was altogether unsuited to our needs. But, whatever the condition of those at home, there were strenuous men in America, and we find Dinwiddie despatching a second mission of forty backwoodsmen, under Ensign Ward, to erect a fort at the junction of the Alleghany and the Monongahela rivers, in the Ohio valley. They were driven back by French *voyageurs* and soldiers, who promptly erected a fort at this chosen spot, a fort well known in following years as that of Duquesne.

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And now we come to more stirring times, times in which George Washington took an active part. As he sat opposite to Steve, he modestly related how he had been sent with 150 men to destroy this Fort Duquesne, how he had fallen in with a party of Frenchmen, and how they had exchanged fire, with the result that the French leader and some of his men were killed and wounded, while some twenty-two were taken prisoners. This may be said to be the first occasion when blood was shed in this historic conflict, and bearing in mind what has been written with regard to the apathy of the various southern States, it is only fair to mention that Washington commanded Virginians, and that it was Dinwiddie, a Virginian governor, who persuaded his legislature to vote £10,000 for the cause, and thereby enabled him to take active steps to oppose the French.

But the men whom Washington now had under his command were hopelessly few, though reinforcements had brought their strength to 350, for the French had been preparing for the struggle for a long while, and had more than a thousand men at Fort Duquesne. They advanced on Washington, who retired to Great Meadows, and threw up entrenchments, aptly named Fort Necessity. And there he was attacked in force, while a deluge of rain descended on the two opposing forces. After nine hours of gallant resistance, the French were still all round the improvised defences, and being in almost as miserable a condition as the colonials, they proposed a capitulation, which the young colonel refused. Later, when his ammunition was exhausted and some hundred of his men lay killed or wounded, he consented to discuss terms, which were at length agreed upon, for they were sufficiently honourable and lenient.

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Such an open rupture, it may be easily assumed, caused unusual excitement, and the presence of the French and their murdering Indians in the backwoods of the Ohio valley practically drove our trappers and pioneers back across the Alleghany range. A few hardy and courageous men, however, still clung to their huts, and we have already made the acquaintance of some of these. The excitement, and obvious intentions of the French were not sufficient even yet to rouse the thirteen States to concerted action, though Virginia, having quarrelled with Dinwiddie till he was almost frantic, and having voted him twenty thousand pounds for purposes of military defence, but saddled with some impossible proviso, at length withdrew the proviso, and granted the money free. There was little stir in the other States. Men from New York State were under arms, and some from Carolina. Pennsylvania, with a large German population, stirred not a finger. It is wonderful and amazing indeed to remember that these people inhabiting the various States and displaying such suicidal apathy, were the sons of a race which had shown wonderful pluck and perseverance, and themselves the originators of that following race of men who fought and bled for their country so manfully, whose blood flows in the veins of descendants who are justly proud of their forefathers, and who, in place of apathy, show to a wondering world great patriotism and activity, the power to fight and work with equal determination.

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We leave the conflict at Great Meadows, and the year 1754 with England and France still at peace in Europe, but preparing for an inevitable war in the backwoods. Those following months saw a new French expedition sent to Canada under a new governor, and feverish preparations pushed on for the coming war. As to England, she at length saw the necessity for sending help, and despatched troops to America, while her fleets sailed, each captain having no doubt secret instructions to attack and capture the French expedition. Indeed, in the summer of 1755 two French vessels were captured off Nova Scotia.

Meanwhile Braddock, the chosen leader of our troops, had arrived at Alexandria, opposite the site of the present city of Washington, and plans for the coming campaign were discussed, while Johnson, a young Irishman, who had lived much in the backwoods, and who knew the Indians as well as did Steve, was given the task of travelling amongst the six tribes who composed the Iroquois, and endeavouring to counteract the subtle influence of the French. For these astute enemies of ours were not content to have their own Indians following them. They aimed at suborning the six tribes who had hitherto been favourable to the English colony.

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Now let the reader glance again at the map for an instant. He will

see that the river St. Lawrence forms one side of a triangle, of which the Mohawk river, uniting with the Oswego, forms a second, the Hudson, Lake George, and Lake Champlain, with the river Richelieu, completing a line which makes the third. The latter two sides formed the readiest means of attacking the French, for there was a waterway in either case, while on every hand there was virgin forest, through which the task of escorting an army was very great. The council which met at Alexandria, and which consisted of British officers and governors of the various States, decided that Fort Duquesne was the key of the whole position, and should be attacked in force, while to divert the attention of the French an expedition should make for the chain of lakes running northward from the Hudson, and a second for Acadia, where the *habitant* subjects of King George were in practically open rebellion.

It is not possible to give in detail the various incidents which befell these three expeditions, but a few words will suffice to describe what happened. Braddock's force, consisting of regulars from England, and of a few rangers from New York, Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina, marched for Fort Duquesne through the woods, and after meeting with great difficulties and serious delays at length came within a dozen miles of the fort. What followed will for ever be an illustration of the futility of attacking a guerilla force as if it were a European army encamped in the open, or drawn up in serried ranks to oppose the coming of the enemy. Braddock's men were met after they had crossed a river by a fierce and stinging fire which belched from the thick forest and brush. Occasionally a blue or white uniform was seen, or the feathered head of an Indian, and at these our guns were discharged with some effect. Indeed, for a while the French flinched, and but for the courage of their officer might have fled. They rallied, took up their stations in the bush, and kept up a constant musketry fire upon our columns drawn up in close order in the open. Then the Indians crept through the forest to either flank, and presently our hapless men were being raked by a stinging hail of bullets. Pack animals dashed madly amongst them. The war-whoop of the Indians deafened the combatants and increased the disorder. At this moment, when the British were standing their ground with magnificent courage, replying to a fire delivered by an invisible foe with searching volleys, a little common-sense might have gained the day for us and sent the Indians and the French in full flight to their fort. But there was no one in authority possessed of that common-sense. The Government of that day had done as those of following Governments have done without fail. They had sent a British officer to command, who knew nothing of the backwoods and the men who inhabited them, who was ignorant of Indian warfare, despised cover, and thought that there was no glory in a fight in which the combatants did not stand shoulder to shoulder, in the full blast of the cannon. An order to the men to break ranks and take cover might have altered the sad event entirely. But our soldiers were kept in the open, and at length, after facing a terrible fire for two hours, they fled on seeing Braddock mortally wounded.

"It was the most terrible experience of my life," said George Washington as he sat in front of Steve. "Those gallant but ill-led men stood as firm as rocks, and were slaughtered like sheep. The few Virginian backwoodsmen we had with us took cover and did their best to hold the enemy, but were too few to make any effect upon them. We fled, and our flight became a rout. A panic seized the men, and nothing could hold them. Let us pass on from that battle, for it is not pleasant to have to reflect upon it, while I can assure you that the effect of such a disastrous defeat was felt throughout America, and even in Europe. As to its effect in the valley of the Ohio, you should know that very well. No doubt you saw something of the Indians and of the French."

"We were attacked by one band, under a rascal named Jules Lapon," answered Steve. "But we beat them off handsomely, and won our way through from Albany in safety. I believe that we owe our security from interference at our settlement to that same Jules Lapon, for he had land next to ours."

"And carefully kept others from stealing it, even his majesty Louis XV. of France. But I will proceed. As I have said, I was one of those unfortunate ones who took part in the Braddock expedition, and I was saying that the effect was disastrous in the valley of the Ohio. The Indians swept on, and though I was left to protect the frontier,

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how much use was I when I had some four hundred miles to watch and a bare thousand men to help me? No wonder the Indians pushed on, and thousands of our settlers were massacred. But to proceed. The French captured papers with the baggage of Braddock which told them plainly what other movements were taking place, and they at once made ready to oppose these attempts on their frontier. Shirley started from Albany with some 1500 men, and made his way by the Mohawk river to Oswego, where he prepared to march on Fort Niagara. But the French put all thought of such an attempt out of his mind by throwing reinforcements into Fort Frontenac, which, as you know, is on the opposite side of Lake Erie, only some fifty miles away. Shirley had nothing left but to increase the defences of Oswego, and returned, having left a garrison of 700 men.

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"The third expedition was under Johnson, a man who knows the Indian better perhaps than any other white man. He also set out from Albany, with 6000 provincial soldiers, 4500 of whom came from Massachusetts. All were amateurs in the art of war. A few were backwoodsmen, but the majority were farmers, mechanics, or fishermen. As for Johnson himself, he was wholly unused to the command of men, and innocent of that organising ability without which a force cannot be victualled satisfactorily. In addition, I must tell you that the men he had were unused to discipline, and very apt to act and think for themselves. But I will not give you all the details. Johnson reached the bend of the Hudson, *en route* for Crown Point, the French station at the foot of Lake Champlain, and left 500 men there to build a fort known now as Fort Edward. Then he pressed on across the twelve miles of virgin forest which stretched between him and Lake George. Arrived there he commenced to build Fort William Henry.

"Meanwhile the French had poured reinforcements into Crown Point, for it must be remembered that they had captured Braddock's papers, and knew that this movement of Johnson's was afoot. Their scouts told them of the arrival of the British, and they at once made arrangements to attack. Stealing down the long strip of water which runs parallel with Lake George, known as Wood Creek, they landed from their canoes at a point which struck the road between Fort Edward and Fort William Henry in the centre, and, believing that there were no cannon at the latter fort, they prepared to attack it. Meanwhile Johnson had heard of their coming, and sent out a force to find the French and drive them back. This force fell into an ambush, and very nearly met the fate which had befallen poor Braddock. However, they extricated themselves and retired on the fort, where the contest was continued. And here the New England farmer and backwoodsman showed his mettle. He took cover cleverly, for the fort as yet existed only in name, and was a mere barricade. He searched the woods with his bullets, and, aided by our guns, caused considerable loss to the enemy. Then, gathering heart, the sturdy provincials leaped over the barricades and charged down upon the French with clubbed musket and tomahawk. That gallant charge drove the enemy from the field, and resulted in the capture of their leader. It was followed by another success, for part of the French force, consisting of Canadians and Indians, had retired from Fort William Henry into the woods to the place where their ambush had been laid, their intention being to loot and gather scalps. Here they were pounced upon by a small force sent from Fort Edward and utterly routed. Thus, you will observe, what had very nearly been a disaster ended in a fine victory for our arms, and in a measure helped to lighten the depression caused by Braddock's defeat."

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Colonel George Washington sat up to look at Steve, and remained for some minutes lost in thought. No doubt he was passing in review those eventful days during which he had marched with Braddock. He had given Steve some idea of what had occurred, though he had not completed the tale. For a fourth expedition was attempted that year. Two thousand staunch rustics, enlisted from Massachusetts, sailed from Boston harbour for Nova Scotia, their object being to capture Fort Beauséjour which the French had built on debatable land on the isthmus connecting Canada and Nova Scotia. It was from this post, the headquarters of the intriguers, that agents and soldiers worked to undermine the loyalty of the *habitants* of Acadia, for France was determined to recover this lost province. However, the gallant peasants from Massachusetts brought their designs to an

end, for they sat down outside the fort, and despite attacks from Indians and Acadians outside, they pressed the siege so strenuously that the place was surrendered. Then the troops marched across to the north shore of the isthmus and took Fort Gaspereu without meeting with opposition.

The end of this momentous year of 1755 found France and England still ostensibly at peace, for there had been no declaration of war as yet. The winter brought some abatement to Indian ravages on the British frontiers, but the French had the best of the position. The valley of the Ohio was theirs, right up to and over the Alleghany range. They had a formidable force at Fort Duquesne, at Frontenac, and at Niagara. Their defences at Crown Point were improved, and now they were hard at work erecting Fort Ticonderoga at the very foot of Lake Champlain, not more than forty miles from Fort William Henry. As to Nova Scotia, it was in our possession now, but the very formidable fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Isle dominated the position, and offered a haven to French ships, and a base from which the strongest expeditions could set out.

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"There is little else to tell you, Steve," said George Washington, sitting up suddenly to shake the ash out of his pipe and refill the bowl with best Virginian. "Still, as I think over all the events which have happened, I see one or two other points which may help to enlighten you. Nova Scotia, for instance, that old French Acadie, you might well consider to be still a thorn in the flesh, in spite of the reduction of Fort Beauséjour; for Louisbourg lies very close to it, and there were thousands of disaffected *habitants* to be dealt with. But they are no longer in need of consideration, for they have been deported. Yes, cruel though the act seems, it was necessary, in my opinion, for they were a menace to our safety, and were so obviously French in interest and sympathy that it was necessary to remove them. And now to complete my tale. Oswego has fallen, and the French have wiped the station out of existence. Then France has made a descent on Minorca, and that taken in conjunction with her attitude here has caused our government to declare war, and to show that it will support us, it has voted £115,000 with which to carry on this conflict. General Abercromby and Colonel Webb have taken up commands, and I hear now that the Earl of Loudon has arrived in the colony. Meanwhile colonial troops have been enlisted for the coming campaign, and after gathering at Albany report says that they are now reinforcing Forts William Henry and Edward, where they will strengthen the defences and make ready for an advance by road or lake upon Fort Ticonderoga. But it is already late in the season, and I doubt that anything will be done before the advent of 1757. We want more men and money, and very much stronger support from home, and I hear that there is a prospect of receiving it; for rumour says that a new ministry will be formed, and Pitt will come into power. Then this campaign will be pressed on, and we may hope to beat the French. For here again I have a little information.

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"Knowing how relatively few their men are, you would expect France to pour troops into Canada," said the young colonial leader, as he looked across at Steve. "Well, she has done so up till recently, and has sent a fine commander in the person of Montcalm. But European conquest has distracted her attention, and it is a fact that she has joined a coalition with the object of attacking Frederick of Prussia. She has dropped her active colonial policy for the shadow of European glory, and, mark my words, she will bitterly rue her determination. She has progressed rapidly in this campaign, her woodsmen and Indians press at our doors, and our middle and southern States still sit apathetic, playing into the hands of our enemies. There will never come such another opportunity. The task before these Frenchmen is easier at this moment than ever before, and never again can she expect such good fortune. And yet she has suddenly changed her policy. She has banished all thought of these vast stretches of unclaimed land, and would rather humble the power of Frederick of Prussia than become a power in North America. I tell you she will repent the action. It is England's turn to profit now, for we have suffered bitterly.

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"But I have told you all the facts now, and will again return to my proposition. Steve Mainwaring, report tells me that you are a practised scout and backwoodsman, and, moreover, I can tell that you have had a good education. A man of your class is wanted in the neighbourhood of Fort William Henry, a leader of scouts who can

keep our generals informed of the movements of the French. The winter is almost upon us, and the next few months will see little movement in other parts. But on Lake George a serious attack from the French is possible, for they can come over the ice. Will you take service with the colonials and enlist a band of scouts to act in that neighbourhood?"

There was silence for a few minutes, while Steve looked back at the Colonel, a man after his own heart, tall and active, with fearless kind eyes which looked straight into his. Then he sat up suddenly, sprang to his feet, and gripped the hand held out to him.

"I will go gladly, sir," he said. "I will take service till such time as this contest is ended."

"Good! That is excellent. Then we can go further. You will be gazetted as captain," said George Washington, "and I may say that I have been authorized to act in this manner, for our leaders are eager to discover the right man. You will receive a bounty on being gazetted, and will draw sufficient in pay and allowances to keep you. To your men you can offer a bounty of six dollars, and twenty-six shillings a month pay, besides rations and clothing."

"I accept the terms willingly, Colonel," answered Steve promptly. "I think I can guarantee that I shall be able to enlist ten men at least. The money will be little inducement to them, for they have a good deal more to fight for. As to the clothing, they will prefer to keep to their hunting costumes. All will be trappers born and bred."

"Then you can enlist them up to forty in number. And now, Steve, for your orders. When can you be ready?"

"In a week, I think," was our hero's answer. "That will give the men time to settle their families."

"And when can you march?"

"When you order, sir."

"Then you will set out in ten days' time, and meanwhile I will send on a letter to Fort William Henry, intimating what I have done. Now join me at my evening meal."

Ten days later Steve set out from the mountains, seventeen of the trappers who had fled from the settlement accompanying him. Jim and Mac and Pete were there, while Silver Fox, wrapped in his blanket, taciturn and silent, strode on in advance, his keen eyes noting everything, his nostrils agape as if he already scented the smoke from the camp fires of the Shawnee Indians, hereditary foes of his race, with whom he hoped to meet before the conflict was ended.

And so with the encouraging cheers of George Washington's ragged soldiers ringing in their ears, the party set out, Steve their acknowledged leader, and turned their faces for Albany. They plunged into the forest within a few minutes, and stole along, a silent band, clad in moccasins and trapper's leather. Icy blasts occasionally reached them, while leaves of every tinge and shade slid from the trees and pattered in their faces. The winter was at hand, and before Steve and his band had reached their destination the frosts had commenced and some snow had fallen. Little did they care for the cold. These hardy huntsmen entered Fort William Henry ruddy and browned by exposure, their honest faces displaying their enthusiasm and the eagerness which all felt to commence the contest. Nor were they kept long impatient. For the French were close at hand, and, indeed, had come within sight of the fort that very morning.

"I am glad to see you," said the commander, as he shook Steve's hand. "You will find your own quarters, and draw your rations as do the others. To-morrow you will see what the French are doing. A dozen of our poor fellows were ambushed and slaughtered yesterday."

Steve saluted and returned to his men. That evening their arrangements were completed, and as the first streak of dawn lit up the gloomy forest surroundings of Fort William Henry, he and his men stole from the fort in single file, and, passing the sentries and outposts, disappeared one by one amongst the trees and brambles. They were alone again, dependent on their own courage and exertions, and conscious of the fact that a remorseless enemy might pounce upon them at any moment.

Chapter X

Steve and his Band of Scouts

"The first thing that we have to do is to muster our forces and divide up the work," said Steve, when his party of trappers and hunters who were to act as scouts had left Fort William Henry a mile or more behind them. "Without organisation we shall be nowhere. We cannot live out here and do good work unless we rest, and if we wish to live we must not dream of resting all together. There would be a very sad tale to tell if we were so careless."

He called gently to Jim and Mac, who happened to be in rear of him, and at a signal from the latter the band of scouts gathered about their young leader, flitting noiselessly amongst the trees. As for Steve, looking tanned and weather-beaten, and as fine and independent a young leader as could well be found, he leaned against the lichen-covered trunk of a small oak, from which the leaves had long been shed, and kicked his snow-shoes from his feet.

"Make yourselves easy, boys," he said. "We'll discuss matters."

"One minute, Cap'n," answered Jim, shouldering his musket and facing round. "Now, boys, you ain't forgot what we've been talkin' about. Get into yer places, jest to let the Cap'n see as you know what's wanted. Hem! Form line! Pete, you're a foot or two out in yer calculations. Jest hop back a piece; and Mac, didn't I tell yer back there in the fort that an old soljer such as you air should know better how to range up with the company?"

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Steve was amazed, and watched with a twinkle of amusement in his steady eyes as the band of backwoodsmen shambled into line, a line remarkable rather for its broken appearance and for its irregular gaps than for regularity. For the lusty and courageous backwoodsmen who till that day knew no master, who had fought and hunted in their own manner, without direction from any one, and more often than not with themselves alone to look to for leadership and advice, had little or no notion of discipline. They scoffed at leaders as a general rule, and at formation of any description. And in consequence the argument which had induced them at length to conform to Jim's wishes had waxed hot and furious.

"We've been settin' our heads together, Cap'n," said Jim, as he ran his eye down the ragged line of staunch backwoodsmen and scowled at Mac and a few others who did not show that amount of interest in the movement which pleased him. "We've seen what them chaps air like way back at the fort, and we reckoned that after all a bit of discipline air wanted. Yer see, supposin' we was called together all of a sudden, and them skunks of redskins war close handy, waal, if we hadn't any idea of order, where should we all be? Reckon the most of us would be jawin' and tellin' the others what to do. Waal, that ain't the thing to keep scalps on our heads. We want to collect quick as a flash and wait for a command. Ef you don't happen to be handy, then me or Mac or Pete, jest in that order, ef it's agreeable to you, 'll take over the post of leader for the time, and there won't be no—no—what's the word boys?"

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"Confusion," suggested Steve quietly, suppressing the smile of amusement which was on his lips and stepping into his snow-shoes again. For all of a sudden he realized that these men who had so willingly placed themselves under his command were serious, desperately serious, and meant to do their utmost to get even with the enemy and wrest back from him the possessions which they had lost. The fine fellows were ready to sacrifice some of their much-cherished independence with the one object of making success more assured. He ran his eye down the rank of stalwart trappers, and noted Jim's slim proportions, his tall, wiry figure. Then Mac's flaming red beard caught his attention, and he looked with open approval at the sturdy, short figure of the Irishman, who stood at attention, his musket to the shoulder, his eye fixed on his leader. A glance, in fact, was sufficient to show that he alone of the whole company present had had some experience of drill and discipline. There, too, was Pete, his bulky figure bursting almost from his hunting shirt, his head and ears swathed in a huge coon-skin cap. Of the others, tall and short, slim or more sturdily built, there was not

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one who had not the appearance of a hardy backwoodsman. There was a keen look in every face, and if he had not known it before, the manner in which this band had slipped from the fort that morning and made their way into the forest told him that all were skilled in such work, that every man had had experience and could be counted on to act with the stealth and cunning of the oldest Indians. Though all with the exception of Mac lounged on their muskets in the most unmilitary style, Steve felt gratified at this the first sign of some attention to discipline. He swept his eye along the line again and let it rest on Silver Fox for the space of a second. The Mohawk warrior stood behind the line of men, resting upon his firearm, the fringes of his moccasins trailing into the snow at his feet. There was a look almost of scorn on his sharply-chiselled features, a look which seemed to say that he of all the party thought such a movement unnecessary.

"With men of my race such a thing is unnecessary, Hawk," he said in his slow, guttural tones. "With us there is a leader, and when danger comes on the sudden the chirrup of a bird, the call of a wild cat, or the screech of an owl brings all together. Then he who speaks is the chief. If others dare to open their lips they die. With these comrades other methods are wanted perhaps. If so they are good. These are all brave men, and are here to fight and not to play. Silver Fox is satisfied."

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"And I too," cried Steve, as he strode down the ranks and passed a word with every man. "Boys, you have done me the honour of accepting me as your leader, and I will do my best for you. I think that we all have the same cause for coming here. We have something to win back from the French and their Indians, and we have a king who asks for our help. I am glad to see that you are prepared to obey some sort of discipline, for it will certainly help us in case we should ever get into a tight place. It will be of service too when we are in action, and I for one have come here to fight, to do my best to drive back the French and their Indians."

There was a general shuffling of snow-shoes at his words, a restless movement along the ragged line which told that the men approved. Had regular soldiers been there they would have tossed their caps on to their bayonets and cheered. But these backwoodsmen knew well that a shout might bring a hornet's nest about their ears, and more than that, custom had taught them to be taciturn as a rule, to be silent and thoughtful, given to deeds and not to words.

"And we're all here to do the same," burst in Jim. "Reckon me and you, Cap'n, and every boy here, has a bone to clean with them 'ere French, and ef we hadn't er guessed as you would most likely show us some fightin', why——"

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"Sure ye know we'd not have been here," sang out Mac, his long friendship with Steve and Jim overcoming all discipline. "But Hawk'll show us the way, bhoys, and remimber, ivery one of ye, that till we can drive these men back to their own counthry there'll be no peace for us, their murtherin' Indians will be rhunnin' over our sittlemints, and our wives and childer, God kape the darlints! will be back there where we've lift 'em, waitin' and longin' for their homes."

There was a low growl from the ragged rank at that, and the backwoodsmen instinctively gripped the barrels of their ponderous muskets. There was now a stern look in their eyes, a look which boded ill for the enemy.

"Then we are all agreed," sang out Steve. "Now for ways and means. I propose that we live out of the fort. Men there are dying daily from infectious disease, while those who form the garrison have little to do but grumble. Let us take up our quarters out here in the forest. We are used to roughing it, and know well how to provide against severe weather."

"Seth Shorter! Where air yer, Seth? Ah, then step forward and speak up," sang out Jim at this moment. "Now, Cap'n, Seth here has been born and brought up close to these lakes, and I reckon he'll know every inch of the ground. Ef we're to live out in the forest, he's the boy to say where. As for livin' out, why we're all for that, for who'd want to stay in there at the fort?"

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He pointed a contemptuous finger in the direction of Fort William Henry where they had spent the previous night, and where even that short experience had taught them that life in the British stronghold was not one altogether to be desired. For, as Steve had

said, men died fast from disease, while the hours hung terribly heavy for all who formed the garrison.

"Now, Seth, where air this camp of ours to be?" demanded Jim, slouching up to the sturdy backwoodsman who had been called upon, and slapping him upon the shoulder with his gloved hand. "Where air the place, lad?"

"Thar ain't a doubt where we should camp," came the ready answer. "It's like this, Cap'n and mates. Here's Wood Creek running down from the foot of Lake Champlain, and alongside of it thar's Lake St. George, which is a good deal bigger. Waal, up thar, at the foot of Champlain, there's Crown Point, one of them Frenchie's forts, and below that they've Ticonderoga building. Between Lake St. George and Wood Creek thar's a tidy strip of land and wood, and ef thar's a place as I know, why—"

"You are acquainted with that," interrupted Steve, eagerly. "Well?"

"Waal, thar's a bit of a stretch o' rocky ground at the foot of that strip o' land, and thar ain't a tree on it for quite a bit. All round's forest, same as this, and then thar's the frozen lakes. Now, Cap'n, I've shot and trapped over that 'ere place scores o' times, and me and a mate once did a winter's outin' thar, trappin' and collectin' pelts. We was, as you might say, jest as this 'ere party air. We was lookin' for a campin' ground whar we could live in spite of weather, and whar we could have a show ef them red-skinned varmint comed along."

"And yer found it?" asked Jim eagerly.

"You bet. That thar rocky ground has got a kind of nose on it. It kicks up into the air all of a sudden, jest a hundred feet perhaps, and right at the top it dips jest as sudden. That dip air about the size to take this party, and with a few trees across the top and a lacing of reeds the snow'll lie and form a roof which looks as natural—waaal —"

"As possible," suggested Steve.

"Right, Cap'n. As natural as possible I reckon. From that ere place a few of us chaps could hold up a hundred and more of the varmint ef we had a supply of victuals."

"Then we'll make for it and inspect," said Steve promptly. "How far is it from the fort?"

"A matter of five mile perhaps, mate, I mean Cap'n."

"The same, my lad," laughed Steve. "We are all mates on this trail. But one word before we move. You are all more experienced than I am, and since you have decided to follow some sort of discipline, I will say nothing more about it, but leave the matter to you alone. But once we have our quarters we will divide into watches, and select hunters and scouts. Now, Seth, just give us a lead."

The trapper shuffled over the snow at once, his musket flung over his shoulder, and without seeming to take note of his position strode off at right angles to the course which they had been following. As promptly his comrades divided into parties, which had been arranged by Jim and Mac, and while some trailed off after Seth and Steve, others moved away like ghosts into the forests to act as flanking guards. And as Steve cast his eye to right and left he caught sight of their figures every now and again, silently flitting between the trees, each man listening intently, noting every little sign, and still keeping in touch with the main party. Ten minutes later the hoot of an owl brought the trappers together.

"Thar's been redskins and Frenchie's here," said one of the band, as he pointed to a narrow track in the snow. "They passed last night, I should reckon."

"And blazed a fresh trail," added Steve swiftly. "Look over there."

His sharp eye had seen a white clip in the side of a tree some distance away, and closer inspection and a little search showed that he was not in error.

"The Hawk has an eye of which the finest chief might be proud," said Silver Fox. "These men passed in the afternoon of yesterday. There were ten of them."

"And one was less accustomed to shoes than the others," said Steve swiftly. "He was a pale face."

"He was. The Hawk can read the signs as I have already learned. One was a pale face, and he led. They went towards the fort, blazing a new track. They returned across the ice."

There was an exclamation at that from some of the trappers who up till lately had been unacquainted with Silver Fox. But Jim silenced the doubts of his comrades promptly.

"How's that, chief?" he asked in the Mohawk, which all the party understood. "How did you get that reckonin'?"

"Ask the Hawk," was the curt answer. "He read these signs, and he knew how they returned."

"It is easy to guess at their track back, but one cannot say absolutely for sure," smiled Steve. "Look at the tracks of their shoes here, boys. Well, there are no return traces. Yesterday they made in the direction of Fort William, and I guess that they were back at their own quarters before night fell. Remember how cold it was and how it began to blow in the early afternoon."

"It did that," exclaimed one of the men. "The snow was sweeping over the ice on the lakes."

"Just so, and the clouds of snow hid them well. They slipped from the forest on to the ice, and with the wind behind them were almost blown back home, while their traces were covered. Here, in the forest, where the full force of the wind was not so much felt, their tracks are pretty clear. They are home again, boys, and we can do nothing with them to-day. But another time——"

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"We'll remember that they've blazed a path," said Jim curtly. "We'll set a watch on this place."

Once more the band separated and plunged on through the silent forest, and within a little while they found themselves on rising ground which finally led up to a hollow, some fifty feet long, by twenty broad, and some fifteen deep. Its opening faced directly north, in the direction of the French position, while its back was walled in by a mass of rock and frozen earth. For roof it had the sky, now overcast and treacherous-looking, save at the extreme rear, where a mass of snow was supported by the branches of a fallen tree.

"The only one as grew up thar," explained Seth, pointing to it. "Me and my mate felled it and dropped it inter position, whar it formed a roof over our heads. Now ef we was to do the same right along, and place a wall in front, there'd be a fort ter be proud of, and room in plenty for every man."

For some few minutes the members of the band closely inspected the hollow and its surroundings, Steve noting with much satisfaction that the slightly elevated position of the mound gave those who occupied it a perfect watch-tower from which they could in clear weather see the frozen surfaces of Lake St. George and Wood Creek, while the trees stood back so far that there was little or no cover for an attacking enemy. It was just the place for an armed camp, for it was within reach of their friends, occupied an advanced position, and, owing to its nearness to Fort William Henry, could easily be victualled. For a little while he stood on the edge of the hollow staring out at the wind-swept and dark frozen surface of the long lake to the left, known as St. George, and then at the still more slender strip to the right, Wood Creek, on the banks of which many a little skirmish had taken place between colonials and French Indians. *La petite guerre*, as the French named these conflicts, had been the order for many a month past, for the enemy were bold, and too often their Indians and *coureurs de bois* had pounced upon the colonials as they gathered firewood, or looked for food in the forests. Steve and his party, with such a commanding position, might well hope to put a stop to many of these unexpected attacks.

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"We have found the very place, Cap'n," exclaimed Jim, with some emphasis, as he stared around. "On a quiet night I reckon we could easily hear folks on the ice, and ef we was held up badly, why a charge of powder buried under the rocks and fired with a train would make a boom as would come to the ears of those in the fort."

"We'll occupy it and take possession at once," answered Steve readily. "Call the men round."

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An hour later fourteen figures could be seen slouching away from the mound across the snow in the direction of Fort William Henry,

while their comrades, with Steve, slipped their gloves from their fingers, and, slinging their muskets, made for the forest. A few words, in fact, to these intensely practical men had set them in motion. While three stood on the mound keeping a sharp look out, the others went to drag the longest boughs they could find in the forest, where hundreds lay on the ground. Then the fourteen who had made back for the fort carried a note from Steve asking for stores of every description. Indeed, as the night began to fall this portion of Steve's following came trailing back, dragging an improvised sledge, on which they had loaded cases of salted meat, dried bear's flesh, bacon, and beans, besides rum, lead, and an ample supply of powder.

Meanwhile those who had remained had gathered a huge stock of boughs, and had easily contrived to place the longest across the top of the hollow. Others had been laid crosswise on these, and on the top of all a thick covering of brambles, reeds, and pine branches had been strewn.

One of the backwoodsmen had detached himself from his fellows, and while they laboured at the roofing of their fort he had set to work with knife and tomahawk. He was an expert, it seemed, for in a little while he had a number of blocks of frozen snow collected at the very mouth of the hollow. And with these and a number of loose rocks he soon contrived to erect a rough fireplace, with a wide chimney overhanging it, which ran up the sloping back of the hollow, and finally pushed its white top through the rough roof above. It was a neat job, and one to be proud of, and this trapper longed to see the chips which he had set in the grate below fired, and send long tongues of flame up the chimney.

"You'd have the hul howling lot of varmint round us in a jiffy," growled Jim, as he watched the man lay the wood in the grate. "Reckon thet fire'll have to get started when it snows hard, and after that, when it's light, nothing but chips as dry as a bone'll have to get throwed on it. Even then, thar ain't any sayin' as a redskin wouldn't spot the smoke."

"With care, it will be well," said Silver Fox, as Jim turned to him as if to ask for his decision. "See, my brother, behind the smoke there will be the sky, and it is clear and white. If dry chips are used there will be a little white smoke perhaps, but none that is dark. We can keep fire within the fort once it has been set alight. Truly, you pale faces think of strange things. Where my brothers and I would have set our wigwams in the thickest forest, there seeking protection from the snow and keen winter winds, you come hither and burrow like foxes. You make one big wigwam where we should have seen no opportunity of doing so, and as I look on and smoke you erect a fort which is strong against attack, which is a watch-tower from which you can see every foot of the lakes, and which also is a comfortable lair in which the firelight can be seen, and where we may huddle about the warmth, and smoke and think. Truly there is no understanding you men who have come so strangely from over the water."

The tall Indian brave wrapped his blanket still closer about his figure, and gazed out at the huge panorama stretched before him. There lay the glistening surface of the two lakes, now clad with ice from end to end, and fringed all about by continuous forest, which grew up to the banks and cast there a deep shadow, which looked black against the white of the ice. And away in the distance the faint reflection from another long expanse of frozen water, Lake Champlain, called after that famous Frenchman who had done so much for New France, and who had founded Quebec. It, too, was clad in a garment of white, snow hanging to the trees, and in the dull wintry green of the pines, which grew thickly there. For background there was the blue haze of the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains, now the favourite haunt of thousands of holiday-seeking Americans. And still farther to the north, buried in the dull horizon and behind it, lay the Richelieu river, with its few forts, and its *seigneuries*, where the *gentilhommes* of this new colony, the lately-constructed noblesse, sat in their palisaded houses watching as their *habitants* cooked their food or went a-hunting. Then it was that these noblesse might don doe-skin leggings, shirt, and moccasins, and clad in the thick fur coats, with hoods, worn by the Indians of Canada, and with thick mittens slung about their necks, might venture into the forest with the *habitants* and enjoy all the

excitement of the chase. Yes, they could hunt and fight, but work, never! Each one was the seigneur, and the lords of Old and New France never blistered their palms nor dirtied their fingers.

"We're almost ready," said Steve, as he stood beside the tall Silver Fox, staring out at the scene below. "What we want now is a wall of snow here in front. How are we to set about building it?"

"It's as easy as fallin'," answered Jim at once. "Look up there, Cap'n."

He pointed to the leaden sky above, and held his hand up for a minute.

"Wind's from the north, Cap'n," he said, "and it's goin' to snow. To-morrow things'll be properly covered, and ef we jest build a wall of branches at the face of this nest, waal, it'll be covered afore the mornin'. Reckon this place'll be lookin' jest natural when the light comes again."

"Then set the men to work," cried Steve, hurrying off to where a pile of branches and small tree trunks had been dragged. "It will be dark in an hour, and if it is going to snow, as I can well believe, why, we may just as well make all snug beforehand."

Less than an hour later there was an erection of boughs and branches against the face of the hollow, to which the finishing touches were given as the darkness fell. By then snowflakes were silently flitting to the ground, powdering the rough roof above the hollow, and resting upon the caps and shoulders of the trappers. A little later it was dark, and through the flakes the distant twinkle of a dozen or more lights could be seen.

"Ticonderoga," said Steve, as he sheltered his face from the snow. "To-morrow we shall hope to know more about its position and about the movements of its garrison. Now, what about sentries?"

"Reckon we can all turn in and be comfortable, Cap'n," answered Jim promptly. "There ain't no need for look-outs to-night. The snow'll keep every livin' soul under cover. It's coming thicker. See for yerself. The lights have gone, and the darkness is deeper."

One by one the gallant little band crept into the cosy little nest which they had prepared, a strip of blanket being dropped over the small opening which had been left amongst the branches. Then pipes were produced and filled, while the backwoodsman who had so diligently built fireplace and chimney, used flint and steel with a will, and watched with all the pleasure of a child as the sparks caught hold and the flames licked round the wood. Soon there was a bright blaze, while smoke soared up the chimney.

"There ain't no red-skinned varmint as'll be able to see that, I reckon," growled Jim, as he snatched a blazing ember from the fire and lit his pipe, passing the brand round the circle when he had finished with it. "It air snowin' hard, and the best brave livin' couldn't see more'n a dozen yards. Get to work with supper, boys, then a yarn or so, and we'll put in the best sleep we've had for many a night past."

Could the French commander at Ticonderoga have clambered to the top of their hollow and peered down at the band lounging below, he would have been more than a little disturbed. For the firelight which lit up the quaint quarters of Steve's command, was reflected from every face, and showed a collection of trappers, every one of whom was a man indeed. They sat for the most part with their muskets close beside them, or across their knees, for the habit had grown upon them these last few months. And as they yarned, the tale falling now from this one, and then from the lips of others of the band, stories of fierce border fights came to the ear, stories which all knew to be true in every detail. Wiry backwoodsmen recounted how they had left civilization to become pioneers in the wilderness, how fortune had smiled upon them, how the land had been cleared, the crops sown, the hut erected, and the store of pelts increased, till the prospect for the future was rosy. And then the French had come, they and their so-called Christian Indians. Wives and children had been slaughtered, men had been slain and scalped, huts fired, and the future utterly wrecked. That was the moment when the forebodings of the French commander would have been greatest, for every bronzed face below looked exceedingly grim and determined, while often enough there was a bitter word on the lips of those who had lost dear ones. Hands gripped the ponderous

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muskets, while fingers fidgeted about the flint locks or felt for powder pouches. Yes, these men had much with which to refresh their memories, and each and every one was determined to come to hand-grips with the French, and to fight till the day when the enemy was beaten and they and their friends restored to their possessions.

"Time to turn in," said Steve at last. "Boys, we'll take it in turns to keep the fire going, and to-morrow we'll tell off a couple to act as cooks. Good-night! Let's hope we shall see something of the enemy soon."

There was a chorus of good-nights, then blankets were produced, and very soon the firelight showed only recumbent figures.

"There's a sight for yer," was Jim's exclamation on the following morning, as he rose from his blanket and pushed his head through the narrow outlet. "Ain't that a pictur?"

Steve pressed past him and gave a cry of amazement, for though he knew the forest well, and had seen many a winter, he had never looked on such a scene. Far and wide the country was white, and glistening in the rays of a winter's sun. Trees and lakes and mountains all had the same thick covering, save in a few odd places, where the green of the pines broke through, or where the snow had tumbled from the treetops. As for the lakes, they were a vast expanse of the whitest snow, laid out most wonderfully at their feet, a long expanse which stretched up to the banks, clambered up the trees, and ran on over the forest unbroken. Unbroken? No, for suddenly Steve's arm shot out, and he pointed in the direction of Ticonderoga.

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"Critters," said Jim with a sniff of approval. "Injuns, I reckon, and those are guns trailin' out behind 'em. Cap'n, it looks as ef they war off on some expedition. There'll be two or three hundred of the fellers."

It was true enough. Stragglng across the surface of Lake St. George came a small force of Indians and Frenchmen, while in rear trailed a couple of guns mounted on sledges. The head of the expedition was turned towards the foot of the lake, and, as it advanced, those who looked could not be sure whether the force were intended for an attack upon Fort William Henry, or whether they were themselves the object of the enemy.

"There can no longer be a doubt," said Steve, some ten minutes later. "Those fellows must have seen us, or gained news of our coming. They are marching for this side of the lake, and before very long we shall have their cannon playing on us. Call the boys."

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Chapter XI

Held Up!

It was with very mixed feelings that Steve and his band of hunters and scouts watched the coming of the French and their Indians, for as the light grew stronger and they were able to see somewhat better, they made out that two hundred at least of the enemy were marching across the snow-clad lake.

"And there air the guns, boys," said Jim, as if he had been calculating their chances. "Up here we've a fort so to speak, and it'll take them braves a time to storm it. The French'll lead 'em, and they air the ones we must keep a watch on. Ef them gunners get the range, and can pop in a few shots, there'll be a muss."

"If we are good enough to allow them to keep at the game," said Steve slowly. "Granted that they get the range, and make out the front face of this place, well, we must do something to prevent them from knocking us to pieces."

"A sortie, Cap'n?" asked Pete, standing beside his young leader, and looking unusually bulky and formidable on this clear, frosty morning. "Ef that's the order, you can put me down. A bit o' runnin' would suit me. It's cold here for fingers and toes."

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"We will see," responded Steve, still with his eyes fixed on the advancing enemy. "Meanwhile, I vote that we select our cooks and get some breakfast. A man can do better when he's had a meal. Stir the fire, boys, and who are the ones to look to our food?"

He stepped inside the shelter again, and ran his eyes round the men whose figures were lit up still by the fire, for now that a heavy fall of snow had covered their rough roof and the front wall, it was very dark inside. There were twenty-seven men in all, for he had obtained several recruits at the fort on the previous day. Seth and another at once put their hands up.

"I ain't been trappin' and fightin' all these days without knowin' a bit about a cooking pot," said the former with a grin. "Put me and Adam here on to the job, Cap'n, and we'll do our best. A man can't do more."

"'Cept fight and pull a trigger whenever there's critters to be shot," laughed his comrade. "That air a bargain, ain't it, Cap'n? We cook for the company, and we does our share with the muskets. 'Twouldn't be fair to bring us out here to do what chaps from the coast and towns could manage just as well."

"You may take my word for it. You shall have a full share of the fighting," laughed Steve. "Get to at breakfast then, while we discuss the other matter."

A little later all were seated about the fire once more, discussing a savoury stew of bear's meat, which had been left simmering most of the night. And as they sat and ate, Silver Fox, vigilant as always, crouched in the opening to this the strangest of forts, and watched the enemy.

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"They are out of sight, Hawk," he said at length, turning and crawling to Steve. "The forests cover them for a while. Soon they will be here."

"Then now is the time. Get to work," cried Steve.

The band broke up at once, and leaving their muskets, crept for the most part through the opening. For they had work to do outside, and now was their opportunity to accomplish it while the trees hid them from the enemy. Gathering outside, they piled a wall of snow at the foot of the barrier which filled in the front face of their fort, while some inside took stout stakes and rammed them through the interlaced branches and their thick covering of snow till apertures were left through which a man might thrust a musket barrel and take good aim. Moreover, these openings were at such a height from the floor of the fort that those who made use of them could see to fire over the wall which those outside were busily erecting.

"They are for use if we are driven inside," said Steve, as he watched the men at work. "Now, boys, run the wall as far out on the right as you can, and make openings in it also. We must do all we can to

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upset the calculations of the enemy, for it would not do for us to fire from the opening of our retreat in the first instance."

Using their hands for the most part, or a thick bough, the trappers swept the deep snow which lay on the rocky ridge into a wall some three feet high, and now that that portion directly in front of the hollow was completed, they pushed on with the work to the right of the fort, where the hummock or rock ran on without interruption, presenting a ledge some ten feet wide, which was perfectly level. To the left the rock fell away suddenly just outside the hollow, and it would have been impossible to erect even a narrow wall.

"Reckon that air a good idea of yours, Cap'n," said Pete, as he beat the snow with his hands to make it bind firmly together. "When them critters gets out'er the trees and makes for the hollow, the snow'll puzzle 'em a little, and they won't be properly sure whereabouts the mouth of the hollow lies. Chances air that not a one of 'em's ever set foot in it. They've likely enough looked up here a score of times jest in the ordinary way of scoutin'. But that won't help 'em much, particular when the hul place is changed by the snow."

"Just what I thought," answered Steve. "If we were to open fire from behind the wall erected just in front of the hollow, the smoke would give our position away to them at once, and they would soon send their cannon balls plumping into the place. As it is, we can crawl away behind the wall till we are well to the right, and there——"

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"Reckon cannon balls don't do much harm against rock, Cap'n," burst in Jim. "The only thing now is to be careful that them critters don't see us at work as they come out of the trees. Best call some of 'em in."

By now the wall which Steve had planned was almost completed, and he at once followed Jim's advice. The majority of the trappers were directed to lie down behind that portion which stood in front of the hollow, while the red-bearded Mac, Pete, and four others went on with the projection to the right, for there it would not matter much if they were seen. However, it is no easy matter to drag guns through a forest where the ground is rough and covered deeply with snow, and an hour more had passed before the head of the enemy's force emerged from the screen of trees which had hidden them from Steve and his men, and which had equally hidden the band of trappers from the French and their bloodthirsty Indians. When they did at length emerge, filing out from the mottled background one by one, Steve's men were in readiness. Those who were advancing to attack them could see only an eminence, getting steeper as it neared the top, and then suddenly erecting a big hummock, in which lay the hollow so strangely converted into a fort. Many had looked at this spot before, just as they did at other parts of the surrounding country in their daily search for stragglers and woodcutters from Fort William Henry. They had a general idea of its conformation, but the heavy fall of snow upset their calculations. They stared at the rise, looking in vain for the hollow and for sight of the trappers.

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"Strange," exclaimed their leader, a tall French officer, who was wrapped in a fur coat, and whose head and ears were muffled in a thick skin cap.

"We had information that they went there last night. Our scout told us that they were busy cutting wood and roofing in some hollow. He saw that it was about to snow, and fearful of losing his way in the storm, he made back to the fort. But the same storm will have kept these trappers here, unless—unless."

"Unless they should have crept away this morning," said his subaltern quickly. "I will give an order to the Indians. The Hurons will tell us whether they are there or not."

A nod told him that he had his captain's permission, and within a minute a dozen blanketed forms had slid ahead of the force. Steve saw them toss their blankets to their comrades, and then, like hounds on the trail, their heads went closer to the snow-covered ground, their shoulders bent, and, separating, the Huron Indians went off across the snow at the edge of the forest at a pace which would have taxed the strength of the strongest European.

"Them cusses'll make round the place within a quarter of an hour, and ef a fox had made out, I reckon they'd know," growled Seth, as

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he watched from an embrasure. "My advice is lie low and puzzle 'em. Give 'em a chance to crawl nearer."

Steve gave a low whistle at once, while he lay at full length staring through an embrasure at the enemy below. And within a little while Jim and Pete and Mac were beside him. They came crawling along the cleared ground behind the wall, and presently were seated beside their young leader. As for the French and their Indians, they had seen not so much as a sign of the movement. For Steve was 'cute, and had the advantage of possessing trained trappers. When building their wall not a man had dared to step to the outside of it. They had taken the snow and thrown or swept it to their front, so that on the outside there was not so much as a mark. Then the two hours' labour had enabled them to run the wall some thirty yards to the right, while behind it there was a rough gallery, along which any man could crawl unseen.

"Now, boys," said Steve, as they threw themselves at his feet, "I propose that we take Seth's advice. We'll lie still as foxes till they begin to think that we have gone. Let them send their Indians up here, and all wait till I give a signal. That will be the best way in which to meet them. And in any case we all fire from the extreme right of the wall, unless they get so close that a rush is possible. Then we will collect. Has every man plenty of ammunition?"

"Heaps, Cap'n," answered Jim, "and the boys know what's to happen. In case they don't, we'll give 'em a warnin'. All are to wait for the signal."

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They went crawling back to their stations on hands and knees, and presently Steve joined them at the extreme right of the wall. Here, within a space of ten yards, the whole band was collected, each man stretched full length on the rock and snow, his eye to a loophole, his head well hidden by the wall of snow, and his musket ready beside him. All were wrapped in rough fur coats, for the most part made of skins which they themselves had collected. Big, warm coon-skin caps covered their heads and ears, while each man had a pair of sack gloves secured to his neck by long strips of doe skin, so that he might discard the covering at any moment and move from his position without losing his gloves. Indeed this was a plan generally adopted in Canada and America in those days, and one which we know was made use of by the Japanese in their recent war with Russia.

Meanwhile the enemy had halted on the fringe of the encircling forest, and stood there about the guns, within six hundred yards of their object. And as they stood the twelve Huron Indians stole softly away over the snow, till at length they had completely covered the circle. There was a movement then amongst their comrades, and presently the teams of men hauling the guns strained at the tackle, and dragged the ponderous weapons into the forest. At the same time a hundred of the Indians broke from the ranks with wild whoops, and began to move towards the mound.

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"They know as well as we do that we're here," growled Jim, as he stared through his loophole. "Them critters'll come within range jest to tempt us. But they won't dare to rush right up. Trust 'em for that. They ain't much good at chargin', and no Injun's goin' to throw away his life for nothin'."

"The French will give them a lead perhaps," said Steve. "When they find that we do not move, and their own Indians will not approach closer, it is probable that they will come themselves to see whether we are actually here."

"Jest because no Frenchie, and no white man for the matter of that, who ain't had experience hisself can believe the 'cuteness of the Injuns, Cap'n. Some of 'em who air new to the backwoods and to the trail, reckon they're mighty 'cute theirselves when they've been a month only in the country. They don't reckon that nothin', not even the print of a bird escapes the eye of a brave. Ef they do give the Injuns a lead, why——"

"It's our turn, boys," sang out Mac. "Sure, haven't we suffered? Haven't our people been shot down and scalped. Haven't the women and childer been driven from their homes. Sure, now's the toime of our loives."

"If all goes as we hope," Steve ventured. "There are the guns to be thought of."

They continued chatting in low voices while the hundred or more Indians discarded their blankets or coats, and with muskets at the trail came sidling up towards the mound on their snowshoes. Presently the smooth and unbroken expanse of snow below which had met the eyes of the trappers early that morning was scored and seamed by hundreds of marks and lines, the prints of the snowshoes. The figures of the Indians, too, dwarfed before by the distance, were now far clearer, for they were within two hundred yards of the hollow. Steve and his friends watched as they gathered together for a while and discussed matters. Then one of the Hurons, a gigantic fellow, broke from his comrades and came stalking up the rise, his musket over his shoulder, his tomahawk in his hand, and a wily and determined look on his sharply-cut mahogany features.

"It air an old trick that," growled Jim. "Maybe he's given offence to some of his tribe. Perhaps he ain't been so forward in the battle as he should ha' been. So he's took the first opportunity of doin' somethin' out o' the way to prove as he ain't a coward. Ef he walks right up, as he well may do——"

"Not a man must move," said Steve sharply and with decision. "Recollect that we are placed high above them, and that the ground slopes very steeply, even from the front face of the wall, so that if a man wishes to look over and see us he must actually reach the wall. Not a man must lift a finger till that Indian actually sees us and shouts. Then it will be time."

A whispered warning was passed down the ranks, and all squinted through their loopholes, watching the hulking figure of the Indian as he ascended. It appeared indeed as if he was determined to sacrifice himself, and would actually clamber up to the wall and over it in his eagerness to be killed or to discover the enemy. He advanced without a waver till within forty yards of Steve and his men, and then, for the first time, they saw him hesitate. He paused, looked round at his comrades, now too far away to support him, and then deliberately lifted his musket to his shoulder, pointed the barrel at the mound above him, and pressed the trigger, sending a bullet thudding into the snow. When the smoke blew away, he was still there, standing now to his full height, his eagles' feathers trailing to his waist, his scalp locks, with which his leggings were fringed, fluttering in the wind, and his hideously painted face turned towards the hollow.

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"Listen pale faces," he called out in his sing-song style, as if he were addressing a meeting of braves. "I am here to summon you to come down and be our prisoners. I swear that no harm shall befall you."

He was silent for a while, and stood staring up at the hummock as if expecting an answer.

"Ef only I might," whispered Jim, his face aglow at the thought, and his huge brown fist clenched. "Ef only I dared shoot the skunk where he stands. Harm! As ef we didn't all know that an Injun's word ain't worth a row of chips. As ef one of them critters could ever keep his fingers off a white man when he got the chance! Don't me and every boy here know well that a man might jest as well, ay, and better, far better, too, put a barrel to his head and draw a trigger rather than fall a prisoner. None of yer Indian prisoners fer me. Huntin' Jim ken tell a tale or two o' pale face men and women, and children, too, the villains has burned and tortured to death by inches!"

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"Hush! He's going to speak again," whispered Steve, nudging the irate backwoodsman. "Perhaps he thinks after all that we are not here."

"Thinks, Cap'n! He knows jest as well as you or me. He ain't a fool. None of them varmint air."

"You do not speak, pale faces," came the sing-song voice again. "Listen, all who lie hidden before me. I give you one more invitation from the white men who lead us. Descend and there shall be no harm."

Once more he waited, while many a hand went to the muskets and many a face scowled at the tall Indian.

"Then, listen again," he went on. "I and my brothers know that you are there, hiding like foxes. If you will not descend, then show yourselves, fight like men, and let it be a combat with tomahawks. See, I am here, the Giant Oak, known throughout the great lakes for

strength and endurance. I have fired my shot, and here I will wait for your leader to come forth and do battle with me."

Silence. The silence of the grave alone greeted the brave who had dared to come so close to the hollow. As Steve stared down at him, he saw that the Indian was making good use of every second, for his keen eyes searched every foot of the snow-clad slope above him, looked into every tiny hollow, and sought to discover a footmark, something to tell him the exact position of the men whom his experience told him were there. But nature had done her work well enough. The heavy fall of snow had covered every trace, and the astuteness of the trappers had done the rest. The man looked baffled and desperate. He caught at his powder horn, charged his musket, primed the lock, and once more sent a bullet thudding into the snow. Then, jeering aloud and throwing every sort of insult at the heads of the hidden enemy, he turned and slid down the hummock, watched by many a pair of eyes.

"And lucky for him," said Jim. "Now there'll be a bother. They'll put their heads together, and there'll be a palaver. The French'll try to make 'em charge, and likely enough the critters will come a little closer. Then, ef they haven't moved us, them Frenchies'll try a rush."

"When we shall break the silence," said Steve. "Look, there are the guns."

Jim was an old Indian fighter, and what he had prophesied took place. For while the Indians gathered together, and could be seen talking and being harangued by some French officers, the two guns which had so long been out of sight suddenly appeared at the edge of the forest, and this time within an easy three hundred yards' range. There they were dismounted, and Steve's men watched the gunners ram in their charges and train the weapons on the slope.

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"A combined movement," said Steve easily, a determined smile on his lips. "They will endeavour to distract our attention while their comrades charge. Ah, there go the Indians. Pass the word. Let every man remember that not a trigger is to be drawn till I give the signal."

It was just as well that he reissued the warning, for it is hard work for men itching to retaliate and suffering under the knowledge of many cruel wrongs, to lie and listen to the patter and thud and whistle of large calibre bullets without sending their own leaden messengers back. However, the backwoodsmen knew what was wanted, and they lay like logs as the Indians drew nearer and nearer, firing as they came. Often and often those trained shots, who had lived their lives in the woods, could have picked off one of their old enemies. But they refrained, though many a growl escaped them. Then came the guns. A column of smoke belched of a sudden from the fringe of the forest, and a ball thudded against the rocky wall behind, bringing down a mass of frozen débris. A second missile struck the very summit of the hummock, was caught as it were by the snow, and with all the venom taken out of it and its pace retarded, went rolling down the far side.

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"Jest a little gentle play," smiled Jim grimly. "Let 'em send their cannon balls. Reckon they won't hurt us. But them Frenchies air gettin' ready to charge."

It was as he said, for as Steve looked through the round opening made in the bank of snow, he saw some fifty dark figures emerge from the trees beside the guns, and throw off their heavier clothing. They were French regulars for the most part, as was shown by their blue and white uniform. But there was a sprinkling of *coureurs de bois* amongst them, bold men of the forest, who had long ago demonstrated their capacity for this class of work.

"We'll not be in a hurry," said Steve. "It is harder work to charge up a hillock, which after all may be untenanted, than it is to dash up while bullets swish past, and while the shouts and cheers of comrades help to keep up one's courage. Not a shot, boys, till you hear my musket. Ah, here they come, and the guns are starting again."

He had watched the French gunners sponging out their pieces, and now crouched a little lower as a ball came hurtling overhead with a scream, and expending all its force against the soft cushion of snow lying on the hummock above, dropped backwards like a stone, and

fell with a thud at his feet.

"Sure, 'tis one of thim bhoys as could give ye a gentle little knock, so it would," sang out Mac, while the trappers laughed heartily. "I'll be afther axing ye, Mr. Frenchie down there, to aim to the righth a bhite, for Mac here don't like thim pellets, and there's Huntin' Jim as is afear'd of the beauties."

There was another laugh at that, a low, noiseless laugh for these men knew that sounds travelled easily and far on such a frosty day. Then all fixed their eyes on the gathering of Frenchmen below, and watched as they advanced towards the hillock, taking their time, for they wished to have all their breath for the more difficult part of their task.

"Ef they'd only hurry," growled Jim. "They're delayin' so much that it makes me jumpy. 'Sides, it's goin' to snow agin, and that'd help 'em."

Indeed, as he spoke, a few flakes came sidling noiselessly through the air, while the clear sparkling light was rapidly shut out by the masses of heavy clouds which were gathering above. Heavy snow might, indeed, be expected, and would help to hide the attackers as they came. Nor were the French slow to recognise that fact. While the guns went on with their bombardment, pitching balls now to the right and then to the left, and on one occasion clean into the hollow, the party who had gathered and moved out to storm the hillock halted and shouted to one another. Ten minutes later as the snow-flakes came tumbling heavily and the wind whirled them across the white expanse below, the Frenchmen started again, and, raising loud shouts, dashed forward as fast as their snow-shoes would carry them. Arriving at the steeper part of the hillock they kicked their shoes away, and in a trice were scrambling up, their muskets slung over their shoulders and tomahawks or cutlasses in their hands.

It was a tense moment for all behind the wall, and even the oldest trapper there felt his heart thumping against his ribs and his pulses throbbing with unusual force. Steve's men lay as if they were dead, each man stretched behind a loop-hole, and every muzzle held just within the opening. The dark figures below became a little more clear amidst the whirling snow-flakes, their shouts grew rapidly closer, and far sooner than Steve had expected they were within easy range. But still he held his hand till only thirty yards divided the combatants.

Bang! Crash! His own piece bellowed noisily, and in an instant a volley burst from the defenders, spitting flames and smoke and leaden bullets into the Frenchmen. There was a shout of consternation, and some dozen of the attackers fell backwards and went sliding down the steep sides of the hill, carrying an avalanche of snow with them, till they reached a more level portion, where their bodies came to a rest. Behind them they left many a dark stain on what had been a beautifully white carpet, stains which the falling flakes did their utmost to cover, as if they were ashamed of this handiwork.

"We have drawn their fire. We have the birds. Charge, mes enfants!"

A slim, short officer, dressed in blue and white uniform, and minus his hat, which had been shot from his head, stood erect for an instant, waving his sword and the pistol he carried in his other hand. Then, turning to face the wall from which the stinging hail of bullets had come so suddenly, he leaped at it, and in a little while was desperately striving to clamber over it.

"Men on the extreme right reload muskets," sang out Steve. "The others use clubbed muskets or tomahawks."

There was no time for more, for the remainder of the attackers had now joined their leader and were already within a few paces of the wall. As Steve leaped to his feet and swung his ponderous musket butt over his shoulder twenty of the enemy were within a couple of yards of him, and in an instant the pistol of the leader was pointing at his head, there was the flash of powder in the pan, a sharp report, and a strange feeling under his cap. The cap rose of a sudden, spun round, and fell at his feet, while Steve grabbed for one brief instant at his scalp and at the locks of hair which had been so neatly shorn from it. Up went his butt, he swung it over his head and brought it down with a crash which broke the Frenchman's guard, wrenched his sword out of his hand, and sent him rolling backwards doubled

up like a ball.

"On to 'em, boys. See the Cap'n. Drive 'em back same as he did."

It was Pete's voice which burst in on the babel of shouts which had broken from attackers and defenders, while the burly backwoodsman himself leaped over the wall, his musket swinging over his head and the butt swaying this way and that, clearing a path on every side.

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"Up and over the wall," shouted Steve. "Now, send them back."

It was all over in less than a minute, even before the men told off to load their muskets had accomplished that task. One desperate onslaught of the backwoodsmen had sent the Frenchmen rolling, sliding, and tumbling down the steep slope till they were out of sight behind the falling bank of snow. Only their voices could be heard, the cries and moans of the wounded, that and the deep voice of the two cannon which had ceased their fire for one instant as the combatants came to hand grips, and which opened again now, the gunners having learned that the attack had been beaten off.

Thud! One ball struck the rock a foot above Steve's head and covered him with splintered rock and snow. Then came the second. They could hear the whirr of the ball as it rushed through the air, the sound rising to that high-pitched shriek which has made many a recruit, ay, and many an old soldier too, bend his knees and his head and look uncomfortable. Crash! It hit that face of the hollow which had been filled in with branches, thudded against the rocky wall beyond, and then——

There was a terrible explosion, which seemed to shake the hillock, and which threw Steve and his men in all directions. The roof which they had placed over their little fort disappeared amidst the snowflakes, while the wall in front was shattered, the branches being sent over the wall of snow on to the slope below.

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"One to them," said Steve, sadly, as he picked himself up. "That ball must have struck the keg of powder we left in the hollow. Listen to their cheers. They guess that they have damaged us severely. Let us see how many of the men are hurt."

One by one the trappers picked themselves up till only two still lay on the ground.

"Jest stunned and knocked silly, Cap'n," said Jim. "Reckon we're in luck this time. But it air not goin' to snow all day, and when it clears them fellers'll knock us to pieces."

"If they are allowed to continue practice with the guns," answered Steve swiftly. "Boys, the French guns must be put out of action. I am going to spike them, and I want a volunteer. Settle amongst yourselves who is to come, while I get something with which to plug the vents of the cannon."

He pulled his ramrod from its fastening and dived into the dismantled hollow, where a minute's search produced an axe. There was a boulder near at hand and very soon he had cut two six-inch lengths off the rod. By then Mac stood beside him, his snowshoes in his hand, his beard and hair red and flaming against the background beyond.

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"Ready and willin', Cap'n," he said.

"Then come," answered Steve easily. "Boys, we'll be back by the morning."

He waved his hand to his comrades, slung his musket, and strode away to the left. A minute later he and Mac had disappeared round the shoulder of the hillock, their dark figures being swallowed up in a whirl of flying flakes.

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Chapter XII

Generosity to the Foe

A blinding whirl of snow hid Steve and Mac from friends and foes alike as they slid from the hummock and made for the back. There was not a sound from their snow-shoes as they progressed, and only distant shouts and whoops from the French and their Indians broke the silence of the wintry day, those and the deep boom of the cannon which now plied their iron shot more rapidly. For the gunners had found the range, and though the snow made accurate aim totally out of the question, yet they took pains not to lose the direction, and in the next quarter of an hour half-a-dozen balls thudded into the hollow.

"The sooner we can put a stop to that the better," said Steve as he halted at the bottom of the hillock. "Up to now we have had luck, but a shot might hit a number of the men, and already the odds are great. How far are we from the forest, Mac?"

"Sure, Oi've no idea, Cap'n. 'Tis mesilf as is scared wid the snow. There's no sayin' where we are."

"There are the guns," answered Steve in a whisper, "and so long as they continue to fire we shall have something to give us the direction. I am sure we are making straight for the forest, and if my calculations are right we should be amongst the trees in a very few moments."

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They slid along over the snow again, Steve leading the way. Then a dull wall cut across the white ground in front of him, and with a smothered exclamation of satisfaction he realized that they had reached the friendly shelter of the forest. By then both were covered with snow, and were with difficulty distinguishable at ten paces.

"We have everything in our favour," Steve whispered, halting for a while. Now, I propose that we make round towards the guns and watch to see how many are serving them. If few——"

"Sure we'll rush 'em," burst in Mac, his red beard trembling, so greatly was he excited. "Give the word, sor, and bedad, 'tis mesilf as will charge all alone. Them Frenchies'll never stand."

"Perhaps not. But we must make sure. We must drive them off and allow sufficient time in which to spike the guns. Now, look here, Mac. If we charge them, hold your fire whatever you do. Use the butt or your tomahawk. If they bolt, then sit down and watch for their return. I shall use my axe to drive in the spikes."

There was no need for further arrangement, and so they set off again, this time turning sharp to their left in the direction of the guns. For the cannon still bellowed at intervals, and on one occasion, when the wind blew the whirling flakes aside for a moment, Steve saw the flash distinctly. In a little while the two were bent almost double, for they were within earshot, and presently they halted behind an enormous oak, for the guns were in sight, half-a-dozen dim figures working about them, sometimes in view and sometimes blotted out altogether by the snow. But there were others there also. As Steve and Mac stared at the place, endeavouring to make out the precise surroundings, they became aware that other figures were silently gathering, that the space behind the guns was being filled by a company of blanketed men, from whose scalp locks fell a crest of trailing feathers. The red and white and blue painted faces showed up through the storm, and soon there could not be a doubt that the Indian allies of the French were there. Suddenly a tall figure appeared amongst them and a voice was heard.

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"Your chief," said the French officer in his own tongue. "Good. You can understand me and tell your friends. The snow falls heavily, chief."

"It falls," was the response, in passable French.

"And hides us from these pale faces. Now is the time for Hurons to strike with their tomahawks. Let them climb to the back of this hummock and fall upon the pale faces from there. We who have just been beaten back will attack from the front."

There was a minute or more of delay while the Huron chief turned to his comrades. Then he swept round and faced the French officer.

"It is well," he said. "In a short while we shall be there. Will you and your men crawl forward now and wait for our shouts. Then charge, and it may happen that you will find us in possession and these men all slain and scalped."

The officer nodded curtly, and then as Steve and Mac looked on, the band of Indians tossed their blankets aside as formerly and went off in single file. Steve was still gaping with astonishment and dismay as the figure of the last disappeared in the forest.

"They are off to surprise the back of the fort," he whispered. "The question now is, whether we ought to return so as to warn our friends, or whether we should stay."

For a little while the two stared into each other's eyes, for the dilemma was a genuine one, and a decision not to be easily arrived at. Then Mac pushed his tangled moustache from his mouth, scattering the tiny icicles which had gathered there.

"Warn 'em I Sure ye couldn't, me bhoy; thim Injuns'll be in position long before we could get up to 'em. A trapper can't cover the ground quicker than they, and ye may be sure that they'll slip along as though the gintleman himsilf was behint 'em. The bhoys must look to thimsilves. Be chanst they'll have set a watch for our return."

"Then we must leave it like that," answered Steve. "There are too many about here just now, but already the French are moving off. Give them a little while and we'll charge."

They crouched behind the friendly shelter of the oak and watched as the minutes fled by. The French officer waited to see the last of the Indians disappear, and then went off through the snow, his feet splaying out in a manner which showed that he was unused to snow-shoes. They heard his whistle and then the murmur of voices growing fainter. Meanwhile the guns continued their thunder, though the men who worked them could only have guessed at the position of the trappers. Still they were cunning fellows, for they had taken care to provide themselves with a signal which pointed always towards the spot where the hollow lay. They had laid one of the long sponging rods between two forked branches, bolstering up the leading end with lumps of snow till the man who stood beside it had it pointing true. It was a wise precaution which they had taken before the snow commenced to fall, and now Steve watched as the direction was taken from it.

Five minutes later a man who was dressed as a trapper slipped up to the men, spoke a few words, and was gone. Once more the guns belched forth their flame and shot, and then to Steve's joy all but four of the gunners threw off their mittens, snatched up the firelocks piled near at hand, and went off after their friends.

"They have word that the attackers are nearly in position, and that they are not to fire again for fear of hitting their friends," whispered Steve. "Now is the time, Mac. Not a shout, not a sound, remember, till we have the guns. Ready? Then come along."

His axe was gripped in his hand now, while his musket was slung over his shoulder. He slipped like a ghost from behind the oak, and slid across the snow towards the guns. He was within four yards of them when one of the four gunners who had remained, and who up till then had been staring out into the snow, swung round, looked at him for a moment, and then gave a cry of amazement. He seized one of the sponging rods and whirled it above his head, while his comrades at once drew their cutlasses.

"On them boys! Cut them down! There are only four!" shouted Steve, in French. "Charge and we have got them!"

Whether or not the Frenchmen believed that there were more of the trappers behind it would be difficult to state; but the man who had first seen Steve and Mac started back at his words, and lowered his rod. Then as Steve rushed in he swung it up again, whirled it round once, and then struck a tremendous blow which lost all its force in the snow. For Steve had had his eyes open, and, moreover, was as agile as a cat, even with snow-shoes on his feet. He leaped to one side, and then ran in, striking the gunner between the eyes with the shaft of his weapon. Almost at the same instant a cutlass blade swished over his head as a second gunner made a wild cut at him,

and striking the barrel of the musket swinging on his back, cut a deep groove into it.

"Ye baste!" shouted Mac, as he brought the butt of his musket against the soldier's head. "Stand back will ye. Will ye dare to sthrike the Cap'n. Ha! So ye're still there. Now, bedad, that's koinde of ye, so 'tis."

The red-headed Irishman rushed at the third man with a bellow of rage, lifting his musket as he ran. Then quick as a flash he swung the ponderous weapon at the Frenchman, throwing it so truly that it struck him full in the face and across the chest and sent him to the ground with a thud which could be heard a dozen yards away. And there he lay, the Irishman standing over him, his hair the one prominent feature, for his cap had been jerked from his head. As for the other Frenchman, he bolted as Steve ran to attack him, and was soon out of sight. Our hero at once rushed to the nearest gun, slipped one of his improvised spikes into the vent, and then drove it home with his axe head. Meanwhile Mac had raced forward a few yards, and turning in the direction of the hollow placed one of his capacious hands to his mouth:

"Boys! Jim!" he shouted with all the force of his lungs.

"Ahoy!" came back. "Is that the Cap'n?"

"It is. Boys, kape a watch on the back of the fort. The bastes are wantin' to rush ye; and they're comin' up in front, too!"

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There was a distant shout of thanks heard clearly through the frosty air, and almost instantly a musket spoke. Then the whoops of the Indians broke forth, while the French, who were attacking the front of the hillock, joined in the chorus.

"Don't spoike the secind gun, sor," called out Mac, all of a sudden. "Sure we'll turn it on the ruffians ef they come to attack us. Here's powder, and, bedad, here's the bags of bullets with which they charge the cratures."

The Irishman had seen service before, and doubtless he had had some instruction in the loading of guns. He ran the sponge rod down the muzzle of the one which had not yet been spiked, wiped it out, and introduced a charge, while Steve poured a handful of powder over the vent. In another minute they had depressed the sights, and our hero stood beside the gun, panting after his exertions, and holding the muzzle of a pistol taken from one of the Frenchmen across the vent. Meanwhile the musket shot which had been fired from the neighbourhood of the hummock where Steve's men lay had been followed by many sharp reports, and by the din set up by the combatants. Sometimes the flash of the powder could be seen, for the fall of snow was not so heavy now as it had been. Dim figures could be discerned here and there, and presently some dashed towards the guns; for the man who had run for his life as Steve and Mac charged had returned with some comrades determined on capturing the guns again. They arrived within sight of the place to find all in readiness, and the instant they caught sight of Steve, standing ready to receive them, they bolted back again, and darting to the right till out of range of the weapon, went shouting for their friends.

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"Get that sponging rod under the edge of the sledge, Mac," sang out Steve, a smile of confidence on his lips. "Ten chances to one they will rush us from another direction, and we must be ready to slew the gun round and fire. Yes. Here they come, this time from the right."

As quickly as possible the rod was thrust under the runner of the sledge which carried the gun, and with a heave Mac slewed it round till the muzzle pointed towards the spot from which the French were coming. He dug it again into position, and then waited, ready to move the sights still further if necessary.

"Jest a little lower wid the muzzle, sor," he sang out. "That's the way. Give 'em the charge raight in their faces, and thin, bedad, we'll be for lavin'."

He stood on the tips of his moccasins peering into the distance, and then shuffled a little to one side in his snow shoes, wrenching the rod as he did so, and again slightly altering the aim of the gun. Figures had sprung up again on the sudden, and some twenty Frenchmen could be seen coming towards the gun as fast as the

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snow and their shoes would allow them. A musket spoke sharply, a flash illuminated the front of the enemy for an instant, and a heavy ball struck the runner of the sledge, glanced from it and very neatly severed the sling which held Steve's musket to his shoulders. Then came another shot, crisp and clear, the missile clipping a bough above the heads of the two gallant backwoodsmen standing beside the gun, and bringing a cloud of frozen snow about their ears. It was time to fire. Steve leaned over the breach, placed the pan of his flint lock close to the vent and pulled the trigger. Then he and Mac turned, and after Steve had driven his second spike home and so rendered the gun useless, darted off into the forest unmindful of the shouts they left behind them, knowing only that their use of the gun had resulted in terrible loss to the enemy.

"They have no thought of pursuing us," gasped Steve, some minutes later as they halted deep in the forest. "I think the discharge must have worked havoc, and thoroughly upset them. Listen to the others. Jim and the boys were just in time to catch the Indians, and I have a shrewd idea that they have beaten off their attack. Can we help in any way?"

"Hilp! Sure 'tis oursilves as will want hilp if them fellers catch a sight af us. Cap'n, we'd best lie hid here till the fightin's over, when we can follow the inimy and see that he returns home."

"And that he does not take his guns with him," exclaimed Steve. "After all, they could very easily bore out the vents again if they took them back to Ticonderoga, and then we might have them firing at us again. Let us return a little way, Mac, till we get a good sight of the weapons. With our muskets we should be able to keep the enemy away from them. Lucky for me that I picked up one of the French muskets when we left. Mine had a deep dent in the barrel, where that man's cutlass struck it, and I doubt whether it was fit to be used."

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They looked to the loading and the priming of their firearms, and then turning away from their old tracks, for the enemy might even now be following, they struck off on another trail which brought them in a roundabout way to the guns. By now the snow had ceased to fall, so that before very long they caught sight of the two cannon, standing black against the white background beyond. Close to the runners of the sledges on which they were mounted lay two of the gunners whom Steve or Mac had struck down, while the third was sitting up on his elbow, and engaged in wiping the blood from his eyes.

"Sure, 'tis sorra he'll be that he's aloive, so he will," said Mac, indulging in a dry chuckle. "'Tis the Frinchman himsilf as will have a head that's fit to burst. Sure the man's dizzy."

"And well he might be," answered Steve. "Poor fellow, your musket gave him a hard blow, and there is no wonder if he does feel dizzy and ill. Don't fire, Mac. The man is harmless, and we are not here to injure such as he. Listen to that. Cheers!"

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"Cheers it is, sor. Them's Jim and Pete and the ithers. Sure they've beaten off the blackguards."

Wild shouts of triumph came across the snow-clad clearing and into the forest, and there could not be a doubt but that they were those of their comrades. Musket shots followed, and then cheer upon cheer, while Steve fancied he could even distinguish Jim's voice. But presently something else occupied his attention. Out of the tail of his eye he caught sight of a figure flitting through the trees away on his left.

"Hu-u-ush! Indians!" he whispered, pulling Mac by the sleeve of his hunting shirt. "Down, or they will see us. They are returning from the hillock."

"And would give all they have and a deal more, too, the bastes! if they could take us with thim," answered the Irishman, dropping on to his face behind a friendly tree and peering round at the enemy.

"They're makin' for the guns, sor. Will ye allow thim to carry the weapons away?"

Steve gave an emphatic shake of his head.

"Indians or French are the same in this case, Mac. They are enemies. If I can prevent it they shall not take the guns. But perhaps they are only returning for their blankets. Count them. I fancy some

have fallen."

They lay full length in the snow and watched as the silent band of discomfited Indians swept by them, gliding over the snow as if their shoes were parts of themselves. But the men who now returned wore a different appearance from those who had such a short while before made through the forest to attack the back of the hillock. This band, gliding so swiftly through the gaps between the trees in single file, was composed of men who had met with deep disappointment, and showed it. Their heads were bent. Some looked ashamed, while there was an air of savage fury on more than one of the clear-cut faces. More than ten of their original number were missing, while amongst the tall, copper-coloured braves who now filed along on their way to the open, were a dozen at least who had been wounded. There could be no doubt that that was the case, for behind them they left the trace of their snow-shoes and dark stains here and there which told their tale only too truly.

"I was right. They are making for the guns so as to get their blankets," whispered Steve. "Lucky for us that they did not come this way, or stumble upon our trail. Even a beaten brave notes every mark in the snow, and if even one suspected that we were here they would turn and pounce upon us. Listen, Mac. If they or the French try to take the guns, fire your piece and shout. Then move away to right or left, loading as you go, and fire again. They will then think that there are many of us."

A glance at the Irishman was sufficient to show that he had grasped his leader's meaning. Steve saw him look to the priming of his musket, and then slowly and cautiously get to his feet.

"They'll do what they can to help their friends," he said. "Look, if ye plaze, sor. There's a French sodjer, and he's givin' thim an order."

A man had suddenly come into sight as Mac spoke, and Steve watched him advance to meet the Indians, who were now engaged in recovering the blankets which they had left beside the guns. He spoke to them, made signs with his hands, and then snatched up one of the ropes which were attached to the sledges. For a minute, perhaps, the Indians stared at him, for this was a task which none of them cared to undertake. It was not real fighting, and, therefore, perhaps derogatory to them. However, a word from their chief set matters right, and in a little while a dozen had harnessed themselves to the tackle.

Crack! Steve's musket sent a leaden messenger at the group, a messenger which was no respecter of persons. It struck the muzzle of the rearmost weapon, with a resounding clang, glanced from it and passed through the calf of one of the Indians.

"Hit! One to you, sor," called out Mac. "Listen to the baste shoutin'. Bedad, Mac here will thry himsilf."

He put his musket to his shoulder, while the group about the guns suddenly divided. The shot had taken them utterly by surprise, for they had no notion that the enemy was behind them. Halting where they were, they looked at their chief, while the wounded man hastily tied a strip of cloth about his leg.

"A shot from behind, my brothers," said their chief. "It is some straggler who has been lying in the forest. We will return and slay him." He dropped the tackle and without another look or word strode off in the direction from which the bullet came. A dozen of his comrades followed his example, and ere Mac had time to sight, the band was clear of the guns, and already entering the forest.

Crack! For a second or two the smoke which had belched from the weapon hid the Indians from view, but a gust blew it rapidly aside, and when Steve looked there was the Indian chief lying full length in the snow, while the braves who had turned from the guns to support him stood dumbfounded, staring at his recumbent figure. For this was hardly the kind of warfare which met with their approval. These fierce Hurons, a portion of the so-called Christian Indians whom the French had induced, to the number of many thousands in all, for many tribes had come from Canada, to become their allies, were accustomed to fall upon unsuspecting enemies and butcher them in their sleep if possible, or at least before they had time to more than grasp a weapon. True, these braves could fight and fight courageously, as they had proved many a time; but they were little use when asked to assault a fort or to attack an enemy in the open.

Their forte was the tracking of enemies in the forest, the stealthy following up of stragglers, wood-cutters, and the small parties sent to shoot meat. It was in expeditions of such a nature that they shone, for their backwoods knowledge, their natural cunning and stealth, enabled them to creep up without observation and wreak a fierce and terrible vengeance on a foe fewer than themselves in number, and more often than not utterly unsuspecting of danger. And here they were exposed in the open, a thought that was hateful to every one, and being fired at by unseen muskets aimed by men of whose presence they had had no notion.

As the chief fell they gathered about him with grunts of consternation, which were increased to howls of anger as Steve lifted his ponderous weapon again, sighted, and sent a bullet into their midst. With one exception they turned tail and fled.

"Hold!" cried the brave who had kept his ground, a tall and fine-looking Indian. "Are my brothers so easily scared? Will they suffer a chief to be slain and not retaliate? Surely we are children, for we run when but few men are there to fire at us. Follow, Hurons. Let us take these men who have fired, and to-night they shall burn over our fires while we watch them writhing."

It was a cheerful proposition for Steve and Mac to listen to, but one at which every brave who heard picked up heart and courage. Why, after all, should they retire from this field without prisoners, without one or more of these pale faces on whom to wreak their vengeance? Besides, they were not children. The very mention of such a word, the scoffing tones of their comrades, were enough to rouse them to desperation. They turned again, their war-whoops rang shrilly through the forest, and in a moment a stream of the painted braves was charging towards Steve and Mac.

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"Take them coolly," said our hero, leaning his musket barrel in the fork of a tree. "Are you ready? Then fire."

Their shots rang out in rapid succession, and two of the charging braves threw up their hands and fell, laughing hideously, for no brave worthy of the name could die with a groan on his lips. He must laugh as if the pangs of death were nothing but an enjoyment.

"Now let us run," whispered Steve swiftly. "Perhaps our shots will bring help from the hillock. If not, we have a start, and may be able to get away. Throw your musket on one side and come along."

Tossing their weapons on to the snow, the two set off as fast as their legs would carry them, their pace being improved by the very fact of their having discarded their muskets, for the muskets then in use weighed perhaps three times as much as the present magazine rifle. Behind them came the Indian braves, in single file now, silent as hounds on the trail, their eyes shining strangely and a look of ferocity and rage on every face. Two hundred yards farther on Steve turned for an instant. He and Mac had not increased their lead, but at the same time they had not lost ground. The issue of this chase was still in doubt, for he and the Irishman might still reach the hillock before the Indians came up with them. On the other hand, a lucky shot from one of the braves might bring the chase to an end very summarily. As if to remind him of that fact, there was a sharp report behind, a report which went reverberating through the forest, and a bullet chipped a foot or more of frozen bark from a tree within a few inches of the fugitives. A second later Steve caught a glimpse of a figure some few yards in front of them. It was Jim, Hunting Jim, the fringe of his shirt and leggings blowing in the wind.

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"Jest keep on towards the hillock, Cap'n," he said swiftly as Steve came abreast of him. "Yer know what's wanted. Draw them varmint into this here trap."

There was no time for more. Steve and Mac held on their course, darting over the frozen snow as if the danger were even greater. And after them came the Indian band, their nostrils agape, their fingers gripping the tomahawks which they hoped to use very shortly. But their hopes were doomed to disappointment, for within a minute they had run into the circle of trappers whom Jim had brought with him. There was a shout, a musket spoke out sharply, and then with a cheer the trappers threw themselves upon the braves.

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"That war a find and no mistake," said Jim some ten minutes later as

Steve stood gasping beside him. "I reckon Injuns was never so surprised in all their mortal lives, unless it was the fellers way back there at the divide when we were on the trail from the settlement. Waal, we wiped 'em out, and with what we killed before I guess as they won't be so keen on comin' our way again. There's twenty down at least, and half as many French. Boys, our Cap'n's given us a bit o' fightin'."

There was a smothered cheer at that, while the men gathered round their young leader.

"We must move again," said Steve sharply. "I thank you all for having come just in the nick of time. And now let us be moving. I want some of you to go down and see that the guns are not taken. If they are there get to work at the tackles and pull the weapons back to the hillock. We can draw the spikes with a little trouble, and then, boys——"

"He's the lad fer us," sang out Pete. "He ain't thinkin' of givin' up our fort, not even if five thousand of the Frenchies wants to come and attack us. He's goin' to put in guns, so as he can fire back the iron pills they've been sendin' us. Take it as done, Cap'n. Them guns'll be in position afore the night comes."

"Then you will look to it," responded Steve, smiling as the men crowded about him with another cheer. "Now there is other work. Jim, take some of the men and follow the enemy as far as the lake. Mac and I will return for our muskets and then scout round to make sure that not an Indian or Frenchman is left."

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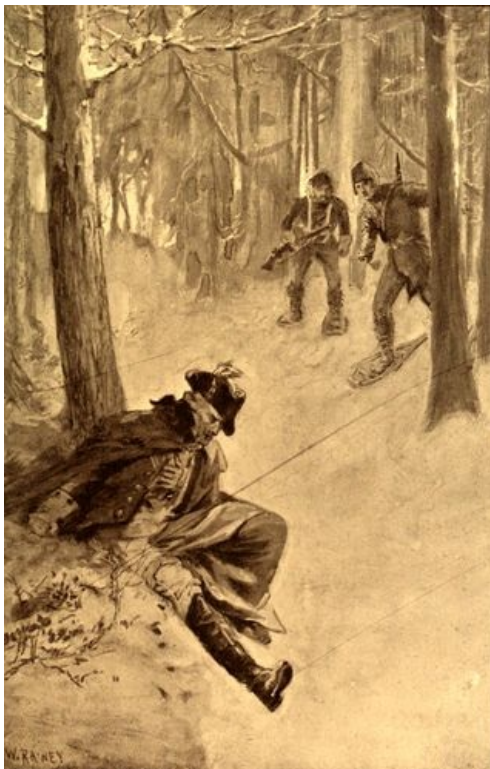
The party of trappers separated into three small bands at once, Steve watching Jim and Pete march their men away to carry out his instructions. Then he and Mac returned on their old trails, this time at a more reasonable pace, and having discovered their muskets dived into the forest and scouted there so as to make sure that none of the enemy were left. Now and again a far-off musket shot came to their ears, as the rearguard of the retreating force fired at the trappers, and on three or four occasions they came upon the dead bodies of Frenchmen or Indians who had fallen. But for the shots there was silence everywhere, the silence of the virgin forest, till a faint sound came to Mac's ears.

"Sure, it's a groan, so 'tis," he whispered. "Listen to it, sor. It'll be the ghost of one of them poor cratur's."

The superstitious Irishman trembled, while beads of perspiration burst out on his forehead despite the lowness of the temperature. He looked scared, and turned appealingly to Steve.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the latter, emphatically. "Don't talk such rubbish. It must be some injured man. Listen, and then we shall get the direction."

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They stood still for some five minutes, and then at last the same moaning sound came to their ears. Steve promptly turned to his right and set off at a rapid pace, Mac following with the same scared look on his wrinkled features.

"Tracks of Indians," said Steve suddenly, as he came across the marks of snow-shoes. "They were carrying a wounded man. Look at the spots of blood. Keep your musket handy, Mac, and use it if there is need."

Some fifty yards farther on the two suddenly burst into a tiny clearing, and discovered there the figure of a man, lying propped against a tree, where he had undoubtedly dragged himself, as the marks in the snow plainly showed. He turned as Steve came forward, and the latter recognised him. It was the tall Frenchman who had commanded the attacking party. He was pale and wan, and evidently in great pain.

"Monsieur, I am your prisoner," he said bravely. "I was hit in the thigh, and I think my leg is broken. The Indians who were carrying me tossed me aside for fear that I should delay them."

Mac and Steve were on their knees at once, tending to the wounded officer. "We will make a litter and carry him out on to the lake," said Steve. "Find a dozen of the boys, Mac, and hurry. We must get back before the night comes."

Half an hour later the gallant French officer was lying in a litter constructed with the help of an Indian blanket and two stout poles, and was being conveyed by four of Steve's trappers, a relay of men following behind. Their muskets were slung across their shoulders, while one of the hunters strode ahead with a white rag tied to his ramrod. And so they passed through the forest and came to the lake, where, a mile away, the retreating force could be seen.

"Fire a round and wave the flag," shouted Steve. "That will call their attention."

A little later a dozen French soldiers returned, their arms also slung, while a lieutenant was in command of the party.

"You are our prisoner, colonel," said Steve to the wounded officer, "but we know that you are wounded, and will be better cared for by your own friends. We release you on your oath that you will take no further part in the war."

"Monsieur, I gladly give that promise, and call all here to witness it," came the answer, while the poor fellow feebly pressed our hero's hand. "Messieurs, you are brave and generous. I give you a thousand thanks. To you, monsieur, I say that I am for ever indebted. If ever you should be in need of help and I am present, call on Colonel St. Arnould de Prossen. He will help you to the utmost of his ability."

The parties saluted, the French with formality, the trappers in their own rough and ready manner. Then they turned from one another and went on their different ways, the French overjoyed at such handsome treatment, the trappers pleased to have been of service. As for Steve he little thought that he would soon have need of French help. He little dreamed that the time was near at hand when it would take the influence of a man stronger even than Colonel de Prossen to save him from death. He made back for the hillock, and that night there was no prouder commander than he, for he and his men had come well out of their first engagement.

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Chapter XIII

A Traitor in the Camp

"To Captain Steve Mainwaring, His Majesty's Regiment of Scouts."

An Indian climbed up the steep rise of the hillock on the day following the French attack and presented a note to our hero. Steve turned it over in his gloved hand, looked at the writing, and then opened the missive.

"You have done well, and I congratulate you," ran the letter from the Commander of Fort William Henry. "Your messenger reached us late last night and explained the heavy firing which we had heard. For your information I now beg to tell you that I have suspicions that news is leaking out of this fort. The French have become acquainted with our dispositions within a few hours of our making them. There is treachery somewhere, and I look to you to discover who is the rascal. You will take steps to clear up this mystery, and will report in due course. I am sending you this day a further store of provisions, powder, and shot to suit the captured cannon."

There was the usual official ending to the letter and the signature of the Commander of Fort William Henry. Steve read it through again, folded it, and dismissed the Indian. Then he called Pete and Jim and discussed the matter with them.

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"Ef there was fifty traitors and bearers of news it wouldn't surprise me," said Pete. "I ain't got no opinion of them colonists and reg'lars at Fort William Henry. No opinion at all. They ain't fer the most part fit to watch for Frenchmen, and much less for Injuns. What air the use of expecting 'em to be any good, when them critters the Frenchies could slip through trappers sich as we air? How do yer mean to get about the business, Cap'n? It seems no easy matter. You've got a mighty wide strip of country to watch, and ef it's one man bearin' the news, as seems probable, why, he can go any way, and slip in between us."

The question was a more than usually difficult one, and for a long while Steve sat and smoked, staring out through the exit of the fort, for the damage done by the exploding powder had now been more or less repaired. News was leaking out of the British fort, news which might be of importance. It was feared that the French, who were in great strength at Ticonderoga, might select some clear, fine night to start out from their fort, and time their march so as to arrive near Fort William Henry early in the morning. The commander who had sent Steve the message knew very well that he was sadly lacking in many respects, particularly in scouts, and the fear of this descent of the French weighed upon him. And now, in some way or other, he had learned that news was leaking, that plans he made to resist a French attack were promptly conveyed to the enemy.

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"We have got to stop the leakage whatever happens," said Steve suddenly, "for if the French are always to know what our people are doing, they might easily take them unawares and slaughter the whole garrison. My idea is to take advantage of snowy and overcast weather."

"Snowy weather! Steve—beg pardon—Cap'n, that ain't like you," exclaimed Jim, somewhat sadly. "How on airth air a man to see sech a skunk when it's thick? It ain't possible. Ef there's one thing sartin it is that thick weather ain't the time to turn out and hunt."

"Not if we have to hunt a wide strip of land, Jim," answered Steve drily. "But we shall not have to do that. This fellow makes use of Lake St. George. Steady, Jim. I know you have your own ideas. So have I. Listen to them and then laugh as much as you like."

The tall trapper subsided at Steve's words, while Pete grinned.

"Fill up yer pipe, Huntin' Jim," he said with a laugh. "Reckon you've got to sit tight while the Cap'n says his say. This here's a palaver. When he's done, you can get to it with yer tongue. An old hoss like you air worth paying some attention to. So's Steve. He air a good 'un."

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Jim was mollified. A smile wreathed his thin lips and wrinkled his mahogany features. He sat down on a lump of frozen snow, kicked

off his snowshoes, and rammed a plug of tobacco into his pipe.

"Right there, Pete," he said. "Reckon when all's said and done that an old trapper air worth consultin' when it comes to a fix and there's time to think. But he ain't as good always when there's a muss and something's got to be done right away at once. Then it's the youngsters who air worth attendin' to. They air quicker like with their brains, and chaps like Steve here gets ideas like a flash. He's done it before."

"I was speaking of the lake, then," said Steve, with a smile, for he knew Jim well by now, and was aware of his impetuous nature. "I said that in my opinion this man, for we will take it for granted that one only is employed in the work, comes and goes over the ice, and most likely has a rendezvous somewhere near Fort William Henry, where he meets the rascal who gives away the information which the French require."

"Gives, Cap'n!" exclaimed Pete, with an oath. "Gives air a polite word, I guess. Chaps what act as traitors don't give much. They sell. I can't make out how a man, who's worth calling sich, can 'low hisself to do a dirty trick like that. It's selling country and friends, and p'raps wife and children, and all for a little gold."

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"Mean men are employed in mean trades, Pete," answered Steve. "It may even be that this rascal who sells news from Fort William Henry is a Frenchman in disguise, an English-speaking ruffian with French sympathies. Any way, I fancy that is how the news leaks out. There is someone in the fort who sneaks into the forest and meets a French messenger. That messenger makes his way over the ice, of that I am sure, for the simple reason that when we came through the forest on our way here there was only one track, a fresh one, you will remember, which had been used by several men. This sort of business is done by a single messenger as a rule, and even supposing that I am wrong in saying that the man does not make use of the forest, he will not do so in future for fear of running into our scouting parties. He will also choose snowy weather, for our look-out station here gives us the opportunity of seeing anyone who leaves the fort at Ticonderoga."

"Blest ef he ain't a judge like his father," burst in Jim, smoking furiously. "Get on with it, Steve."

"There is really nothing more. We shall send out scouts every day, and night, too, when the weather is fine. When it comes on snowy, we'll send men down close to Fort William Henry, while a few of us will station ourselves across the lake and watch. The man who comes from Ticonderoga will cut over the ice in a direct line, for he has a long journey, and will take the shortest route. Look out there for yourselves. That line I speak of will pass the point which pushes out from this side of the lake. A line of watchers stretched for a quarter of a mile across that line ought to see something."

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For a little while the trio stared out at the frozen and snow-covered surface of the lake, that lake at the head of which stood the French fort of Ticonderoga, while at its foot was Fort William Henry. And as they looked, Jim and Pete agreed to the full with what Steve had said.

"Reckon you're right, Cap'n," said the former. "This chap'll be caught somewheres within hail of that point ef he's caught at all. Waal, we've given them Frenchies and their varmint a knock already, and we'll let 'em have another. Give us a fill of yer 'bacca, Steve. Mine's done. Now, let's have some orders. It's time we shook down to reg'lar business."

It took only a little while to arrange the duties for the whole band. They were divided into two sections, each of which was to act as a rule independently of the other. They were to take night duty week by week, and when away from the fort, as it had now come to be called, were to scour as much of the country as possible, so as to prevent French parties from pouncing upon the woodcutters who were sent every day from Fort William Henry. This arrangement would always allow half the band to garrison the place, while the boom of one of the captured cannon would quickly bring the other in, if that were necessary. As to the weapons which had been captured, they had been mounted on the front face of the hillock, and a little thought and skilful handling by one of the band possessing some mechanical knowledge soon removed the spikes which Steve had driven into the vents. Men were told off from the

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two parties to act as gunners, and no sooner had the arrangements been completed than Mac took these men in hand, and commenced to drill them in their new duties. One other arrangement was made.

"If snow begins to fall, those who are out scouting will make at once for Fort William Henry," said Steve. "They will endeavour to hit upon the meeting-place where this rascal sells his news, while those who are resting here will file off to that point on the lake, and will draw a line out from it. It will be cold work, boys, but it may bring success, and thanks from our commander. I think, too, that it might help if the men engaged in this last duty were dressed as Indians, for then a Frenchman who happened to catch sight of one of our number would not take fright so easily. You see, we have very few braves working with us, and they seldom come even as far from the fort as this. The French have, on the other hand, some hundreds of Hurons, Micmacs, and other braves, and they make long excursions."

"It air a good thing that," agreed Pete. "What's more, there ain't a one of us that can't dress as an Injun in quick time, and act the part too. As for dress, there's plenty of the braves lyin' out in the forest."

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For a week the scouting work of the band of trappers went on without incident. The two parties fell into their duties as if they were born to them, and all agreed that their lot was infinitely more pleasant than it would have been had they remained at Fort William Henry. Thanks to the care which Steve had taken, the men had ample time for rest and sleep, and either half of the band on their return from scouting always found a good meal ready, that being one of the duties of those resting in the fort.

"Reckon that 'ere attack and the way we beat 'em off has shook them Frenchies and their Injuns up a bit," said Jim, one night as he sat smoking in front of the cosy fire which blazed in the fort. "They've had their own way for a precious long time, and it's kind'er taken their breath away to have someone suddenly stop 'em. There ain't no news from Fort William Henry, Cap'n?"

"Only that the commandant thinks that whoever has been sending news to the enemy has been quiet this last week. It has been fine, Jim."

"Ay, and it'll snow afore many hours have gone. Jacob thar?"

"Waal, what air wrong? What's wanted?"

A bearded head, topped by a coon-skin cap of huge dimensions which covered the ears, was thrust into the opening of the fort, while the owner held the blanket aside with one of his thickly gloved hands. The firelight shone upon his tanned face, and upon the hundreds of tiny icicles which clung to his beard, his moustache, and eyebrows.

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"Waal?" he repeated. "What's amiss?"

"Nothing, lad. But you air the boy on sentry go, as Mac calls it, and it's reasonable to think that you've looked to the weather. What's it doin'?"

"Nothing. Jest cold as ever it was. But it's cloudy. There ain't so many stars. Suppose it'll snow afore midnight."

"Then sing out when the first flake falls," called Jim. "Now, shut that 'ere door, Jacob, and quick with it. The wind comes in like a knife, and we're warm and smokin'."

The bearded face at the opening grinned, a grin denoting disgust rather than merriment.

"You was always like that, Huntin' Jim," Jacob growled. "Just wait till it's your turn for sentry go. I'll be the boy then to sit snug in thar and smoke, and I won't let you know it, oh no, of course I won't."

He was gone, and they heard his feet scrunching the frozen snow outside. The blanket fell into its place, and the men inside lounged again, spreading their hands to the flare, smoking and gossiping, for your trapper was not always the silent person he is sometimes painted, but a garrulous individual, fond of company, and making the most of it when he had the opportunity. A little later blankets were produced, and the whole party lay down with their feet to the fire, over which a huge iron pot of stew was left simmering.

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"It air snowin'. Jest rouse yerselves and come out. It'll liven some of yer outside, for the wind air like a knife."

Jacob's bearded face appeared again, and he roused the trappers with no gentle hand. They sprang to their feet, rubbed the sleep from their eyes, and prepared to depart. Ten minutes later saw them all filing from the fort, all save two who were to act as guard. They were dressed in their usual hunting costumes, under which all wore the thickest and warmest garments that they could procure for otherwise they could never have endured such exposure. And now, in addition, each had an Indian blanket wrapped round him, while an eagle's crest was secured to the warm fur caps which all wore.

"We shall pass," said Steve, as he inspected his comrades in the firelight. "Now, one word more before we go. This must be the work of one man to-night. We shall be spread out over the ice, and should the Frenchman come, he will probably be seen by one only of our number. That one must pounce upon him promptly. Come along."

He turned to the doorway and went out, the band following close upon his heels. It was snowing outside, but not so hard as it did on the day when the Indians and French attacked them. It was, in fact, just the night that a man would choose for an expedition such as that of meeting a rascal from the British force, and buying information from him, for the snow would act as an excellent cloak, while it was not so thick as to prevent a man from making progress in it. Then again, though the wind was cold, it was not blowing strongly, and what there was came from the south.

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Steve stepped over the snow wall which had been left in front of the fort, and gaining the steep slope beyond it, promptly slid down, his snowshoes scattering the white particles in a fine spray on either side. One by one the band followed, floundering down to the bottom. Then they moved off in single file, and very soon had plunged into the depths of the silent forest. Three miles took them to the bank of Lake St. George, when they struck out on to the ice, here clear of snow, for the wind had been in the opposite direction, and had swept it away. Their faces were now turned to the north, and they kept on in that direction for half an hour. Then Steve halted. It was still very dark, and snowing a little. But all were glad to find that the forest, which clad the point below them, sheltered them from the keen wind, and that it was considerably warmer.

"We will spread now," said Steve. "If you find that you are getting cold, swing your arms round your head. Don't beat them against your sides, for the sound would carry."

"It air likely, too, that some of the boys will fall asleep with this cold and standin' still," whispered Jim. "Steve, supposin' yer order the men to beat up and down past one another. That'll keep 'em lively, and it'll make it more sartin that no one can get through."

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There were twelve in all, and their young leader at once adopted the suggestion.

"We'll divide again into two parties," he said. "Jim, you will have command of the five out farthest, making with yourself six. I'll command the other half. We will spread out for a quarter of a mile from this bank, you posting yourself at the farthest point. The men will be at intervals of about forty yards, and as soon as they are in position they will commence to beat to and fro, each couple exchanging places. In that way the ground will be thoroughly patrolled. Understand?"

"Right, Cap'n."

"Then take your men. This fellow may be along at any moment."

Within ten minutes the twelve watchers were in position, and for four long and weary hours the men continued to patrol the snow-covered ice. But trappers were used to such work, and made light of the exposure, though the wind was so cold, even here in the shelter, that untrained men would quickly have succumbed. However, Jim's idea helped not a little, for the men patrolled backwards and forwards without cessation, walking at a brisk pace, which kept their blood circulating and their extremities warm. And as they watched, the snow still fell silently and gently, sometimes almost ceasing altogether. The sky overhead was still overcast, but not so much as before, and that added to the reflection from this vast expanse of white made it possible for all the men to see a few yards in all directions, and to retain their relative positions. A deathly silence hung over the lake, broken only by an occasional crash, as the wind sent a mass of snow tumbling from the trees in the forest.

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Then the sound would reverberate down the long expanse of ice, and go rolling away to the mountains far beyond.

"It looks as if we were going to be disappointed, Jim," said Steve, as he walked along the line to speak to the hunter. We have been in position four solid hours, and have seen nothing."

"Which don't say as there ain't nothin' to be seen, Cap'n," was the answer. "I reckon it's somewhere's about three in the mornin', and a good hour for this feller to be returnin'. P'raps he slipped past here before we turned out of the fort. He may have made so far through the forest, and then dropped on to the ice when the snow commenced. Give him another two hours, and then we may as well get back to the fort and curl up in front of the fire. It's cold here. Them chaps down at Fort William Henry would ha' been asleep or frozen long ago."

They separated again, and another half hour passed without interruption. Then, suddenly, from the lower end of the lake there came a shout, then a second, and almost immediately afterwards the report of a rifle, heard very clearly at that distance, for the ice acted as a sounding-board. At once all was excitement amongst the waiting trappers. They lifted their coon-skin caps so as to make sure that they would hear even the slightest sound, and ranged up and down at an even faster pace. They were on the qui vive, and determined to catch anyone who attempted to pass them.

"Chances air that Pete and the other boys have come upon the meeting of these varmint," said Jim, as he drew close to Steve. "They've likely as not shot one of 'em, and will be followin' the other. Supposin' we extend a little."

The movement was carried out promptly, Steve stationing himself on the far extremity of the line. An hour later, when the excitement had died down and the trappers were beginning to murmur that there was little use in staying, for the man, if he actually existed, must have already passed, or have been shot lower down the lake, Steve thought he caught sight of a figure flitting across the snow quite a distance out on the lake. He could not be certain, but as it would not do to miss even a chance, he hurriedly set off in the direction, trusting that the trapper stationed next to him would be careful to notice that he had gone, and would follow on his traces. Dashing ahead at his fastest pace, it was not long before he came upon the marks of snowshoes, and, thanks to the increased light out there on the lake, made sure that two men had passed. Then he set off after them, sweeping over the snow at a rate which would have taxed the endurance of an Indian, for Steve was an old hand with snowshoes. A quarter of an hour later he again caught sight of a figure, and within a few minutes made out a second, in advance of the first. The time for action had arrived. He took one swift glance behind him, and thought he saw the dull outline of one of the trappers following in his wake. Then he started forward again, and soon was within easy distance of the last of the figures.

"Halt, there!" he shouted, as he lifted his musket to his shoulder. "Throw your hands up, both of you, and return at once."

There was an exclamation, a shout of alarm, and almost instantly the two men threw themselves on their faces in the snow. Then there was a short interval, followed by the loud report of a musket. A splash of flame illumined the darkness, while a leaden ball raced past Steve's head, and went humming into the distance. He was down in an instant, and having waited to make sure of the position of the enemy, he took careful aim and fired. Instantly there was a loud scream, one of the dark figures started up, staggered, and fell again, to roll over and over in the snow. Then something else happened. A dozen shots were fired from a spot some little distance to the right, while Indian war-whoops broke on the air.

"They must have had friends waiting for them," thought Steve, as he busily reloaded. "Where is Jim? He and the men should be here by now. Ah! That must be their fire."



**"WHEN HE CAME TO HIMSELF AGAIN HE WAS BEING CARRIED ON
THE SHOULDERS OF FOUR INDIANS"**

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He swung round suddenly, for more shots had rung out behind him, shots which he made sure came from the muskets of his friends. But in a moment he found that he was mistaken. A series of loud reports answered the last discharge, and the flashes told him that the muskets were aimed in his direction.

"Surrounded! The Indians have got between me and my friends," thought Steve. "I must creep away, and make the best of a bad position."

He knelt up stealthily, saw no one in his immediate neighbourhood, and commenced to creep on hands and knees. But he was not allowed to go very far, for one of the two dusky figures which he had been following rose at once, and strode back a few paces. There was the loud ring of a ramrod as the man drove in a bullet, and then came the report, the crash of which rang in Steve's ears. Stars flashed in front of his eyes, and the snow over which he was creeping turned to a blood-red hue. He fell all of a heap, and lay there for some few seconds, while the shouts of the combatants rang in his ears. Then he revived a little, staggered to his feet and fell again, this time with a crash which left him senseless. When he came to himself again he was being carried on the shoulders of four Indians, the snow had ceased, and the lights which twinkled in the distance were those of Ticonderoga. Steve was a prisoner.

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Chapter XIV

Steve meets an Old Enemy

Steve Mainwaring was a prisoner, and as he realised that fact a thousand misgivings filled his mind. For to be taken by the French and their Indians was not a fate which even the boldest of the British courted.

"It may mean torture," he thought. "The French are not always able to control their Indians, and even if they were always capable of doing so, there are the backwoodsmen. We have heard what they are, and the fugitives from our settlements have given us many a tale of their ferocity."

No one, in fact, could guess in those rough days what pains were awaiting him if he fell into the hands of the French, and if there had not been sufficient evidence already, there was to be abundance in the near future. But that was hardly required. The thousands of unhappy settlers who had been driven from the forests and the backwoods were full of tales of brutality, of cruelty on the part of French pioneers and Indians alike. And it was a known fact that even if the French were kindly disposed and desirous of treating their prisoners well, they often had to stand aside and look on helplessly while the braves who were their allies wreaked a terrible vengeance on the unhappy people who had been captured. This was the price which New France had too often to pay for the allegiance of these monsters.

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"I have been taken in fair fight, and am a prisoner of war," Steve said to himself. "That in itself should gain fair treatment for me. But what is the use of worrying? I am cold, and have a severe pain in my side. I suppose I have been wounded. Brothers, have you a blanket with which to cover me? My blood runs cold with the frost and my wound, and in a little while I shall be frozen."

He spoke the last aloud, addressing himself to the Indians who carried him, and speaking in the Mohawk tongue. All four instantly came to a halt, there was a grunt from the leading man on the right, and then Steve was gently laid on the ground.

"Cold, brother?" said the leader, a fine specimen of a brave, if the faint light could be trusted. "We will give you a covering and see to your comfort. Tell us, how comes it that you speak our tongue, or rather, that of the Mohawks? Have you lodged in their wigwams?"

Steve answered with a nod. "I have lived and hunted with them," he said feebly, for he was very weak. "They are firm friends of mine, as are others of the Iroquois nation. They call me Hawk."

At that there was another grunt, a grunt which denoted approval and the small amount of astonishment which the brave would permit himself to express.

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"Hawk. Yes, we have heard of you. Then you were the chief of those whom we attacked a week ago?"

"I was. The fight was a fair and open one. The Hurons attacked boldly, but were unfortunate. Those who fell were as brave as those who lived to return to Ticonderoga."

This time all the bearers nodded their approval and grunted. For these Indian braves, with all their faults, with all their ferocity and their barbarous customs, had one redeeming virtue. They were brave, and they respected bravery. It was the one great virtue after which all strove, and if an enemy could speak well of their conduct, then he was for the time being a friend. More than that, these wild men of the backwoods, who had come so many miles to aid the French, were accustomed, like other Indian nations, to make much of their prisoners, provided they had fought with courage. A prisoner with them was a man who had already shown fortitude, and who, by becoming a prisoner, threw down the gage to his captors as it were, and boldly asserted that if they were bold, he was still bolder, that if they and their brothers could support hardship and pain amounting to the acutest agony, he could support the fiercest pains which they his captors could design. In fact, a prisoner was wont to boast loudly of his own superiority, to defy his captors to make him flinch, and when the time for the ordeal came, to endure

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hours of the most diabolical torture, and finally the pangs of death without so much as a groan, if possible with a smile of triumph on his quivering lips. And till the time for torture arrived he was a brother and a man, deserving of respect and attention, not a beast to be goaded and bullied and loaded with chains.

"Our brother is weak," said the brave. "He shall have a covering at once, and we will carry him with all comfort and care. The Hawk is our friend. We have heard of him. There are braves with us who met the Hawk and his brothers on the Mohawk river and down in the great valley beyond. Yes, of a truth, the Hawk is known to us as a man of bravery and energy." He went off over the snow at a swinging pace, and presently his tall figure appeared again, while in his hands he bore a huge rug of bearskin.

"This will keep the warmth in you, Hawk," he said kindly. "We will wrap you in it till you are completely covered. Then your blood will run again. You have lost much, brother. See, it is frozen on your shirt."

Steve had not felt the place before, but was glad to hear the news, for he reckoned that if there had been severe bleeding from his wound, as seemed to have been the case, for he was very weak, the frost had arrested further hæmorrhage, and perhaps saved his life. He submitted while the Indians wrapped him in the skin rug, and then felt himself lifted on their shoulders again. Very soon he was in a comfortable glow from head to foot, and that, combined with his weakness and weariness, caused his eyes to close, and he fell asleep. An hour or more later a light flashed in his face, for the dawn had not yet broken, and on looking round, he found that he was in a big hut, the walls of which were constructed of whole timbers. The light flashed from a candle lamp hanging to the rafters, and showed beside the walls and roof of the hut, the figures of the four Indians standing about him, and some twelve French soldiers and as many backwoodsmen, the irregulars on the side of France. Someone was speaking in the background, and for a time he listened to the words. Then some familiar note in the voice struck on his ear, and he found himself wondering who was speaking, wondering why the voice caused his heart to flutter so and his pulses to beat.

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"One captured, you say? Only one? Peste! Is this carrying out my orders?"

There was a bang as the speaker's hand came down upon a table which stood close to one of the walls.

"That is so, monsieur. One only was taken," came the answer, and by dint of craning his head, Steve saw that it was a regular who spoke, dressed in the familiar uniform of the French line, but now swathed in warm furs, which, however, did not cover the chevrons, which showed that he was a sergeant. "One only, monsieur," he repeated, as if excusing himself.

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"And for this fine capture you paid well no doubt. What was the price? Come, I am asking you."

The voice was very calm now. There was a note of satire in it, and those who listened could tell that the man who spoke was angry, that his calmness was only the prelude to an outburst of temper. The sergeant felt that, too. He drew himself up at attention, clapped his pike close against his shoulder, and looked askance at his commander.

"The price, monsieur. There was one killed by this prisoner, and three others who fell within the five minutes which followed. Yes, four were killed altogether, one of these being a messenger."

"Ah! I hear. But there were three messengers. That was the arrangement, friend, for if one were fool enough to be captured or killed, then there were two left. You follow, sergeant? You give me news of one of these fine fellows. I have been roused in haste, and have come here expecting other news. You do not bring it. You have only one beggarly prisoner to show. The whole tale, man. Let me have it."

This time the speaker's rage got the better of him, and he thumped on the table as an excited Frenchman might be expected to do, leaning far over it till his face was within an inch of the sergeant's. Not till then did Steve catch sight of his features, and when he did so, he fell back with a scarcely suppressed groan. It was Jules

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Lapon, the very man who had hunted him and his friends out of house and home.

"The whole tale, monsieur? You have heard it already, unless——"

"Unless what? Speak fool. I am but just out of my bed, and have gathered nothing, save the fact that you have returned without a single messenger."

"Then the news is still bad," came the faltering answer. "One messenger was killed within four miles of this, while the hunter who accompanied him as guide escaped unharmed. They were set upon near the British fort, and they alone escaped. The other two messengers are therefore accounted for. They were surrounded and attacked by hunters, just as the two who escaped were suddenly followed and fired on at this end of the lake. We put the enemy's numbers down at a dozen, and of those we captured one. He is here, monsieur."

The sergeant having unburdened himself of a disagreeable tale, endeavoured to distract his angry commander's attention from himself and his failure to the prisoner, and succeeded. Jules Lapon scowled at him for a little while, drumming with his fingers on the table. Then he cleared a path for himself by savagely sweeping the soldiers aside, and in a moment was standing over the prisoner.

"Bring a light and let us see the fellow," he growled. "Come, it is so dark in this hole that one cannot see. Are you sure, sergeant, that he is one of the enemy? You have done so well that perhaps you have half-killed and then captured one of our own side. Mistakes are made in the darkness."

"By white men, perhaps, monsieur," came the answer, an answer which caused Jules to writhe. "Indians were with us, monsieur, and they are not often in error."

"The lamp, man! Hold it higher, and pull that skin from his head. Ah!"

He started back as if he had been shot, and gripped instinctively at the tomahawk which was thrust in his belt. For a moment he looked thoroughly frightened, and then of a sudden his features assumed an expression of triumph and hate and of the most diabolical malice all intermingled till those who watched him were amazed and horrified. As for Steve, he was utterly bewildered. He knew well that the meeting between himself and this Jules Lapon would hardly prove a pleasant one, for the relations between them were somewhat strained. He and his friends had, in fact, obtained two consecutive victories over this Frenchman and his band of Indians, and no doubt those successes had roused the ire of Jules. But the tables were turned now, and had been for some time. For if Jules had lost at first, he was the conqueror now. He had turned Steve out of house and home, the settlement where the hunters had lived so happily was his, by right of conquest if by no other right, and now, to crown all, here was the Hawk his prisoner, wounded and completely in his hands. Then why so much triumph and hate?

"Ah. Then this is your prisoner. The only one you say, sergeant?"

The voice had become calm again. This Jules Lapon was now speaking in even tones suggestive of kindness.

"That is true, monsieur. The only one. He is the Hawk, the leader of those men whom we attacked a week ago. It is a fine capture."

"You have done well, sergeant. This man is of more value even than that news could have been. He is wounded, you say?"

"There is a bullet lodged in his ribs, Monsieur. He bled much, and is weak, so that we were forced to carry him. But he may have recovered now, and will stand if we lift him to his feet."

At a sign from the sergeant, the Indians raised their prisoner, and stood looking at him critically, wondering whether this pale face, of whom they had heard before, would fail now, or whether he would have sufficient courage to overcome his weakness. But they had little need to fear the result, for though Steve was weak, as weak and weary as a tired child, he had a determined spirit, and moreover felt intuitively as if this was the supreme moment of his life, as if his future, his safety in fact, depended upon his courage now. He set his teeth, placed his feet well apart, and stood erect, his face towering above that of Jules.

"The Hawk thanks the braves who carried him," he said, as steadily as he could. "They treated him honourably, and though he has no gift to make, he gives them thanks a thousand times."

"He is a man. We are satisfied," was the answer.

"He is more. He is a spy!"

Jules darted forward with a cry of delight, and snatched at Steve's skin cap, to the top of which was attached an eagle's crest.

"Tell me, sergeant," he said, swinging round with an air of triumph, "this prisoner was captured out on the ice. Had he a blanket?"

"Not when captured, monsieur. But all who supported him were dressed so. They had the appearance of Indians."

"Then this Hawk is a spy," shouted Jules. "He and his men came in this direction with one object. They came to spy, and in order to help them they dressed as Indians, knowing well that they would pass as such with a crest and a blanket about them, so long as the snow fell. This is a most important capture. See that this man is guarded well, and at dawn march out a firing party."

The sergeant brought his pike to his shoulder smartly as Jules swept a path to the door and departed. Steve watched him go, and then stared at the Indians and the soldiers and the backwoodsmen about him. He was too weak to take in the full significance of that last command, but vaguely wondered whether the firing party could be meant for him, and whether he was to be executed. And as he wondered, he listened to the chatter of those about him. It was evident that many of the backwoodsmen, rough and brutal men as many were, who had become tainted with the cruelty of the Indians, approved of the sentence. They crammed tobacco into their pipes and smoked furiously, while they acclaimed the decision of their leader with many an oath and with many a glance at the prisoner. Some of the regulars were of their opinion also, but not so the sergeant.

"Disguise! Spy!" he cried, some minutes later, having talked the matter over with some of his comrades. "This brave lad whom we have taken had no more idea of spying here than I have of setting a watch at Fort William Henry. I'll be bound that he and his friends knew of the messengers going to the English fort, and set a trap for them. They guessed that an Indian dress might help their plans, and adopted it. Why, the same is done here amongst ourselves. Even this commander of ours, who shouts into one's throat, and orders all as if they were dogs, dresses as a brave, ay, and goes out with a following of Hurons."

"Which does not alter the case as it stands, friend of the three stripes," answered one of the trappers. "This leader of ours, a backwoodsman like ourselves, fights in the garb that best suits him, chancing capture. This fool here decks himself out in feathers, and is captured. Both run the same risk. One is taken and shot as a natural course, while the other, the smarter man, you understand, lives to fight another day. As to shouting down a man's throat, there are some dull dogs who want a deal of that, and still remain dull."

For a little while it looked as if the two would come to blows, for the sergeant strode over to the trapper who had spoken, a flush of anger on his face. But evidently he thought better of the matter, turned to the Indians, and in a little while was accompanying Steve out of the hut. Borne on the shoulders of the braves, the prisoner was transferred to a second hut, where he was placed on a low couch.

"Whatever happens you shall have food and some attention, friend," said the sergeant. "I will leave the Indians to see to your wound, while I myself get you some victuals. Cheer up. You have still a friend or two left in the world."

He smiled kindly at our hero, and, taking a lamp, went out of the hut, speaking a few words to the Indians as he went. The latter at once set about tending to Steve's wound, for these sons of the lake and forest were for the most part excellent surgeons. One placed a jar over the fire, and blew at the embers till the flames roared round it. A second crept from the hut, to return some ten minutes later with some soft fleecy material, while beneath his arm he carried a bundle wrapped in bark. Opening the last, he disclosed a heap of dried leaves, which he commenced to pound between two stones,

while some he even chewed. A little water was added to the mass, and the whole worked into a soft brown paste.

"The Hawk will let us see and tend this wound, well knowing that we have had experience," said the chief who had already shown his friendly spirit. "We will carry you close to the fire, so that you will feel no cold. That is well. The Hawk has won our favour. He does not flinch at the prospect of a death which would be an eternal dishonour to even the most cowardly brave. Fear not. There are men here who will see that this indignity is not allowed. If die you must, there are other and nobler ways of taking the life of a prisoner."

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Little did the fine fellow know what pangs he was causing our hero, for to Steve, if he were condemned to die as a spy, shooting would be infinitely preferable to the death by torture which the Indians would inflict. He knew their customs well, and he told himself over and over again that it would be better far to stand for one brief minute and face the muskets than to be feasted for a day or more by these braves, to be petted and praised by them, knowing full well that all the while their preparations were being completed for the orgie of the morrow, when all their diabolical ingenuity would be called into play to provide a slow death for him, which in their opinion was alone worthy of a warrior. Ugh! The very idea made him shiver.

"You are cold. Cover our brother with the skin again," said the chief. "Now, let us remove the shirt, and see what harm has come to him."

Very gently they cut the leather shirt away and removed his clothing till the wound was uncovered. By then the water in the jar placed over the fire was comfortably hot, and with some of this and a portion of the fleecy material the chief bathed the place till the nature of the injury could be seen.

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"Ah! The bullet struck beneath the arm, Hawk, and ran round the ribs. It is here. I feel it beneath my fingers."

The chief ran the tips of his fine fingers over the ribs, and traced the direction of the bullet from the entrance wound to the spot where the hard mass could be felt to move under the skin.

"Some water, brother," he demanded. "Nay, hotter than that. Heat it till it bubbles."

He sat patiently beside Steve while the jar was placed on the fire again. And presently, when the water was boiling, he strode over to it, and plunged the blade of his keen hunting knife deep into the contents.

"The Hawk has felt pain before," he said. "He will not flinch. The bullet shall be within my hand in less time than it takes to count the fingers. Lie so. Now, Hawk."

Steve shut his teeth again, and never so much as winced as the keen blade, wielded by a dexterous hand, cut down on the bullet. It was extracted in a few seconds, and when Steve opened his eyes, there it was in the chief's hand.

"Good," grunted the brave. "The worst is done. We will dress the wound now."

Once more he had recourse to the jar of water. A wide piece of doe skin was steeped in the boiling water first, and then, having been wrung out, was made the receptacle for the brown paste already prepared. The skin was then folded round, screwed up at the ends, and again plunged into the water, and left there for a couple of minutes.

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"It is ready," said the chief. "Squeeze the mass dry, and bring the skin to me."

Up to that moment the wound had been smarting, particularly that portion where the Indian had made use of his knife. But a minute later, after the hot brown paste had been applied and covered by a pad of the fleecy material, the pain disappeared, and Steve felt huge relief. He was carefully bound up with long strips of doe skin, his shirt replaced, and in a little while he was lying back on the couch, expressing thanks to the Indians.

"Here is the food, and you look as if you could enjoy it," said the sergeant, entering a little later. "Come, drink this stuff. It is hot and steaming, and will put warmth into your body."

The kind-hearted fellow sat down and watched his prisoner eat and drink. Then he propped his head up on the couch, drew the rug well over him, and sat staring thoughtfully at his figure till Steve's eyes closed and he slept.

"A fine lad, and one who fights stoutly for a lost cause," murmured the sergeant, as he watched the sleeper. "To look at him as he lies there, one could take him for one of our country, though he is bigger and stouter than we are built. And he speaks French, too. Yes, I remember that. It struck me as strange when I heard him answer this Jules Lapon. Can it be that he is partly French, his mother perhaps being one of our land? There have been many such marriages, and often they have turned out well."

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For a little while he lapsed into silence again, till his eye caught the gleam of a long, thin streak of light which was pushing its way through a chink in the roughly fashioned door. It was dawn, the hour for the firing party, and the sergeant rose at once to his feet.

"We shall see," he said aloud, as he moved towards the door, but still kept an eye on Steve. "This lad is a brave one, and I am taken with him. That is strange now, for up to this an Englishman has been to me, as to all my comrades, just an Englishman, fit to be slain if need be. I have pitied them often, to be sure, for it is hard to see them given over to these braves. But it is necessary to keep the Indians in good temper, and, therefore, what is necessary should not be grumbled at. Why is it that this young Hawk has gained my goodwill?"

He was of a reflective turn of mind, this French sergeant, and stood again with his hand on the latch of the door, staring hard at Steve and thinking aloud.

"Peste take it! Why is this? Ah! It must be this Jules Lapon. I have hated him ever since he came to us, and more so now that he is our commandant in the absence of the colonel. He is a hard man, or else he would never order the execution of a white prisoner without some sort of trial. I doubt that he has the power. The colonel could intervene, if only he were not chained to his bed with a broken thigh. *Mon Dieu!*"

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He strode across the floor of beaten and frozen earth, and shook the sleeper vigorously. His face was flushed, and there was an air of excitement about him.

"Pardon, monsieur, but I wish to ask a question. Monsieur, you are awake, and I ask pardon for disturbing you. But this is a matter of importance."

Steve opened his eyes wearily, and acknowledged the presence of the sergeant somewhat peevishly, for he had been enjoying a most refreshing and dreamless sleep. He rubbed his eyes, stared at the sergeant, and then caught sight of the streak of light penetrating through the door. Then his senses returned with a rush, and he remembered.

"The dawn, sergeant," he said. "Then this Jules Lapon will carry out his purpose. I am ready. Help me to get to my feet."

"Not now, monsieur. I am about to go for the firing party, but wish to ask an important question. Tell me, was it you who aided monsieur le colonel, Colonel St. Arnould de Prossen, till a week ago the commandant of this force?"

He waited for the answer eagerly, as if his own life depended on it, and gave a cry of joy as Steve replied that it was he who had found the unfortunate soldier, and who had had him carried on to the lake and handed over to his friends.

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"Then rest easy, monsieur. I go to the colonel, and we shall see if this firing party assembles. Sleep again. Have I not said that you have many friends? Even the Indians would save you now, not because they wish to reserve you for torture, but because you have shown bravery and much honour to themselves."

He pressed Steve gently back on to the couch, and raced from the hut. A few minutes later he was knocking at the door of his colonel's quarters, thumping on the logs with an energy which brought shouts of anger from within, and very soon afterwards the squat figure of a French soldier servant came to the door.

"Peste!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad, sergeant, to come and beat so on the commandant's door? Go away before it is light enough for me

to recognise you. Go, I say, or I shall know you, and then there will be trouble."

"Give way. I have important information for the colonel. Let me pass," gasped the sergeant, thrusting the man aside and pushing his way into the hut. A moment or two later he was confronting the wounded officer, and for some ten minutes the two were closeted together, much to the amazement of the soldier servant.

"There, there, Armand, you must leave us," said the colonel, as his valet rushed in after the sergeant with the intention of ejecting the intruder. "Our friend has news for me. Withdraw. Come again when I knock, and have no fear. Our friend is in his sober senses."

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"I am glad that you have come to me, sergeant," he said, at the end of their interview. "Glad to think there are some here who have kind hearts still after all this bitter warfare. Not for worlds would I have this lad injured, for he behaved with noble generosity to me. Go now, summon your firing party, and march the squad to the hut where this prisoner lies. If any dare give you an order to proceed with this unjust and cruel execution, show this note. Though I am wounded and incapable at the moment, I am still nominally, if not actively, in command, and I will have my orders obeyed. Go, and I will follow presently."

Half an hour later Steve awoke to the fact that men were gathering outside the hut in which he lay. He could hear the tramp of their boots on the frozen ground, and the ring of their muskets as they stood at ease. The voice of the sergeant came to his ears as he gave the commands. "Attention! Shoulder your pieces! Stand steady there, lads, for Monsieur Jules Lapon comes to inspect you."

The door was thrown open, a gust of freezing air swept the apartment, and there was Jules, muffled in furs, his face haggard and weary as if he had some great weight on his mind which had kept him wakeful since the arrival of the prisoner, two bright, hectic spots on his cheeks and staring, blood-shot eyes which seemed to denote a fever. And despite the cruel smile now on his lips, it wanted no acute observer to see that this young man, with all his bravado, was hesitating as to his course of action, not out of compassion for the prisoner, but for fear of what might happen to himself. However, the sight of Steve's calm face settled the question.

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"You are ready, sergeant?" he asked curtly. "Good. Then bring out the prisoner. There is a wall yonder, where you will set him up and shoot him promptly. He is a dog and a spy, and should thank us for giving him bullets instead of a noose."

"He will certainly not thank you for his life, monsieur. The lad is too proud and too brave for that. He would not ask it of me, and much less of you."

The words, spoken in the coldest and most cutting tones, caused Jules to swing round and face the open. He flushed to the roots of his hair, and then turned deathly pale, while, like the coward and bully he was, his lips at once commenced to frame lies and excuses. For his superior was there. Four soldiers stood before him, bearing a bed, on which, warmly covered with skins, lay the long figure of the colonel.

"Have you no heart, man?" demanded the colonel fiercely. "Do you not know that this prisoner was the leader of those men whom we attacked last week? Yes, you know that, I see. Then it is also in your knowledge that it is to that gallant youth that I owe my life. And yet you would shoot him! You are suspended, monsieur. You will retire to your hut till I can send you out of the fort. Sergeant, you will carry monsieur the prisoner to my hut, where he will remain till completely recovered. Tell off one of the men to wait on him."

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The colonel fell back on his pillow, waved to his bearers, and was gone without deigning to glance again at Jules Lapon. Then the sergeant's voice was heard.

"Ground arms, my lads. Now pile them against the hut. Good. Enter now and fetch monsieur. You will carry out the colonel's orders."

In a minute Steve was being conveyed across the open, while Jules Lapon looked on as if dazed. Then he turned, rushed across to his own dwelling, and broke the door open with a furious kick. He was beaten. At the very last minute the life at which he had been aiming

for so many months now, for some subtle reason of his own, was saved, and the prisoner, in place of standing up before the muskets of a firing party, was being quartered in the colonel's own hut. Jules ground his teeth with fury, and filled the bowl of his pipe with savage energy.

Chapter XV

Off to Quebec

"You have to thank a very fine and robust constitution, and the open-air life which you have lived for your excellent progress, monsieur," said the French colonel one morning, some six weeks after Steve had been taken prisoner, as the two sat in front of a cozy log fire in the speaker's hut, "and I have to thank fortune—bad fortune for you, perhaps, monsieur—that some weeks of what would have been a weary time for me have passed so very pleasantly. It is the fortune of war, good for me, bad for you, and in either case to be taken philosophically."

"For myself, I admit that I am sorry to have been taken prisoner," replied Steve with a smile, "but then I might have been in the hands of Monsieur Jules, instead of in yours, colonel, and then—"

"Monsieur Steve would not have been here. You have not forgotten the firing party and the wall. Yes, that wretch would have had you shot, for he has some spite against you. Tell me, Monsieur Steve, have you ever done this compatriot of mine an injury, other than defeating him in the course of this war?"

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Steve shook his head emphatically. "None," he said.

"Then there must be some other reason for his enmity. You speak French like a native, monsieur, while you are an English colonist born and bred. That is curious."

"My mother was French," explained Steve. "She was a Mademoiselle Despelle before her marriage. More than that I do not know, for she died when I was an infant, and my father has always been very reticent about such matters. It is to him that I owe my knowledge of French, for he speaks the language like a native."

"And your name is Mainwaring. Monsieur Steve Mainwaring. Yes, there must be some other reason for this Jules to have such spite against you, and I shall endeavour to unravel the cause. Meanwhile, monsieur, allow me to warn you most solemnly. For the moment this man is at Crown Point, and therefore harmless; nor will he have a post of authority again while I am able to prevent it. Still, beware of him, monsieur. He is dangerous. And now to give you some information. In a month perhaps the ice will have broken. Even now there are signs that the end of this terrible winter is coming, and as soon as the spring puts in an appearance you and I will go to Quebec, where I can promise a welcome. For I do not forget that I owe my life to you. Monsieur will be a prisoner on parole till the end of the war, while I—well, I am a lame dog, and of little further use, I fear, and besides, I have given my word to you—I am on oath not to fight again during the course of this conflict."

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The tall colonel looked down woefully at his thigh, still heavily bandaged, and then glanced at the crutch which lay beside his chair, and which up till then he had never dared to use. Then he sighed, brushed a tear away, and smiled.

"I spoke of accepting fortune good or bad philosophically," he said. "*Bien!* I will act up to my words, but my fighting days are done."

It was only too true, and none but those who have seen the keen soldier struck down in his prime can realise what this gallant colonel must have felt. For his prospects were brilliant; he was in command of one of the most important advanced posts, and had everything before him. Then a chance ball had fractured his thigh, and here he was, one leg some two inches shorter than the other, lamed for life, and unfitted for further service. But he did not permit his disappointment to take the place of his gratitude to the young man who had befriended him, who had discovered him deserted in the forest and restored him to his friends, and to this colonel alone Steve owed his comfort during the last few weeks. For his wound had proved to be a severe one, and was followed by some amount of fever. However, he was practically recovered now, and for quite a time had constituted himself nurse to the colonel. As to his friends, Jim and Pete and the others, he had been able to send them a few brief lines, telling them of his safety, and promptly a note had come back, scrawled on a dirty piece of paper, and conspicuous for its brevity.

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"You ain't dead yet, cap'n, and whilst there's life there's hope. Look out fer a rescue."

That was all. There was a blurred letter at the end which might have been Jim's signature, or Pete's, or even Mac's. But the words were clear enough, and somehow they gave Steve much comfort.

"I am sure they will do something for me," he said, when he had read the note, "but rescue here is hopeless, for there are too many Indians. Then, when I reach Quebec I shall be still further away, so that there is little hope of seeing them there. On the way up though —"

He considered the matter for a few seconds, for he had learned from the colonel already that when he was removed from Ticonderoga it would be by water.

"No, I will send them no information of the move," he said. "It would not be fair to do so, and besides, I shall be travelling with a man who is unfit to fight. No, I fear that they will be able to do nothing for me, and I shall have to rely on myself alone."

With that Steve had to banish all thought of help from his friends, and resigned himself to a long imprisonment in Quebec. A few weeks later the frosts broke up, the sun melted the ice, and ere long the green of a gorgeous country began to be seen again.

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"We will make for the headquarters of our Government," said the colonel, now promoted to a chair outside the hut, where he could bask in the spring sunshine and listen to the twitter of the birds. "Anything will be better than to remain here, unable to stir a foot, while others are active and busy. For you, Steve, I fear it means removal from friends. But then it is inevitable."

Ten days later Steve and the colonel were carried by road to Crown Point, at the foot of Lake Champlain, and from there were conveyed by canoe to the reaches of the Richelieu river. An escort of Indians paddled beside them, and swept their own craft along at a pace which very soon brought them to the mighty St. Lawrence. They turned into the river, and in due course sighted the promontory on which the city of Quebec is built, then a small and straggling place made up of private residences and churches, and of numerous batteries, barracks, and forts. As Steve's eyes rested on what is now, and was even then, a queen of cities, bathed in the spring sunshine, he realized what Wolfe and many another was to realize after him, namely, that this was no trading place, a mart given over to business men and the trade of the country. It was a stronghold devoted to the military and to the church, for the predominant features were barracks and batteries, spires and belfries, all clinging like flies to the steep cliff.

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"A jewel than which there is none more beautiful in the crown of France," said the colonel, as he pointed out the various places to Steve. "Quebec is the most regal-looking city I have ever seen, and I never know whether she looks best as we see her now, with the spring sunshine smiling on her, or in the winter, when she is clad in her mantle of white. Monsieur, this struggle between our two nations may end in victory for England, but whatever happens, this jewel I am showing you will never fall. Quebec is impregnable. Look east and west and you will see why I am so confident."

It seemed indeed as if no other opinion could have been given, for as Steve approached this fair Canadian city he, too, declared to himself that nothing but starvation could cause it to surrender. For Quebec stands on a steep promontory, as has been described, and has to its immediate east the river St. Charles, and beyond that again a long ridge continuing for some six miles and ending abruptly in the beautiful falls of Montmorency, at that time of the year in their full grandeur, for the melted snow and ice had added to the volume of the river. This ridge, which was the southern extremity of an upland plateau, fell sheer into the river, and a glance at it was sufficient to discover the obstacles which would at once confront any foe bold or rash enough to attempt to clamber to the top. Standing on that same ridge on many a day after, Steve looked down upon the garden of Canada, the Isle of Orleans, which the first navigator of the mighty St. Lawrence had called the Island of Bacchus.

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To the west Quebec is even more strongly protected by natural obstacles, for the ridge on the edge of which the fair city is built

runs westward for many miles, falling almost perpendicularly into the river, while the St. Lawrence, just opposite the town, is suddenly constricted by a projecting spit of land, known as Point Lévis, which narrows the bed till it is barely three-fourths of a mile across, a distance which the French rightly considered could be commanded by their batteries.

"This will be your prison, Steve," said the colonel, kindly, as the canoes made in for the wooden stage, "and I think that you could come to no more charming spot. I shall take you to see Montcalm, our military leader, and shall advise you to give him your promise not to attempt an escape. No. Do not refuse, I beg of you," he went on, seeing Steve pull a long face. "After all, you can but try it for a time, and can then formally declare your intention not to remain on parole any longer. It will make all the difference to you just now, for if you give your word, you will be allowed much liberty, and you will be therefore out in the open. On the other hand, you will be placed in confinement, which will be irksome, to say the least of it, and not the best thing for your health. Then, too, consider the circumstances. Miles and miles of forest now lie between you and your friends, and there is not the smallest chance of your getting down to them, or they up to you, for the country swarms with our backwoodsmen and Indians. Such an attempt would be sheer madness. You must wait, my lad, and, later, if your friends beat us back, perhaps it will be worth your while to withdraw your parole and make that attempt of which all prisoners dream. There, I am honest with you, am I not? If matters were in my hands I should aid you to escape."

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He laughed heartily, patted Steve on the back, and then held out his hand for our hero to help him ashore. For Steve had become indispensable to the wounded colonel, and was more like his son than anything else.

"I suppose you are right, colonel," said the lad some little while later, when they were ascending the steep hill. "I will give my parole and try the arrangement for a time."

A little later they were ushered into the presence of Montcalm, a soldier whose memory is still kept green, and who, though an enemy of ours, was undoubtedly one of the bravest and most honourable of foes Englishmen have ever met. He shook hands gaily with Steve, asked after his wound, and gripped his hand again when the colonel had told him how this prisoner had saved his life.

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"Monsieur," said Montcalm, swinging round and regarding Steve with shining eyes, "such an act of generosity should earn for you your freedom. But I dare not give it, and I must ask you to reconcile yourself to captivity here. You will give me your word?"

"I will, general. For the present and until further notice I promise not to attempt an escape, and to obey any orders as to my behaviour which you may choose to give."

"Good! Ha, ha, monsieur le colonel. You hear him? You hear this young officer? *Bien!* He promises not to escape till he warns us. Truly, you English are droll! But I understand, monsieur, and I know how honourably you will keep your promise. Now for quarters. You will be posted with the colonel, at his express wish, and will be allowed the same rations as our captains. As for pay, perhaps monsieur le colonel will permit you to draw on him, and afterwards you can refund. I hope you will find the time pass pleasantly. There are many here to entertain you."

That indeed proved to be the case, for Quebec in those days was filled with young officers, and with a sprinkling of wealthy men. Balls and routs were of frequent occurrence, and for a time Steve was a lion at these entertainments, thanks again to the honesty of the colonel, who had told his tale everywhere.

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"We hear, monsieur, that our beloved colonel owes his life to you," said one of the numerous ladies then resident in the city. "Tell us your story of this venture."

Steve bowed in courtly manner, a trick which he had learned since his arrival, flushed to his hair, and looked embarrassed.

"Madame must know, surely," he answered, desperately. "I saw the colonel speaking with her a little while ago, and she is good enough now to admit that she has heard this tale."

"True, monsieur. But it is your version that I require," was the laughing answer. "Come, monsieur, I will not permit you to disappoint me."

Thus pressed, Steve shuffled uneasily, admitted that there might be truth in the colonel's tale, and then blurted out his own explanation, as if he had need to make an excuse for performing what had been a very generous action.

"You see, madame, I was there," he said. "I chanced upon the colonel, and could I leave him to die? I brought him in, and since we did not desire to be troubled with a wounded man, why—well, we took him to his friends."

There was laughter at that, for some half-dozen other people had gathered, amongst them the colonel, who leaned on his crutch.

"You hear that, monsieur le colonel?" called madame, with a laugh, catching sight of the wounded officer. "I thought I should like to hear what this prisoner of yours had to say as to your rescue. You should listen to him. Ladies and gentlemen, I declare that these English are naive. Monsieur tells me that having chanced upon our wounded friend he brought him back to his friends for one reason only. Guess at it, if you please. No. You cannot, mon colonel. Very well, monsieur has the effrontery to say that he feared you would be a great trouble to them. He would not be bothered with so useless a person as our colonel."

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There was loud laughter at that, laughter which sent Steve flying from the group, his cheeks aglow, while the gallant and merry colonel who had so befriended him stood leaning on the back of a chair, shaking his crutch after him.

"Ah! Let me catch the rogue," he called out, and then, "Madame. It is like the lad. Honest as the day. He says what he means whenever possible, and at other times keeps silent lest he should give offence. Despite what he says, I know him to be a brave and a generous lad."

Many and many a time in the months which followed did Steve take rod and line and cross to the river St. Charles. He was even given the use of a gun and a canoe, and permitted to go on the St. Lawrence, or even into the forest on the southern bank. But he was always careful to return before dusk, and made a point of reporting his arrival. And while he was a prisoner only in name, and the weeks grew into months, the reader may wonder what had been happening in other and more familiar quarters, for the war with France was now more than ever a fact, and the two nations were preparing for the struggle which both knew well must end in victory for one, and the consequent mastery of this huge continent.

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Steve had gone to Fort William Henry in the winter of 1756, and the spring of 1757 found him in Quebec. It will be remembered that he had taken part in more than one of *les petites guerres* at the foot of Lake St. George. These conflicts had been of frequent occurrence, and throughout the winter they continued, Jim and his friends, as well as those in Fort William Henry, often sending out small parties to attack the French. The winter months passed, in fact, without other incident, save for one attempt made by the garrison of Ticonderoga. On March 18, 1757, they descended over the ice of Lake St. George, hoping to take the garrison of Fort William Henry by surprise. They were easily driven back, and retired to their own fort, having accomplished nothing. Elsewhere nothing of moment occurred, so that this long winter season may be described as being barren of incident.

Meanwhile the British Government had determined to support the colonial troops, and regiments had been collecting at Cork, in Ireland, preparatory to sailing for America. On the eighth of May some hundred sail set out with these reinforcements, and finally arrived at Halifax, in Nova Scotia, which the Earl of Loudon, now in command of our forces in America, had recently reached with his troops. Of these he had now under his immediate command some eleven thousand, and with them he hoped to be able to attack and capture the very formidable fortress of Louisbourg, which, it will be remembered, had been erected at great cost on Cape Breton Isle, just north of Nova Scotia. But information now came to hand that there were seven thousand Frenchmen in Louisbourg, two-thirds being regulars, while Indians swarmed in the vicinity. This formidable force, added to a French fleet of no mean proportions, was considered too powerful for the troops under Loudon's

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command, and in consequence the idea of an attack on Louisbourg was given up, and on August 16 Loudon embarked with the bulk of his troops, leaving the 27th, the 28th, the 43rd, and the 46th regiments as a garrison for Nova Scotia.

Valuable months had been wasted, and the projected descent on the formidable French fortress had ended in fiasco. But Loudon cannot be blamed alone for such a result. If reinforcements had been collected earlier and despatched without delay, they would have reached Cape Breton Isle before the French fleet put in an appearance. It was this delay, together with the prompt crossing of the Atlantic by the French fleet, which caused the expedition to be countermanded. But we lost far more than valuable time and money in this useless movement. By withdrawing his troops from America proper to Halifax, Loudon left the disputed country south of the great lakes and west of the line drawn north from the Alleghany mountains almost denuded of men. There were some three to four thousand to hold this huge country, a force insufficient even to keep back the French in the neighbourhood of Lake St. George, if they wished to press south in that direction.

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It may readily be seen that Loudon was guilty of a serious error in thus denuding an important stretch of country, and it may equally be anticipated that the French were quick to take advantage of the withdrawal of our soldiers. Montcalm had been busily gathering Indians from far-off portions of Canada, Indians attracted to the French after their victory at Oswego. These, with numerous regulars and Canadians, he poured down the Richelieu river, massing them at Ticonderoga, till he had nearly 8000 there. Some forty different Indian tribes were represented, and if the native element had been cruel and bloodthirsty before, it promised to be even more so now. For these sons of Canada who crowded the huts at Ticonderoga were pure savages, vastly impressed by the French, and more than ever eager to join in this fray now that they had heard the tales of their brethren who had been already engaged.

On the British side General Webb, who had been left in command in this area, had some 1600 troops in Fort Edward, while Munroe had two thousand five hundred in Fort William Henry, or encamped in its immediate neighbourhood. This latter force was surrounded by the huge numbers at the disposal of Montcalm, and prepared to defend itself as well as possible. The French had forty guns, and made no active attempt upon the place till these were in position. Then, at a range of two hundred yards, they opened such a fire that the fortifications were splintered and flying in fragments before many hours had passed. Munroe and his men made a gallant defence, but their ammunition soon began to run out, while some of their cannon burst. They attempted two sorties, which were repulsed, and waited in vain for some action on the part of Webb and his men at Fort Edward. But no one came to help them, and finally, when some hundred and fifty of the defenders had fallen, Munroe agreed to surrender, further resistance being useless. Terms were arranged, the garrison to march out with the honours of war, and to proceed under escort to Fort Edward, there to remain till they should be exchanged.

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What followed will for ever be a stain on the annals of New France and a warning to all who employ the help of such ruffians as the Indians had already proved themselves to be. The numerous braves with Montcalm, accustomed to murder all their prisoners, seemed to think that these men who had surrendered were theirs, with whom they thought they could do as they wished. They were already nearly out of hand, and as an earnest of what was coming, the miscreants promptly slaughtered a dozen or more unfortunate fellows who from illness or wounds had been left in the hospital. On the following morning the British troops were to set out under escort, and seventeen more unfortunate and helpless men were slaughtered by the Indians in the sight of Canadian officers, who did not even venture to remonstrate. Indeed, the Canadians engaged in this war looked upon the methods and desires of the Indians with favour. They considered that the scalps of the enemy were the natural reward for the services of these miscreants, and there is not a shadow of doubt that at the surrender of Fort William Henry they were, with few exceptions, if not actively sympathetic with the Indians, at least callous onlookers at a tragedy to which energy on their part could have put a summary end. Be that as it may, the march had no sooner begun than the Indians got completely out of

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hand. Montcalm, in place of drawing a cordon of his regulars around the prisoners, endeavoured to arrest the excitement by his own unaided efforts. Almost at once the war-whoop sounded, and in a few seconds the howling demons were busy amongst the prisoners, tomahawking them, or dragging them into the forest to slaughter at their leisure when opportunity offered. It was a horrible exhibition of cruelty and inhumanity, and it is a wonder that, seeing the helpless methods adopted, Montcalm and his officers contrived to save a single one of the unfortunates who had surrendered to them. Perhaps a hundred were slain, and some six hundred carried off, of whom about half were returned on heavy payment. The remainder were taken away by the Indians on the following day, and who knows what happened to them? Suffice it to say that this disgraceful and cruel affair shocked all who heard of it, and raised such a storm of feeling in the breasts of all who boasted British blood, that "Remember Fort William Henry" became the cry of our soldiers in the future, and when the opportunity came they remembered. The trigger finger which in days before might have been steadied and withdrawn pressed sternly and without mercy in the future. The Canadian who begged for his life, had to beg most earnestly before he was sure that his captor would be merciful. For bitterness had entered into this war, and the British were face to face now with the fact that it was one of life and death, one which aimed at their very existence in America.

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Another summer had gone and still the war was not ended, while the French may be said to have been victorious all along the line. They held the Ohio valley securely, their Indians and trappers still ranged the forests along the Alleghany border, while their troops occupied Ticonderoga, whither they had retired after the capture and destruction of Fort William Henry. In other quarters also they predominated, for Louisbourg constantly threatened Nova Scotia, while the island of Cape Breton on which it was erected, offered immediately in the neighbourhood of the huge fort a most excellent harbour to a French fleet which was ever ready to descend upon our American ports.

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England wanted fresh troops, new and more enlightened leaders, and a far more energetic policy if she was ever to raise her head from the mire and despondency into which she had fallen. She wanted one paramount general at home, to rouse the people in England from their lethargy, to stimulate their zeal in the cause of the American colonists, and to reinforce our men already in the field not by driblets, but by a big army capable of coping with the difficulties which stared us in the face. That able leader appeared early in the year 1758, when Steve had been almost twelve months a prisoner. The great Pitt came into power, and the nation at once felt the change which he exerted. There was enthusiasm now, where there had been apathy before, and men spoke of the end of this campaign with confidence, forgetting that but a few months gone by the utter loss of America had been prophesied. New energies were concentrated in the conflict, money was voted with a freer hand, and the best that England and her American colony could give in brains and generalship was sought for.

Ticonderoga was to be attacked, and Abercromby was to command, for it was urgently necessary that this route to Canada should be opened and the defeat at Fort William Henry wiped out. Then Fort Duquesne, for some time a stinging thorn in our side, was selected for an expedition which Brigadier Forbes was to lead to glory. Amherst was selected for the most important of the expeditions, that to Louisbourg, in which operation the fleet was to help also. With Amherst Lawrence and Whitmore were to act as Brigadiers, while James Wolfe was selected in the same capacity. At home preparations were made to capture or destroy the provision fleets preparing to sail from France to Canada, and Hawke and Osborn did excellent service in this respect.

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In fact, thanks to Pitt's energy, England showed her teeth during this spring of 1758, and took up the struggle in a manner which thoroughly alarmed Montcalm and his forces. There was less gaiety now at Quebec, for matters wore a serious aspect. Preparations were even made to resist an attack by the British, while all prisoners, of whom there were many, who had hitherto enjoyed considerable liberty, were confined to the fort and placed under a guard.

"I offer you many apologies on behalf of the commandant, monsieur," said the officer who brought the orders to Steve. "But you will understand. There are certain necessary preparations. Work is going on in the batteries which you must not see. You will remain in this fort, and will leave it at the risk of your life. Also, you will confine yourself to the front face of the fort, and will not venture to walk along the other walls. I wish to warn you formally that the sentries are under orders to fire the instant they detect an attempt at escape. Pardon, monsieur. It is unpleasant to have to speak so to such a friend as you are."

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Steve bowed, and thanked the officer, saying that he fully understood the necessity for the order.

Two months later, when the spring weather had fully set in and the river was entirely free of ice, an Indian entered the courtyard of the fort in which Steve was located. There were always numbers of braves hovering about the batteries and barracks, and the presence of this one was therefore not remarkable. Steve had not even seen him, for he was leaning on the wall staring out at the green woods on the Isle of Orleans. Suddenly the tinkle of some metal instrument attracted his notice, and he swung round to catch sight of the Indian trudging past him, and of a tomahawk which had fallen on to the stone paving of the courtyard.

"Stop," he called out in the Mohawk tongue. "Stop, brother, you have dropped your tomahawk."

Picking it up Steve followed the Indian and handed the weapon to him. Then only did he look into his face. It was Silver Fox, painted and daubed as a Huron Indian, cool and absolutely unruffled as of yore.

"Greeting, chief. Silver Fox delights to look into the eyes of the Hawk. Read this, and be ready to-night. I have spoken."

He took his tomahawk, grunted his thanks, and passed on, leaving a tiny note in Steve's hand.

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"My lad, my dear, dear lad," ran the note, which our hero carefully opened when out of sight of the sentry, "we have tracked you to the fort at Quebec, and have completed our arrangements for a rescue. Be ready to-night. Listen for a voice beneath the front wall where you are accustomed to walk. Your father."

A rescue! That very night, too! Steve thrust the note into his pocket and straightway commenced to whistle merrily, for he was tired of this captivity, and longed to be free again, fighting and hunting with his friends in the forest.

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Chapter XVI

The Return of the Hurons

Steve was filled with delight at the idea of rescue. A thousand thoughts flashed through his mind, a thousand memories of the old days, which seemed now so very long ago, for despite the easy terms of his imprisonment, the time had dragged heavily.

"To-night! To-night!" he said over and over again to himself as he paced backwards and forwards. "And father is there. Where can he have been, and how comes it that Silver Fox has managed to get into Quebec? He seems to know the place, too, and is in no hurry to depart."

He had purposely walked in the opposite direction to that taken by the chief, but now he watched him out of the corner of his eye. Silver Fox was dawdling idly in the courtyard, as many another Indian had done on that and on previous days. He strolled along the wall, looked out at the magnificent prospect spread out before him, at the rolling waters of this, one of the mightiest of rivers, at the green slopes of the Isle of Orleans, and at the blue and green vista beyond, the forest-clad southern bank which stretched right away across the much-debated frontier to America, the colony filled with the hardy sons of Old England, and with fugitives from many parts of the world. Silver Fox halted for quite a little while and filled his pipe meditatively, striking flint and steel with great deliberation, and puffing languidly as if he had nothing in the world to occupy him, nothing to fear, and only desired to remain there and think and watch the lovely country below. For half an hour at least he leaned against the granite parapet, and then Steve saw him walk softly along some dozen paces, turn his head to the place where the sentry was placed, and then deliberately point below.

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"A signal undoubtedly," thought Steve. He dropped his hand to show that he was watching, and then turned away again, while the Indian chief daubed in the colours of the Hurons struck flint and steel again as if his tobacco had not been lit sufficiently, and then sauntered calmly from the courtyard. Half an hour later our hero ventured to the same spot and carelessly looked over. Down below, some thirty feet perhaps, was a narrow path running between the wall of the fort and another wall which hemmed in the courtyard of a private residence.

"That is where I am to expect them," he thought. "Well, it is a good place, for the path is little used, and at night time it is densely dark. Now how am I to get here without upsetting the sentries?"

He thought for a little while, and then suddenly walked across the courtyard, clambered up the flight of steps which led to the room which had been allotted to him as his quarters, and promptly took off some of his clothing. A minute later he had thrown himself on his couch, where he lay half on his face, feigning illness. An hour or more later there was a step outside, and the guard, whose duty it was to make a round of the rooms occasionally, looked in at the door.

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"Ha! Monsieur sleeps," he said gently, for he was a good fellow, and Steve had always been pleasant with him. "Monsieur is tired. I will be careful not to wake him."

He tip-toed away down the passage, and would soon have been out of hearing had Steve remained silent. But that was the last thing he wished to do. He desired to attract the attention of the man, and promptly gave a groan as if he were in agony.

"Did I hear correctly? Was it monsieur who groaned?"

The guard stopped abruptly, and brought the stock of his ponderous musket with a clatter to the ground, the jar being instantly followed by a second groan.

"Surely, it must be monsieur. What ails you, if you please, Monsieur Steve?" he asked, coming back to the room. "You are ill and in pain. What is the matter?"

Steve was not the one to sham as a rule, but he knew that he could not very well remain in the courtyard that night unless he had some plausible reason. He was not ill. In fact, he had never felt better or

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more energetic in his life. But he was 'cute, as Hunting Jim had already observed, and he was determined to manufacture some complaint.

"It is nothing," he answered, letting another feeble groan escape him. "I do not feel very comfortable. I have pain here. Perhaps monsieur would speak to my servant and ask him to bring me something warm to drink."

Steve placed his hand over his stomach and rolled on to his face again, for he was fearful that his healthy colour would betray him. The guard trailed his musket promptly, and went off at a run, bellowing for the soldier who had been detailed to wait on the prisoner.

"Quick," he cried, accosting the servant in the courtyard, "Monsieur is ill. I discovered him lying on his couch, groaning horribly. He desires something warm to drink. Run to the kitchen and see if you can obtain some milk."

A little later Steve was sitting up and sipping the warm milk, while his servant looked on sympathetically.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said, "but the pain will be better shortly. Monsieur looks well, and I am sure that this is only a little matter; for think, monsieur was in the courtyard two hours ago and I heard him whistling as if he had not a care in all the world, and as if he were with his own friends again."

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Steve winced at the words, knowing that they were only too true. But a man who wishes to escape must act the part he has selected to the utmost of his ability, and he did so promptly.

"You are right, Jean," he said. "It is only a little thing. Some food has upset me. In a little while I shall be better. You are a good fellow to come so quickly. Now leave me, for I think I can sleep, and perhaps later the sentries will allow me to have some exercise."

"Truly, monsieur. They are asking kindly after you already, for monsieur is a favourite. I will go to them, and you will walk when you feel inclined."

He went out of the room, closed the door, and slipped silently down the passage.

"He is better," he cried gaily as he came to the guard-house. "Monsieur makes light of his pains. Another would be groaning and groaning, till one would imagine he was on the point of death. But our prisoner sips his milk and asks to sleep, so that he may trouble no one. Ah, yes, and he wishes to know if he may walk in the courtyard later, just to exercise, you understand."

"Certainly," came the answer. "Let monsieur walk if he wishes, though one would have thought that it would have been better were he to keep his bed till to-morrow. But there, these English are strange. They walk and walk, just for exercise as they say. Surely a man is better and lives longer when he rests, and rests often."

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Steve did not long remain on his couch. In a little while he was seated at the table with which he had been provided, and was engaged in writing. To the commandant he scribbled a few lines thanking him for his constant courtesy and kindness, and stating deliberately that he was tired of being a prisoner, and intended to escape if possible. Then he wrote a short note for his servant, enclosing a handsome amount of money and many thanks for his attention. Also he gave him instructions to make his adieus to a number of friends in the garrison.

"Now I am ready," he thought. "It is dark now, and must be about seven o'clock. I shall wait till ten, and then go out. If they are suspicious I will return and then creep out again."

He threw himself on his bed and dozed for a long while, till a step outside roused him. He sat up then to find Jean standing over his couch.

"Monsieur is better?" he asked. "Then he will sleep, and to-morrow I will come later than usual to rouse him. Monsieur has no pain?"

"Pain! You are a wonderful physician," answered Steve heartily. "I declare that I never felt better in all my life. What is the night like, Jean?"

"Fine, monsieur, but somewhat dark. It is also crisp, and cold for

this time of the year."

"Then it is just the night to brace me up. I shall have a stroll, Jean, and then turn in. Yes, wake me late to-morrow, and, by the way, I am hungry."

Jean was delighted with his master, and promptly produced food.

"You are a strange person, monsieur," he said with a grin of satisfaction. "You are ill and in great pain at one moment, and then, behold! after a little sleep you are well again and wish to eat and to walk."

"You forget. There was the warm milk, and Jean gave it to me," smiled Steve. "But I am hard. I have roughed it in the forests ever since I was a little fellow, and have had very little illness."

He sat down at the table and ate a hearty meal. Then he lit his pipe and strolled into the courtyard, passing a few words with the sentries.

"He is a fine young fellow, this monsieur," said one, to his comrade, when Steve had passed on. "If all are like him we shall have but a poor chance. Jacques, can you tell me why it is that our prisoner has never attempted an escape?"

"Perhaps he is afraid, comrade. Men have been shot for that in the last few months."

"Afraid! Not he!" came the answer. "It is this way, Jacques. Monsieur is a man of honour, though he is only a youngster. He has been on parole up till lately, and that is why he has made no attempt. As to why he does not go now, well, I will give you the reason. He is no fool, comrade. Understand that. He is no fool, I say, for he knows that the sentries here are old soldiers and keep a good watch. Besides, could a cat escape from this place, and if it did, where is it to go? Nowhere! Unless a prisoner is tired of life and throws himself into the river. That would be better than to be butchered by the red villains whom we have hanging about the place. Tobacco, Jacques? Help yourself, but be gentle, please, for I have but my slender pay and allowances, and a smoke is a luxury."

They stood together chatting for a while, and then separated to patrol the courtyard, passing Steve on each occasion and noticing that he was walking up and down rapidly, as was often his custom.

"*Vraiment!* These English make me smile," laughed one of the men, as he met his comrade opposite the guard-house. "One would think that monsieur earned his rations by walking this place. Now, if I were he——"

"You would draw the rations first and sleep, leaving another to do the walking," was the laughing answer. "Peste take these English. It is because they are so energetic that they still keep up their opposition. Others would have given in long ago after suffering so many defeats."

They stood together chatting for a time, their talk turning upon the surrender of Fort William Henry and the massacre which followed. Then they shook their heads and agreed that such a catastrophe would have ruined their own cause, while, strangely enough, it had made the enemy even more determined.

And while they chatted Steve gradually approached the wall, and finally halted at the spot where Silver Fox had given his signal. It was absolutely dark down below, and though he peered into the black shadows, even his trained eyes failed to see any object. He was in the act of withdrawing his head when there was a movement below, and the faint bark of a dog. Then someone whispered.

"Steve? Is that you, lad? Then catch this tackle."

Something swished in the air, a bright object shot up from the black abyss, and the prisoner gripped an iron hook, to which a stout rope was attached. To place the hook in position was the work of a second, and within a minute he was down at the bottom of the wall, with his hand gripped firmly in that of his father.

"Come. They will discover that you are gone in a very few seconds perhaps, and then there will be a noise. Ah! The sentries are calling."

Steve clutched at his father's sleeve, and allowed himself to be led away through the darkness. They ran along the narrow path, darted

out into one of the roads which ascend the cliff, and soon afterwards were making their way along another path.

"They're at it! Listen to 'em shoutin'."

Steve suddenly heard a well-remembered voice speaking a foot or two behind him, and with a gasp of surprise realised that Hunting Jim was one of the party. But he had no time to greet him, and, indeed, little opportunity of doing so, for Judge Mainwaring hurried him on at a rapid pace, shouts from the fort having plainly shown them that the escape was already discovered. In fact, the sentries who had been so eagerly discussing the English nation and their idiotic absurdities, as they were pleased to call several of their customs, were smart fellows, in spite of all their chatter. Steve had been gone less than a minute when one of the men became suspicious.

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"*Ma foi*, but I believe this monsieur has given us the slip already," he suddenly exclaimed. "I cannot see him. Jacques, get along and report if he is there."

The last-named ran along the courtyard, and presently his voice was heard. "He is nowhere to be seen," he cried. "Had we not better fire so as to give the alarm?"

"Fire! And so wake the whole garrison! Not for worlds. Get across to monsieur's quarters, and report if he is there. It is possible that he entered while our backs were turned."

It was not long ere the sentry returned with the news that Steve's room was empty, and then, indeed, the alarm was sounded. The sentries shouted to the sergeant of the guard, and the sergeant, having promptly turned his guard out and interrogated the sentries, roused the officer in command of the fort. A cannon was then fired, a signal agreed upon beforehand to mean that a prisoner had escaped, and very soon the garrison was acquainted of the fact.

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"Now to the left," whispered Steve's father when they had run the better part of a mile and were on the outskirts of the city. "That is excellent. We are now on the plains of Abraham, and in a little while should be in safety."

Breaking into a fast walk, the fugitives kept straight ahead for another mile, till they came to a dip in the ground. There was the reflection of a fire hanging over the dip, and presently Steve caught sight of a native wigwam of large proportions. His father gave a cry of delight, and in a few seconds they were all inside. A smothered greeting welcomed them, and at once Steve was gripping the many hands held out to him, for there were now seven persons crowded into the wigwam, and a lantern which hung to one of the roof poles shone on their painted faces, and enabled the rescued prisoner to see them. Not that he easily recognised these friends, for they were all heavily daubed with paint and decked out in all the feathers and finery of the Huron Indians. However, he was sure of his father, the huge, raw-boned chief who stood beside him, holding him affectionately by the shoulder, for the voice betrayed him at once. But for that, Steve would have passed him by without recognition, for the Judge had shaved his beard, and now presented a smooth face, than which there was none more noticeable for the power and reserve which it expressed.

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"You ain't forgot me, Cap'n, I hope," burst in one of the men, painted hideously to represent a fox. "You ain't quite forgot Pete, as took up quarters with yer 'way back thar down by Lake St. George."

"Nor me, if ye plaze, Masther Steve, Cap'n, beggin' yer honour's pardon," said someone else, pushing to the front and holding out a huge paw, which was painted now, but which at other times was freckled and tanned to a colour that matched that of an Indian. It was Mac, a grin stretching from ear to ear, clean shaven, and with his brilliant locks cut back to form the conventional scalp lock of the Hurons, and dyed; yes, Mac boasted hair of the blackest jet now, and but for his speech, his huge grin, and his squat, powerful figure, was quite unrecognisable.

"You've took the Cap'n aback," cried Jim, pushing Mac aside. "It ain't likely as he'd recognise an old pal in a beauty sich as you air. Why, Mac, you was never so good-lookin' in all yer life before, and ef you'll take a bit of advice from me, why, you'll stick where yer air. Jest take to bein' a brave for the rest of yer natural existence."

That brought a still wider grin to the broad face before Steve, a grin which seemed to sever it into two complete portions, and which showed a most excellent set of teeth.

"Bad scran to ye now, Huntin' Jim, ef I don't take ye by the neck this instant and scalp ye. 'Tis yerself that's uncommon handsome to-day. Stand up and let the Cap'n see ye."

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He retired into the background, and gave Steve an opportunity of setting eyes on the tall trapper who had been such a staunch friend. He, too, was decked as an Indian, and in his case the disguise was perhaps even more natural than in that of the others. For Jim was tall and wiry. He was trained by constant wanderings in the forest to the very last ounce, and his muscles, though small and not of Mac's proportions, stood out like whipcord. Then, too, his sharp and intelligent features helped in the deception, while the habits which this old hunter had learned in the fifty years of his busy life had given him that imperturbable look common to the Indians.

"You was never so surprised in all yer life, Cap'n, I reckon," he said. "You was mighty sick of roostin' up there in the fort, and no doubt thinkin' of having a turn for liberty yerself. Then Silver Fox come into the fort, and I'll bet what yer like that he walked about as ef he'd been thar many a time, and as ef he wasn't on no account to be hurried. He's that cool, he's like an icicle."

"He is a gallant fellow, and I thank him. Chief, I owe a lot to you as well as to these other friends. But who is the stranger?"

A tall Indian had stood in the background looking on at the scene with a half-suppressed air of contempt on his finely chiselled features, for your Indian could not understand the need for such warmth and such hand-shakings over a meeting. Silver Fox beckoned to him.

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"This is my brother, Hawk," he said, "this is Flying Bird, a Mohawk once, and later a Huron. He is now again one of our tribe."

"And thereby hangs the tale of your release, my boy," broke in Mr. Mainwaring. "The story is soon told. This Flying Bird was born in the same wigwam as our old friend Silver Fox, and would have been there to this day had not the village been raided. The Hurons made a sudden descent, and Flying Bird was carried away. He was then seventeen, and almost a brave. He was spared, and became one of the Hurons, marrying into the tribe. Now he has lost his wife, and taking advantage of the fact that the Hurons were marching into the country adjacent to that in which the Mohawks lived, he made a journey to find Silver Fox. He came in the nick of time. I had just returned to find you a prisoner, and the band of scouts which you had formed near Fort William Henry about to be disbanded. They had been fortunate in escaping from the fort before the surrender, and of course there was little left for them to do."

"Well, we made plans to meet again at the breaking of the winter, and two months ago we gathered at Silver Fox's village. His brother had returned to Canada for the cold months, so as to allay suspicion, and we fell in with him ten days ago south of the St. Lawrence. As to how we reached that part, why, the movements of our troops are beginning to worry the French, and they are concentrating at the threatened places, leaving the upper reaches of the Richelieu and the country to the west of that river almost denuded of trappers and Indians. We slipped through, and——"

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"And here you are, father. What is the next move?"

"We wait here for a week perhaps, till the hue and cry for you is over. Then we take to the river, capture some sort of craft, and sail for Nova Scotia."

Everything had, in fact, been carefully mapped out, and so far the plans of the rescue party had gone without a hitch. But there was a great deal still to be done, and many dangers would have to be faced before Steve and his friends could hope to reach safety again. However, they were not the men to flinch at the thought of danger. Indeed, they rather enjoyed the prospect and the novelty of their present position, and on the following morning eagerly scanned the city and its neighbourhood for signs of searchers.

"Fortunately for us they have very few Indians at their beck and call just now," said Mr. Mainwaring, "for they have sent them down to Ticonderoga and to the country about Louisbourg. There are a few

lazy fellows still remaining, the ne'er-do-wells of the various tribes, and there is of course this small party of Hurons."

He smiled at Steve, and proceeded.

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"You see, there was need for a party to lie close to Quebec, for it would have been impossible to spirit you away from the city in the few hours we had at our disposal. You will see why shortly, for the river will swarm with canoes, and what Indians there are will be sent off in search of your tracks. We had to have some arrangement whereby we could take up our quarters near the city, and Jim settled the matter very quickly."

"Thar warn't nothin' in it," growled the trapper. "We wanted to lie up here, and Flyin' Bird gave us the word that all the redskin varmint was off to other parts. Waal, Cap'n, we fixed it up that we should be a kind of deputation of Injuns from the Huron tribe come back to complain of the favouritism shown to other redskins. That air a likely tale, for these braves air always rowin' among theirselves. Flyin' Bird's seen the commandant, they've had a palaver. We're here waitin' for a proper palaver with this officer, and I reckon when he's ready we won't be so anxious to get our grievance to his ears. But there ain't no hurry. The French know how to deal with redskins, and they've larned long ago that time ain't anythin', that ef yer hurry matters yer show unnatural weakness and anxiety. So this officer'll wait a while, and when he sends, he won't find no one to greet him."

"And meanwhile we are fairly safe from interference," chimed in Mr. Mainwaring. "The Hurons are accustomed to stand aloof from other braves, and therefore we are hardly likely to have visitors. If some come, Flying Bird will entertain them."

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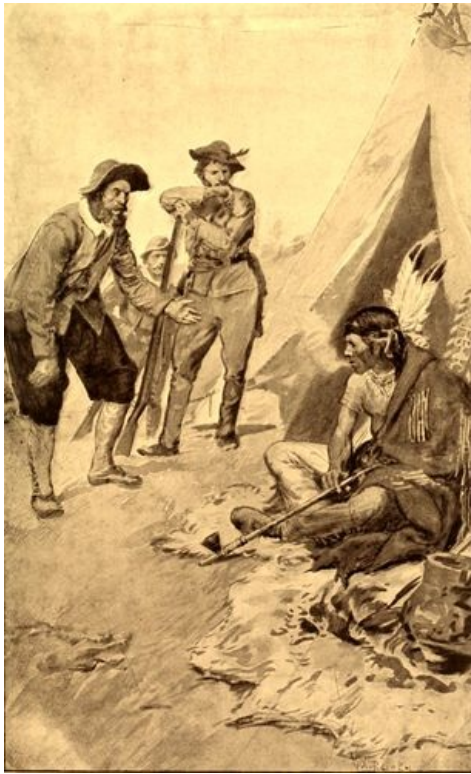
Daylight showed that the authorities at Quebec were determined to retake their late prisoner if possible. Canoes filled with soldiers and trappers swarmed on the river, and the steep shore all along on either side of the city was closely scrutinised. Then a strong party was sent out along the banks of the St. Charles river, for that was a likely direction for a fugitive to take. Once a party of trappers even came to the Huron wigwam lying in the hollow.

"We seek a pale face who has broken away from the city," said their spokesman, addressing Flying Bird, who alone appeared to meet them. "Have you seen traces of him. He broke away last night."

"Then his trail will have been stamped out by the coming and going of the people," was the curt answer. "Here, however, there may be traces, my brothers. I have not looked for them, but if they are here surely you who are accustomed to the forest and the trail should be able to discover them. For us, we are resting. We require favours before we will help your countrymen."

Flying Bird remained seated all the while, smoking placidly. The Frenchmen stared at him doubtfully, muttered words beneath their breath, and moved away.

"Let the dog sit there and rot if he will," growled



"WE SEEK A PALE FACE WHO HAS BROKEN AWAY FROM THE CITY"

one. "These Indians are either completely out of control, and far too eager even for our hot bloods, or they are sulky and will not stir a finger. Let the dog sit and smoke."

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They moved away in none of the best tempers, for these trappers and the French in general were more than beginning to see that the price they had to pay for the use of their numerous tribes of ruthless savages would prove heavy in the end. Already they knew that it had roused the British from their apathy. There were tales even then in Quebec that the backwoodsman and the regular who fought for England had a new battle cry, that bayonets were more vengeful and terrible than ever before.

A week later the hue and cry had died down, and the party made ready to escape. Flying Bird sauntered off towards Quebec early in the morning, his musket over his shoulder, and a fishing line strung to his belt. Entering a canoe down by the stage, he paddled out into the river, rounded the promontory to the west of Quebec, and sent his craft along parallel to the steep cliff, at the top of which lay the Plains of Abraham. His comrades above saw him occasionally, for he had paddled to the far shore, and was diligently fishing. He was there at dusk, and those who had the curiosity to look at him from the city saw that he was pulling up his line and preparing to return home.

"It will be dark by the time he is over this side of the river," said Steve's father, "and by that time we shall be near him. You can find this trail, Silver Fox?"

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"On the darkest night, Chief."

"Then we will go. Pick up your traps, boys."

The party filed out of the wigwam, leaving their late home standing, and, with the Indian leading, strode off towards the edge of the cliff. Steve had been decked as a Huron, and he took his place third in the line. They reached the edge, and without the smallest hesitation the Indian chief scrambled over it.

"Be careful, brothers," he cautioned them. "The way is steep. A fall would end in death."

One by one in quick succession they lowered themselves over the edge, and gripping boulders and grass and the roots of bushes, finally reached the bank below. The canoe was there, and they stepped into it silently. Jim pushed off from the shore, and in a little while they were shooting down the centre of the river, hidden in the darkness, from which they watched a hundred and more twinkling lights which glimmered from the windows of the fairy city of Quebec.

Chapter XVII

Down the Mighty St. Lawrence

"We ain't out er the wood by no means," said Jim, when the canoe had shot past the city and had lost the lights behind a promontory of the Isle of Orleans, "cos there's the journey back. Judge thinks as we'd best make down stream for the sea, and cut out to Halifax or some other place, wherever our chaps may be. There's talk of an expedition to Louisbourg, and, of course, that's somewheres at the mouth of the river. Now, ef it was me alone——"

"You'd make up stream, or even enter the Richelieu," burst in Mr. Mainwaring, "and for the simple reason that you have never even seen the ocean, nor even a big ship. You are at home in the forest, and feel that you could more surely reach friends in that way."

"Thet's the case, Judge, in a nutshell."

"But I happen to know that the forests south of this are swarming with Indians. We had the utmost difficulty in making to the north, and we have to remember that the escape of the prisoner will within a couple of days be associated with the disappearance of the band of Hurons. That will rouse the French, and they will send urgent messages down to the neighbourhood of Ticonderoga. No, my friends, I have good reason to know that Frontenac is almost deserted at this moment, so that we might escape that way. Even then there would be a very long strip of forest to traverse, and many enemies in it. The mouth of the river is our easiest way, for once clear of the neighbourhood and safe on a suitable vessel, no one can catch us. And French vessels down the stream will be deceived by our hoisting a French flag, while the mouth itself is patrolled by our fleet."

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Mr. Mainwaring had, in fact, supplied himself with all the available information before venturing on this hazardous journey to Quebec, for an intelligent man, such as he was, knew very well that such an expedition was fraught with much danger, and that if not carefully planned in every detail, it would very likely end in disaster. The reader will remember that Pitt had come into power, and that one of the chief items of his programme against the French was to be an attack on the formidable fort of Louisbourg. Our ships were on the way there from Halifax already, and it was clear that safety lay in that direction for Steve and his friends if only they could descend the river.

"I can see that it will be easier to make down by the water than to march miles and miles through the forest, scouting every foot of the way," Steve said. "What about a suitable boat, father? We shall want something bigger than this canoe, for this would never live down at the mouth. I understand that it is like an open sea there, and that it is often very rough."

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"It is swept by sudden gales, even in the summer," was the answer. "As for a boat to take us to our friends, there is one lying down at the tail of this island, and just within sight of Quebec. She lies, I should say, eight or ten miles from the city, so that any commotion aboard will not be seen or heard. That is the vessel we are going to capture, Steve. How we are going to do it is another matter. We must discuss that. Meanwhile we shall paddle down beside the island till about a mile from the end, and there we shall tie up."

Accordingly the paddles were kept moving gently, for the stream was strong here, and it was hardly necessary to urge the canoe along. Half an hour later the signal was given, and they turned the nose of the bark canoe into the bank, and Silver Fox made her fast there to some overhanging branches.

"Guess we can put in a sleep," said Jim, yawning widely. "The nights are getting very short now, so it won't be long before we are up and doin'. Who'll take the watch?"

"I will," answered Steve promptly. "Turn in all of you and sleep. I will rouse you an hour before it is light. By the way, shall we settle this question of the capture of the boat to-morrow?"

"Onless you've got somethin' fixed already, Cap'n. Blest ef you ain't now. I knows that by yer voice. Spout it out, boy, and let's know

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what it is. He was always like this when cap'n of the band, Judge. Kind er suggestin' a discussion when he'd got the hul thing settled in his own mind. Spin it out, Steve."

"There is nothing in it, only I thought we had better settle the matter now. We shall be dull and sleepy in the early morning. I fancy our best plan is to be that Huron party out fishing. There are plenty of Indian canoes about on the river every day, and often enough the men are fishing. We can do the same, and gradually drift down to the boat. But have we lines aboard?"

"You bet. There's half a dozen in Flyin' Bird's pouch."

"Then I will bait a couple now and fish. We must have a few fish with us, and when we get opposite the boat we will offer some to the men aboard. Thus we shall have an excuse for hanging on to the boat, and a couple can clamber aboard. If the rest of us cannot do the same—"

"You've said enough, Steve, so you have," cried Mac, opening his capacious mouth for the first time for many an hour. "If others cannot follow, why, me name's not Mac. Sure, we'll be rhunnin' over the decks afore you can count yer fingers."

"Then pass the lines and get to sleep."

Steve sat in the centre of the canoe while the hours of darkness passed. On either side of him sprawled his companions, lying packed as closely as possible, for a bark canoe is never of great dimensions, and though this was a large one, it gave little room for men who wished to sleep. In addition, a craft of this sort was very liable to capsize, particularly when manned by novices. But Steve and his friends had learned to manage these canoes when they were very young, and could move about in them, spear fish over the side, and even sleep in them with the utmost security.

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Almost before he was prepared for it, Steve saw a streak of white break across the black sky towards the east, and knew that dawn would not be long in coming. In half an hour it was beginning to get light, and he at once roused his companions.

"Time's up," he called out softly. "Rouse yourselves and rub the sleep out of your eyes. Now, I vote for a meal before we start. Then, if there is trouble, we shall be able to struggle on for a long while without wanting food."

They followed his advice with eagerness, for the night's adventure had sharpened their appetites. But very soon the meal was ended, and there being nothing further to wait for, they cast off from the branches, paddled well out into the river, and then, taking in their paddles, drifted down the stream, each one of the party, with the exception of Jim, who steered with the tip of his paddle, having a line overboard.

"There yer air," he said some minutes later. "Best not look all together, lest they should get suspicious. Thar's the boat, boys, and a bonny one she seems. I reckon she's ten times bigger'n this."

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"Forty times," answered Mr. Mainwaring. "She is quite a large craft, and not far short of eighty tons. If so, there are few of larger size that ever venture up the river. That is a peculiarity about the French. I believe they have seldom brought a boat of more than a hundred tons up to Quebec. And yet there must be sufficient water, though there are shoals here and there, and the passage is considered dangerous. She will suit us well, boys. In a little while we shall be exchanging our rôle of Huron Indians for that of a sailor. Lucky it is for us all that one of our numbers has sailed a boat before."

"We ain't aboard yet, Judge," said Jim, rather suddenly. "Steve, you've lived a year in these parts. What do yer make of them critters away over thar under the island? You others keep on fishin'. 'Twon't do to seem curious."

Steve raised his head slowly, drew in his line, and threw it out from the other side of the canoe. The movement gave him the opportunity of looking in the direction Jim had indicated, where he saw a large ship's boat pulling out from the tail end of the island. She was manned by six sailors, and swept through the water at a rapid pace. In addition, the white coats of four passengers proclaimed that they were regulars from the French garrison, while an equal number of Indians crouched by the thwarts. In the stern sat a man who was

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huddled in a cloak, for the early morning was chilly.

"I should say that she is a patrol, probably ordered to search all vessels and boats which come south of the island. Perhaps her crew have directions to turn all back who come so far. I don't like the look of those fellows, but we must not appear to be alarmed. Go on fishing, all of you, and just see that your muskets are handy. Flying Bird, be ready to answer them."

He addressed the Indian in Mohawk, and then tossed his line again, pulling up a fish a moment or two later quite coolly and leisurely. Meanwhile his comrades went on with their fishing, without even turning their heads, for they were one and all trained men, who knew by experience that the simple turning of a head was sometimes sufficient to cause suspicion. They betrayed not the slightest curiosity, but pulled in their fish or rebaited their hooks with wonderful unconcern. Jim still steered the canoe languidly, glancing now and again at the strangers, while Steve was able to keep his eyes on them without appearing to do so.

"They are making direct for us," he said suddenly. "I will turn round for fear that they might recognise me. I was a prisoner so long, and quite free to move about that the majority of the troops in Quebec know me."

Suiting the action to the word, he swung round and dropped his line in on the far side. Presently a hail came over the water, while the splash of paddles could be heard.

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"Ef they order us back, why, we've got to obey," said Jim. "Better to please 'em and put the critters off the scent than to run our heads against a wall. Let the beggars sing out again before you answer them."

Flying Bird nodded curtly, for he had picked up a deal of English, and could understand the drift of the conversation. He went on fishing calmly, without even turning his head, till they were hailed again, this time in the Indian language.

"Hi! Put about there and wait till we come up with you. Who are you, and where are you from?"

In a little while the boat came seething alongside, where she lay, held by an occasional stroke of the oars, while the man in the stern repeated his questions. Steve did not dare to steal so much as a look at him, while Jim suddenly ducked his head and turned, so that the Frenchman could not see his face. For once again Jules Lapon's voice was heard. Once again had this odious Frenchman come upon the scene when least desired, and at the most inopportune moment. It was he without a doubt, more sallow than of yore, his overbearing manners almost as openly displayed as on the last occasion when Steve had faced him.

"Where from, and who are you, Indians?" he demanded curtly, in the Huron tongue. "We have orders to search all who come this way, and to send them back if they have no good reason for coming."

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"The chief can see what our business is," answered Flying Bird steadily. "Does the Frenchman wish to be assured that these are fish?"—and he held up one of their catch—"or does he suspect us of other business? As to who we are, this is a party of Hurons from the south country. We are awaiting a palaver with your big chief. That is all."

He baited his hook and tossed it into the river, turning away at once and ignoring the Frenchman. But Jules was a man of keen perception, and possessed of a suspicious mind. Unknown to Steve, he had recently come to Quebec to take up some duty there, and had almost instantly heard of the escape of the prisoner whom he had cruelly ordered to be executed down at Ticonderoga. A backwoodsman, such as he was, knew the difficulties with which a fugitive would have to contend, and he had at once assured himself that Steve must have friends who were helping him, and that in place of making away from the neighbourhood of the city at once, he was probably in hiding close at hand, awaiting a favourable opportunity to escape.

"And this is just the party to help him," he said to himself as he stared at the occupants of the canoe. "I will not let him slip through my fingers if he is here. We will go a little closer, and then have a look at the far side. It is distinctly suspicious that they should have

their faces turned away."

Very slowly the big boat was rowed past the canoe till she was above her. Then she dropped down again, and drifted past while Jules Lapon, standing at the tiller, and still wrapped in his cloak, carefully scrutinized the painted faces before him. Jim's angular features he passed without a second look, while Mac stared back at the Frenchman with a boldness and an impudence which had the desired effect. He went on to Steve, found nothing suspicious in his open face, and passing Pete, Silver Fox, and Flying Bird in turn, came at length to Mr. Mainwaring. Something in the strong face and in the huge build of this brave seemed to strike him. He gave an exclamation, and, bending forward, looked closer. Then his sallow cheeks were suddenly suffused, he bent forward to take a closer view, swept his eyes along the occupants of the canoe again, and stopped when he came to Steve.

"The prisoner," he shouted at the top of his voice. "Hurrah! I have found him as I had hoped to do. Cover them with your muskets. Drop those paddles and sit upright or we will fire."

Jules had indeed made a discovery of the utmost importance. But he was a man who always found it hard to curb his passions or his impetuosity. Had he done so now, he would first have warned his men that he had made some discovery, and so have had them in readiness. As it was, the four soldiers who sat in the boat did not understand a word of Huron, and had no knowledge of what had passed. They had been on this duty for the past six days, and were heartily tired of it, particularly as this leader of theirs had already treated them to more than one false alarm. They sat half asleep, lolling against the thwarts, by no means pleased to be turned out at such an early hour without their breakfasts. The sudden order took them absolutely by surprise. They had not even powdered the pans of their muskets.

"Peste! Up with your muskets and cover them, fools!" shouted Jules, seeing them hesitate. "I tell you that that is the prisoner. Shoot him down if he moves a muscle."

"You will be good enough to seat yourself, Monsieur Jules. Jim, you are our best shot, and will cover him."

It was Steve's voice which spoke, and at the order the heavy deckard which the trapper carried went to his shoulder, and his eye squinted along the sights.

"Covered," he growled, "and jest you watch it over thar. This here gun's got a way of its own of goin' off sudden. Jest watch it or you'll know why. It's shot many a varmint before, and it won't take long to treat a skunk like you to a bullet."

"Mac, and you, father, and Silver Fox cover the soldiers and the Indians. Now, messieurs, you know me perhaps. I am the prisoner, as this Jules Lapon tells you, I am about to escape, and I advise you to be satisfied with that statement. You,"—and he pointed to one of the men,— "will oblige by throwing your musket overboard. Good! Now your pouch and horn and your bayonet. That is excellent. Your comrades will follow suit."

Long before those in the boat had recovered from their astonishment every musket aboard the canoe was levelled at their heads. And one by one the muskets and bayonets aboard the French boat were tossed overboard, the Indians being compelled to follow the example set them. So far not a shot had been fired, for the band of supposed Hurons had been too quick for their enemies. But if eyes could have fired bullets, then every one of the occupants of the canoe, and in particular Steve and his father, would have been slain by Jules, for this curiously bitter Frenchman glared at them furiously, and finally turned his eyes on Jim. Up till then he had been too excited and too angry to take note of the tall Indian who covered him with his weapon. But now an uncomfortable feeling crept down Jules Lapon's spine. He swore under his breath, tried to stare back at the squinting eye of the man who levelled the sights, and then was suddenly overcome by that strange sensation. His knees shook and his legs doubled up beneath him. He crouched in the stern, his face hidden in his hands, tears, induced partly by sheer terror and partly by mortification, streaming down his cheeks and welling out between his fingers.

"Others has felt like that and weakened," growled Jim, lowering his

piece. "There's better men nor you has looked into a gun and felt ill and sick. I've done it myself, and I knows that queer feelin' that you've got. But fer all that I ain't never played the coward like you. A leader's a man as should stand up to the worst, and face everything, so as to show his men he's worth his salt. You ain't. Reckon you're the biggest coward as I ever set eyes on."

The trapper spat derisively into the water, laid down his musket, and commenced to fill his pipe.

"What next, Cap'n?" he asked, a grin on his hard features. "Thar's work to be done. Beg pardon, Judge, but it seems natural like to turn to Steve after being away thar at the hollow with him."

"And you could not do better. Let the lad lead us. I have perfect confidence in him. Steve, what is the next move?"

For a little while there was no answer, for our hero was engaged in looking closely at the boat which they had decided to capture, and then over his shoulder at the river. There was not another boat in sight, while, though he looked very carefully, no one seemed to be stirring aboard the ship.

"We shall want men aboard that boat to manage the sails, for I know nothing of seamanship, and Pete and Mac and Jim are the same. But we are lucky. Here are the very hands we want."

He pointed to the sailors aboard the boat, at the stern of which the discomfited officer sat, and at once a smile broke over the faces of his friends. They saw his meaning in a flash, and the coolness of their old captain amused them.

"Shucks! Ef he ain't the most——"

"Jest the slimmest, 'cutest, cussedest chap as ever you or me set eyes on, Pete," burst in Jim. "No wonder that 'ere Frenchie thar has dug his head into his hands. Reckon it makes him kind er faint to look at him."

"I said that we should need sailors. There they are. Monsieur Jules, you will be good enough to come aboard this canoe and bring your soldiers with you. My men, you have nothing to fear. We are merely about to change places with you."

At a nod from Steve, Jim and Mac dug their paddles into the water, and presently they were alongside the boat. Jim leaped aboard at once, took Jules Lapon by the shoulder with no very gentle hand, and lifted him to his feet as if he were a babe.

"Ef you ain't able to hold yerself up, why, I'll sling yer across to the canoe. Bah! Man, show some spirit. From all accounts yer can be bold and hard enough when things air right and you've got a poor prisoner to deal with. There's the cap'n thar as can tell a yarn about yer."

The exchange of boats took only a few minutes, and very soon the party of Hurons were seated in the one which had belonged to Jules, while that worthy, with his soldiers and his Indians, was crouching in the canoe. They were given a couple of paddles, and were ordered to row up stream.

"If we see you turn, or if you shout, we shall follow," said Steve. "It would be better for you to go quietly back to Quebec."

They watched as the Frenchman and his disconsolate crew paddled away, and soon they were round the bend of the island, prepared to attack the vessel which they hoped would take them to the sea.

"You have nothing to fear," said Steve to the sailors who still manned the oars, "and I promise to set you free as soon as we can get along without your services. How many are aboard the ship?"

"As well make the best of a bad job," came the answer. "There are two only, monsieur, and you can climb aboard as soon as you like. You say that we shall be set free, monsieur?"

"I give you my promise. We shall make this boat fast astern, and tow her down. When you can be spared you shall take the boat and sufficient arms and provisions and go. Is that a bargain?"

"You can count on us, monsieur, and our comrades aboard would prefer such terms to the hard knocks which you are able to give."

A few words passed between the Frenchmen, they smiled at Steve and his friends, and seemed to enter into the spirit of this adventure

of theirs as though it was as pleasant to them as service with their own comrades.

"'Tis a poor heart which cannot make light of troubles, monsieur," laughed their spokesman. "A minute ago it seemed that we should be shot. Now we are promised safety, and are commanded by one who speaks kindly to us, and even says 'monsieur' when he gives us an order. That is good. We welcome a change after that ruffian."

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By now the boat was very close to the anchored ship, and presently she struck against the counter, and one of the French sailors hung on with a boathook.

"We shall trust you to go aboard and let your comrades know what is happening," said Steve to the spokesman of the sailors.

"Otherwise shots might be fired and useless opposition shown. Get aboard, my lad."

"You can come up," shouted the man a little later, appearing at the rail above with two strange faces beside him. "My comrades see the wisdom of behaving quietly, particularly since I took the liberty of promising them what you offered us. Is that correct, monsieur?"

"Perfectly. You will be rewarded also if you behave properly. Now make the boat fast and place yourselves under the orders of monsieur here, who is my father."

It was wonderful to see with what eagerness the French sailors sprang to obey Mr. Mainwaring. For though the huge Englishman was dressed as a Huron, and plentifully daubed with paint, yet he spoke perfect French, and held himself as only a white man could do. But surely never was there a stranger sight than this, a ship commanded by Indians, and worked by pale faces.

"We shall have to make a change, Steve," said his father. "Just hunt out some old clothes from the lockers down below. They will serve a double purpose. We shall be more comfortable, and then, in case of our meeting another ship sailing under French colours, we shall pass all the easier."

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That night, as the darkness began to get deeper, the ship was anchored close in to the southern bank, and remained swinging to her cable there till the dawn came again. Then she went on her course again. And so, without incident, the sea was reached, the island now known as Prince Edward Island sighted, and finally the bleak slopes of Cape Breton Island.

"If monsieur would allow us to escape in the boat within the next few hours we could reach our friends in Louisbourg," said the sailor who had spoken for his comrades before. "The wind is fair for us, and we should not have a long pull."

Steve and his friends at once agreed, the boat was pulled alongside, and food and water lowered. Then Mr. Mainwaring presented each of the six sailors with a small sum of money and sent them down to the boat. They pushed off, waved their adieux, and put out their oars. Then the tiller of the big ship was put up again, the sails filled, and she bore away to the far end of the island. Rounding that, and giving the land a wide berth, the party aboard saw a ship stealing along close to the island. At her fore flew the fleur de lis of France, and sighting the boat out in the offing, her head was turned and she came surging out towards Steve and his friends.

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"She is a big boat. It would be hard if we were to see the inside of a French prison after all our trouble," smiled Mr. Mainwaring. "But I doubt that she will have the courage to come far, for if my information has been correct, the British fleet must be hereabouts. They have been blockading the mouth of the river since the winter broke up. Ha! Steve, what do I see?"

There was a white dot away in the far distance, a dot which might have been a bird. But it held the same position steadily, except for the fact that it grew gradually bigger, proving that it was a ship approaching. And presently a huge eighty-gun frigate, with the British ensign at her mast-head, came into clear sight and ranged up alongside the captured Frenchman. A gun was fired, and hardly had the boom been heard when a boat dropped from the side of the frigate, a smart naval officer tumbled into it with his crew, and, being joined by another individual, raced across the water. They were alongside in five minutes, and a ladder being lowered the naval officer and his companion came aboard.

"A party of seven. So far so good," exclaimed the officer, running his eye over Steve and his friends. "Is this the ship we were to expect?"

"It is," answered Mr. Mainwaring promptly. "Allow me to introduce the party, general. I am Mr. Mainwaring, though somewhat altered, I fear. And here are my son, Hunting Jim, Mac, Pete, Silver Fox, and Flying Bird, all old friends and staunch companions. I have to thank you for picking us up. My friends, this is General Wolfe."

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"Indeed, I fancy the term picking you up hardly meets the case. You seem very well able to look to yourselves, and, if my observation is correct, have been fairly comfortable."

The officer who spoke turned to Mr. Mainwaring, and then shook hands with every one of the party, giving Steve an opportunity of inspecting him closely without seeming to be rude. General Wolfe, whose name was then prominently before the world, was a tall, gaunt man with no other particular feature about him to attract unusual attention, unless it was his hair, which, like Mac's, was decidedly red. He was quiet, reserved, a typical officer and gentleman, and evidently one accustomed to discipline and to be obeyed. Little did Steve think as he watched this brigadier that Wolfe was to be the hero of this conflict with France in Canada, and that he himself was to be closely associated with him in the conquest of that fair city from which he had so recently escaped.

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Chapter XVIII

The Attack on Louisbourg

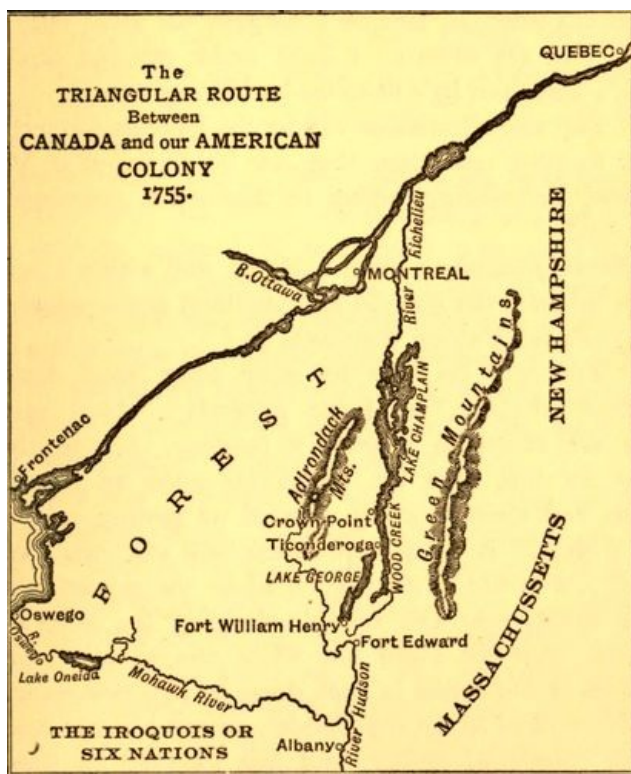
"You have turned up in the very nick of time, gentlemen," said General Wolfe, as he surveyed the party standing before him on the deck of the French vessel. "Our fleet and transports have arrived in these waters, and we are about to attempt a landing on Cape Breton Island. After that we shall lay siege to the fort of Louisbourg. Can I be of service to you in any way?"

He swept his eye over each one of the group, smiling at the strange appearance of Steve and his white friends, for they were now dressed in the rough sailor clothing which they had found aboard, and for the most part looked curious objects. Their paint and feathers had disappeared entirely, but all clung to their fringed hunting shirts, while rough trousers of sailcloth protected their legs, and French sailor hats covered their heads where only a few days before there had been scalp locks and the crests of eagles.

"Come, gentlemen, now that you are free, you have the world to choose from. You can return to England, you can make for your old haunts near Ticonderoga, where I am sure Hawk and his band of scouts will be welcome, or you can remain here and help us a little. Personally, I should be glad if that were your decision, for I am training a number of the men of my brigade to fight in open order, making use of cover as do backwoodsmen. I could not have better instructors than yourselves."

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The TRIANGULAR ROUTE Between CANADA and our AMERICAN COLONY 1755.

"You can put me down, then, general," sang out Jim, promptly, raising his arm. "Only there's jest one condition of service I bargain for after rations and pay are earned. I fight under my old cap'n. He's here, and he's fit to lead a hul regiment."

"Pay and allowances will be the same as formerly. As to your condition, that can be arranged if Mr. Steve Mainwaring wishes to take up a commission again."

Steve promptly agreed to do so, and within a very few minutes the general had obtained seven valuable recruits for his new regiment.

"You will be able to enter upon your duties almost at once," said the general. "As I said, we are about to attempt a landing. Up to this the sea has been too rough for such an expedition, but there is every sign of its getting calmer, and should it do so, our boats will put out."

We will now return to the frigate, where the master-tailor can supply you with suitable clothing, for, after all, I fear that we could not allow you to take your places in our ranks in such dress as you now wear."

He walked to the rope ladder, swung himself down with wonderful agility, and was followed by Steve and his friends and by the naval officer. An order was then given, and the two men at the oars pulled away for the frigate, a couple of sailors being left aboard the captured vessel.

"We have lost a few of our ships since we sailed from Halifax," said the general, "and as I expect that you have no further use for the ship you captured, we will put her into commission at once. There is a permanent Prize Board sitting, and they will inspect her and decide on her value to-day. That money will be yours, gentlemen, for you are the owners."

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Some hours later as Steve walked the broad deck of the frigate, he could hardly believe that he had so recently escaped from prison. The days had flown since his father and his old friends came to his rescue, and they had been so filled with incident. He felt strange on this big vessel, and found it difficult to realize that he was again under orders, holding a captain's commission, and about to take part in the conflict between England and France.

"This is a very different affair from those up by Ticonderoga, Steve," said his father, coming up to him. "Look at the force we have; there must be ten thousand men at least. I mean soldiers of course, and am not counting the crews of the ships."

"Of the ships there are nearly two hundred," answered Steve, for he had been busily counting them. Indeed, Mr. Mainwaring might well observe that this was a big affair, for on this sunny June morning those who patrolled the deck of the frigate could see numerous ships of war, sloops, frigates, and transports, all cruising backwards and forwards off Cape Breton Island. Boscawen, "Old Dreadnought," was the admiral in command, and his fleet had only recently reached Halifax, where he had picked up the vessels remaining there, and had brought them on with him. Amherst, whom the reader will recollect, was in command of the troops, had now some twelve thousand men aboard the ships and transports, for on his arrival at Halifax he had strengthened his own force with the troops taken to this port by the Earl of Loudon in the previous year. Nor had he a single regiment too many, for the task before him was a formidable one.

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Louisbourg, like Quebec, may be said to have been the stronghold of the military, while, owing to its excellent harbour, it was also a rendezvous for the French fleets. It consisted of private residences, churches, and innumerable barracks and forts. In fact, it was a vast fort, constructed at huge expense and pains, and designed by the very best engineers of France. Seen from the edge of the harbour, its most prominent features were the king's bastion and barracks, the hospital, and the Recollects church nestling under the walls of the former. There were fish stages and wharves, for Louisbourg was occupied by a large number of men who looked to the sea for their living. In all there were some four thousand inhabitants at this period, and these consisted of the fisher folk above mentioned, of numerous priests, and of many others whose business was connected in some way or other with the military or with the navy.

This vast fortress undoubtedly existed for war alone, and the French had made enormous efforts to make it impregnable. Once before the gallant New Englanders had captured the place, but a shortsighted English ministry had handed it back to France, whose ministers were possessed of far keener perception. They realized that the struggle between the two nations would break out again, and since it had come into their hands after capture, they had spared no pains to complete their preparations for offence and defence. There were four thousand French and Canadian regulars behind the two miles of granite walls of the fortress, making eight thousand defenders if the civil population are counted. Four hundred cannon grinned from the embrasures, while the store-houses contained ample ammunition and food for a year. Add to these preparations against attack the natural defences of the place, for the seas were rough, and the coast rocky for miles on either side, save for an occasional cove capable of easy defence, and the reader will be able to gather some idea of the difficulties before our forces. In addition, the

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seven-mile circumference of the harbour prevented all approach from the sea-side to the fortress, and sheltered seven battleships and five frigates, which together added five hundred and fifty guns and three thousand men to the strength of the garrison.

"There will be a landing to-morrow," said General Wolfe that evening, as he joined Steve and his father on the deck. "This sea is settling down, I am thankful to say, for I am the worst of sailors, and if only the wind will remain fair we shall embark during the night. You will take part in the landing."

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That night, in fact, it became known through the fleet that an endeavour would be made to land in the early hours of the following morning, and sunrise found the troops embarked in the ship's boats, and hanging on to their sides awaiting the signal. Three spots had been selected for the expedition to attack, and in consequence the force at General Amherst's disposal was divided into three divisions. The first and second of these were under the command of Brigadiers Lawrence and Whitmore respectively, and they were to attack the two coves nearest to the fortress on its west. Wolfe was in command of the third division, with orders to row along the rocky coast till he came to Le Coromandiere, which while being the most likely spot for a landing, being easier than the former two, was at the same time strongly defended by the enemy, who had trenches, rifle pits, and strong barricades, with mounted cannon. It was four miles from Louisbourg, so that it was some little while before the boats of this division arrived near the cove. Meanwhile our fleet opened a terrific fire on the fortress.

"Listen to that fer cannon," said Jim, who sat beside Steve, his musket, now provided with a bayonet, set upright between his legs. "I've never in all the course of my days heard the like of it. It's thunder and worse."

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"Our men are just giving the French in the fortress a taste of what they have in store for them," laughed Steve. "But take a look at the cove, Jim. Those are guns there, and there must be a large force of men ready to receive us."

"Then the more the merrier, lad. I've fought behind trees many a score of times. I've been shut in a fort with a couple of hundred redskin varmint howlin' and firin' outside, but I've never in all my days tried my hand at this sort of thing. Somehow we rangers think we're better soldiers than air these here reg'lars. But I ain't so sartin. No doubt when it's a war with braves, or a fight in the forest, we're the best boys at the game. But out here, a job of this sort ain't done by hanging behind trees and rocks. It wants a rush, and to make that a man has to have downright pluck. Yes, I'm beginnin' to see that a reg'lar has got heaps o' grit when he fights in his own way, and as he's been taught. Whew! Did yer feel that?"

Steve did. It was the shot from one of the French batteries which, now that the boats were within some hundred yards, opened on the flotilla suddenly. The shot, round and grape, hissed and hummed through the air, and striking the water for the most part, sent up cascades which blew away in spray, drenching many of the occupants of the boats. Had that cove been sheltered it is probable that Wolfe's division would have suffered terribly, for there were twelve hundred Frenchmen waiting for their attack, and they had many guns. But this barren, rockbound coast gave little or no shelter, and it happened that a big swell was running, which made correct aim impossible, and a hit more a matter of chance than of skill. And so it turned out that little damage was done. The bellow of the cannon was answered by a derisive cheer, and at once the boats' crews bent to their oars and raced for the narrow beach.

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"Thunder! That air wuss nor bullets," sang out Jim, half rising to his feet, for this was a weird and new experience for the hunter.

"Reckon another of them bangs and there won't be much of this crowd left to fight. Cap'n, it air clean mad to keep out here in the open when there's a bit of a rock thar that'll shelter us from them guns and give a landing at the same time."

This time the trapper got to his feet, in spite of the shouts of the ensign in command of the regulars aboard the boat, and as if to show how right he was, there came the crash of a second discharge, round shot and ball, hurtled about the boats, striking some of the men, and splashing foam and spray everywhere.

"Look thar," cried Jim, in no way abashed by the gold lace and smart

uniform of the young officer. "Yer'll never set yer toe on the beach, but yer'll get to hand grips with them ere Frenchies ef yer'll make away where I'm pointin'."

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The officer was on his feet in a moment, scanning the rock to which the trapper had drawn his attention. Then he gave a sharp word of command, which caused the tiller to be put over and the bows of the boat to sheer off in that direction, while the crew, who had lain on their oars and looked doubtfully about them after the last discharge of cannon, bent to their work again with a will. Another boat near at hand followed their example, and a third was not slow to do the same. It became a race, and the water was churned into froth at the bows of the boats.

"Steady! That's near enough. Over we go. Hurrah!"

A wild cheer burst from the men as they leaped into the surf, and with their young officer and Steve ahead made for the shore.

"Make way for the other men and just get your breath, my lads," sang out the officer. "Sit down and keep close to the rock. They cannot see us here, and we shall be able to form up for a charge. Ha! Look at the brigadier. He is following. Did anyone see his signals?"

He looked round anxiously, passing his eyes from face to face till he came to Steve. The latter nodded, while a smile played on his lips.

"I fancy I did," he laughed. "The brigadier was in a hot place, and saw that his men would be shot to pieces. I rather think I saw him signal to the whole flotilla to retire."

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This, in fact, was the case. General Wolfe, seeing the narrowness of the beach, its difficult approach, and the batteries which commanded it, had signalled for the flotilla of boats to retire at once, for he was fearful of losing his men. But he was not the officer to allow a breach of discipline of this sort to arouse his anger. His boat came surging up to the rock upon which the first party had landed, and in a trice he was being carried ashore on the shoulders of a stalwart sailor.

"Well done! Well done, indeed, my lads. A very smart manœuvre, which may save the situation for us. Lucky none of you saw my signal."

There was a dry smile on his thin lips, and he looked at the young officer directly, causing him to flush to the roots of his hair.

"Now we shall turn those gentlemen out, my lads. Will any one follow me?"

There was a shout at that, a bellow of excitement, for the men had been roused by the small losses already suffered, and were stung by the fear of failure. In a trice they were lined up behind the brigadier, who faced round to inspect them, a simple cane his only weapon. And beside this gallant officer stood Steve and Jim, the latter looking grim and determined.

"What reg'lars can do, so kin I," he growled. "But I 'low as this fightin' in the open air enough to scare a chap as is used to the forest. Let's get ahead with the charge. I'm warm and ready."

So were the men. Their blood was thoroughly up. They gripped their muskets, and held the bayonets levelled with their chests. Then the brigadier gave the word, and the troops, now all collected, save for those who had been hit, or who had been drowned in the surf, gave a shout and set off towards the intrenchments held by the French.

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"Steady, boys. Here are some of their grenadiers. Let the left flanking company get down and open fire. Steady. Drive them back, or they will take us in the rear."

The brigadier brought the column to a halt for a few moments, while the company selected sent out its riflemen, for a company of French grenadiers had suddenly put in an appearance. However, the English soldiers were not to be gainsaid on this particular day. There were a number of defeats to be wiped out. The memory of Braddock's defeat was still fresh, while Fort William Henry and its dastardly massacre was always before them. Those skirmishers fired a hail of bullets into the grenadiers sent down by the enemy to oppose the landing, and then, finding that their powder was damped by the sea-water, for very few of the men had escaped a drenching, they clapped bayonets to their muzzles, gave a fierce shout, and

heads down charged the enemy, the long and terrible weapon, which they knew so well how to wield, held well in advance.

Meanwhile the column, thanks to Jim's sagacity and to the sharpness of the ensign and of the other two commanders of boats who had followed to the spit of rock, lay out of range of the French cannon and musketry fire. The enemy lying in their rifle pits and trenches above could not see them, and were forced to remain idle while the company of grenadiers they had sent down attempted the impossible task of turning the invaders back. Nor did it improve their steadiness when they saw these same grenadiers flying back for their lives, a draggled and drenched crew of red coats charging after them, with bayonets flashing in the June sun and shouts of triumph on their lips. For that sight gave them an idea of what they might expect in a very few minutes, and caused many to have doubts. Brigadier-General Wolfe did not give them long before showing them his intentions.

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"We will charge now," he sang out, standing there before the column as cool as an iceberg, while he swished the air with his ridiculous little cane. "There are batteries, with some hundreds of men to defend them. We are about to take those batteries and to chase the French back to the walls of their fort."

There was a shout from the officers, who had by now got their companies into order, a shout which was taken up deliriously by the men. The brigadier turned, waved a signal, and set off steadily round the spit of rock. Then he broke into a trot, and as soon as the companies swung round from the shelter, they wheeled so as to face the enemy's position, opened out a little, preserving wonderful steadiness in spite of the bullets and round shot hurtling about their ears, and then broke into a fast run which very soon changed into a most determined and furious charge. The men's blood was undoubtedly up. All thought of personal safety was gone. They forgot the fact that bullets were flying, forgot that they were drenched to the skin, and that their powder was wet, for they had no need for it now. This was a day for cold steel, and the thought of that, the determination to get up to those batteries, to fling the French back and punish those who had fired at the flotilla alone filled the minds of the men.

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"It 'ud do a lot of trappers a power of good to see 'em," shouted Jim, as with Steve beside him he swung out from the shelter of the rocks. "This air fightin'! This I 'low would take all the grit a backwoodsman's got, 'cos there's no cover. Air yer ready?"

He turned to find that Steve was not only ready, but was already rushing away from him. For our hero had caught the infection spread by these gallant fellows under Wolfe's command. He had no wish to kill. He felt only a huge desire to be amongst the very first to reach those batteries, come what might, and when he was there, not a Frenchman would dare to remain. He would see to that. He was armed with a sabre on this occasion, and dressed in the red coat and pantaloons of an officer who had died on the voyage from England. He felt more than ever now that he was an officer, to whom the men would look. And that thought, as well as his own natural dash and gallantry, stimulated him. He shouted with the loudest, swung his sabre above his head, and then raced through the bullets and the cannon shot. A low wall of rock stood in his way, and Brigadier Wolfe was in the act of scaling it. With one leap Steve stood on the summit. Then he turned, caught the brigadier by the arm and hoisted him up. The two were now ahead of the charging column.

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Brigadier Wolfe faced the tall young officer for a second, and coolly shook him by the hand, gripping his left, for Steve had his hilt in the right. The sight of such an act of coolness brought a frantic shout from the men. Steve turned to look at them for one brief moment, and noted the set expression of their faces, the grim, determined looks, the gaping nostrils and the heaving chests. Then, as the brigadier waved his cane, he faced the enemy again, and with a shout went on at the head of the men. A huge Frenchman, armed with a ponderous musket, suddenly shot up from behind a barricade, brought his piece to his shoulder, and aimed at our hero. There was a flash, the powder in the pan spluttered up into smoke, while the bullet swept within an inch of Steve's head, thudding heavily on something just behind him.

"Ef I don't get even with that ere chap, why, I ain't Huntin' Jim,"

shouted a voice at his elbow. "Jest wait a minute. Ha! Yer'd shoot me down. That's jest to make yer remember that I ain't so soft as to fall 'cos a bullet's happened to strike me."



"IN ANOTHER SECOND HE HAD BAYONETTED THE FRENCHMAN"

It was Jim undoubtedly, all his old backwoods coolness gone, all his cunning and his Indian ways forgotten in the excitement of this moment. His eyes were wide open, his lips set close together, while rage was written on every feature. The stolid hunter had been struck through the fleshy part of one arm, and the sting of the wound had served only to increase his excitement. With a bound he passed Steve, and in another second he had bayoneted the Frenchman, bringing the grenadier to the ground with a terrific crash. By then the head of the column was up at the batteries, and for a few moments a desperate hand to hand contest was fought, while the gunners endeavoured to fire their charges of grape into the midst of the rear of the column. However, English bayonets had before then driven the French off the field, and on this occasion our gallant fellows were not to be denied. They drove those of the enemy who dared to remain out of their rifle pits with their murderous bayonets, broke down and shattered their defence, and sent them racing for the fortress. Nor did that entirely satisfy them. They broke into more open order, and with Jim and Mac and Steve to lead, chased those fugitives to the very gates of the fortress, till reinforcements poured out of Louisbourg, and until the cannon of the fortress began to ply them with shot. Only then did they deign to retire, showing a defiant face to the enemy, now outnumbering them by many hundreds.

"Very gallantly done, lads," said the general, when the column was again drawn up, and the wounded had been seen to. "I congratulate officers and men on the brilliant dash which they have shown, and on having won a most valuable landing-place for our army. To-night you will have the place of honour in the general's published orders. Let me not forget to thank those gentlemen who have so recently come from a visit paid to the French in Quebec. Their gallantry and dash were most stimulating, while I myself owe some help to their leader."

There was a shout at that, for long ago the men had been made acquainted with Steve's history. But these men of the backwoods were as yet strangers to the majority of the attacking party, who had but lately arrived from England. They had heard many a time of their particular methods of fighting in the forests, of their cunning and of their value as scouts. It did them good to find that these same men could stand in the open and deliver a charge when bullets and round shot were flying, and when there was no cover to be obtained.

"I expect we shall soon have some of our old scouting work now," said Steve that night, as he and Jim and Mac sat under a tent which had been brought ashore, and discussed the action of the morning. "One of the first duties of the general will be to see that the country round about the fortress is clear, for there are many Indians about, and a canoe can easily be paddled across from the mainland. While we are scouting, the troops will be busily engaged in getting the guns ashore and making ready for a proper siege. That will be slow work, and I for one shall not care to take part in it."

Two mornings later our hero was sent for to the tent of Brigadier Wolfe.

"You will at once be attached to my light companies," he said, as Steve saluted. "Your friends will, of course, be with you, and you will do all you can to give instruction. The men had about two weeks' work at Halifax, but are, of course, very inexperienced. They are all young and active, and picked as marksmen."

On the following day, therefore, Steve and his friends walked over to the officer in command of these light infantry companies, and promptly set to work. On his advice the men were at once taken away from the camp, and divided into smaller parties, each of which was under one of the backwoodsmen, for Pete and Mr. Mainwaring had now come ashore. There was dense forest within easy reach, as well as some more open ground, on which, however, it was possible to find cover. And here for hours at a time the men were practised, till they were fairly proficient. Then one half was set to fight the other, the men being roused to such keenness by these methods that they hardly seemed to notice any fatigue.

"They are the fellows who will help us to win this war," said the brigadier a few days later, as he watched them at their work. "But now for my news. The rough seas are delaying the landing of stores, and until they are all ashore we cannot, of course, undertake to lay siege to the fortress. Meanwhile the general has ordered me to march round to the far side of the harbour and erect a battery there. I will take these companies. We start at daybreak to-morrow."

It would be tedious to narrate how Steve and his friends accompanied this expedition, and how, in spite of a galling fire from the batteries and the ships, General Wolfe managed to construct his earth-works and batteries at Lighthouse Point. It was a class of warfare which, like the attack on the cove, was entirely new to them, and all agreed in admiring the persistency and the cool bravery, not to say recklessness, of the soldiers.

That battery, in spite of the heavy fire poured upon it, silenced the French guns, and broke to pieces a battery on Goat Island in the middle of the harbour. Its fire was soon followed by the bellow of the huge siege guns which had now been brought ashore, and very soon the din about the fortress of Louisbourg was such that men were deafened, and Steve had never heard the like of it before. Sorties were delivered, and were promptly met and driven back. The siege was pressed vigorously, shot and shell pouring on the devoted place, while the politest messages passed between besiegers and besieged. Then the Canadians and their Indians outside our lines delivered their attack, an attack which Steve and the light regiments, now employed as scouts, were able to detect in good time and drive off easily.

And so a month passed, a month of endless cannonading, till the fortress was shattered, and the walls and buildings flying in fragments everywhere. The French were in desperate plight, and wisely agreed to surrender, having fought most gallantly. Thus the formidable fortress came into our hands, and Pitt's forward policy began to bring a long-looked for success. We had captured a place for long the greatest menace to our power in America, and with it had taken some six thousand soldiers and sailors, thus reducing the enemy's strength, while it set ten thousand of our own troops free to operate in other quarters. As for the fortress itself, it was of no use to us, and some two years later was torn to pieces and utterly dismantled. Hardly a stone of that fine costly place can be seen to-day.

Steve did not long remain at Cape Breton, for scouts were required at Ticonderoga, and an urgent message had been sent through to General Amherst to ask for a supply. Steve and his friends were sent, therefore, and arrived in the neighbourhood of Fort William

Henry, now reconstructed, only to hear the doleful tidings of a defeat, the effects of which required even more than the crowning victory at Louisbourg to counteract. For General Abercromby had made a most hopeless and inexcusable failure of his long projected attack on the French fort at Ticonderoga. Nor was this failure due to want of careful preparation, to unsuitable troops, or to lack of courage. Of the troops there were plenty and to spare. Had the attack been delivered by the same troops again, properly led over ground which had been carefully reconnoitred, there would have been a different result, in spite of the stubborn and wonderful gallantry of the French. But Abercromby made no use of the excellent scouting material which he possessed. He made no use of the few guns dragged to this part with infinite labour, but left them six miles in his rear. He had six thousand troops, all burning to avenge the massacre at Fort William Henry, and he launched his regiments one after another over open ground in a frontal attack upon the *chevaux de frise* which the French had erected. Time and again gallant souls dashed forward, only to be beaten down and slain by the bullets and cannon of unseen marksmen and gunners. Why, the youngest subaltern, inexperienced in war, would have ordered all further attacks to cease till he had brought up his guns and smashed those formidable but flimsy defences to pieces. Not so General Abercromby. He had shown no lack of astuteness and organising ability up till now. But at this the critical time in the actions of this expedition he ruined all by his helpless and singularly unsuitable tactics, or, rather, by his absolute disregard of the simplest of tactics.

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That bitter defeat cost us two thousand men, for the most part men of the regular regiments, though the colonial militia did their duty admirably. Indeed, as has been said, there was never any lack of bravery. The soldiers one and all were filled with the utmost courage and zeal.

Steve and his little band soon found more work to do, for Bradstreet, a popular and very dashing New England officer serving with Abercromby, jumped at the news which Mr. Mainwaring was able to give. Frontenac, a French port at the entrance to Lake Ontario, and almost opposite the forts at Oswego which Montcalm had captured and burned, had for a long time been of the utmost importance to the French. But to meet Abercromby at Ticonderoga, and Amherst at Louisbourg, the French had been compelled to denude it of its troops. Bradstreet at once took advantage of this news. With Steve and Jim leading his forces, he went by river and land, taking the Mohawk route, and after a long struggle reached the lake. From there he paddled across to Frontenac, captured the place, for there were only a hundred soldiers to defend it, and promptly burned the forts and town, together with some armed vessels lying off it, and enormous stores of food and armaments, powder and ball, which had been collected there. In fact, he delivered a blow of the utmost consequence, and one which helped not a little to counteract the defeat we had received at Ticonderoga. Let any reader who may happen to sail into Lake Ontario just glance at the fine city of Kingston, and remember that it was there, on the site which this city occupies, that Steve and his friends, with Bradstreet in command, inflicted a blow on the French which was of the utmost consequence, and which helped to make this eventful year of 1758 stand out prominently in our annals.

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To their success was added that of Forbes, sent against Fort Duquesne. It will be remembered that it was here that Braddock had met with defeat, and that the fort from its position was necessarily a thorn in our sides. Forbes was faced with stupendous difficulties, not the least of which was the terrible weather he met with. It seemed, indeed, as if he would never reach his destination, for he had miles of forest to traverse, and a host of undisciplined troops to deal with. So certain did it appear that he would not persevere in his attempt, that the French reduced their garrison. However, Forbes, in spite of ill-health, was a man of bull-dog determination, and he eventually reached the fort, took it, and changed its name to that of Pitt. The thriving city of Pittsburg now occupies the site where Duquesne stood.

One other item has to be mentioned in the description of this year's doings. A gallant Moravian missionary, one Post by name, offered to undertake a journey to the Ohio Indians, who, led by the French, had for so long been harrying our Alleghany frontiers. This brave

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man went not once only, but twice to these people, at the risk of almost certain torture and death, and finally persuaded the fierce braves to give up their alliance with the French, to cease their slaughter, and to bury the hatchet with the six nations. For the tide of war was changing. The tale of Frontenac, and of Louisbourg, had reached to the farthest wigwams, and no Indian existed who did not desire above all things to be on the winning side, the side to which most reward and plunder would come.

Thus our generals found themselves with a huge weight off their minds. Ticonderoga still existed, and it alone barred our advance up those lakes, St. George and Champlain, to Canada itself. The winter of 1758 found Pitt with another policy, pushing on his preparations for carrying it out when the spring should have come to break up the ice in the mighty St. Lawrence. Quebec was to be the objective, and Brigadier-General Wolfe, the silent, active leader, was to command. Nor was Steve to be left out of the expedition, for hardly had the month of May, 1759, come when a message reached him.

"To Captain Steve Mainwaring," it read, "From General Wolfe. Please make it convenient to travel to New York at the earliest date, and from there join the fleet making for Quebec. I have urgent need of your services."

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Steve packed his clothing, took Jim and Mac and his father with him, and set off at once, eager to see again the fair city in which he had been so long a prisoner.

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Chapter XIX

Wolfe makes his Last Attempt

"Listen to that, boys. There is music for you," said Mr. Mainwaring some weeks after he, Steve, and the two trappers had set out for New York. "Listen to our guns, and do not say after this that we shall be too late. Quebec is not to be taken in a day. The city is one of the very strongest, and has a big army to defend it. I said long ago that we should be in time to see and take part in the crowning act of this campaign."

"And you've stuck to that through thick and thin, Judge," chimed in Jim, standing at the rail of the ship, and looking his old self again, for the hunter was dressed at this moment just as he had been on that day when we first made his acquaintance. Steve, too, was in his trapper's clothing, looking taller and broader now after his many months of campaigning, and bearing on his face more character perhaps than ever before, for the anxieties of command had developed the natural self-assurance which he had possessed from the first.

"I am delighted to feel that we are here at last, and in time, too, father," he said. "I confess that I had doubts about reaching Quebec before the city was taken, for we have been so long delayed. But here we are, and, of course, the very first thing will be to seek an interview with the general. I have my letter, and that should gain an interview for me. As to the city being easily captured, I am sure that our troops have their work cut out for them."

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The little party was gathered on the deck of a small transport which they had picked up at Louisbourg. For having arrived at New York in accordance with the wish expressed in General Wolfe's letter, they had taken the first trader for Louisbourg, and had had the huge misfortune of running into big seas and nasty weather. Indeed, as if to make the task of our general harder, this season proved to be an extremely late one. Spring was very long in coming, and the expedition, which sailed from England early in the year, was much delayed by contrary winds. Even when it did arrive in the harbour of Louisbourg the seas were encumbered with ice floes, and ice was floating thickly in the harbour.

The same difficulties had been encountered by the ship on which Steve and his friends sailed, and when at length they reached Louisbourg the fleet had sailed for Quebec some weeks before, while their own arrival there was delayed further by having to await a transport. But here they were at last, and within a few hours were landed at the huge camp which the general had pitched on the western end of the Isle of Orleans. Promptly they went to the quartermaster-general to report themselves.

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"Better late than never, gentlemen," he said, as Steve handed him his letter, "and I can promise you a very warm welcome from our leader, that is, as soon as he is recovered. He has very bad health as a general rule, as you may know, and now I regret to say that he is down with an attack of fever, and lies in bed over at the camp by the Montmorenci. Now, I shall allot tents for you, and you will draw rations in the ordinary course. You must find wood for yourselves, and must appoint your own cook."

"That ain't no difficulty to men as has been cooking their own grub all their lives," said Jim, with a laugh. "Reckon I'll take that 'ere job till the time comes for fightin'. Then I'm off to try what a charge feels like again. General, fightin' in the forest ain't nothin' for excitement compared with the rush of these 'ere soldiers. A man feels a man when he sees the enemy plain before him, and when he's made up his mind to reach 'em and turn 'em out whatever their numbers."

"The kind of spirit which I fancy fills our gallant fellows," came the smiling answer. "If I make no mistake you are Hunting Jim."

"You've struck it, General. That's me."

"Then I have heard of your dash at the landing on Cape Breton Island. You will have other chances, my man, for Quebec has still to be taken. Now I wish to warn you. Those guns are being fired from Point Lévis, just opposite the city, and should you make in that

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direction you will do wisely to keep well in rear of our batteries. The work there is rather warm at times. As to your duties. You will, of course, wait till you have seen the general. But there is much for you to do. We have Rogers, a gallant colonial, and Stark, and others, too, in command of bands of trappers and scouts like yourselves, and for weeks they have been in the forests, meeting the French irregulars and their Indians. There have been some very fierce encounters between the different parties, and I am glad to say that our men have driven the French and their allies back, and have penetrated even as far as Montreal. You might very well join one of those bands."

"And what of the fighting here, sir?" Steve ventured to ask. "We rather feared that we should arrive too late, for we have been very much delayed. It is already September."

"And very soon we shall have to be returning, for the winter will be upon us. But it will not come to that, I hope. Frankly, gentlemen, we are face to face with what would appear to be an insuperable difficulty. We have made attempts on the city without success, and our leader is almost in despair. As to what we have actually done, we brought our fleet right up the river, much to the amazement of the French, who have never dared to do such a thing with their own ships. That proves that our navy is very capable, and, indeed, we owe a tremendous amount to it. We pitched our camp here promptly, while the fleet lay off the island, and were almost at once in difficulties, for the French sent down fire ships. However, our tars made short work of the flaring ships, and, indeed, enjoyed the fun of towing them away. Then we captured Point Lévis, and commenced to build batteries. Our guns have been at work, just as you hear them now, almost incessantly for eight weeks, and the lower parts of the city are crushed to pieces. But still the garrison is there, with strongly entrenched lines stretching east from the city to the Montmorenci, and known to us as the lines of Beauport, while there is also a force watching the ford which exists higher up the river Montmorenci. Our aim is, of course, to get on to that plateau, and on one occasion we landed troops below it, close to the falls, and failed to gain a footing above, though our men made a gallant and very reckless charge, without having received orders to do so.

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"At the present moment we are contenting ourselves with a constant cannonade, and with feints here and there, while our ships, some of which have passed Point Lévis, and run up above the city, drift down during the night, thus making the French think that we may attack at any moment. Prideaux has captured Niagara, which has resulted in a movement of Montcalm's troops, Bougainville having been sent with 1500 men to Cap Rouge, which, you know, is some seven miles west of Quebec, at the end of the ridge which faces the river there, and offers an insuperable barrier to us."

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"The one on which we lay hidden for a week, or rather where my friends took me after they had rescued me from prison," broke in Steve. "I remember the ridge well. The heights above are known as the Plains of Abraham."

"You recollect the ridge, sir? How do you mean?" demanded the quartermaster-general suddenly, a faint flush spreading over his face.

"We descended to the river that way," came the answer. "There is a rough path, which we scrambled down during the darkness. A canoe was waiting for us at the bank, and we set off in her. After that we captured a ship and——"

"Stop! One moment!"

To Steve's amazement the quartermaster-general came a step closer, and stared at him with a curious expression of excitement.

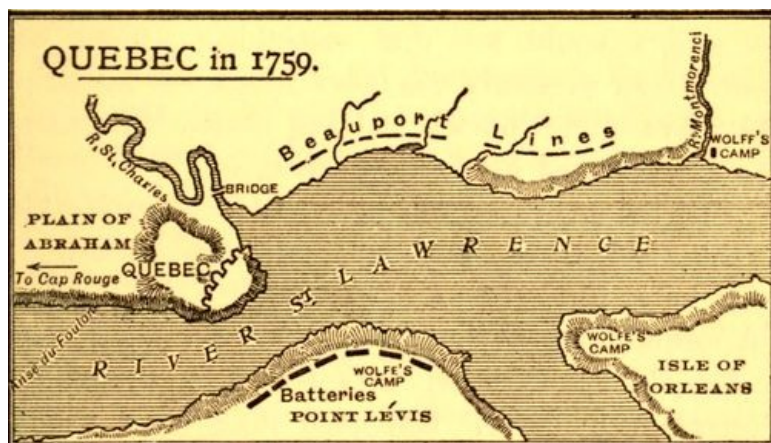
"You clambered down that ridge, sir?" he asked. "Up to this we have considered that an impossible feat. Are you sure?"

"Certain. I was a prisoner for some months, and was allowed great liberty. I have scrambled down from the plains many a time, and could clamber up again. What defences do they have there?"

"None. There are fifteen hundred men at Cap Rouge, as I have just explained, and here and there are guards to watch the ridge. But Montcalm believes, just as we have always believed, that to scale those heights is impossible. You could clamber up? You are certain? You could find a place?"

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"I am positive," came the swift answer. "Give me a boat in which to run up river and inspect, and I am sure I can find a place."



QUEBEC in 1759.

By now there was little doubt of the excitement into which the officer had worked himself. His face was red and white by turns, his hands were clenched, and he strode to and fro as if he could not remain still.

"I will do it," he said. "The general is ill, very ill, I fear, though he is reported to be a little better this morning. But this is important information, and he must have it at once. Be good enough to accompany me."

He beckoned to Steve, turned, and strode to the river, where there was a boat belonging to one of the men-of-war, fully manned, and at once the officer stepped into her, Steve taking his place beside him.

"Pull for the Montmorenci, lads," he cried. "This is urgent business, and your officer must excuse my taking his boat. Let one of your number stay behind to tell him that the quartermaster-general was compelled to borrow it."

The oars splashed and the boat put off into the river. Then she surged over to the far shore, for the sailors could see that something urgent was afoot. And presently the bows struck the far bank, and Steve found himself walking beside the general to a hut situated in the English camp.

"Tell the general I am here and wish to see him on the most urgent business," said the officer. "I know he is ill, but this news cannot wait."

A minute later Steve was gripping the feeble hand of his old commander, who lay in a camp bed, prostrate with fever. But even though he was ill and suffering he could remember old friends, and at once greeted our hero.

"Our escaped prisoner," he smiled, somewhat wanly, "come at my bidding, but very late, I fear."

"We were delayed, sir," answered Steve. "We feared that we should arrive too late."

"Would that you had, my lad. But Quebec is still not ours, and I have grave doubts about taking it. Montcalm has sixteen thousand men to defend the place, to say nothing of the enormous natural obstacles which aid him. I have seven thousand men, gallant fellows every one, and finely equipped and disciplined. If it were possible they would have captured the city for us by now. But it is not. I see no way out of the difficulty."

"Knowing that, I ventured to bring this young officer with me," said the quartermaster suddenly. "General, Steve Mainwaring was a prisoner at large and knows every foot of the surroundings of Quebec. He can tell you of a place where an attempt might be made."

Wolfe shot up on his couch as if he had been stung, and stared at our hero with blood-shot eyes, which plainly showed the fever from which he was suffering.

"You know of a place!" he cried eagerly. "Where? Where?"

"I mentioned that I had escaped down the cliff which falls from the

Plains of Abraham. There are several tracks down it, and one I often used when I was a prisoner is known as the Anse du Foulon. Men could climb there, General, if the place were pointed out to them."

"Will you find it? Will you lead the men there?"

The hollow eyes of the general stared at Steve eagerly, while the sick man sat on the edge of his couch as if about to stand.

"I could," was Steve's emphatic answer, "I or any of the three friends with me, one of whom is my father. If you will give us the order, sir, we will carry out the duty, and will do our best to take a party to the top so as to hold the place. Then others can ascend."

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"You shall go at once. The quartermaster-general will make all arrangements for me. You shall be taken aboard one of the sloops of war, and sail up the river. That will allow you to get your bearings. When you have identified the place come back to Point Lévis. I shall be there, and we will make final preparations."

The general dismissed them with a nod, and as they left the hut they heard him calling to his servant.

"A gallant gentleman, cursed with execrable health, but possessed of wonderful spirit and ability," said the quartermaster-general. "Captain, your news will do more for him than any amount of rest or physic. Find this path for him, and our leader will be happy."

Indeed, our hero seemed to have arrived in the very nick of time, and as a result perhaps of his news, the general was soon out of his bed, and making his way from point to point, inspecting the batteries and camps, infusing new spirit into the men, and causing the enemy many a qualm. The news of a possible attempt on the Heights of Abraham was kept a dead secret while Steve was engaged on his search, and every effort made to harass the French. In order to carry out this programme effectively the camp at Montmorenci was broken up, and the troops brought to Point Lévis or to the Isle of Orleans. Then a garrison was selected for these two posts, and all save a regiment of seven hundred men secretly embarked upon the ships of the fleet, the men who remained being posted close to Point Lévis. Thenceforward, for a few days the French had many an alarm, for fleets of boats, filled with troops from the camp at Orleans, or from that at Point Lévis, put off from the bank as if about to make an attack, only, however, to return as promptly, for it must be remembered that they were the only available garrison now for those points. Ships opened fire on the city from various stations, while the fleet massed up by Cap Rouge, and so many feints were made that Bougainville was severely harassed. As for Montcalm, the brave and able commander of the French, he saw in all these feints a projected attempt on the mouth of the St. Charles river, under the very shadow of Quebec, and disposed his troops accordingly.

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Meanwhile Steve, his father, and the two trappers had embarked on a sloop, and having sailed during the night up to Cap Rouge, drifted down river on the following day. Twice in succession they repeated the performance.

"I am satisfied now that we have found the place," said our hero, when sent for by the general. "From the river here the land looks so different that at first we were a little uncertain. But we have picked up our bearings, and there can be no doubt. It remains now only to make sure that the enemy is not above, and if they are there, to get such a hold that they cannot drive us down before reinforcements arrive. May we have a canoe, General? and whenever you select the night for the attack, we will slip ashore, find the path, and signal to the men."

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"We are ready now," came the answer, for Wolfe was nothing if not eager and impetuous. "But the weather is against us. It is dull and inclined to rain, and that, in my opinion, would spoil our chances. We want a fine night. Return to the sloop, Steve, and when the hour comes I will send for you."

Steve left the general stalking restlessly backwards and forwards in front of his tent, looking wan and ill after his attack of fever. But Wolfe was full of energy and determination. This coming attempt, he felt, was to be his last. It was to be the one great stroke upon which the success of the whole campaign depended, and nothing should cause failure that care and attention beforehand could obviate. He went aboard the fleet, and himself studied the face of that cliff up

which his battalions were to clamber. Then he published his orders, gave his final instructions, and sent a short note to Steve.

"The weather is settled now, and the night will be fine," he wrote on the twelfth of September. "Carry out your plan to-night. As soon as it is dark make for the shore, and find this path. When you are sure that you are near it lie close down by the water and listen. My men leave three hours after it is dark. Show them a lantern as they pass you."

That was all. This General Wolfe, a keen organiser himself, was one of those officers who had the happy knack of rapidly discovering the good points of those who served him. Once assured of an officer's discretion, he could give an order and leave it to the officer in question to carry it out in every detail without interference. And now he sent his final orders to Steve, intimating to him that on his discretion depended the success or failure of the whole expedition.

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"Then we will make our preparations," said our hero, when he had read the note. "We already have a canoe, and I advise that we put some provisions into her, for the troops may be delayed. We will go alone, and will take knives and tomahawks. A musket might go off accidentally, and in any case we shall be glad to be free of the weight."

"Another o' Steve's 'cute ideas," cried Jim. "This 'ere game as we've got air the biggest I reckon of any as we've ever tackled, 'cos, yer see, ef we make jest the smallest mistake and the French hear us, waal, what's the good of troops? They'll be down upon us at once."

"But not in force," answered Steve quickly. "Remember, Jim, that Montcalm has the majority of his men either in the city or in the Beauport lines. There are men at Cap Rouge, but only posts along the cliff we are to climb. We will find the path, clamber up it, and leave two at the top to watch. If a French sentry should come along and hear the noise made by the men as they disembark, those two must silence him. After that it will take only a few minutes to get some of our fellows up, and then Montcalm will want an army. Our boys will not be turned off the cliff by anything less. Jim, you and Mac will take that post up at the top. Father and I will descend and give the signal."

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Darkness had fallen barely more than a quarter of an hour when the party of four prepared to leave the sloop. Those aboard her now knew what was about to happen. Indeed, the English troops aboard the fleet were aware of the attempt about to take place, and were already silently embarking in the boats secured to the ships' sides. As to the French, they still believed that an attack in force was impending at the mouth of the St. Charles, or against the Beauport lines, for the feints of the fleet at Cap Rouge had ceased entirely, while Montcalm did not even suspect that the bulk of Wolfe's army was aboard. There was a curious calm up the river, where there had been so much energy a few days ago, while down stream, at Point Lévis, the guns thundered even more loudly than before, and there was very obvious activity at the camp on the Isle of Orleans. Indeed, perched as they were high up in Quebec, and the ridge on either hand, the French could see every movement of the English, unless cloaked by the darkness. Montcalm had been an attentive watcher, and on this very night his charger stood ready saddled, so that the commander might gallop along the Beauport lines, wherever circumstances might call him. Little did Montcalm think that it was towards the opposite direction that his horse's hoofs would carry him.

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"Good luck, boys. Remember we're waiting. Remember that every man aboard the fleet looks to you to-night, and that every mother's son in Old England will sing your praises if you are successful."

The captain of the sloop, a rough old sea dog, gripped each one of the party by the hand as they prepared to step into the canoe. Then he gave Steve a bag containing a dark lantern, flint, and steel.

"Light it ashore," he said earnestly. "Even the best lamp of this sort might show a glimmer, and the French would see it. Get under cover when you strike the flint, lad. Don't forget. Under cover."

There was a faint murmur from the men as Steve dropped gently into the canoe, while the clatter of booted troops lowering themselves into the boats of the fleet came softly to the ear.

"Push off," he whispered. "Out paddles. Jim, take post in the stern."

It was a silent party which floated down the mighty St. Lawrence, for up above there might be many listening ears. The paddles dipped ever so gently, while at the stern Jim sat stolidly, his nerves strung to high tension, for this was new work again, his paddle deep in the river, and his eyes following the faint line of the ridge.

"Put her in. We have floated far enough, and, I think, are nearly opposite. H-u-u-s-h!"

There was a sound high up above the river, and close at hand, for the canoe was now within a few yards of the bank. Then, startlingly loud on this calm night came the voice of a sentry.

"*Qui va là?* Who goes there? Reply or I fire."

"Be silent. We are a provision boat. You will show the enemy our position."

Quick as thought Steve gave the answer in French, and at once the figure which had stood dimly silhouetted against the clear sky and the stars above disappeared.

"Paddle back a little," whispered Steve, when the man had gone. "Now lie off the bank for a while, dipping your paddles gently. In a few minutes we will drop down again."

They took their frail craft some two hundred yards up stream again, making out into the river as they did so. Then, having allowed some minutes to pass, they struck for the bank again, floated down without using a paddle, and grounded noiselessly. There was no need now for talking. Steve stepped softly ashore, and was followed by his comrades. Together they lifted the canoe, and laid it on the bank some yards from the brink. Then they turned their faces to the cliff, crept over the grass, and between bushes and brambles till they were at its foot, and then separated. Five minutes later they had gathered again at the same spot.

"Struck it, Cap'n," whispered Jim, a thrill of excitement in his usually even voice. "I jest hit nicely on it. Come."

On hands and knees now the four crept along at the foot of the cliff till Jim stopped them. They turned to the left abruptly, and as Steve felt the ground his fingers detected the hollow track which he had used on former occasions when a prisoner at Quebec. They were on it now, Jim leading still, and Mac in rear, clambering through the darkness.

"H-u-u-u-sh! What in thunder air thet?"

Jim spoke in a whisper, and Steve, who followed closely after him, squeezed up to his side. There was a mass of wood and earth clinging to the face of the cliff, and entirely blocking a portion of the zig-zag Anse du Foulon.

"Get round it," whispered Steve, when he had run his fingers over the obstruction. "Quietly! I think I heard someone moving up above."

Creeping to the right, and making use of every possible stump and rock, Jim clambered round the obstruction, and reached the path again. Another minute and he had gained the summit of the cliff, here some two hundred feet in height, and was stretched on the grass which clad the edge. And there the four lay listening for some few minutes.

"There's a sentry or two 'way over thar," whispered Jim, after a little while. "I can hear the tap of his boots, and what's thet?"

"A song. He is doing what many a sentry does to pass the hours of darkness. Humming a little tune all to himself. It's company to a man posted on such a lonely beat. Well, Jim, we'll go. Keep a bright look-out."

Steve and his father slipped from the edge, past Mac and Jim, and groped their way down the steep path. On any other occasion they would have placed their heels against the earth and slid, for the path gave little holding, while its steepness was lessened by the fact that it ran zig-zag across the face of the cliff. But a slide now would bring the sentries to that quarter, and so the two groped their way down till they reached the bottom. Then Mr. Mainwaring unstrapped a blanket which he had carried attached to his back, and he and Steve sat down beneath it, dragging the edges close to the grass. The rasp of a flint on steel followed, and within a few seconds the candle in their dark lantern was alight.

"Close the dark slide now, Steve," whispered Mr. Mainwaring. "I will take charge of the lamp while you watch. Then you can sing out when I am to expose the light. Remember, lad, you are in command of this little party."

He took the lamp and sat down close to the edge of the water, his eye fixed on the dark figure of his son. As for Steve, he stood like a rock, listening intently and watching the river. Ah! A voice broke from the summit of the cliff, the sing-song tones of which he recognised. It was the sentry again.

"Who goes there? Halt, or I fire!"

And almost at once, in the most excellent French, came the answer. "Silence, fool, can you not see that we are provision boats floating down to Quebec. Silence, I say!"

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The sentry was satisfied. He shouldered his arm and strode off, complimenting himself on his sharpness. As for the boats which he had detected, they were, in fact, the leading craft of the flotilla which bore our troops, and the officer who answered in such excellent French was a Highlander, sent in advance for the very purpose, in case the necessity to reply to a challenge should arise. The time had come. Steve clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, a signal which his father instantly followed. There was the low squeak of the moving slide, and then a pencil of light shot out from the bank, to be extinguished in less than five seconds.

One, two, three, Steve counted the boats as they ran in to the bank and grounded. He ran forward, greeted the officer in command, and then turned to lead them. They reached the cliff, gained the track, and commenced to ascend. Hark! Above the faint noise made by the boots of this advance party, above the deep breathing of the men there came a sharp challenge from above.

"Who is there? Ah! I hear men moving down below, and there are boats. Fire!"

Then followed a sudden shriek, there was the sound of a conflict above, and within a few seconds a body crashed on the path some yards beneath the top of the ridge, rebounded, and fell with a sickening thud to the bank below. At the same instant a shot was fired, while shouts arose in the distance.

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"Charge. Up with yer, boys. We've got 'em. There ain't more then a score here. Up yer come, every one of yer."

Jim shouted the words, and as Steve clambered to the top, he came across the trapper standing to his full height, jubilant at the success of the leading party.

"Did yer hear that air varmint strike?" he asked coolly. "Yer did. Then you've nothing more to fear. It air that fellow Jules Lapon, who's come up against us this many times. Reckon he won't be troubling no longer."

Steve had barely time in which to grasp his meaning before the first of the men were up. And after them, struggling up the track and at a hundred and more other spots, came the rest of the troops, excited and eager, fiercely determined to win on this occasion. Reckless of danger, staunch to a man, and with childish confidence in their officers, these gallant fellows gained the heights, paused to gather breath, and then fell into their companies. When the daylight came, Montcalm looked with consternation to the Plains of Abraham. For Wolfe was there with four thousand three hundred seasoned and determined men, who stood eagerly awaiting the expected battle.

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Chapter XX

The Plains of Abraham

The sun, rising in all its early autumn splendour on that eventful thirteenth of September, 1759, looked down upon an historic scene which England should never forget. The slanting rays pierced the mists overhanging the side reaches of the St. Lawrence, and slowly disclosed to view the promontory on which the city of Quebec was built, now no longer that fairy place which Steve had known it, but a mangled heap of ruins, with debris of fallen houses, convents, and barracks choking the tortuous streets. The lower portions of the city were gone, while above, where the cannon shot from Point Lévis had failed to reach, the batteries and walls stood out prominently on this fair morning, as defiant as ever, frowning upon the English camp on the Isle of Orleans, and upon the two long plateaux on either hand. There was turmoil in this upper city. Soldiers and civilians were rushing aimlessly about, horsemen galloped from the walls with frantic messages, while Montcalm, that gallant soldier, discussed the situation with the Marquis Vaudreuil, governor of Canada.

The news had just reached the city, and as the French commander looked towards the Plains of Abraham, spying them through his glass, he saw that it was only too true.

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"At last," he said, "they have outwitted us, these fine Englishmen and their persevering leader. They are waiting for our soldiers. I must go."

In his own heart Montcalm knew in what a desperate plight he and his force were, for he had already learned that the enemy who had for so long faced the city were trained men, veterans, determined to win.

"We have a breathing space," said General Wolfe, looking haggard on this early morning as he stood surrounded by his officers. "Let the men lie down and eat their rations. And send for Captain Steve Mainwaring and those gallant friends who helped us last night."

He stood, his glass to his eye, watching the distant city and the men bustling about the walls. Then he turned to his own battalions and inspected them critically.

"They will not fail me," he said, in tones of the utmost confidence. "Though they are but a few more than four thousand, they will beat these French. But I must remember that there are enemies in front and behind."

Wolfe was, in fact, in a precarious position, had the French but known it, for by placing his army on the Plains of Abraham, within little more than half a mile of the city, he had wedged his force in between Montcalm's city garrison and the soldiers holding the Beauport lines, and the force, now amounting to over two thousand, which held Cap Rouge under command of Bougainville. These separate bodies of troops might march to attack him at the same moment, and he would find himself assailed in front and rear, a very serious position for so small a force as he possessed. However, to the brave many things are possible, and it happened that Wolfe's daring tactics on this occasion threw the enemy into hopeless confusion. The guards along that ridge where the Anse du Foulon had been ascended rushed with their information to Quebec, shouted the alarm, and caused Montcalm hastily to gather troops from the city and the Beauport lines, where he had imagined the attack would be delivered. In the flurry of the moment no one thought of Bougainville and his men, and while the fate of Canada lay in the balance, this officer remained within six miles of Wolfe's position, ignorant of what had happened, and expecting hourly an attack in force on his own entrenchments. Not till the cannon roared and the volume of musketry fire reached his ear did he gather what was happening, and then it was too late. Even then it is doubtful whether Bougainville would have been right in leaving the post entrusted to him, for cannon were for ever booming in the neighbourhood of Quebec.

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"Gentlemen, at such a time I can say little to show my appreciation of your conduct," said General Wolfe as Steve and his comrades

ranged up before him and were closely surrounded by the officers. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart, for you have given me and these fine fellows of ours our opportunity. You shall see that we will take the fullest advantage of it."

He shook them each warmly by the hand, and then turned to watch the enemy. As for our hero, he went back to the ranks with burning cheeks, feeling that there was nothing he would not do for his commander.

"There's goin' to be some of the old work to-day," said Jim, as he munched at a hunch of bread which he had brought in his pocket. "Cap'n, set an eye over thar to our left. Do yer see?"

"There are Indians and Canadian irregulars filing off into the bush," came the answer. "They will creep closer, and open fire from the cover. Jim, we will collect a few of the rangers, and do our best to hold those men in check."

A number of scouts and trappers attached to the regulars had returned to camp two days before, and these had only now put in an appearance, having crossed the river with the seven hundred troops left just above Point Lévis. Steve at once went to their leader, pointed out that the enemy were massing their irregulars in the bush to the left of our troops, and asked if he would obtain orders to operate against them.

"Certainly," was the answer. "It is just the work for us."

The stalwart leader of backwoodsmen went off at a run to the general, and very soon the trappers, with Steve, his father, Jim, and Mac, were creeping into the bush. By now Montcalm had gathered some troops together, and had massed them just outside the western wall of the city. At ten o'clock he was ready, and advanced with some three thousand five hundred men, to which some fifteen hundred irregulars must be added, these hanging on to his right flank and making for the thickets and bush and cornfields which lay on Wolfe's left flank.

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"The men will load with two bullets, and will reserve their fire till the enemy are at close quarters." The order, issued from the cool leader of our men, went down the ranks, and at once there was the ring and tinkle of ramrods as a second ball was pushed into place. Men powdered their pans and looked to their locks carefully, and then all eyes went to the enemy. They were less than half a mile away, and already their cannon, three of which had been hurriedly brought into position, were plying our ranks with their shot, while from the flank came a hail of bullets, sent by unseen marksmen.

Never in all his after-life could Steve forget that morning and the scene upon which he looked, for he lay at the edge of a scrap of cover replying to the fire of the French irregulars. The French line, consisting of regulars and militia, advanced steadily, firing when they came into range. They were mixed together in a heterogeneous mass, and their shouts and the clatter of their pieces filled the air. Steve watched them closely, and noted that already they were thrown into some confusion, though our troops had not yet fired a shot, for their militia backwoodsmen, once they had fired, threw themselves down on the ground to reload, causing gaps in the ranks. But still they were coming, looking formidable, and as if determined to succeed. Then he gazed at the English troops, and a glow of enthusiasm suffused his cheeks. For our men have won the unstinted praise of everyone for their action on that morning. They were formed in a triple line, and lay on the ground, waiting, while the cannon shot and bullets plunged in amongst them, killing and maiming many. Here and there stood an officer, talking quietly to his men, joking, laughing, keeping their temper in hand, as our officers have always known how to do. But the time for action had come. Wolfe, calm and patient, yet itching to commence operations, walked to the front of the Louisbourg Grenadiers and lifted his cane.

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They were up. As one man the English regiments scrambled to their feet, lined up, and brought their pieces down to the charge.

"Remember orders. Men, hold your fire till the word is given."

The officers could be heard calling to the men while they dressed the lines for the coming charge. Ah! Wolfe was advancing. Steve saw him wrapping a handkerchief about his wrist, which had been shattered by a ball. The French were close at hand now. Men could catch the gleam of bayonets, and could see into one another's eyes.

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But there was not a sound from the English. They still advanced, silent and awe-inspiring. They were within forty yards when the signal was given, officers stepped to the flanks of their companies, a loud command was heard, and in an instant a line of flame spouted from the ranks, while the crash of the muskets sounded more like the discharge of cannon than of smaller weapons. Then, indeed, did our men shout. Their voices deafened the air, for they cheered enthusiastically. As for the French, they were thrown into instant confusion. Huge gaps were torn in their ranks, while men fell in all directions. They stood spellbound for the most part, while some of their militia fled, for this was almost the first time in this momentous campaign that they had stood face to face with our men.

"Load again. Ready. Present! Fire!"

The order went rolling down our thin ranks, and again Steve heard the clink and ring of the ramrods. Then came a second rattling volley, the bullets crashing into the French ranks. Hurrah! Our men were advancing again. The bayonets were breast high, while the broadswords of the Highlanders flashed in the sun. Another shout went down the ranks, and then there was heard the clatter of bayonet on bayonet, the hoarse cheers of Highlanders, and the frantic shouts of New England lads, and men from Old England. The French held their ground for a moment, bravely contesting the path. Then they turned, broke into small parties, and for the most part fled, a few veterans here and there standing shoulder to shoulder to the last.

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But where was Wolfe? The Indians and Canadians were flying with their comrades now, and Steve was no longer required on the flank. He slung his musket over his shoulder, and went off at a run till a small gathering of officers attracted his attention. Wolfe, the gallant, lion-hearted officer had been hit in the wrist at the commencement of the action, and afterwards in the groin and through the lung. He was mortally wounded, and called to Lieutenant Browne. "Support me," he cried, "lest my gallant fellows should see me fall."

The officer was too late, and arrived at the general's side to find him on the ground. Then a Mr. Henderson and Colonel Williamson arrived, while Steve came on the scene a second or so later. Together they lifted the poor general and carried him to the rear, where they laid him gently down again, for he was in great pain and almost unconscious.

"They run! See how they run!" cried an officer.

The words seemed to rouse the dying man. "Who run?" he asked eagerly, but with feeble voice.

"The enemy, sir. Egad, they give way everywhere!"

"Go one of you, my lads," said Wolfe, "with all speed to Colonel Burton, and tell him to march down to the St. Charles river and cut off the retreat of the fugitives to the bridge."

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Those were almost his last words. Even as he lay dying this fine officer thought of his duty and of his country. He turned on his side, exclaimed, "God be praised, I now die in peace," and becoming unconscious, he died within a few minutes. Wolfe had won fame indeed. His last hours of life had been devoted to the welfare of his country, and this crowning stroke had won Quebec, had wrecked the French power, and given to England another colony, a gem which shines in our crown as brightly as do any. Many and many a winter has come and gone since Wolfe laid down his life on those Plains of Abraham, the maple leaf has gladdened the eye with its wonderful autumn tints on many an occasion, while thousands of our population have blessed the man who helped to win us this fine province. Let England and her sons not forget. It is to devoted heroes such as Wolfe and his officers and soldiers that she owes in great part this flourishing empire over the seas.

Montcalm, the brave commander of the French, was also wounded on this field, and died on the following morning. An obelisk stands now on the heights of Quebec in honour of these two men who won renown on the Plains of Abraham, and pays its tribute to their bravery in the following lines:

Mortem Virtus, Communem
Famam Historia,
Monumentum Posteritas
Dedit.

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Canada was won, but was not altogether in our hands, for Vaudreuil, the French governor, still had many troops and irregulars, not to mention the murdering Christian-Indians, at his beck and call, while there were garrisons on Lake St. George, and at Niagara and other forts during this summer. However, Prideaux marched against the last, and the place was taken, while Amherst, ascending Lake St. George, found Ticonderoga deserted and blown up, and Crown Point destitute of troops. The following year brought an attack on Quebec, then garrisoned by English, who were for a time in desperate plight. But a fleet ascended the river, and relieved them, while Amherst appeared upon the scene, took his troops to Montreal, and so overawed the French that they capitulated.

To describe all these actions, to tell of the gallant doings of our soldiers and the daring enterprises of Rogers and many another backwoods hero would be to occupy more space than is available. We are more concerned with the doings of Steve Mainwaring, now a captain in the British army, a post he had won by his gallantry. He fought his way with his old comrades right through this eventful campaign, and in the end returned to that settlement from which Jules Lapon had driven him. As to Lapon, his strange enmity was explained by Mr. Mainwaring on that very morning after Jim had struggled with the Frenchman and had tossed him to the bottom of the famous Anse du Foulon.

"He is gone, Steve," he said. "Let us speak well of the dead, whatever his faults. This misguided young man had a grudge against you and me, a grudge which must have caused him many an hour of bitterness. He was a connection of yours."

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"A connection?" Steve lifted his head in astonishment. He knew well that his mother had been French, but to hear that through her he was related to this Jules Lapon was astounding.

"Yes, a connection," said Mr. Mainwaring. "Listen, lad. Your father is the eldest son of a wealthy man living in England, a proud gentleman who had his own aims and views for his son. He had arranged, when I was only a boy, that I should marry the daughter of his old friend. I travelled, and in due course spent some months in France. There I met your mother and married her, much to my father's indignation. He disowned me after settling a sum of money on me so that I should not starve. As to your mother's parents, they were pleased with our union, I believe, but not so a Monsieur Lapon, your mother's cousin, and father of this unfortunate Jules. He was older than I, and for years had been the accepted suitor. My marriage to your mother raised his hate and anger, and for years he attempted to do me an injury. He sailed for Canada, for he was a poor man, while I made for America. There he discovered me, and before he died he set his son on my track. There, my boy, the mystery is explained. Had this Monsieur Lapon been wedded to your mother he would have been a rich man. Yes, rich, for her father left her a big property. That will be yours, Steve, when I am gone."

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Steve took his pipe and went away to think over the matter. His father's conversation had cleared up a mystery which had often troubled him. Now he understood why at times his father found need to absent himself. He had to go to France to look to the welfare of this property which had come to him through his wife. And now, too, he gathered why this unfortunate young Jules had followed him so often, and with such bitterness. He was a disappointed man, who considered that this English family had filched wealth from his own.

"And in the end his strange bitterness brought about his downfall," thought Steve. "He would have done better had he left us alone, and settled peacefully in the country. But there. I know now why he had a spite against me, and I forgive him."

In the course of years Mr. Mainwaring died, and Steve found himself a rich man, the owner of many broad acres in America, and of more in France and in England. But he never left his native country. The charm of the backwoods held him a prisoner, while he could never forsake Jim and Mac and Pete and many another

trapper, now grown old and feeble and dependent upon him. The storm of the American revolution, which lost us one of our finest possessions, passed over his head like a huge rumbling cloud, leaving him unharmed. For he remained a neutral, in spite of threats and fines, declining to fight against his old comrades-in-arms, though he was conscious that his fellow-colonists had many grievances. When that struggle was ended, Steve made his way up those historic lakes, St. George and Champlain, found the hillock which he and Jim and their comrades had defended, and fought his battles over again. That zig-zag path up the face of the ridge at Quebec attracted his attention, and he clambered to the summit of the Anse du Foulon. His steps took him to that spot where the gallant soul of Wolfe had departed, and once again he saw the triple line of the English, heard the roar of their double-shotted weapons, and watched the charge of those gallant fellows. He was a lad again. The years which had flown past since those momentous times were bridged for the moment, and once again he was Captain Steve Mainwaring, fighting for a noble cause, the friend and leader of a gallant band of trappers and redskins.

Transcriber's Notes

The transcriber made these changes to the text to correct obvious errors:

1. p. 120, "If all is right, --> If all is right,
2. p. 127, embarassment --> embarrassment
3. p. 136, separted --> separated
4. p. 184, tree." --> tree.
5. p. 229, "We will return --> We will return
6. p. 281, Levis --> Lévis
7. p. 300, own friends again. --> own friends again."
8. p. 372, Levis --> Lévis
9. p. 374, Levis --> Lévis
10. p. 382, Levis --> Lévis

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOW CANADA
WAS WON: A TALE OF WOLFE AND QUEBEC ***

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