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Along the Susquehanna; or,
The Silver Fox Patrol Caught
in a Flood, by active 1909-
1917 Herbert Carter**

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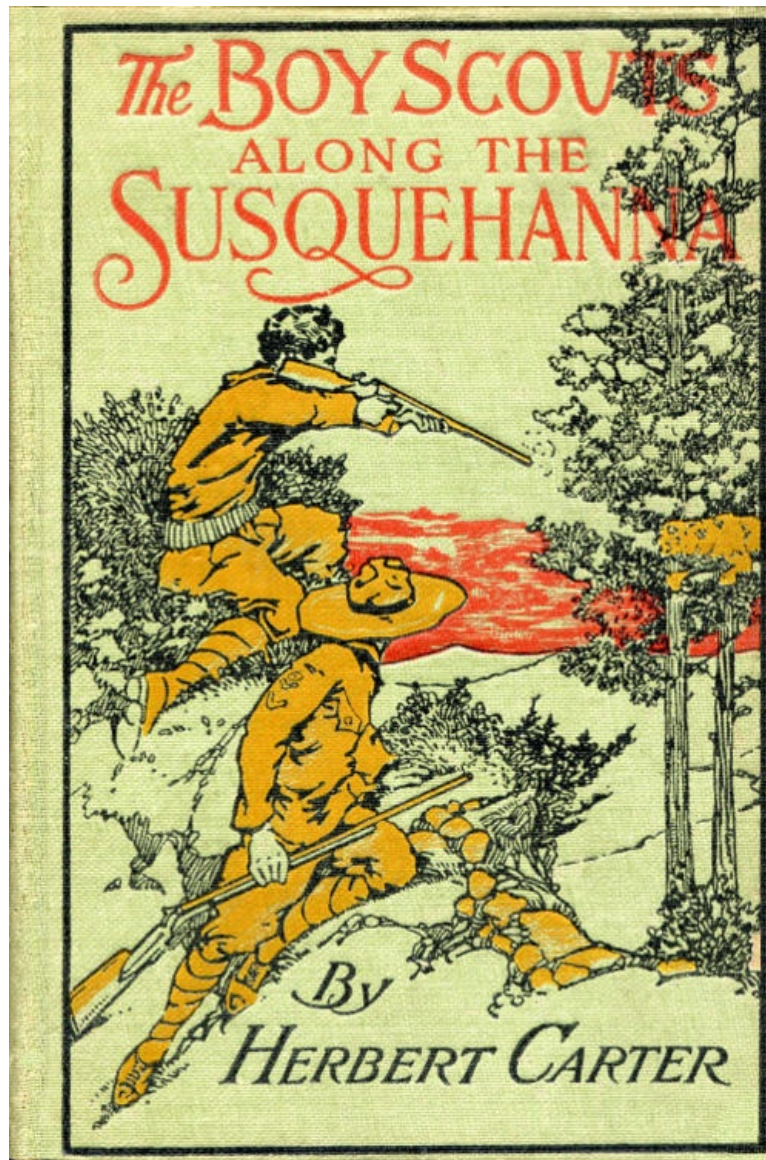
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SILVER FOX PATROL CAUGHT IN A FLOOD ***

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The Boy Scouts Along the Susquehanna

OR

The Silver Fox Patrol Caught in a Flood

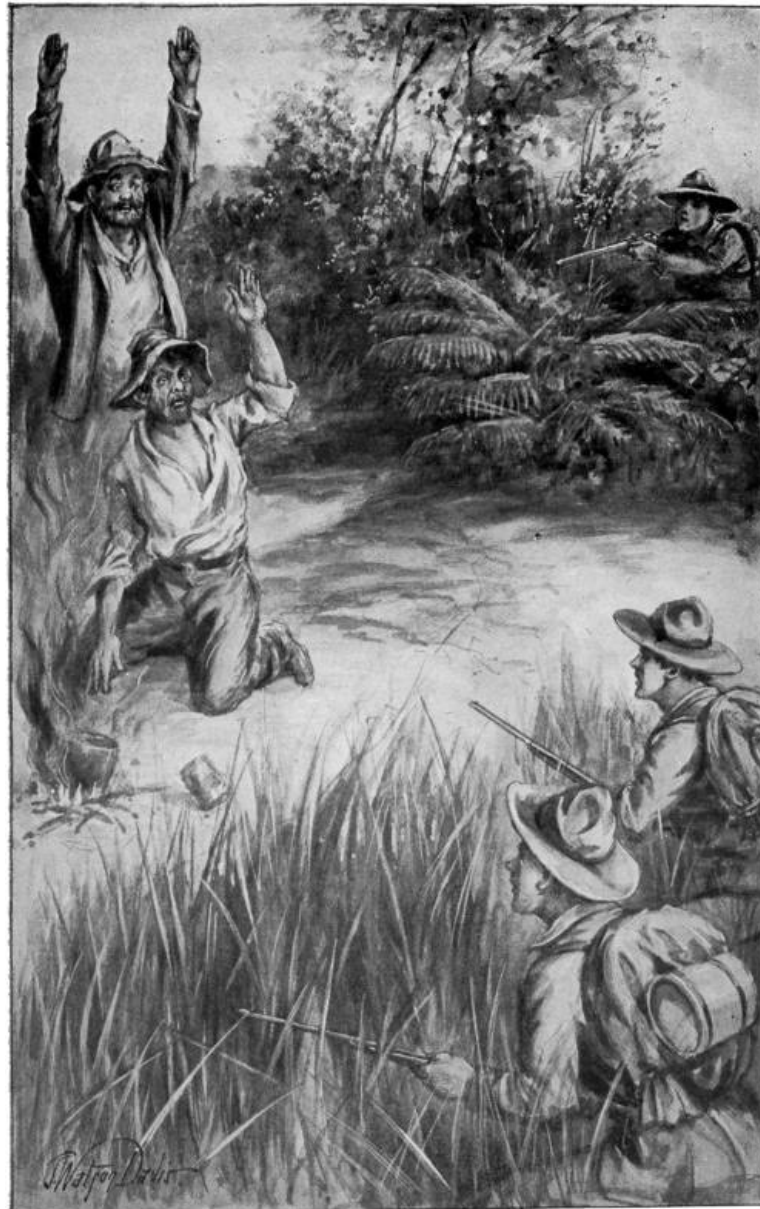
By HERBERT CARTER

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"The Boy Scouts' First Campfire," "The Boy Scouts
In the Blue Ridge," "The Boy Scouts On the
Trail," "The Boy Scouts In the Maine
Woods," "The Boy Scouts
Through the Big Timber,"
"The Boy Scouts In
the Rockies,"
Etc. Etc.



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“CLOSE IN ON ALL SIDES AND KEEP THEM WELL COVERED, BOYS!” SAID THAD. [Page 20](#)
—*The Boy Scouts Along the Susquehanna.*

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THE BOY SCOUTS ALONG THE SUSQUEHANNA.

CHAPTER I. THE TRAMP CHASE.

"I'm no weather sharp, boys; but all the same I want to remark that it's going to rain like cats and dogs before a great while. Put a pin in that to remember it, will you?"

"What makes you say so, Davy?"

"Yes, just when we're getting along splendidly, with the old Susquehanna not a great ways off, you have to go and put a damper on everything. Tell us how you know all that, won't you, Davy Jones?"

"Sure I will, Giraffe, with the greatest of pleasure, while we're sitting here on this log, resting up. In the first place just notice how gray the sky's gotten since we had that snack at the farm house about noon!"

"Oh! shucks! that's no positive sign; it often clouds up, and never a drop falls."

"There's going to be quite some drops come *this* time, and don't you forget it, Step Hen. Why, can't you feel the dampness in the air?"

"That brings it a little closer home, Davy; any more reasons?" demanded the boy answering to the singular name of "Step Hen," but who, under other conditions, would have come just as quickly if someone had shouted "Steve!"

"Well, I was smart enough to look up the weather predictions before we left Cranford yesterday," replied the active boy whom they called Davy, as he laughed softly to himself; "and they said heavy rains coming all along the line from out West; and that they ought to hit us here by to-night, unless held up on the road."

"Whee! is that so? I guess you've made out your case, then, Davy," admitted the boy called "Giraffe," possibly on account of his unusually long neck, which he had a habit of stretching on occasion to abnormal dimensions.

"Mebbe Thad knew about what was in the air when he told us to fetch our rubber ponchos along this trip," suggested Step Hen, whose last name was Bingham.

There were just eight boys in khaki sprawled along that log in various favorite positions suggestive of comfort. They constituted the full membership of the Silver Fox Patrol connected with the Cranford Troop of Boy Scouts, and the one designated as Thad Brewster had been the leader ever since the start of the organization.

Those of our readers who have been fortunate enough to possess any of the previous volumes in this Series need not be told just who these enterprising lads are; but for the purpose of introducing them to newcomers, a few words may be deemed necessary in the start.

Besides the patrol leader there were Allan Hollister, a boy whose former experiences in the woods of Maine and the Adirondacks made him an authority on subjects connected with outdoor life; a Southern boy, Robert Quail White, called "Bob White" by all his chums; Conrad Stedman, otherwise the "Giraffe," previously mentioned; "Step Hen" Bingham; Davy Jones, an uneasy fellow, whose great specialty seemed to lie in the way of wonderful gymnastic feats, such as walking on his hands, hanging by his toes from a lofty limb, and kindred remarkable reckless habits; Cornelius Hawtree, a very red-faced, stout youth, with fiery hair and a mild disposition, and known as "Bumpus" among his set; and last though not least "Smithy," whose real name was Edmund Maurice Travers Smith, and who had never fully overcome his dainty habits that at first had made him a subject of ridicule among the more rough-and-ready members of the Silver Fox Patrol.

There they were, as active a lot of scouts as could have been found from the Atlantic to the Pacific. They had been through considerable in the way of seeing life; and yet their experiences had not spoiled them in the least.

At the time we discover them seated on that big log they were a good many miles away from their home town; and seemed to be bent upon some object that might make their Easter holidays a season to be long remembered.

When Step Hen so naively hinted that the patrol leader may have suspected a spell of bad

weather was due, when he ordered them to be sure and fetch along their rubber ponchos, there was a craning of necks, as everybody tried to set eyes on the face of Thad. Of course Giraffe had the advantage here, on account of that long neck of his, which he often thrust out something after the style of a tortoise when the land seems clear.

"How about that, Mr. Scout Master?" asked Bumpus.

Thad Brewster had a right to be called after that fashion, for he had duly qualified for the position, and received his commission from scout headquarters, empowering him to take the place of the regular scout master, when the latter could not be present. As Dr. Philander Hobbs, the young man who gave of his time and energies to help the cause along, found himself unable to accompany the scouts on many of their outings, the necessity of assuming command frequently fell wholly on Thad, who had always acquitted himself very well indeed.

Thad laughed as he noted their eagerness to hear his admission.

"I'll have to own up, fellows," he went on to say frankly, "that I did read the paper, just as Davy Jones says happened with him; and when I saw the chances there were of a storm coming down on us, I made up my mind we ought to go prepared. But even if we didn't have a rubber poncho along I wouldn't be afraid to wager we'd get through in pretty decent shape."

"That's right, Thad," commented Giraffe; "after scouts have gone the limit, like we did down South last winter, when the schoolhouse burned, and we had a fine vacation before the new brick one was completed, they ought to be able to buck up against nearly anything, and come out of the big end of the horn."

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"Horn!" echoed Bumpus, involuntarily letting his hand fall upon the silver-plated bugle he carried so proudly, and the possession of which told that he must be the bugler of the troop—"Horn! that reminds me I haven't had a chance to use my dandy instrument only at reveille and taps for quite some time now."

"Well, don't start in now, Bumpus, whatever you do," remonstrated Step Hen. "To my mind a horn's a good thing only on certain occasions. Now, when I'm just gettin' the best sleep after sun-up it's sure a shame to hear you tooting away to beat the band."

"But none of us make any sort of a row when he blows the assembly at meal times, I notice," Smithy remarked sagely; and not a protest was raised, showing that in this particular the members of the patrol were unanimously agreed.

The last exploit of the scouts had taken them into the Far South, in fact among the lagoons and swamps of Louisiana; and although some months had since passed, it would seem as though the events of that thrilling experience were still being threshed out whenever the eight boys came together.

Thad was an orphan, living with an uncle, a quaint old man whom everyone knew as

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"Daddy." Acting from information that had been received in a round-about way, the leader of the scout patrol had organized an expedition to go South during the unexpected vacation, to look for a certain man who had once worked for his widowed mother, and was suspected of having been concerned in the mysterious disappearance of Thad's little sister, Pauline, some years back.

The boys had carried this enterprise through to a successful termination; and after meeting with many thrilling, likewise comical adventures, had actually traced this man, and managed to recover the child; who was now a happy inmate of the Brewster home, the pride of old Daddy's heart.

Judging from the numerous burdens with which the eight boys were weighted down it would seem that they must be in heavy marching order, after the manner of troops afield. Each fellow carried a blanket, folded so as to hang from his shoulder, and with the two ends secured under the other arm. Besides, he had a haversack that looked as though it might contain more or less food and extra clothing.

Giraffe also sported a frying-pan of generous dimensions; another scout carried a coffee pot; and doubtless the necessary tin cups, knives, forks, platters and spoons would be forthcoming whenever needed.

The convenient log which served the boys as a seat lay close to the road along which they had been tramping for hours that day, making inquiries whenever a chance offered, and picking up clues after the fashion of real scouts.

As the reason for their coming to this part of the country has everything to do with our story, it had better be explained before we follow Thad and his chums any further along the rather muddy road that led across country to the Susquehanna River.

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Just a couple of days before the coming of the Easter holidays Thad had been asked over the 'phone to come and see Judge Whittaker, one of the most respected citizens of Cranford. Wondering what the strange request could mean, the patrol leader had immediately complied, after school that same afternoon.

He heard a most remarkable thing, and one that thrilled his nerves as they had not been stirred for many a day. The Judge first of all told him that he had long observed the doings of the scouts with growing admiration, and finding himself in need of assistance of a peculiar order, made bold to call upon Thad to help him.

Shorn of all unnecessary particulars, it would seem that the Judge, obeying a whim which he now called the height of foolishness, and while waiting for a new safe to be delivered from New York to take the place of the one that had to be opened by an expert because the time-lock had gone wrong, had actually sewed a very valuable paper in the red lining of an old faded blue coat which was hanging in his closet, and which he kept as a memento of the time his only son served in the engineer corps of the army.

It seemed that as the Judge had married again, his wife was not very fond of seeing that old blue

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army overcoat with the red lining hanging around; and thinking it a useless incumbrance, she had figured that it would be doing more good shielding some poor tramp from the cold than just tempting the moths in that closet.

And so it came about that one day, upon looking for the army coat, the Judge discovered to his utmost dismay that it could not be found. When he asked his wife, she was compelled to admit that three days before, after pitying a shivering hobo who came to the door and asked for food, she had obeyed a sudden generous instinct and given him the warm if faded blue overcoat.

The Judge was in a great predicament now. His first thought was to start out in search of "Wandering George" himself, and buy back the coat, which the hobo could not imagine would be worth more than a dollar or so at the most. Then, when he remembered his rheumatism, and how unfitted for such a chase he must be, the Judge gave this plan up.

His next idea was to send to the city and have a detective put on the track; but he had a horror of doing this, because he fancied that most of these professional detectives were only too ready to demand blackmail if given half a chance; and there was something about that paper which Judge Whittaker did not want known in a public way.

And just about that time he happened to think of Thad and his scouts; which gave him an inspiration. He felt sure they would be able to follow the hobo who wore the faded army overcoat, and in due time come up with him. Then Thad was to offer him a few dollars for the garment, using his discretion so that the suspicions of the tramp might not be aroused.

It promised to be a pretty chase, and already they had been on the road for the better part of two days, here and there learning that a man wearing such a coat had been seen to pass along. Part of the time they had tramped the ties of the railroad, but latterly the chase had stuck to the highway.

Now, acting on the suggestion of the sorrowful Judge, Thad had not told any one of the scouts, saving his close chum Allan, what the real reason of the hunt for the lost army coat meant. The others simply fancied that Judge Whittaker valued the old garment highly because his only son, now in Alaska, had worn it during the Spanish-American war, and was unwilling to have it come to such a disgraceful end. All they thought about was the fun of tracking the hobo and eventually bringing back the old engineer corps overcoat to its late owner. That was glory enough for Step Hen, Giraffe, Bumpus and the rest. It afforded them a chance to get in the open, and imagine for a time at least that they were outdoing some of those dusky warriors who, in the good old days of "Leatherstocking" and others of Cooper's characters, roamed these very same woods.

"If you feel rested enough, fellows," Thad now told them, "perhaps we'd better get a move on again. The last information we managed to pick up told us this Wandering George, as he likes to call himself, can't be a great distance ahead of us now. In fact, I'm in hopes that we may run

across him before night comes and forces us to go into camp somewhere along the river."

Accordingly, the other scouts sprang to their feet, everyone trying to make out that he was as "fresh as a daisy," though poor fat Bumpus gave an audible groan when he pried himself loose from that comfortable log. He was not built for long hikes, though possessed of a stubborn nature that made it hard for him to give up any object upon which he had set his heart.

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"Yes, we've rested long enough," admitted Giraffe, who, being tall and slim, was known as a fine runner, and long distance pedestrian. "Sorry to say there won't be any wagon following us to pick up stragglers; so if you fall down, Bumpus, better stop at the first farmhouse you strike, and wait till we come back."

This little slur only caused the fat scout to look at the speaker contemptuously; but from an unexpected quarter help came.

"Huh! you certainly do like to rub it into Bumpus, Giraffe, because he's built on the heavy order," Step Hen went on to say; "but go slow, my boy. Don't you know the battle isn't always to the swift or the strong? Have you forgotten all about the race between the hare and the tortoise; and didn't the old slow-moving chap come in ahead, after all? I've known Bumpus to beat you out before this. You may have to use a crow-bar to get him started sometimes; but once he does move he don't let little things balk him. Besides, it ain't nice of you nagging him because he happens to weigh twice as much as you do. Bumpus is all right!"

"Thank you, Step Hen; I'll remember that," observed the freckled-face scout, as he gave his defender an appreciative grin.

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Down the road they went, straggling along without any particular order, because Thad knew from past experiences he could get better work out of his followers when they relaxed. Still, they kept pretty well bunched, for whenever the conversation started up none of them wished to lose a word of what was said.

On the previous night they had been forced to make a temporary shelter with all manner of fence rails, boughs from trees, and such brush as they could find. Having their blankets along, and being cheered with a camp fire during the night, the experience had been rather delightful on the whole.

These energetic boys had been through so much during the time they belonged to the Cranford Scouts that nothing along ordinary lines seemed to daunt them. They were well equipped for meeting and overcoming such difficulties as might arise to confront them on a trip like the present one; in fact, they took keen delight in matching their wits against all comers, and a victory only served to whet their appetite for more problems to be solved along the line of woodcraft knowledge.

For something like half an hour they pushed steadily along. Bumpus, in order to positively prove to the sneering Giraffe that he was in the best of condition, had actually pushed ahead

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with the leaders. If he limped occasionally he did his best to conceal the fact by mumbling something about the nuisance of stepping on pebbles and being nearly thrown off his balance; a ruse that caused the said wily Giraffe to smile broadly, and wink toward Step Hen knowingly.

However, this disposition of their forces enabled Bumpus to make a discovery of apparently vast importance, which he suddenly communicated to the rest in what he intended to be a stage whisper:

“Hey! hold on here, what’s this I see ahead of us, boys? Unless my eyes have gone back on me, which I don’t believe they have, there’s the smoke of a fire rising over yonder alongside the road; and Thad, tell me, ain’t there a couple of trampy looking fellows sitting on stones cooking their grub? Bully for us, fellows, I wouldn’t be surprised a bit now if we’d gone and ketched up with our quarry right here and now!”

Every scout stared as Bumpus was saying all of this. They saw that smoke was undoubtedly rising close to the road, showing the presence of a fire; while their keen, practiced eyes, used to observing things at long distances, told them that in all probability the two men who occupied the roadside camp belonged to the order of hoboes; for their clothing showed signs of much wear and tear, and moreover they were heating their coffee in old tomato cans, after the time-tried custom of the tramp tribe the country over.

Naturally, under the circumstances, this discovery caused their hearts to beat with additional rapidity as they contemplated an early closing of their campaign.

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CHAPTER II. SIGHING FOR TROUBLE.

“Well, I’m sorry, that’s all!” ejaculated Step Hen.

“What at?” demanded Giraffe; “we ought to be puffed up with pride over our success, and here you go to pulling a long face. What ails you, Step Hen?”

“It’s just this way,” muttered the scout addressed disconsolately; “we never did run across a better chance to have a great time than when we started out on this hobo chase; and here it’s turned out too easy for anything. Shucks! a tenderfoot might have followed that Wandering George right along to here; and now all we’ve got to do is to surround the camp, and make him fork over that old blue coat the judge loves so well. It’s a shame, that’s what!”

“I feel something the same way you do, Step Hen,” remarked Allan; “why, I figured on doing all sorts of smart stunts while we were on this hike; and here, before a chance comes along, we corral our game!”

“I’m just as sorry as you, suh,” observed the Southern boy, with the accent that stamped him a true Dixie lad; “but I reckon now you wouldn’t

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have Thad tell us to sheer off, and give the hoboes a chance to run away, just to let us keep up this chase. We promised to recover that old army coat for the judge, and for one I'd be ashamed to look him in the face again, suh, if we let it slip through our fingers on account of wanting to lengthen the sport."

"That's the right sort of talk, Bob White," said Thad, with a nod of his head, and a sparkle in his eyes. "Much as we all like the sport of showing what we know in the way of woodcraft, duty comes first. And we couldn't shirk our responsibility in this case just to gratify our liking for action."

"What's the program, then, Thad?" asked Smithy, yawning as though he did not feel quite as much interest in the chase as some of the others; for Smithy of late, Thad noticed with regret, was apparently losing some of his former vigor, and acting as though ready to shirk his duty when it did not happen to appeal to him very strongly.

"We can have a little fun out of the thing by planning a complete surround, can't we, Thad?" asked Step Hen eagerly.

"I hope you say yes to that, Mr. Scout Master," added Giraffe; "because it'll be apt to take some of the sting out, after having our game come to such a sudden end."

"I was going to say something along those lines, boys, if you had let me," Thad told them. "So far the tramps have given no sign that they suspect our being here. We'll arrange it so as to surround the camp, and then at a signal from me everybody stand up and show themselves. I'll arrange it so that we'll make a complete circle around the fire, and to do that we'll move in couples."

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He immediately paired them off, and each detachment was told what was expected of it in making the move a practical success.

Even in these apparently small matters Thad proved himself a capable commander, for he picked out the most able to undertake the difficult part of the work, while to Smithy and Bumpus was delegated the easier task of crawling along the side of the road until they found shelter close to the hoboes' fire.

Giraffe and Step Hen were ordered to cross to the other side of the road and, making a little detour, came up from the north. The remaining four scouts branched off to the south, and it was the intention of Thad, taking Davy Jones along, to continue the enveloping movement until he could approach from the opposite quarter, which would mean along the road in the other direction.

Meanwhile Bob White and Allan would be taking positions to the south, and then curbing their impatience until Thad had signaled and learned that all of them were in place.

This was a most interesting piece of work for the boys. They delighted in just such practices, and for the simple reason that it enabled them to bring to bear on the matter all the knowledge they had managed to accumulate connected with

the real tactics of scouting, as practiced by hunters and Indians, as well as the advance guard of an army sent out to "feel" of the enemy's lines.

At a certain point Thad gave Allan and Bob White the sign that they were to turn to one side, and begin advancing toward the smoke again, while he and Davy would keep straight on.

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They did not have to creep as yet, but kept bending low, in order to render the risk of being discovered as small as possible. Later on, however, as they headed toward the hub of the wheel, which was marked by the cooking fire, Thad and his companion did not hesitate to flatten themselves out on occasion, and do some pretty fine wriggling in passing from one patch of leafless bushes to another.

Every time they raised their heads cautiously to look, Davy would give one of his little chuckles, telling that the situation was eminently satisfactory, so far as he could see.

The two men were still hovering over their miserable little fire, which was such a poor excuse for a cooking blaze that any practical scout must curl his lip in disdain, knowing how easy it is to manage so as to have red coals, instead of smoky wood, when doing the cooking.

Davy could see that there was no longer the first question about their being genuine tramps. A dozen signs pointed to this fact; and he found himself wondering which of the pair would turn out to be Wandering George.

He did not see the faded blue army coat on either of them; but then it would be only natural for the possessor to discard this extra weight when keeping so close to a warm blaze. Doubtless, the object of their search would be found nearby, used in lieu of a blanket, to cover the form of the new owner as he slept in the open, or in some farmer's haystack.

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Several of the scouts carried guns, even Bumpus having so burdened himself in the hope that during their chase after the lost army coat they might happen to run across some game worth taking, in order to lend additional zest to the outing.

As Thad and Davy had chosen the longest task in making for the further side of the hobo camp, they could take it for granted when they finally reached the position the scout leader had in his eye, that all of the other detachments must by then have arrived.

To test this Thad gave a peculiar little sound that was as near like the bark of a fox as possible. Every member of the patrol had in times past perfected himself in making just that sort of sound, and of course they would immediately recognize it as the signal of the scout master, desirous of knowing whether all of them had gained their positions.

There came an immediate "ha! ha!" from across the road, and also from deeper in the woods, where Allan and Bob White were lying; but none from Bumpus and Smithy. Evidently, something had happened to cause a delay there. Thinking

they had what they might call a "snap," the two slow moving scouts covering this quarter had delayed their advance too long, and were now holding back.

As the tramps, however, had heard those strange barking sounds coming from three quarters, and jumped to their feet in alarm, Thad did not consider it wise to delay the exposure of their presence any longer. Accordingly, he gave a shrill whistle that was well known to the others.

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Imagine the consternation of the hobo campers when from behind concealing bushes they saw figures in khaki rise up, some of them bearing threatening guns. Even Bumpus and Smithy followed suit, though not as near the fire as the rest.

Perhaps the first thought of the alarmed tramps was that they were surrounded by a detachment of the militia, for the sight of those khaki suits must have stunned them. Before they could gather their wits together to think of resistance Thad was heard to call out with military precision:

"Close in on all sides; and keep them well covered, boys!"

At that those who carried guns made out to aim them, and their manner was so threatening that both hoboos immediately elevated their hands, as though desirous of letting their captors see that they did not expect to offer the slightest resistance.

Slowly the scouts came forward, converging toward the common center, which of course was the smoky fire, alongside of which those two old tomato cans stood, each secured at the end of a bunch of metal ribs taken from a cast-off umbrella.

That successful surround would have made a picture worthy of being framed and hung upon the wall of their meeting room in the home town, some of the scouts may have proudly thought, as they walked slowly forward, thrilled with the consciousness of power.

The tramps kept turning around, to stare first at one pair of boys and then at another lot, as though hardly knowing whether they were awake or dreaming.

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If they had guilty consciences, connected with stolen chickens, or other farm products, they must have believed that the strong arm of the law had found them out, and that the next thing on the program would be their being marched off to some country town lockup.

"Aw! it's too, too easy, that's what!" grumbled Step Hen disconsolately.

"Like taking candy from the baby!" added Giraffe, who always liked to have some spice connected with their adventures, and could not bear the idea of being on a team that outclassed its rival in every department; a tough struggle was what appealed to him every time, though of course he wanted the victory to eventually settle on the banner of the Silver Fox Patrol.

"Makes me think of that old couplet we used to say about old Alexander," Bumpus here thought it policy to remark, just to show them that he too hoped there might have been some warm action before the tramps surrendered; "let's see, how does she go? 'Alexander with ten thousand men, marched up the Alps, and down again!'"

"Mebbe it was Hannibal you're thinking about, Bumpus," suggested Step Hen; "but it don't matter much who did it, we've gone and copied after him. I say, we ought to go home by a roundabout course, so as to try and stir things up some. This is sure too easy a job for scouts that have been through all we have."

The tramps were listening, and eagerly drinking in all that was said; perhaps a faint hope had begun to possess them that after all things might not turn out to be quite as bad as first appearances would indicate.

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"Thad, it's up to you to claim that coat now, so we can evacuate this camp," observed Smithy, who was observed to be pinching his nose with thumb and forefinger, as though the near presence of the tattered hoboes offended his olfactory nerves; for as has been said before, the Smith boy had been a regular dude at the time he joined the patrol, and even at this late day the old trait occasionally cropped out.

Thad looked around at his comrades, and somehow when they saw the smile on his face a feeling bordering on consternation seized hold of them.

"What is it, Thad?" asked Davy Jones solicitously.

"Yes, why don't you tell us to get what we came after, and fly the coop?" demanded Giraffe, who did not fancy being so close to the ill-favored tramps much more than the elegant Smithy did.

"There's nothing doing, fellows," said the acting scout master, with an eloquent shrug of his shoulders that carried even more weight than his words.

"What!" almost shrieked Step Hen, "do you mean to tell us that we're on the wrong trail, and that neither of these gents is the one we want, Wandering George?"

"That's just what ails us," admitted Thad; "we counted our chickens before they were hatched, that's all. Stop and remember the descriptions we've had of this Wandering George, and you'll see how we've been barking up the wrong tree!"

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All eyes were immediately and eagerly focused on the faces of the two wondering hoboes. At the same time, no doubt, there was passing through each boy's mind that description of the man who had gone off with the faded army overcoat, and which had been their mainstay in the way of a clew, while following the trail.

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CHAPTER III.

WHEN BUMPUS CLIMBED OVER THE FENCE.

A brief silence followed these words of the patrol leader. Then the boys were seen to nod their heads knowingly. It was evident that, once they had their suspicions aroused by Thad, every fellow could see what a dreadful mistake had been made.

"Well, I should say now that Wandering George was half a foot taller'n either of these fellows!" declared Bumpus, being the first to control his tongue, which was something remarkable, since as a rule he was as slow of speech as he was with regard to moving, on account of his weight.

"And had red hair in the bargain!" added Step Hen.

"Oh! everybody's doing it now," mocked Davy Jones; "and I can see that there ain't the first sign of an old faded blue army overcoat anywhere around *this* camp."

"After all, who cares?" exclaimed Giraffe, as he lowered his threatening gun; an act that doubtless gave the two tramps much solid satisfaction. "All of us felt mean and sore because our fine tracking game had come to such a sudden end. Now there's still a chance we'll meet up with a few crackerjack adventures before we pick the prize. I say bully all around!"

Davy Jones immediately threw himself into an acrobatic position, and waved both of his feet wildly in the air, as though he felt that the situation might be beyond weak words, and called for something stronger in order to express his exuberant feelings.

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"Yes, all of those things would be enough to convince us we've made a mistake," remarked Thad; "and if we want any further proof here it is right before us."

He pointed to the ground as he spoke. There were a number of footprints in the half dried mud close to the border of the road, evidently made by the two men as they walked back and forth collecting dead wood for their cooking fire.

"You're right, Thad," commented Allan Hollister, who of course instantly saw what the other meant when he pointed in that way. "We settled it long ago that we ought to know Wandering George any time we came up with him, simply because he's got a rag tied around his right shoe to keep it on his foot, it's that old, and going to flinders. Neither of these men has need to do that; in fact, if you notice, they've both got shoes on that look nearly new!"

At that one of the tramps hastened to speak, as though he began to fear that as it was so remarkable a thing for a road roamer to be wearing good footgear, they were liable to arrest as having stolen the same.

"Say, we done a little turn for a cobbler two days back, over in Hooptown, an' he give us the shoes. Said he fixed 'em fur customers what didn't ever come back to pay the charges; didn't we, Smikes?"

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"We told him his barn was on fire, sure we did, an' helped him trow water on, an' keep the thing from burnin' down. He gives us a hunky dinner, an' trows de trilbies in fur good measure. But

dey hurts us bad, an' we was jest a-sayin' we wishes we had de ole uns back agin. If it wa'n't so cold we'd take 'em off right now, and go bare-footed, wouldn't we, Jake?"

"Oh! well, it doesn't matter to us where you got the shoes," said Thad. "We happen to be looking for another man, and thought one of you might be him. So go on with your cooking; and, Giraffe, where's that knuckle of ham you said you hated to lug any further, but which you thought it a sin to throw away? Perhaps we might hand the same over to Smikes and Jake, to pay up for having given them such a bad scare."

This caused the two tramps to grin in anxious anticipation; and when Giraffe only too willingly extracted the said remnant of a half ham which the scouts had started with, they eagerly seized upon it.

"It's all right, young fellers," remarked the one who had been called Smikes, as he clutched the prize; "we ain't a-carin' if we gits the same kind o' a skeer 'bout once a day reg'lar-like, hey, Jake? Talk tuh me 'bout dinner rainin' down from the clouds, this beats my time holler. Cum agin, boys, an' do it sum more."

Thad knew it was folly to stay any longer at the camp, but before leaving he wished to put a question to the men.

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"We're looking for a fellow who calls himself Wandering George," he went on to say. "Just now he's wearing an old faded blue army overcoat that was given to him by a lady who didn't know that her husband valued it as a keepsake. So we just offered to find it for him, and give George a dollar or so to make up. Have either of you seen a man wearing a blue coat like that?"

"Nixey, mister," replied Jake promptly.

"Say, I used to wear a blue overcoat, like them, when I was marchin' fur ole Unc Sam in the Spanish war, fool thet I was; but honest to goodness now I ain't set eyes on the like this three years an' more," the second tramp asserted.

"That settles it, then, fellows!" ejaculated Step Hen, with a note of joy in his voice; "we've got to go on further, and run our quarry down. And let me tell you I'm tickled nearly to death because it's turned out so."

"Who be you boys, anyhow?" asked Smikes. "Air ye what we hears called scouts?"

"Just what we are," replied Allan. "That's why we think it's so much fun to follow this Wandering George, and trade him a big silver dollar for the old coat the lady gave him when she saw he made out to be cold. Scouts are crazy to do all kinds of things like that, you know."

"Well, dew tell," muttered the tramp, shaking his head; "I don't git on ter the trick, fur a fact. If 'twar me now, I'd rather be a-settin' in a warm room waitin' tuh hear the dinner horn blow."

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"Oh! we all like to hear that, let me tell you," asserted Giraffe, who was unusually fond of

eating; "but we get tired of home cooking, and things taste so fine when you're in camp."

"Huh! mebbe so, when yuh got plenty o' the right kind o' stuff along," observed the man who gripped the ham bone that Giraffe had tossed him, "but yuh'd think a heap different, let me tell yuh, if ever any of the lot knowed wat it meant tuh be as hungry as a wolf, and nawthin' tuh satisfy it with. But then there seems tuh be all kinds o' people in this ole world; an' they jest kaint understand each other nowadays."

Thad saw that the tramp was rather a queer customer, and something along the order of a hobo philosopher; but he had no more time just then to stand and talk with him out of idle curiosity.

So he gave the order, and the scouts, wheeling around, strode out upon the road, their faces set toward the east. The last they saw of the two tramps was just before turning a bend in the road they looked back and saw that the men were apparently hard at work dividing the remnant of the ham that had been turned over by the boys as some sort of solace to soothe their wounded feelings.

Half a mile further on and the woods gave place to cultivated fields and pastures, although of course it was too early in the season for much work to be done by the farmers, except where they were hauling fertilizer to make ready for the first plowing.

"If we get the chance, boys, to-night, let's sleep in a barn," suggested Giraffe, as he rubbed his right shank as though it might pain him. "Where we lay last night it seemed to me a million roots and stones kept pushing into my body till I was black and blue this morning. And I always did like to nestle down in good sweet hay. I don't blame tramps for taking the chance every opportunity that opens. What do the rest of you say to that?"

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"It strikes me favorably," Step Hen quickly admitted.

"Oh! any old place is good enough for me," sighed Bumpus.

"If you can only be sure there are no rats around, I believe I'd enjoy sleeping in a hay mow," Davy told them.

"I've never had the experience," remarked Smithy with a shrug of his shoulders, and a grimace; "and I must confess I don't hanker much for it. Bad enough to have to roll up in your own blanket any old time; but spiders and hornets and all that horrible set are to be found in haylofts, they tell me. I'm more afraid of them than an alligator or a wild bull. A gypsy once told me I would die from poison bites, and ever since I've had to be mighty careful."

Of course the rest of the scouts had to laugh to hear Smithy confess that he believed in the prophecy of a gypsy, or any other fake fortune-teller.

"I wouldn't lie awake a minute," ventured Step Hen, "if a dozen gypsies told me I was going to break my neck falling out of bed. Fact is, I'm

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built so contrary that like as not I'd hunt up the highest bed I could find to sleep on. I do everything on Friday I can think of; and when the thirteenth of the month comes around I'm always looking out to see how I can tempt fate. Ain't an ounce of superstition in my whole body, I guess. Fortune-tellers! Bah! you ought to have been a girl, Smithy."

"Oh! well, I didn't say I *believed* I'd die by poison, did I?" demanded the other adroitly; "I'm only explaining that I don't mean to let the silly prophecy come true by taking hazards that are quite unnecessary."

"Seems to me we've been walking like hot cakes ever since we said good-by to Smikes and Jake," observed Bumpus, who was puffing a little from his exertions; "and Thad, would you mind if we took a little breathing spell about now? Just see how inviting this pile of old fence rails looks alongside the road. I hope you say yes, Thad, because I want to get fit to keep on the go till dark comes along."

"No objections to favoring you, Bumpus," Thad told him; "and if looks count for anything I rather think all the rest of us will be glad of a chance to rest up a little. So drop down, and take things easy, boys. I'll give you ten minutes here."

"Look sharp before you sit down!" warned Smithy, who had disengaged his blanket, as though meaning to use it for a soft cushion—time was when he invariably brushed a board or other intended resting-place with his handkerchief before sitting down; but the other scouts had long ago laughed him out of this habit, which jarred upon their nerves as hardly consistent with rough-and-ready scout life.

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Giraffe had a most remarkable pair of eyes. He often discovered things that no one else had any suspicion existed. On this account, as well as the fact that he was able to see further and more accurately than his chums, he was sometimes designated as "Old Eagle Eye," and the employment of that name invariably gave him more or less pleasure, since it proclaimed his superiority in the line of observation.

Giraffe was also a great hand for practical jokes. When some idea flashed into his mind he often gave little heed to the possible result, but immediately felt impelled to put his scheme into practice, with the sole idea of creating a laugh, of course with another scout as the victim.

They had hardly been sitting there five minutes when Giraffe might have been heard chuckling softly to himself, though no one seemed to pay any particular attention to him.

He elevated that long neck of his once or twice as if desirous of making sure concerning a certain point before going any further. Then, when satisfied on this score, he glanced from one to another of his companions, evidently seeking a victim.

When his gaze, after going along the entire line, returned once more to plump, good-natured Bumpus, who had now ceased puffing, and was looking rested, it might be set down as certain that there was trouble of some sort in store for

the red-haired, freckle-faced scout.

Now Giraffe was a sharp schemer. He knew how to go about his business in a way least calculated to arouse suspicion.

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Instead of immediately blurting out what he had in mind, he started to "beating around the bush," seeking to first disarm his intended victim by drawing him into a little discussion.

Before another full minute had passed Thad noticed that Giraffe and Bumpus were warmly discussing some matter, and that the stout scout seemed to be unusually in earnest. Doubtless, this was on account of the sly assertions which Giraffe inflicted upon him, the tall scout being a past master when it came to giving little digs that hurt worse than pins thrust into one's flesh.

"I tell you I *can* do it!" Bumpus was heard to say stubbornly.

"Don't believe you'd ever come within a mile of making it, and that goes, Bumpus." Giraffe went on as though he might be a Doubting Thomas who could only be convinced by actual contact; "and tell you what I'll do to prove I'm in earnest. If you make it in three trials, straddling the limb while my watch is counting a whole minute, I'll hand over that fine compass you always liked so much. How's that, Bumpus; are you game to show us, or have I dared you to a standstill?"

"What, *me* back down for a little thing like that? Well, you just watch me make you eat your words, Giraffe!"

So saying the fat scout clambered up over the rail fence, and dropped in the open pasture beyond.

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"What's he going to do?" asked Thad, as they saw Bumpus start on a waddling sort of gait toward a tree that stood by itself some little distance from the fence, and with a clump of bushes not far away.

He looked a little suspiciously at Giraffe, who immediately stopped his chuckling, and tried to draw a solemn face, though he shut one eye in a humorous fashion.

"Why, he started to boast that he had been doing some fine climbing lately," explained the tall scout; "and I dared him to go over and get up in that tree while I held the watch on him. He's got to start climbing and make it inside of sixty seconds; and between you and me, Thad, I reckon now he might manage it in half that time—if hard pushed."

"You've got some game started, Giraffe; what is it?" asked the patrol leader, as he turned again and watched the portly scout moving like a ponderous machine toward the tree which Giraffe had mentioned as a part of the contract.

Giraffe did not need to answer, for at that very second there came what seemed to be a loud bellow of rage from over in the field somewhere. Looking hastily through the bars of the fence, the seven boys saw a spectacle that thrilled them with various emotions.

From out of the sheltering bushes, where those keen roving eyes of Giraffe must have

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discovered her presence, came a dun-colored cow. Possibly her calf had recently been taken from her by the butcher, for she was furious toward all humankind. Her tail was held in the air, and as she ran straight toward poor Bumpus she stopped for a moment several times to toss a cloud of earth up with her hoofs, for she had no horns, Thad noted, which was at least one thing favoring Bumpus.

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CHAPTER IV. GIRAFFE ADMITS THAT THE SHOE FITS.

"Look out, Bumpus!" shrieked Davy Jones, as though instantly realizing what a perilous position the stout scout would be in if that angry cow succeeded in bowling him over with her hornless head.

"Run! run, Bumpus; a wild bull is after you!" shouted Step Hen, who may have really believed what he was saying with such a vim; or else considered that by magnifying the danger he might add more or less to the sprinting ability of the said Bumpus.

There was really little need to send all these warnings pealing over the field, because Bumpus had already glimpsed the oncoming enemy, and was in full flight.

At the moment of discovery he chanced to be fully two-thirds of the way over to the tree which had been the special object of his attention. It was therefore much easier for him to reach this haven of refuge than it would have been to dash for the fence with any hope of making that barrier.

"Go it, Bumpus, I'll bet on you!" howled Giraffe, jumping up on the fence in his great excitement, so that he might not miss seeing anything of the amusing affair.

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Now, possibly, the angry cow that had been bereft of her beloved calf by a late visit of the butcher might have readily overhauled poor Bumpus had she kept straight on without a stop, for she could cover two yards to his one. For some reason which only a cow or bull could understand, the animal seemed to consider it absolutely necessary that with every few paces she must come to a halt and paw the ground again, sending the earth flying about her.

That gave the stout runner his chance, and so he succeeded in gaining the tree, with his four-footed enemy still a little distance away.

Bumpus was evidently unnerved. He had seen that terrifying spectacle several times as he looked anxiously over his fat shoulder, and it had always caused him to put on an additional spurt.

When finally he banged up against the tree, having of course stumbled as usual, his one idea was to climb with lightning speed. His agreement with the scheming Giraffe called for an ascent in sixty seconds, but he now had good

reason for desiring to shorten this limit exceedingly. He doubtless imagined that he would feel the crash of that butting head against his person before he had ascended five feet, and this completely rattled him.

Left to himself and possibly he could have climbed the smooth trunk within the limit of time specified in his arrangement with Giraffe; but such was his excitement now that he made a sorry mess of it.

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The boys were shrieking all sorts of instructions to him to "hurry up," or he was bound to become a victim; one was begging him with tears in his eyes to "get a move on him!" while another warned Bumpus of the near approach of the oncoming cow, and also the fact that she had "fire in her eyes!"

Twice did the scout manage to get part way up, when in his tremendous excitement he lost his grip, and in consequence slipped down again, amid a chorus of hollow groans from the watchers beyond the fence.

The avenging cow was now close up, and still enjoying the situation, as was evidenced by the way she made the earth fly. She could be heard giving a series of strange moaning sounds peculiarly terrifying; at least Bumpus evidently thought so, for after his second fall he just sat there, and stared at the oncoming enemy as if he had actually lost his wits.

"Get behind the tree, Bumpus!"

That was Thad shouting, and using both his hands in lieu of any better megaphone. Now, since Thad had always been the leader of the patrol ever since its formation, Bumpus was quite accustomed to obeying any order which the other might give. Doubtless, he recognized the accustomed authority in those tones; at any rate, it was noticed that he once more began to make a move, struggling to his feet in his usual clumsy way.

"Oh! he just missed getting struck!" ejaculated Smithy, as they saw Bumpus move around the tree, and heard a loud crash when the head of the charging cow smashed against the covering object.

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The animal was apparently somewhat stunned by the contact, for she stood there, looking a little "groggy," as Giraffe called it. Had Bumpus known enough to remain perfectly still, and allow the tree to shelter him the best it could, all might have gone well; but something that may have been boyish curiosity impelled the fat scout to thrust out his head. Why, he had so far recovered from his fright, thanks to the substantial aid of that tree-trunk, that he actually put his fingers to his nose, and wiggled them at the cow!

She must have seen him do it, and immediately resented the implied insult; for all of a sudden she was seen to be in motion again. There was a flash of dun-colored sides, and around the tree the cow sped, chasing Bumpus ahead of her.

Of course the scout did not have to cover as much ground as the animal, but the fact must be remembered that he was a very clumsy fellow,

and apt to trip over his own feet when excited, so that the danger of his falling a victim to the rage of the mother cow was as acute as ever, despite the sheltering tree.

Giraffe seemed to be enjoying the game immensely. He sat there, perched on the rail fence, and clapped his hands with glee, while shouting all manner of brotherly advice at Bumpus. This of course fell on deaf ears, because just then the imperiled scout could think of only one thing at a time, and that was to keep out of reach of that battering ram.

Thad knew that something must be done to help Bumpus, who if left to his own resources never would be able to extricate himself from the bad fix into which he had stumbled, thanks to that love of a joke on the part of Giraffe, and his own blindness.

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"Hi, there, Bumpus, she thinks you look like the butcher that took her calf away, that's what's the matter!" cried Step Hen.

"Pity you ain't a cow puncher, Bumpus," Giraffe went on to say; "because then you could throw that poor thing easy. Huh! think I could do it with one hand!"

"Then suppose you get off that fence and do it!" said Thad severely. "You got poor old Bumpus in that hole, and it ought to be your business to rescue him!"

Giraffe looked dubious. When he spoke so confidently about believing himself able to down the raging cow he certainly could not have meant it.

"Oh! he ain't going to get hurt, Thad," he started to say; "if I saw him knocked down, course I'd jump and run to help him. The exercise ought to do Bumpus good, for he's been putting on too much flesh lately, you know. You'll have to excuse me, Thad, sure you will. I'll go if things look bad for him; but I hate to break up the game now by interfering."

Thad paid no more attention to Giraffe, since he knew that the other's inordinate love for practical joking made him blind to facts that as a true scout he should have kept before his mind.

"Hello! Bumpus!" the patrol leader once more shouted.

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"Yes—T-had, what is it?" came back in a wheezy voice, for to tell the truth Bumpus was getting pretty well winded by now, thanks to the rapid manner in which he had to navigate around that tree again, with the active bovine in pursuit.

"Take off that red bandanna from your neck, and put it in your pocket!" ordered the patrol leader.

Strange to say no one else—saving possibly the artful Giraffe—had once considered this glaring fact, that much of the cow's anger was excited by seeing the hated color so prominently displayed by the boy who had invaded the pasture at such an unfortunate time in her life of frequent bereavements.

Taking it for granted that Bumpus would obey the first chance he got to unfasten the knot by which his big bandanna was secured around his

neck, Thad clambered over the fence and started to run.

He did not head directly for the tree around which this exciting chase was being carried on, but obliquely. In doing this Thad had several reasons, no doubt. First of all he was more apt to catch the attention of the angry cow, for he was waving his own red handkerchief wildly as he ran, and doing everything else in his power to attract notice. Then, if he did succeed in luring the animal toward him he would be taking her away from the tree at such an angle that when Bumpus headed for the spot where his other chums were gathered the cow would not be apt to see him in motion and give chase.

Thad knew how to work the thing nicely. He succeeded in attracting the attention of the cow, for he saw her stop in her pursuit of Bumpus, and start to pawing the turf again.

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"She's coming, Thad!" roared Allan.

As he spoke the cow started on a full run for the new enemy. That flaunting red rag bade her defiance, apparently, and no respectable bovine could refuse to accept such a gage of battle.

Thad had not gone far away from the fence at any time. He was not hankering to play the part of a bull-baiter, and run the chance of being tossed high in the air, or butted into the ground.

He had, like a wise general, also marked out the way of retreat, and when the onrushing animal was fully started, so that there seemed to be little likelihood of her stopping short of the fence, Thad nimbly darted along, and just at the proper time he was seen to make a flying leap that landed him on the top rail, from which he instantly dropped to the ground.

He continued to flaunt the red handkerchief as close to the nose of the cow as he could, so as to hold her attention; while she butted the fence again and again, as only an angry and baffled beast might.

Thad was meanwhile again shouting his directions to the dazed Bumpus, who, winded by his recent tremendous exertions, had actually sunk down at the base of the friendly tree as though exhausted.

"Get moving, Bumpus!" was what the patrol leader told him. "Back away, and try to keep the tree between the cow and yourself all you can. Don't waste a single minute, because she may break away from me, and hunt you up again! Get a move on you, Bumpus, do you hear?"

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Finally aroused to a consciousness of the fact that he was not yet "out of the woods" so long as no fence separated him from that fighting cow, Bumpus started in to obey the directions given by the leader of the Silver Fox Patrol.

It was no difficult matter to back away, keeping in a line that would allow the tree to cover him, and the fat scout in this manner drew steadily closer to where his comrades awaited him.

He was near the fence when the cow must have discovered him again, for the first thing Bumpus knew he heard Davy shrieking madly.

“Run like everything, Bumpus! Whoop! here she comes, lickety-split after you! To the fence, and we’ll help you over, Bumpus! Come on! Come on!”

Which Bumpus was of course doing the best he knew how, not even daring to look over his shoulder for fear of being petrified by the awful sight of that “monster” charging after him, and appearing ten times as big as she really was.

Arriving at the fence he found Davy and Giraffe awaiting him, for the latter, possibly arriving at the repentant stage, had begun to realize that a joke may often be very one-sided, and that “what is fun for the boys is death to the frogs.”

Assisted by their willing arms the almost breathless fat scout was hustled over the fence. There was indeed little time to spare. Hardly had Davy and Giraffe managed to follow after him, so that all three landed beyond the barrier, when the baffled bovine arrived on the spot, to bellow with rage as she realized that her intended prey had escaped for good.

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Bumpus was hardly able to breathe. He was fiery red in the face, and quite wet with perspiration; but nevertheless he looked suspiciously at Giraffe, as though a dim idea might be taking shape in that slow-moving mind of his.

“Oh, no, Bumpus! You don’t get that compass this time,” asserted the tall scout, shaking his head in the negative, while he grinned at Bumpus. “You never climbed the tree at all, you know. Our little wager is off!”

“If I thought you knew—about that pesky cow, Giraffe—I’d consider that you played me a low-down trick!” said Bumpus, between gasps.

Giraffe made no reply. Perhaps the enormity of his offense had begun to trouble him, because Bumpus was such a good-natured fellow, with his sunny blue eyes, and his willing disposition, that it really seemed a shame to take advantage of his confiding nature. So Giraffe turned aside, and amused himself by thrusting his hand, containing his own red bandanna, through the openings between the rails of the fence, and tempting the cow to butt at him, when, of course, he would adroitly withdraw from reach in good time.

When Bumpus had fully recovered his breath, the march was resumed. Giraffe loitered behind a bit. He knew from the signs that he was in for what he called a “hauling over the coals” by the patrol leader, and fully expected to see Thad drop back to join him. The sooner the unpleasant episode was over with the better—that was Giraffe’s way of looking at it, and he was really inviting Thad to hurry up and get the scolding out of his system.

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Sure enough, presently Thad dropped back and joined him. Looking up out of the tail of his eye, Giraffe saw that the other was observing him severely. He fully expected to hear something unpleasant about the duty one scout ought to assume toward his fellows. To his surprise Thad started on another tack entirely.

“I want to tell you a little story I read the other

day, Giraffe," he said quietly, "and, if the shoe fits, you can put it on."

"All right, Thad; you know I like to hear stories first rate," mumbled Giraffe, glad at least that the others of the party were far enough ahead so that none of them could hear what passed between himself and the patrol leader.

"I think," began Thad, "it was told to illustrate the old saying that 'curses, like chickens, come home to roost.' The lecturer went on to say that when a boy throws a rubber ball against a wall it bounds back, and, unless he is careful, it's apt to take him in the eye; and that's the way everything we do comes back to us some time or other."

"Sure thing it does; and p'raps some day I expect Bumpus will be getting one over on me to pay the score," admitted Giraffe; but Thad did not pay any attention to what he said, only went on with his story.

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"There was once a boy, a thoughtless boy, with a little cruel streak in his make-up, who always wanted to find a chance for a good laugh, without thinking of what pain he might be causing others," Thad went on, at which Giraffe winced, for the shaft went home. "One day he was playing on a hillside with their big dog, Rover. He would roll a stone down the hill, and Rover would obediently run after it, and bring it back. He seemed to be enjoying the sport as much as the boy.

"Then all at once the boy discovered a big hornet's nest almost a foot in diameter, hanging low down on a bush. He saw a chance to have a great lark. He would roll a stone so as to hit the nest, and send Rover after it. Then the hornets would come raging out, and it would be such a lark to see them chasing poor Rover down the hill.

"Well, the stone he rolled went true to the mark, and came slam against the hornet's nest. Rover was in full pursuit, and he banged up against it, too. Out came a black swarm of furious hornets, and of course they tackled poor Rover like everything.

"The boy up on the hill laughed until he nearly doubled up, to hear Rover yelp, and whirl around this way and that. He thought he had never had such a bully time in all his life as just then. Rover was a fine dog, and the boy thought just heaps of him; but then it was so comical to see how he twisted, and bit at himself, and he howled so fiercely, too, that the boy could hardly get his breath for laughing.

"But all at once he saw to his alarm that poor Rover, unable to help himself, was running up the hill straight to his master, as though thinking that the boy could save him. Then the boy stopped laughing. It didn't seem so funny then. And, Giraffe, inside of ten seconds there was a boy running madly down the hill, fighting a thousand mad hornets that stung him everywhere, and set him to yelling as if he were half crazy. When he got home finally, and saw his swollen face in the glass, and felt Rover licking his hand as if the good fellow did not dream that his master had betrayed him so meanly, what do you suppose that boy said to

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himself, if he had any conscience at all?"

Giraffe looked up. He was as red in the face as any turkey that ever strutted and gobbled. Giraffe at least had a conscience, as his words proved beyond any doubt.

"Served him right, Thad; that's what I say! And I thank you for telling me that story. It's a hummer, all right, and I won't ever forget it, either, I promise you. It *was* a cruel joke, and some time I'm going to make up for playing it. That's all I want to say, Thad."

And the wise patrol leader, knowing that it would do Giraffe a lot more good to commune with himself just then, rather than to be taken to task any further, walked away, to rejoin Allan, who was at the head of the expedition. Nor did Giraffe make any effort to hasten his footsteps so as to catch up with the rest, until quite some little time had elapsed.

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CHAPTER V.

THE CAMP IN THE HAYMOW.

"There's a farmhouse over yonder, Thad; and night's coming on pretty fast now!" called out Davy Jones later on, after the expedition had covered several more miles of ground, and seemed to be descending an incline that would very likely shortly take them to the bank of the winding Susquehanna.

"I hope we decide to bunk in a haymow, and not out in the open to-night," added Step Hen. "Not having any tents along makes it a poor business trying to keep off the rain, if she should drop in on us. How about it, Thad?"

"I reckon, suh, we're all of one mind there," remarked Bob White.

"Just as you say, boys," Thad announced. "We'll turn in here, and see if the farmer will allow us to camp in his barnyard."

"And mebbe he might sell us a couple of fat chickens, and some fresh milk or cream to go with our coffee. That would be about as fine as silk, I'm telling you," and Giraffe, who had rejoined his comrades, looking just the same as ever, rubbed his stomach as he said this, by that means implying that the prospect pleased him even more than words could tell.

Accordingly the line of march was changed. They abandoned the road, and started up the lane that led to the farmhouse. A watchdog began barking furiously, and at the sound several people came out of the house, and the big barn as well; so that while the scouts had clustered a little closer together, as though wishing to be ready for an attack, they knew there was now nothing to fear.

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Three minutes later and they were talking with the grizzled farmer, his good wife, a couple of girls, and the stout young hired help named Hiram, all of whom were fairly dazzled by the sight of eight khaki-clad young fellows, some of

whom carried shotguns, grouped in their dooryard.

Thad explained that they were a patrol of Boy Scouts from Cranford, on a hike, and not having tents along with them, made bold to ask the farmer if they might sleep in his haymow, and cook their supper in the open space before the barns.

There was something inviting about Thad Brewster's manner that drew most people toward him. That same farmer might have been tempted to say no under ordinary conditions, for he looked like a severe man; but somehow he was quite captivated by the manly appearance of these lads. Besides, he had doubtless read considerable about the activities of the scouts, and felt that the chance of hearing something concerning them at first hand was too good to be lost.

"I ain't got the least objection to you boys sleeping in my hay, if you promise me not to light matches, or do any smokin' there," he said.

"I'll look out for that, sir," replied Thad promptly, "and we all promise you that there will be no damage done from our staying over. We will want to make a cooking fire somewhere, but it can be done at a safe distance from the barn, and to leeward, so that any sparks will go the other way."

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"And if so be you could spare us a couple of chickens, mister," put in Giraffe, "we'd be glad to pay you the full market price; as also for any milk or cream or eggs you'd let us have."

"Oh! you can fix that with the missus," returned the farmer; "she runs that end of the farm. I look after the crops and the stock. Now, if you wanted a four-hundred-pound pig I've got a beauty to offer you."

"Thanks, awfully," returned Step Hen quickly, giving Giraffe, who was a big eater, a meaning look; "but I reckon we're well supplied in that way already."

Arrangements were quickly made with the farmer's wife, and under charge of the willing Hiram, who never could get over staring at the uniforms of the scouts with envy in his pale eyes, some of the boys gave chase to a couple of ambitious young roosters that were trying their first crow on a nearby fence, finally capturing and beheading the same.

Thad meanwhile accompanied the good woman to her dairy, and returned with a brimming bucket of morning's milk, as well as a pitcher of the thickest yellow cream any of them had ever gazed upon.

The girls brought out some fresh eggs, and altogether the sight of so much riches caused Giraffe to smile all over.

Giraffe was the acknowledged leader when it came to making fires, and that duty as a rule devolved upon him. He had made a particular study of the art, and in pursuing his hobby to the limits was able to get fire at his pleasure, whether he had a match or not. And in more than a few times in the past this knowledge had

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proved very useful to the tall scout, as the record in previous stories concerning the doings of the Silver Fox Patrol will explain.

Accordingly Giraffe had chosen to make a neat little fireplace out of smooth blocks of stone which happened to lie handy. This he had built at the spot selected by Thad as perfectly safe; for what little wind there was would blow the sparks in a direction where they could do no possible damage.

When Hiram came back he forgot all about any chores that might be waiting. Never before had he been given such a glorious chance to witness the smart doings of Boy Scouts. He observed everything Giraffe did when he made that cunning little out-of-doors cooking range, and noted that while the double row of stones spread wide apart at one end, just so the big frying pan would set across, they drew much closer at the other terminus, like the letter V, so that the coffee pot could be laid there without spilling.

Then Giraffe started his fire. Hiram noticed how he picked certain kinds of wood from the abundant supply over at the chopping block. Giraffe liked to be in the lime light; and he was also an accommodating chap. He saw that the farmhand was intensely interested, as well as quite green at all such things; but the fact of his "wanting to know" was enough to start the scout to imparting information.

So he told Hiram how certain kinds of wood are more suitable for cooking purposes, since they make a fierce heat, and leave red ashes that hold for a long time; and it is over such a bed that the best cooking can be done, and not when there is more or less flame and smoke to interfere.

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Allan and Davy had been very busy plucking the fowls during this time, while Bumpus busied himself getting some fresh water from the well near by, and fixing the coffee ready to go on the fire when Giraffe gave the word that he was prepared.

One of the girls brought a loaf of fresh homemade bread, and a roll of genuine country butter that was as sweet as could be. Fancy with what impatience those boys waited while supper was being cooked. The odors that arose when the cut-up chicken was browning in the pan along with some slices of salt pork, and the coffee steaming on one of the stones alongside the fire, made a combination that fairly set several of the fellows wild, so that they had to walk away in order to control themselves.

Finally the welcome signal was given by Bumpus, and never had those silver notes of the "assembly" sounded sweeter in mortal ears than they did that night in the barnyard of that Susquehanna farm, with the eight khaki-clad scouts sitting on logs, and any other thing that offered, and every inmate of the farmhouse gathered near by to watch operations.

They had a feast indeed, and there was plenty for every one and to spare. Indeed, Hiram had accepted the invitation of Giraffe to hold off supper, and join them, and the big fellow seemed to be enjoying his novel experience vastly, if one could judge from the broad grin

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that never once left his rosy face.

After the meal was over they found seats, and as the fire sparkled and crackled merrily Thad told them all that he possibly could about the aims and ambitions of the scout movement. He found a very attentive and appreciative audience; and it was possible that seeds were planted in the mind of Hiram on that occasion calculated to bear more or less good fruit later on in his life.

Of course Thad had to explain to some extent why they were so far away from home, and this necessitated relating the story about the old army overcoat that had been turned over to a tramp through the desire of the judge's second wife to get rid of it. Thad of course only went so far as to say that the judge mourned the loss of an article which he really valued highly on account of its association with his only son's army life years before; and he made out such a strong case that those who heard the story could easily understand why the gentleman should wish to recover the garment again, if it were possible.

None of them could remember having seen any party wearing such a coat; and it would seem that if the hobo had passed along that way, he might have applied at the farmhouse for a meal, though the presence of the dog usually deterred those of his kind from bothering the good farm wife.

"Guess they've got the chalk mark on your gate post, mister," commented Step Hen, when he heard this; "I've been told these hoboes leave signs all along the way for the next comer to read. Some places they say are good for a square meal; then at another place you want to look sharp, for the farmer's wife will ring pies on you that are guaranteed to break off a tooth in trying to bite 'em. Now, like as not there's a sign on your post that says: 'Beware of the dog; he's a holy terror!'"

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"I hope there is," replied the farmer; "and if I knew what it was I'd see it got on every post I own, for if there's one thing I hate it's a tramp. I've had my chickens stolen, my hogs poisoned, and my haymow out in the pasture burned twice by some of that worthless lot. They kind of know me by now, and that I ain't to be trifled with."

The evening passed all too quickly; and when Step Hen happened to mention that Bumpus was the possessor of a beautiful soprano voice of course the country girls insisted that he entertain them. Bumpus, as has been remarked before, was an accommodating fellow, and he allowed himself to be coaxed to sing one song after another, with all of them joining in the chorus, until he was too hoarse to keep it up. Then they spied his lovely silver-plated bugle, and nothing would do but he must sound all the army calls he knew, which added to the enjoyment considerably.

Taken in all, that was the most novel entertainment any of them had ever experienced; and especially those who lived in the lonely farmhouse. It must have been a tremendous and pleasant break in the monotony that usually hangs like a pall upon all farm work. No wonder, Thad thought, all of them looked so happy when they were bidding the boys good

night, and admitted that they had enjoyed the coming of the expedition greatly.

Hiram could not be "pried loose," as Giraffe said. He insisted on seeing all he could of these new and remarkable friends, and had announced his intention of accompanying the scouts to the hay, and sleeping near them.

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No one offered the least objection. Indeed, by this time, after such an exhausting march as they had been through since sun-up, all of them were pretty tired, and their one thought was to snuggle down in the hay, with their blankets wrapped around them, and get some sleep.

"Still cloudy and threatening," remarked Allen, as he and Thad took a last look around ere turning in.

"Yes, it's holding off in a queer way," replied the other, "but when it does hit us, look out for a downpour. I'd be glad if we ran on that Wandering George before the rain starts in, because it'll be hard getting around when the whole country is soaked and afloat."

"I'm told the river is already close to flood stage, owing to so much snow melting at headwaters," observed Allan.

"Yes, we had an unusual lot last winter, you remember; and when the weather turned actually hot a few days back it must have started the snow melting at a furious rate. If we get a hard rain now there'll be a whopping big flood all along the Susquehanna this spring."

"Everything seems all right around here, doesn't it?" asked Allan, as he bent down over Giraffe's fireplace, with the caution of a hunter who knew how necessary it always is to see that no glowing embers have been forgotten that a sudden wind could carry off to cause a disastrous conflagration.

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"I saw Giraffe throw some water over the coals," remarked Thad. "He loves a fire better than anyone I know, but you never find him neglecting to take the proper precautions. Yes, it's cold to the touch. Let's hunt a place to bunk for the night, Allan. With our blankets, a bed in the soft hay ought to feel just prime."

Nine of them burrowed into the big haymow, with all sorts of merry remarks, and a flow of boyish badinage. Finally they began to get settled in their various nooks and the talking died down until in the end no one said a single word, and already Bumpus and perhaps several others began to breathe heavily, thus betraying the fact that they had passed over the border of dreamland.

Thad of course had more to think about than most of his mates, because, as the patrol leader, and head of the present expedition, he found problems to study out that did not present themselves to such happy-go-lucky fellows as Bumpus, Step Hen, Davy, and perhaps Giraffe. So Thad lay there for quite some time, thinking, and trying to lay out some plan of campaign to be followed in case the expected rain did strike them before they came up with the fugitive tramp.

It was very comfortable, and the hay was sweet-smelling, so that even the fastidious Smithy had not been heard to utter the least complaint, but had burrowed with the rest. Possibly he may have swathed his face, as well as his body, in the folds of his blanket, in order to prevent any roving spider from carrying out the gypsy's evil prophecy; but if so no one knew it, since all of them but Allan and Thad had made separate burrows.

The young scout master remembered that his thoughts became confused, and then he lost his grip on things.

It seemed to him that his dreams must be wonderfully vivid, for as he suddenly struggled up to a sitting position he could fancy that he heard some one calling at the top of his voice. Then shrill screams in girlish tones added to the clamor.

"What's that mean, Thad?" demanded Allan, as he clutched the arm of his chum, at the same time sitting up.

"I don't know," replied Thad shortly. "There must be something wrong up at the farmhouse. The other fellows are stirring now, so let's crawl out of this in a big hurry, Allan!"

Both scouts made all haste to escape from the tunnel under the hay, kicking their way to freedom. No sooner had they gained their feet than they started out of the barn, for the haymow was under the shelter of a roof.

Only too well did Thad know what was the matter, when he burst from the door of the barn, and saw that the darkness of the night was split by a glare from up in the direction of the farmhouse on the rise. Through the bare branches of the trees he could see tongues of flames.

"The house is on fire, Allan!" he shouted. "We must get all the boys out, and do what we can to fight the flames. Hi! everybody on deck—Giraffe, Step Hen, Davy, and the rest of you, hurry out here and lend a hand! You're wanted, and wanted badly into the bargain!"

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CHAPTER VI.

SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE.

Feeling sure that the rest of the scouts, as well as Hiram, the overgrown country boy who worked on the farm, would be along shortly, Thad and Allan seized upon a couple of buckets, filled them at the watering trough near by, and hastened toward the burning building.

The farmer, partly dressed, was doing valiant work already, and his wife kept up a constant pounding of the pump, filling buckets as fast as the man of the house emptied them.

When the two scouts got to work things began to look more hopeful, though with the flames making such rapid headway it promised to be a hard fight to win out.

Thad wondered why the fire should have gained such a tremendous headway, but later on the mystery was explained, and he understood the reason. When kerosene is dashed around it offers splendid food for fire, once the flame is applied.

Now came all of the other fellows, eager to lend a helping hand. The farmer had been neighborly and kind, and his folks had helped to make a pleasant night for their unexpected but nevertheless welcome guests, and on this account alone Thad and his chums felt that they must do all in their power to save the house. Then again they were scouts, and as such had cheerfully promised to always assist those in trouble, whether friends, strangers, or even enemies.

They found all manner of vessels capable of holding more or less water. Bumpus even manipulated a footbath, although on one or two occasions he had to stumble as usual, and came very near being drowned in consequence, since he deluged himself from head to foot with the contents.

When such a constant stream of water was being poured upon the fire it could not make much headway.

“Keep her going!” yelled Giraffe, whose long legs allowed him to make more frequent trips back and forth than any of the others; “we’ve got her at a standstill now, and the next thing you know she’ll cave under. More water this way! Everybody’s doing it! Hi! Bumpus, don’t upset that ocean over me; it’s the fire that wants putting out, not me. Whee! look at that, would you; he smothered it with that deluge. Bully for you, Bumpus! Do it some more, boy! You’re sure a brick!”

They worked like beavers, every fellow acting as though the success of the undertaking depended wholly upon his individual efforts. When the good woman fell back, completely exhausted with her efforts, the two girls nobly responded to the call, and pumped away as only sturdy country lassies could, filling the buckets that came their way as speedily as possible.

It was very lively while it lasted, and none of those who took part in that midnight battle with the devouring element would soon forget their exciting experience.

The fire seemed to be confined to the room in which it had started, so that the damage would not be extended, which was one satisfaction at least.

To the boys it was next door to a picnic. They just gloried in participating in such an exciting event as this, and some of them may even have felt a little disappointment because the battle with the devouring element promised to be of such short duration, though of course that did not mean they would have been glad to have seen further disaster overtake their friend the farmer.

Thad and Allan would not allow anyone to relax their efforts in the slightest degree, even when it became positive that they were quickly putting out the last of the fire. Until every spark had

been properly extinguished there must lie no stoppage to the good work. A fire is only put out when there is no longer any danger of its awakening to new life when one's back is turned.

Finally the work was done, and they could rest themselves. The man had gone into the kitchen and started a blaze in the stove there, for the night air seemed chilly, and none of them was dressed any too warmly.

"Well, this old tramp promises to make a new record along the line of excitement for our crowd, and that's a fact!" declared Step Hen, as he took a drink of cold water, for his recent exertions had "warmed him up inside," he remarked.

"I should remark it did," added Giraffe; "and who can say what lies ahead of us yet? One thing follows another like a procession. But I'm glad we happened to be here at the right time, so we could help save the farmhouse. These people have been mighty kind to us, and it's nice to be able to pay 'em back."

"Say, Thad, I hope now *we* didn't have anything to do with that fire?" remarked Davy, who lowered his voice as he spoke, as though unwilling to have anyone outside of his comrades hear what he said.

"Well, I reckon we had a heap to do with extinguishing the same, anyhow," Giraffe told him; "but what do you mean, Davy? Don't act so mysterious, but blurt it out."

"Are you sure you didn't leave any fire where you cooked supper, Giraffe, that could have been scooped up by the rising wind, and carried to the house up here? That's what's bothering me."

"Don't let it worry you a whit any longer then," Thad told him promptly; "because Allan and I made sure to examine the fireplace, and we found that Giraffe, like a true scout, had thrown water on the last spark. It was cold and dead. So you see, Davy, we couldn't have had anything to do with its starting."

"Then what happened?" asked Smithy, who evidently did not know that he had a ridiculous long black smooch down one side of his face, or he would not have looked so well satisfied, because Smithy still cared a great deal for his personal appearance, and sometimes even brushed his hair on the sly when in camp.

"We'll have to find that out from the farmer," said Thad.

They looked in the kitchen where the owner of the house had last been seen, but he was not there. Just then they heard him calling them.

"Come in here, boys!" he kept saying; and presently they located the voice as coming from the living room, where the fire had been confined, thanks to their energetic labors.

As they pushed in there they saw that it was pretty much of a wreck; but as the farmer's wife had already told Thad they were fully insured, the result would be more of an inconvenience, and the loss of family treasures, than any great

amount of pecuniary damage.

The farmer was standing at an old desk that was part bookcase. It had somehow managed to escape the flames that came upon most of the contents of the sitting-room.

"They got my little pile, all right," he started to say, as the scouts crowded into the damaged and blackened room, now several inches deep with water; "but I'm glad it wasn't very much. If this had happened three weeks ago I'd have stood to lose several thousand dollars, because I sold a patch of land, and had the cash overnight in this same desk, though I banked it next day."

Thad was immediately deeply interested. He saw in these significant words of the farmer an explanation of the mystery as to how the fire could have started.

"Do you mean to tell us that you have been robbed, sir?" he asked; and the old man nodded his head.

"I woke up, and thought I heard the low sound of voices downstairs here," he went on to explain; "so I got out of bed, after waking Nancy, picked up my gun, and came down the stairs. They creak like all get-out, and must 'a' told the scamps somebody was coming. Just as I got to the door I saw two men by the desk here, that they had forced open; and I guess they'd copped my little roll of bills about that time. Well, I was struck dumb at the sight at first, and then I remembered my gun; but before I could swing it up to my shoulder one of them swept the lighted lamp from the table to the floor."

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"The flash that came blinded me, and I forgot all about the robbers in thinking about saving my house. Then Nancy she came down, and we got busy. All at once I remembered you boys in the barn, and Hiram, and I started to yellin' at the top of my voice, but pitchin' water all the while. That's how the fire started, you see; and we're sure beholdin' a heap to you boys for helpin' put it out as smart as we did. It looks tough, for a fact, but sho! it might 'a' been heaps worse."

"But the dog—what d'ye reckon they could have done to him?" asked Giraffe.

"It might be they pizened Toby," replied the farmer; "I wouldn't put it past that tough pair to do anything. But chances are the dog's off to the woods huntin' rabbits. He often runs away like that and stays all night long. If I tie him up he barks enough to set us crazy. I'll have to get rid of him, and find a better watchdog."

"Well, things are getting warmer right along, ain't they?" Step Hen wanted to know. "A fire was bad enough, but when you find out that it was started by thieves, and that they actually robbed the house first, it gets more and more exciting. Now the Silver Fox Patrol has done something along lines like that before; and mebbe we might again, given half a fair chance."

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"I suppose the two men didn't wait to see what happened after they had knocked the lamp over, and the flames shot up?" remarked Allan, thoughtfully; and the farmer was quick to reply.

"They cleared out in a big hurry, because I

didn't see anything more of the pair," he admitted. "But then they got what they came after, and that satisfied the rascals. And I don't reckon there's a single chance in ten I'll ever recover that fifty dollars, barring twenty cents, that I got for the last two loads of hay I took into town. But then my house is left, and we'll get some insurance to pay for repairs, so I'm not complaining. There's only one thing that makes me mad."

"What was that, Mr. Bailey?" asked Davy, deeply interested.

"That I was so stunned at sight of them fellers robbin' my desk I forgot I had an old Civil War musket in my hands. I had ought to've let fly, and knocked one of the pizen critters silly. I'll never forgive myself for bein' so slow to act."

Thad had his own ideas about that. Had the farmer fired that long-barreled musket at such close range he would possibly have killed one of the men; and whether such a tragedy would have been justified under the circumstances was and must remain an open question. If his life had been threatened of course the farmer would have done right to defend himself to the utmost; but Thad believed that had it been him he would have allowed the men to get some distance away before sending a load of shot at them, his object being to wound and not slay.

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It was certainly good, however, to find that Mr. Bailey took things so philosophically all around. Some men would have been bewailing their misfortune, and never once seeing how much they had to be thankful for.

"Do you think you would know either or both of them again if you happened to set eyes on them, sir?" asked the patrol leader, with an object in view.

"I saw them faces as plain as I do yours, my boy," responded the farmer, soberly, "and I'm dead sartin I'd know 'em again. Why—whatever am I thinkin' about, to be sure? Say, you boys ought to know that you've got nigh as much interest in findin' them tramps as I feel. You wonder why I say that, do you? I'll explain it to you in a jiffy. Listen then. One of the thieves had red hair, and he was wearin' an old faded blue army coat with red lining in it. That's why!"

It seemed as though every one of those eight scouts drew a deep breath that had the sound of a sigh. They looked at one another, at first with wonder in their faces, and then Giraffe was heard to give vent to what he intended should be a joyous chuckle. The sound was contagious, for immediately broad smiles began to appear here and there, and there was a general hand-shaking as though the news were deemed important enough to make them congratulate each other.

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It was a fact calculated to make them feel that the long chase had not been useless, when they thus learned so suddenly that the man they hunted had been almost in their power half an hour before.

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CHAPTER VII.

ON THE RIVER ROAD.

"Well, wouldn't that give you a heart-ache, now?" remarked Giraffe, making a wry face, as he looked at his seven mates.

"Just to think of it!" exclaimed Bumpus, "we were all sleeping sweetly like babes in the woods, out there in the hay, while our game passed us by. A healthy lot of scouts we seem like, don't we? When people hear of this they'll vote us a leather medal. Always on guard, hey? Never letting a single thing worth while slipping through our fingers? Oh! my stars, somebody fan me!"

Thad laughed at the fat scout.

"I wouldn't feel so bad if I were you, Bumpus," he remonstrated; "there's nothing on us that I can see. This happened to be an accident that we couldn't help. How were we to guess that the man we came after would drop in here and rob the farmer? The fortunes of war, Bumpus. Besides, it gives us a pointer. We know now that Wandering George isn't far ahead of us; and we're going to catch up with him before a great while."

"That's the way to talk, Thad!" commented Step Hen. "We never give up when we get started on a game. Keeping everlastingly at it is what wins most of all. George was kind to leave his card behind him; and in the morning we'll start out fresh on the trail."

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It would appear from this that none of the others felt at all depressed because of the strange happening; and realizing this even Bumpus was soon looking satisfied again. The farmer declared he would not try to sleep any more that night, but as for the scouts they could see no reason why anyone else should follow his example, when that sweet hay called so loudly.

The consequence was that before long there was an exodus to the barn, for since the small hours of the morning had come the air was decidedly cool, and none of them felt comfortable.

Nothing more developed during the remainder of that night, and the first thing some of the sleepers knew they were hearing the bugle sounding the reveille. Bumpus had been aroused by Allan poking him in the ribs, and telling him it was sun-up; for somehow the two had bored into the hay together the second time.

Giraffe attended to the fire, as usual, and as everybody wanted to get warm there was no lack of cooks. The work of the farm had started long before, and already the girls were coming in with full buckets of new milk; while the cackling of many hens announced that the biddies were giving an account of themselves.

As the boys gathered around and started to partake of their breakfast the farmer and his family poured out of the house bearing all manner of additions to the menu, even to a couple of apple pies, which seems to be a standard early morning dish in the country along the Susquehanna, even as doughnuts are in New England.

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Of course the boys fared like kings, and would not soon forget that splendid breakfast. When they packed their kits ready to make a fresh start, the girls insisted on pressing various little additions to their larder upon them, so that what with the apples, cookies, and the like, some of the boys could hardly manage to strap up their haversacks.

And there was Hiram looking so forlorn over their going that Thad took pity on the poor fellow.

"I'm going to remember you, Hiram," he told the farmhand, as he squeezed his big hand warmly, "and after we get home I'll send you a bunch of reading matter in connection with this scout movement, as well as several cracking good books that have been written covering the activities of our Silver Fox Patrol."

"Gosh! I hope yeou do that same!" ejaculated Hiram, brightening up; "'cause I'm jest bustin' to larn all about it. I'd give a heap if I ever hed a chanct to wear a suit like them be, an' camp out in the woods. I hearn thar be a troop o' scouts a-formin' over in Hicksville, an' by jinks I'm a-goin' to put in a application, as sure's my name's Hiram Spinks!"

"I hope you do, Hiram," the patrol leader told him, "and if I can do anything at any time to help out, let me know. First of all I'm going to mail you an extra handbook or Boy Scout Manual I've got knocking around home; and if you're feeling a touch of the fever now, that's guaranteed to give it to you ten times worse."

So they said good-by to the hospitable farmer and his family, none of whom would accept a single cent in return for what they had done for the scouts. Indeed, they vehemently declared they were heavily in the boys' debt on account of their having helped save the farmhouse after it had been set on fire by the action of the hobo thieves, surprised at their work of robbing the farmer's desk.

Thad had been off somewhere while the rest were finishing their packing. When he came back Allan, who noticed the expression on the face of the patrol leader, guessed he must have met with a certain amount of success. Apparently he knew what the other had started out to find; at least his first remark made it look that way.

"Well, was it there, Thad?" he observed.

"As plain as print," came the immediate reply, accompanied with a smile of satisfaction, such as a fellow may assume when he is in a position to say "I told you so!"

"That is, the track of a broken shoe which has the sole held in place by a rag bound about it, hobo fashion?" continued Allan.

"Yes, and belonging to the right foot at that, just as we learned long ago was the case with Wandering George," Thad continued.

"Where did you run across the trail?" questioned Allan.

"I'll show you when we're leaving here," he was

told. "It's so plain even a tenderfoot couldn't miss seeing the same. And when the road is reached you can follow it for some little distance."

"Toward the river, Thad?"

"Yes, in an easterly direction," answered the leader of the patrol; "and that just suits us right up to the notch, you know. But the boys are ready to start, so we'd better be hiking out."

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The last they saw of the farmer and his family the two girls were waving their sun-bonnets wildly, while the older people contented themselves with making use of their hands. This little visit of the scouts had made a very enjoyable break in the monotony of their lives, and would not be soon forgotten.

As for Hiram, he had received permission to accompany the boys for a mile along the road; though Thad had solemnly promised the farmer to send him back in due time, for there were daily chores to be looked after that could not be neglected.

While some of the others, notably Bumpus and Smithy and Davy, were paying attention to answering the fervent signals of the jolly country girls, Thad was showing Allan, Giraffe, Bob White and Step Hen the plain impression of the marked shoe belonging, as they very well knew, to the particular tramp whom they were so anxious to overtake.

How Hiram did listen eagerly to every word that was uttered, and even got down on his hands and knees to scrutinize that impression. He had of course hunted at times, as every country boy does, and shot his quota of small game like rabbits, squirrels, quail and woodcock; yet knew next to nothing concerning the real delights of woodcraft. But the seed had taken root in Hiram's soul, and would sprout from that time on. The coming of these scouts had aroused an ambition within him, and he could never again be the same contented plodder that he had seemed to be in the past.

Down the road the boys walked at a brisk pace, chatting and joking as they went on. Those in the van of course had the task of keeping in touch with the tracks and every once in a while they made sure that these could still be discovered in the rather soft soil alongside the road.

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When the mile had been passed and more Thad reminded Hiram of his promise, and in turn every scout pressed the big fellow's hard hand warmly. So they passed out of Hiram's life; but the result of his meeting these wide-awake scouts was destined to mark an epoch in the career of that country boy, a turning point in his destiny as it were.

The day was another gloomy one.

It seemed as though Nature might be frowning her worst, and giving all sorts of portentous signs concerning what was coming before long. If anything the damp feeling in the air had grown more pronounced than before, which would indicate to a weather prophet the approach of wet weather.

It takes considerable to dampen the enthusiasm of lively scouts, however; and as the morning crept along they continued to make merry as they plodded on their way.

It was about eleven o'clock when a shout from Giraffe in the front announced a discovery of some moment. Trust "Old Eagle Eye" for finding out things ahead of others; he was not gifted with that keenness of vision for nothing.

"What is it, the river at last?" called Bumpus, between puffs, for the pace was fast enough to make the stout scout breathe hard.

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"That's what it is, as sure as you live!" exclaimed Step Hen.

"And let me tell you, suh, she looks mighty fine to me," remarked Bob White, who was particularly fond of the water, and a good boatman as well as canoeist.

"Whew! Strikes me the old Susquehanna must be on a tear already!" came from Bumpus, as he caught his first glimpse of the wide expanse of flowing water.

"It is pretty high for a fact!" Smithy admitted; "I'm somewhat familiar with the river, because I visited here several summers; and I never saw so much water running down between its banks."

The road they were following, upon drawing near the river, turned sharply to the south. After that the boys knew they must be within reaching distance of the water as long as they kept to that thoroughfare; though of course should they learn, through the tracks they followed, that the hobo wearing the old army coat had taken to a side path they would be compelled to do the same.

Occasionally they came to an isolated house, and once passed through a small hamlet; but made sure to find the trail beyond, showing that Wandering George had safely navigated through the outpost of civilization, and not been locked up. In fact, Thad was of the opinion that the pair of nomads must have circled around the village on general principles. After having been discovered in the act of robbing the farmer's home bank they may have feared arrest; and while one hid in the thickets the other possibly ventured into the village in order to purchase supplies, principally strong drink at the tavern.

No matter what their tactics may have been, the pair still held to the river road, and that was sufficient for the scouts who followed the trail.

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"What do you make of it, Thad?" asked Giraffe, after he had seen the leader and Allan closely examining a pretty fair footprint left by the tramp; "and are we a long ways behind right now?"

"It isn't an easy thing to say," he was told, "because we haven't much to go by, you see, and have to figure it out on general principles; but we've concluded that this print is about two hours old; and that the men are taking it fairly easy as tramps walk."

"Every once in so often they stop, and sit down

on a log that looks inviting, as you see they did here," Allan added, pointing as he spoke. "We figure they must have invested some of the stolen money in whisky at that village tavern, and that every time they stop they indulge themselves in a good swig."

"Just what they do, Allan!" announced Step Hen, who had been aimlessly prowling around on the border of the road back of the log where the tramps had rested; "see here what I've picked up. That flask must have held a full pint, and it's been drained to the last drop. More where that came from; and chances are before long we may run across our men sprawled out in the bushes in a drunken sleep."

"Well, as most tramps can soak in any amount of bug juice without showing signs of it," Giraffe ventured, "you mustn't count too heavy on that same; though it'd be a bully good thing for us, as we could get back the Judge's blue overcoat without any row. The question is, ought we to arrest the hoboos on account of what they did up at Bailey's farm?"

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"We won't cross that river till we come to it, Giraffe," laughed Thad; but all the same some of the scouts felt positive their leader had his plan of campaign mapped out already, because that was his invariable rule, so as not to be taken unawares.

Another half hour passed. Just ahead of them was a small cabin between the road and the river. A fenced-in patch showed where the occupants managed to have a little garden in season.

"What ails that woman standing there and calling out, d'ye suppose?" remarked Step Hen, as they were passing the cottage.

"She seems to be bothered some, if you can judge by the way she waves her hands, and keeps on beckoning," Giraffe went on to say, becoming interested. "She's facing out on the river, too, you notice. Now, I wouldn't be surprised if she's got a cub of a boy who's gone out further than he ought to on the swift current in some tub of a boat, and she's trying to make him come ashore. There, didn't you hear her yell to Johnny to come back at once? And here's where the bushes end, so we can see for ourselves."

It turned out that Giraffe was correct, for there was a makeshift of a boat out on the current of the river, containing a boy who was clumsily trying to turn its head in the direction of the shore. The obstructions in the Susquehanna make it a very treacherous stream, with eddies and stealthy currents that take one unawares, and "Johnny" was making a sorry mess of his work, Thad saw at a glance.

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"He's apt to get upset if he doesn't take care!" exclaimed Bob White, who knew the signs all too well.

The woman kept shouting and no doubt this distracted the boy more or less, causing him to lose his head. In fact he did just what he should never have done; for when the bow of his boat ran up on a partly submerged rock he let go the oars, picked one up, and rising to his feet

stepped forward to push the craft off again.

"Sit down!" shouted Thad, between his hands; but if the boy heard he gave no sign of obeying, his one thought being to push his oar against the obstruction, and get the boat moving free again.

Then came a shriek from the poor mother. The current had got in its treacherous work, just as Thad and some of his chums had expected would be the case.

"He's gone in, and the boat turned turtle!" cried Step Hen, aghast.

"Help! oh! somebody save my poor Johnny, because he can't swim a stroke!" shrieked the woman, wringing her hands, and appealing to the detachment of scouts, of whose presence near the spot of the tragedy she had just become aware.

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CHAPTER VIII.

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE.

That was a time for rapid action, and not talk. No one knew this better than the leader of the Silver Fox Patrol. At the same time, if he wished to render assistance to the imperiled lad it was necessary that he give a few quick directions to his chums, so they could all work together toward that end.

"Allan, the rest of you hurry along and get below! Giraffe, back me up, will you? I know what you can do in cold water. We've just *got* to save that boy, and that's all there is to it. Come along, Giraffe."

The tall scout never hesitated for even a single second. He understood that it would be necessary for both of them to plunge into that flood of water, cold from the melting snows further toward the source of the river; but Giraffe was known for his boldness, and a little thing like that could not frighten him. Why, on one occasion he had plunged into a burning woods, and performed prodigies of valor; what was an ice-water bath to him but a little episode?

Both boys as they hurried toward the brink of the river commenced to shed their outer garments, having discarded other impedimenta like their haversacks the first thing. In this way Thad knew he would be "killing two birds with one stone," for they must be impeded with clinging clothes when swimming; and after they came out it was bound to feel very cold, so that these dry garments must come in handy.

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"Jump in here, Giraffe, and I'll drop down a little further!" he shouted, as the two of them came upon the river bank.

A quick look out on the rolling current had shown him how affairs stood just then. He saw that the frantic boy was clinging to the overturned boat, which was swirling around in the eddies, and swinging downstream at quite a rapid rate. He lost his grip even as Thad looked,

and the heart of the scout seemed to leap into his throat with dread. Then the boy somehow managed to regain his hold, but he seemed to be so excited and frightened that there was danger of his slipping away again at any second; and being weakened by exposure the chances of his once more recovering his slender hold could not be worth much.

Thad did not waste a single second. He was hurrying along even when taking this look toward the scene of the catastrophe and figuring just where to jump into the water at the same time.

In deciding this he had to take into consideration the length of time that might ensue before he could expect to push out to where the overturned boat was going to pass; also the strength of the current that was bringing the wreck down toward him.

Although the water felt like ice when he started in Thad did not allow that fact to bother him a particle. He shot a glance upstream, and saw that already Giraffe had reached deep water so that he was compelled to swim. The sight of him buffeting the waves gave Thad considerable satisfaction; though he feared that the boy clinging to the slippery bottom of the boat might disappear before either of the intended rescuers could reach him.

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Meanwhile the other six scouts had started on a run down the road, it being the intention of Allan to have them where they could render assistance in getting the others ashore, because those in the water would likely be exhausted, even if all went well.

Then Thad reached a "step-off" and plunging in over his head was compelled to swim for it, which he did right valiantly, constantly keeping tabs on the oncoming boat, and still hoping that the boy might maintain his hold until either Giraffe or himself could lend a helping hand.

All at once he felt a chill that was not caused by the icy water, for the poor fellow had again slipped back into the churning water. But Thad and Giraffe were closing in on him, with the latter in a position to glimpse the still struggling lad ere he finally went down.

With the crisis upon him Thad dived, while Giraffe started to tread water, and hold himself in readiness to help should his chum meet with any success. It seemed an interminable time to the lengthy scout before he saw Thad reappear. At first he feared the patrol leader must have missed connections with the drowning boy; and then he made the pleasing discovery to the contrary, for Thad was gripping Johnny tightly with one arm, as he swam with the other.

Giraffe shot toward him as fast as he could go, and in another moment the two scouts were putting into practice something that all scouts learn as a part of their preparedness, when trying to rescue a comrade who has been seized with a cramp while swimming—holding the unconscious lad between them, with his head kept well above the water, they started toward the bank, swimming with sturdy and well-regulated strokes.

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When they drew near enough for one of the others who had waded in up to his waist to reach out a hand, it came easier; and in this way they bore the rescued boy ashore.

Thad was already shivering with the cold, but he kept his wits about him, and gave such orders as he saw were necessary.

Allan and several of the other scouts were directed to try and resuscitate the apparently drowned boy; while Bumpus and Smithy started as big a fire as they could manage, so that all of them might warm up.

Meanwhile Thad and Giraffe jumped around, and slapped their arms furiously in the endeavor to get up a good circulation of blood.

The poor woman came upon them at this unfortunate moment, while Allan kneeling over the wet form of her boy was kneading his chest after the most approved fashion known to life-savers; and a couple of the other fellows were working his arms back and forth above his head as though they gripped pump-handles.

"Oh! he's dead, my boy Johnny is dead!" wailed the mother, starting to throw herself upon the group; when Bob White, although full of sympathy for her harrowed feelings, knew that to stop the proceedings just then might end what hope there existed for saving a life.

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Accordingly, he caught her in his arms, and insisted in restraining her, at the same time speaking words of hope and cheer.

"You mustn't interfere with them, ma'am," he told her soothingly; "they've got the water out of his lungs, and are trying to start artificial breathing by pumping him that way. There's lots of hope he'll come out all right, because he wasn't under the water long. Why, I believe I saw his eyelid flutter right then. Yes, suh, it did the same again. It's a fact, and you're bringing him along handsomely, fellows. So you see, ma'am, you're not going to lose Johnny after all!"

The woman knelt there, awed, and watched the slow recovery of her boy. After a little while he began to breathe naturally; then his eyes opened, and he even made an effort to struggle, possibly being still impressed with the horror of his recent peril.

Before that time the fire had got to burning splendidly, and both boys who had been in the river crowded as close to the warmth as possible, feeling much better on account of it. Thad, too, could think again, and direct his chums what to do. One of them ran to the cabin and came back with a blanket, which was wrapped around the now recovered but shivering Johnny; after which Step Hen and Allan assisted the small boy to reach his home, with the rejoicing mother following at their heels, crying now, but with happiness.

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Allan told her just what to do in order that no ill effect, such as pneumonia, should follow the immersion, and she promised to keep him in bed, and give him warm liquid food until he was feeling himself again.

When the two scouts turned to leave her the poor woman kissed them both, much to their confusion; for they felt that the thanks were due to Thad and Giraffe, if anybody, since they were the ones who had risked something in order to save the drowning boy.

Of course this was going to detain them for perhaps an hour, because those who had been in the water wished to thoroughly dry their clothes, at least such as they had taken with them into the river.

Both had been wise enough to tear off leggins and shoes before leaving the shore, as swimming would have been next to impossible otherwise; and this counted considerably in their favor now.

While they sat around the blaze, waiting until Thad gave the signal for another start, the boys thought it wise to make their noonday meal, so they would not have to stop again.

Of course the talk was pretty much all upon the subject of rescuing persons who were in danger of being drowned; and also of resuscitating those who had been pulled out of the water apparently far gone.

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Thad, as usual, did not let the chance slip to deliver a few telling remarks connected with a knowledge of certain kinds which all scouts are required to attain before they can become shining lights in the profession, or hope to rise to the position of second or first class scouts.

"If there's one splendid thing this scout business has done for boys above another," he went on to say, as they sat around the fire, "I think it is the fact that every tenderfoot has to learn how to swim during his first season in camp. How many thousands of lives might have been saved in the past if all boys over eight years of age had been taught how to keep themselves afloat in the water. If the movement had never done a single thing more than that it would deserve to be reckoned the finest thing that ever happened for American youth."

"Yes," Giraffe went on to add, "and think how many a fellow has been saved from drowning, just as little Johnny here was, first by being taken from the water, and then in having the spark of life coaxed back. You worked that as fine as anything I ever saw, Allan, and the rest of you. Thad and me felt so shivery cold I'm afraid we couldn't have done it alone by ourselves. A whole lot of the credit goes to the rest of you, and we want you to know that. It was a patrol rescue, and something the boys of the Silver Fox can be proud of always."

That was just like Giraffe, who could be one of the most generous-hearted fellows ever known when he wanted to. That he felt considerable remorse because of his reckless way of sending poor Bumpus into that field with the angry mother cow had been patent to Thad early that morning, when he saw Giraffe asking Bumpus to lean on him, after the stout scout had mentioned the fact that he was feeling somewhat stiff following his unusual exertions of the previous day.

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"According to my notion," Step Hen broke in with, "no boy should ever be allowed to go out in

a boat on the water unless he knows how to swim."

"I agree with you there, Step Hen," the patrol leader added; "and yet how often you see boys taking the greatest kind of chances, when if an upset comes along they're as helpless as babies. That mother has learned a lesson; and chances are Johnny never goes in a boat again till he can swim like a fish."

"But boys are not the only ones who take such chances," Allan argued; "why, in the days gone by when nearly all ships were sailing vessels, and not steamers, it wasn't a strange thing to find dozens of old jack tars who had spent their whole lives at sea, and yet never swam a stroke. It seems queer, and hard to believe, but I've heard men tell that who knew."

"Things are going to be different after this, then," said Davy, "because every Boy Scout has got to learn how to swim, or he'll stay a tenderfoot all his days; and no one wants to do that, you know."

"What happened to the boat; none of you thought to rescue that at the same time?" Smitty wanted to know.

"Oh! it wasn't worth saving," Giraffe told him; "and after what happened, Johnny's mother would never want to see it again. We had our hands too full getting him to the bank to bother about that cranky old junk. It'll bring up somewhere below, like as not, or else float out on the Chesapeake Bay around Havre de Grace, where they used to have such great duck shooting years ago, because of the wild celery beds that grew there."

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Giraffe was fond of hunting, and knew considerable in connection with his favorite sport, which information he delighted to impart to his chums at divers times and on sundry occasions. Once upon a time he had been like most thoughtless boys, so intent on filling his gamebag, or catching a record number of fish, that slaughter counted little with him; but after joining the troop Giraffe had learned what a true sportsman should be, and since then was never known to inflict needless pain, or destroy game or game fish when they could not be used for food.

These numerous useful things which scouts learn have the knack of curbing the half savage instinct that seems to repose within nearly all boys' breasts; and which they say must have descended to them from far-back ancestors.

By the time lunch had been dispatched Thad and Giraffe declared they were as good as new again, since every particle of their clothes had been thoroughly dried. There was a general scrutiny on the part of all hands, so as to make sure nothing had been forgotten in the excitement. Thad had sent several of them back over the ground, to pick up every object thrown aside in that mad scramble, from guns and knapsacks to clothes and shoes.

Outside of a little delay, which they expected would not matter much, they had not suffered in the least because of this sudden and unexpected call upon their services. And to have saved a

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human life was certainly worth ten times as much as they had done.

Bumpus at a signal from the leader sounded his bugle, and once more the little detachment of khaki-clad boys started along the river road, headed southeast, and with a positive assurance that the man whom they sought, the hobo wearing the old blue army overcoat, was somewhere ahead of them.

In this manner they tramped for several miles, constantly on the lookout for any signs of their quarry. Thad frequently searched for the marked footprint, and as often discovered it plainly marked in the yielding mud close to the road; so that they had no fear of overlapping the fugitive.

It was about this time that Bumpus was heard grumbling to himself.

"What's wrong now, Bumpus; want a little help on account of that stiff leg?" asked Giraffe, turning around.

"Taint that," returned the other quickly, as if scorning to show signs of fatigue when the others were capable of keeping up the pace.

"Well, what are you grunting about, then, tell us?" demanded Step Hen, who was himself limping a little, because of a pebble that had managed to work into his shoe despite the protecting legging, and hurt his foot before he bothered getting it out.

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"Why, you see," began Bumpus naïvely, "it's started to rain at last, that's all!"

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CHAPTER IX.

ANY PORT IN A STORM.

"Hurrah for Bumpus, who's made a first discovery!" exclaimed Giraffe, pretending to show great enthusiasm by waving his campaign hat about his head.

"Well, I don't see that it's anything to laugh at," Smithy was heard to remark, with a lugubrious expression on his face; "if it comes down on us while we're on the tramp, and without any sort of protection, we'll soon be all mussed up, and in a nice pickle. I'd be considerably better pleased to have Bumpus discover the sun peeping out at us before setting."

"What can't be cured must be endured, you know, Smithy," Thad told the former dandy of the troop, who was every now and then showing traces of his old faults, though he had been cured of numerous shortcomings. "If it rains we'll have to get our rubber ponchos over our shoulders, and then look for a place to spend the night. Things are never so bad but what you'll find they could be worse."

That indeed was the whole secret of Thad's success, and the cheerful spirit he invariably displayed when up against difficulties; and every boy who makes up his mind to look at his troubles in the same hopeful spirit will surely

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profit from such a course. Things are *never* at their worst, though we may temporarily think so. The few drops that came down did not last and as the scouts continued to push along the river road they kept their eyes on the watch for some valley farm, where they might possibly find shelter against the coming storm.

It began to look as though they must have struck a portion of the country where, for some unknown reason, farms were few and far between, which is not often the case along the picturesque Susquehanna, since most of the land is under some kind of cultivation.

Thad even began to fear that as the evening was now close at hand they might be compelled to abandon their hope of finding a house, and use the little time remaining in building some sort of rude shelter.

The idea did not appeal very strongly to him, because he knew that if a heavy downpour came upon them it might last for twenty-four hours; and such a primitive camp would prove a dismal refuge indeed, with no fire to cheer them, and dripping trees all around, not to speak of a rapidly rising river.

On this account he was determined to keep pushing on until the darkness became too dense to allow further progress. When they found themselves up against such a snag as this it would be time to consider the last resort, which must consist of shelter under some outcropping rocks, or a rustic hangout made of branches and every other sort of thing available.

The boys were not talking so much latterly. It seemed as though they might be feeling too tired for merriment, or else the increasing gravity of their situation began to impress them.

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One thing Thad regretted very much. This was the fact that after the rain had come and gone they could hardly expect to follow the man who wore the old blue army coat by means of the tracks he left behind him, for these would have been utterly obliterated. They must then depend on information given by the inmates of such houses as they came upon along the road.

"It's sure commencing to get dark, Thad," grumbled Giraffe, after a while, as if to explain why he had stubbed his toe, when by rights all that clumsy business was supposed to be monopolized by poor Bumpus.

"That's partly because we happen to be passing under a big patch of woods here on the right," the patrol leader explained; "which helps to shut out more or less of the light from the west. Over there across the river the sky is so gloomy you couldn't expect it to help out any."

"But inside of half an hour at the most it'll be so black you can't see a hand before your face," Step Hen observed.

"I suppose you mean we ought to be thinking of stopping," Thad returned, "and I'm of the same mind; but I hate to give up the hope of striking some farm, where we could get another chance to sleep in the haymow. But give me ten minutes more, boys, and if we fail to strike what we want I'll call a halt."

"Whew! I've got a hunch we're going to run up against an experience before long that we won't forget in a hurry, either!" volunteered Davy.

"Here, none of that croaking, Davy Jones!" cried Bob White. "We've all been through so much that it doesn't become any member of the Silver Fox Patrol to show the white feather, suh."

"Nobody's thinking of doing that same, Bob White," retorted Davy; "I was only trying to figure out what sort of a night we had ahead of us. If it comes to knocking up against trouble, I reckon I'm as able to hold up my end of the log as the next one. My record will prove that."

"We're all in the same boat, Davy," Step Hen told him, in order to "smooth his ruffled feathers," as he called it.

"And I'll time you on that promise, Thad," remarked Allan, as he took out his little nickel watch, and held it close up to his face in order to see where the hands pointed, which action in itself proved the contention of Giraffe that the daylight was certainly growing quite dim.

They continued to plod along, now and then some one making a remark, and all of them looking continually to the right, in hopes that they might discover a haven of refuge in the shape of some sort of house, they cared little how unpretentious it might be.

Indeed, just then there was not one scout present but who would have hailed the appearance of even an old abandoned shanty having a leaky roof with delight; for with their ingenuity a worn-out roof could easily be made to shed rain; and a supply of firewood was to be gathered in a hurry.

The formation of the country was not favorable in one respect, and they failed to run across anything in the shape of an outcropping ledge, under which they might find shelter. This had saved them from a ducking on more than one former occasion, as they well remembered; but fortune was not so kind to-day.

Minute after minute dragged on.

Once Allan even took out his watch, and examined its face, only to laugh.

"Beats all how you get fooled when you're counting the minutes," he remarked.

"You mean we haven't been walking that ten Thad allowed us?" asked Step Hen.

"Just six to the dot, boys," the timekeeper told them.

"Oh! dear, I thought it was closer on half an hour," sighed Bumpus, who was dragging his feet along as though each one weighed a ton. "Four whole minutes left! But Allan, mebbe that watch of yours has stopped! I had one that used to play tricks like that on me, 'specially in the mornings, when by rights I ought to have been out of bed. It was the most accommodating thing you ever saw; I'd wake up, take a look and see it stood at a quarter to seven, and then roll over for another little snooze. Then I'd look again after a while, and see it was still a quarter to seven, which allowed me to have another nap.

And when my dad came up to ask me if I was sick, I'd tell him he'd have to get me a better watch than that if he expected me to rise promptly."

"And did he?" asked Davy.

Bumpus shrugged his fat shoulders as he replied:

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"I climb out of bed every morning now when a great big alarm clock rattles away close to my ear. Dad sets it there before he retires, and I can't chuck it out of the window, either. So you see watches go back on their best friends sometimes."

"Well, mine is running like a steam engine right now," Allan remarked, "and the four minutes are nearly down to three. Keep a stiff upper lip, Bumpus, and the day's hike will soon be over, no matter what the night brings."

That was the thing that bothered them all, for the night was setting in so gloomily that it filled their hearts with secret misgivings and forebodings. The lonesomeness of their surroundings had something to do with this feeling, perhaps, although these boys were used to camping out, and had indeed roughed it many times in far-distant regions, where wild beasts roamed, and made the night hideous with their tongues.

At least nothing of that kind might be expected here along the peaceful Susquehanna. Their sufferings were apt to come mostly from the severity of the weather, and their unpreparedness to meet a storm such as now threatened.

The three minutes had certainly dwindled to two, and might be even approaching the last figure to which their progress was limited, when suddenly Giraffe gave a shout.

"We win, boys!" was the burden of his announcement; "because, as sure as you live, I glimpsed a light ahead there. Look, you can see it easy enough now. We're going to have a roof over our heads to-night, after all! What a lucky thing it was you said *ten* minutes, Thad. Suppose, now, you'd just notched it off with five, why, we'd have missed connections, that's what!"

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"But hold on, Giraffe, don't you see that light's on the wrong side of the road," remonstrated Allan. "It ought to be on the right, but instead it lies close to the edge of the water. Now, no man would be silly enough to build his farmhouse on the river bank, where any spring rise might wash it away."

"It must be a boat of some kind!" Thad now declared; "yes, I can begin to get a glimpse of the same through that thin screen of bushes."

"Wow! looks like a houseboat to me, boys, or what out on the Ohio and the Mississippi they call a shanty boat, which is a cabin built on a monitor or float!" was what Step Hen announced.

"I believe you're right there, Step Hen," Allan put in; "but no matter, any port in a storm; and

when a crowd of scouts are hard pushed they can squeeze in small quarters. We'll fix it somehow with the owner of that craft to let us pile in with him till the clouds roll by."

All sorts of loud remarks followed, as the party hastened their footsteps, some of the boys even laughing, for the improved prospects made Bumpus and Smithy temporarily forget their troubles.

All of them quickly saw that the object of their attention was really a clumsy-looking houseboat. It seemed to be moored to the bank with a stout rope, and, judging from the fact that a light shone from a small window, it must be occupied.

Laughing and jostling one another, the eight boys pushed on. It was not so dark as yet but what they could have been seen after passing the screen of leafless bushes, had any one chanced to look out of that window.

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Thad led the way aboard. No dog barked, nor did they hear any sort of a sound inside the cabin.

"Give 'em a knock, Thad!" said Step Hen.

This the patrol leader did, but there was no reply. Thad waited half a minute, and, hearing nothing, once more rapped his knuckles on the door.

"All asleep, or else up the road somewhere; s'pose you open the door yourself, Thad!" suggested Giraffe impatiently.

When he had knocked a third time, and received no reply, Thad proceeded to open the cabin door, after which the rest of the scouts were so eager to enter that he was actually pushed ahead of them into the place.

They stared around in bewilderment, for while a small lamp was burning on a table screwed to the wall on hinges, and some supper was cooking on a small stove, there did not seem to be the first sign of any human presence. There was something so strange and uncanny about this that the scouts looked at one another uneasily.

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CHAPTER X.

THE DESERTED SHANTY BOAT.

"Nobody home, Thad!" remarked Giraffe presently.

"It looks that way," admitted the patrol leader, for the light of the little lamp allowed them to see every part of the interior; and some of the scouts had even bent down to look under the table, and behind an old trunk, without result.

"If he's stepped out to go on an errand down the road, where there may be some sort of a house, it looks queer to me that he'd leave his supper cooking on the stove here," and as Allan said this he pushed back a frying pan that seemed to contain fried potatoes so nearly done they would

have started to burn in a few more minutes.

"Gosh! don't this mystery beat everything!" Bumpus was heard to mutter; and since the stout scout seldom expressed himself forcibly it could easily be understood that he was now well worked up; at the same time he warmed his hands by the fire, and even stooped down to take a closer whiff of the cooking food which must have appealed irresistibly to a hungry scout, who was also reckoned a champion feeder.

"He'd better be hurrying back, then," Step Hen interposed, "if he don't want to get his jacket wet, because she's started in to rain, boys, you hear!"

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Sure enough, they caught the increasing patter of descending drops on the roof of the cabin, showing that the long-delayed storm had broken bounds at last.

"Woof! talk to me about luck, we've got it in big chunks," said Giraffe, grinning, as he relieved himself of his haversack, and immediately began to open the same, as though bent on considering their own supper.

"How kind of the storm," said Smithy; "it held off until we had run upon this haven of refuge. I hope now the owner will allow us to stay with him over night, for it would break my heart to have to step out of this comfortable place into the nasty wet."

"Don't worry, Smithy," asserted Giraffe; "it'd have to be a charge of dynamite that'd hoist me out of this. Possession is nine points of the law, they say; and we're here to stay, even if we have to pay three prices for accommodations. And I want to tell you that with that jolly fire so handy we'll be silly to delay getting our own supper ready."

"Don't bother with what is on the stove," warned Thad; "only shove it back, for when the owner of the boat does come home he'll want it. Plenty of room for our purpose, isn't there, boys?"

They assured him on this point, and then both Giraffe and Bumpus busied themselves. The contents of the various haversacks soon disclosed a quantity of eatables, and the cooking of supper was deemed a "snap" by those in charge, since they had the rare privilege of doing their work on a real stove, with plenty of wood handy.

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Let the rain beat upon the roof overhead, until it made such a racket they had at times to fairly shout in order to be heard—who cared, with a cabin to shield them from the fury of the storm?

Thad hardly anticipated that the absent owner of the boat would return while the rain was coming down in such torrents, though if it relaxed its violence later on they might expect to see him. Some of the other boys did not have quite so much confidence, for whenever there was a sudden movement of the boat, as some gust of wind struck the upper end, the more nervous ones would hastily glance toward the door, as though half expecting to see it thrown open, and an angry boatman push in, demanding to know what they meant by taking possession during his

absence.

But supper was cooked and placed upon the table without any interruption of this sort taking place. There was not room for them all to gather around the table; indeed, they filled the small cabin pretty well, eight of them in space that was really intended for two or three; but that did not interfere with everyone getting his share of food, though he had to sit cross-legged like a Turk on the floor to devour it.

All of them were in fairly high spirits now. The solving of the problem as to where they were to find shelter from the storm did considerable to lift them to this plane. Then again the enjoyment they found in satisfying their hunger with good things had its share, as well as the warmth of the cabin, which was certainly a feature worth considering.

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Supper done, and still no let-up to the downfall of rain, which was beating the liveliest kind of a tattoo upon the roof. Thad was glad to discover no signs of a leak anywhere, which spoke well for the tidiness of the owner.

Giraffe, noticing how Thad looked up and around, must have guessed what the other was thinking about, to judge from the remark he made.

"No use talking, Thad, the chap who owns this boat can't be that Irishman who when some one asked him why he didn't mend his leaky roof said that when the weather was dry he didn't think to bother with it; and when it rained why he couldn't mend it. This one is as tight as a drum. We're a lucky lot of scouts again; and I'm only sorry that the mysterious owner isn't here to enjoy the hospitality of the shanty boat."

Once Thad walked over to the door, which he found could be secured inside with a bar. It also had a padlock on the outside, showing that it might be the habit of the owner when he left his home for a time to fasten it securely.

"I'm glad that padlock wasn't in use when we struck here," remarked Allan, who had followed the leader over. "We'd have been compelled to break in, and that's a serious offense against the law, if you're caught, though we'd have left money to pay for our housing."

Thad opened the door, and they looked out into the pitch darkness of the night, though neither of them essayed to step beyond the sill. The storm was now in full blast, and the river seemed to be rushing past the moored shanty boat with foam on the little waves formed by the sweeping wind.

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"Looks pretty ugly, doesn't it?" said Thad.

"I never would have believed the Susquehanna could get on such a rampage as this," Allan remarked in turn. "I always had an idea it was a peaceful sort of river, with beautiful banks, and the canal running along in places parallel to the river; but I declare you'd think it was the big Mississippi right now, what we can see of it, from the way our light shines on the water."

"It's on the boom, you know," Thad told him, "and there's an unusual amount of water in the

channel; but from the way the rain's coming down it'll be a flood before twenty-four hours, if ever there was one along here."

"Lucky we struck a boat then, instead of some shanty close to the bank; because in that case, Thad, we might have been washed away before morning, as the river kept on rising a foot an hour perhaps."

Thad closed the door again.

"Looks a whole lot better inside than out," he observed, "which makes me feel glad we're not cowering under a branch shelter, and taking a ducking. Even with the rubber blankets we couldn't expect to keep half way dry when it's pelting down as steady as that."

"I've been trying to figure out what happened here," said Allan. "There was some man in this cabin, and he was getting supper when we gave that first shout. Now, it might be he looked out, and glimpsing a bunch of fellows in khaki suits and carrying guns, running this way, he thought we were soldiers. He may have had some good reason for not wanting to meet up with the State troops, and so cut and ran for it. That's the thing I've made my mind up to."

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"And according to my way of thinking you're close to the truth, Allan," he was told by the patrol leader.

"I noticed that you dropped that bar in place, Thad, after you'd shut the door; what was the idea of doing that?"

"Well, it doesn't seem to be just the right thing, fastening a man's own door against him," laughed the other; "but as we all want to get some sleep to-night, being tired, I thought it might be best to fix things so we'd have ample warning if the owner of the boat did turn up. Let him knock, and we'll be only too glad to open up; only we don't want him to walk in on us and catch us napping. There's no telling how unpleasant he might make it for us."

This sound reasoning appealed favorably to Allan.

"The window you see has got a stout iron bar across it," he went on to say; "and a fellow would have the time of his life trying to crawl through such a small space; so it's all right; we can lie down to sleep without worrying."

They were in fact pretty well played out, having been up a good part of the previous night, it will be remembered, and the day's tramp had been anything but a picnic to certain members of the party who need not be mentioned by name.

Accordingly, about an hour after they had finished supper there began to be a movement on foot looking to finding accommodations for spreading blankets on the hard floor of the cabin.

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Space was somewhat at a premium, since there were eight of the scouts. The owner of the shanty boat had some sort of contraption in the way of a cot which in the daytime could be fastened up against the wall, and in this manner avoid taking up a considerable amount of space,

to be dropped when needed. None of the boys considered for a moment using that cot, all of them preferring to make sure of the protection of their own clean blankets on the floor.

Bumpus, while very tired, was afraid that he might not get to sleep as easily as he would have liked, because of the way his mind was worked up. Giraffe, in talking about matters, had happened to suggest that possibly the man owning the boat may have been seized with a fit when he was stooping over to draw some water from the river in a bucket, and had fallen overboard; and the thought of such a terrible thing happening filled the mind of tender-hearted Bumpus, who never liked to see anyone suffer if he could help it.

But although the roar of the storm and the dash of the waves against the side of the boat, causing it to rock from time to time, bothered some of the scouts in the beginning, they finally grew more accustomed to the chorus of sounds, and in the end all of them slept as only exhausted boys may.

Thad had remained awake after the last of his chums yielded to the drowsy feeling that overcame them; but finally he, too, found forgetfulness in sleep.

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He was aroused by some one clutching him desperately, and realized that Giraffe, who chanced to have lain down alongside the leader, was calling his name wildly.

All was darkness around them, for they had seen fit to put out the little lamp, wishing to save the oil as much as possible. The bellowing storm still held full sway without, and while there had been no thunder and lightning, as must have been the case had it happened in midsummer, the forces of Nature were fiercely contending, and combined to make a terrible noise.

But Thad immediately became aware of the fact that there was a new motion to the shanty boat on which they had found such welcome refuge. It rocked violently, and pitched very much after the manner of a bucking broncho trying to unseat a rider.

Thad could give a quick guess what this signified, though it chilled him to the very marrow to realize the new horror that had come upon them.

The other boys were all aroused by now, even Bumpus, who usually had to be rolled violently before he would open his eyes; and their various exclamations of alarm began to be heard all around him in the gloom of the cabin interior.

“What is it, Thad?”

“My stars! just feel the old boat jumping, would you?”

“I’m beginning to be seasick already!” complained Smithy.

“Thad, what d’ye think, has she broken away from her moorings?” demanded Giraffe; and the anxious listeners felt a shock when they heard the patrol leader reply:

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“I’m afraid that’s just what’s happened, boys,

CHAPTER XI. ADRIFT ON THE FLOOD.

"What can we do, Thad?" cried Bumpus, as a lurch of the boat caused him to bang up against some of the others.

"Hold on, don't smash me against the side of the cabin, you elephant!" roared Davy, who had been unfortunate enough to serve as a buffer for the stout scout.

Thad struck a match, and somehow even the small glow thus afforded seemed to give the boys new cheer.

"Thank goodness the tin lamp hasn't been knocked over and the glass broken!" said Step Hen, as he reached out, and just saved the article in question from slipping off the table.

"Here, let me put this match to the wick," said Thad; "things won't seem quite so bad then as in the pitch dark."

After that they fixed it so the precious tin lamp could not be spilled; and so long as the oil held out they meant to keep it burning.

When the door was opened so that they could look out, it was a dreadful sight the scouts saw. All before them lay heaving water, that had a sickening motion to it, but did not seem to be rushing past as they had noticed it do before.

"Why, the old river's standing still, I do declare!" cried the astonished Bumpus, as he thrust his head out of the open doorway to see.

"It looks that way because we're moving along with it, Bumpus," Giraffe told him; ordinarily the tall scout would most likely have jeered scornfully at the innocent for suspecting such a thing, but now he seemed to feel that he owed Bumpus a debt on account of the trick he had played, which could only be paid by his being unusually kind.

"Can we do anything, Thad?" demanded Step Hen. "Is there a push pole on board so some of us might start the old tub back to the bank again?"

"There is one, but it seems to be broken, and wouldn't be worth a continental cent in all this flood," Thad told him. "Unless we feel desperate enough to jump over and try to swim for it, we'll have to stay aboard, and take our chances."

"Oh! I hope now you won't decide to try that!" said Bumpus, whose failings were well known to his chums, and a lack of the knowledge pertaining to the art of swimming happened to be one of them.

Indeed, when they looked at that terrible water all of the scouts shrank back, and not a single voice was raised in favor of the plan. There might be worse things even than finding

themselves adrift on the flood in a houseboat.

"Do you think that thick rope broke under the strain, Thad?" asked Allan presently, as they still stood there, looking out, not liking to close the door lest something terrible happen to the boat, and all of them be caught in the cabin to drown like rats in a trap.

"That's what must have happened, Allan, though when I looked it over I thought it could stand any sort of strain. But it must have been part rotten in some part; and a rope's like a chain, you know, only as strong as its weakest link or strand. But no matter what the cause may have been, all we have to think of is the effect. It's too late to prevent the accident; and we'll hope the worst isn't going to happen to us now."

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"What d'ye mean by the worst, Thad?" asked Bumpus, almost piteously.

"This river, you know, is full of rocks," explained the other. "In the summertime when the water's low they stick up everywhere; but in case of a flood most of them are under water, and act like snags to punch holes in boats that may be unlucky enough to be caught afloat. Then again there's always danger of being crowded up on a sliding shelf of rock, when the wind and the sweep of the current might upset us all!"

"Gosh!"

After that last exclamation Bumpus remained silent, but he certainly found plenty of food for thought in what he had heard Thad say. Every new lurch of the boat was apt to give him a fresh quiver of anxiety. He kept his eyes fixed on Thad, just as though he believed that if they were to be saved at all, it must inevitably be through the instrumentality of the patrol leader.

It might readily be assumed that none of those eight scouts would ever forget that wild voyage down the flooded Susquehanna, in the inky darkness of that Spring night. The floating shanty boat kept performing all manner of remarkable gyrations under the influence of wind and waves. Sometimes one end would be upstream, and in a little while the craft would spin around so that the door had to be temporarily closed in order to keep the driving rain from deluging them.

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In the midst of this dreadful suspense they suddenly felt that their onward motion had ceased. At the same time they discovered the forward part of the boat to be rising.

"We're ashore!" shouted Giraffe, looking ready to plunge out of the door and take any sort of a ducking rather than stay aboard, to risk death in the flood.

"Hold on!" cried Thad, clutching him just in time to prevent any rashness; "you don't want to leap before you look. There's water on this side where the shore ought to be. I think the boat's only shoved up on a sunken rock! If you jumped now you'd find yourself in the river!"

"Yes, and she's swinging around right now, let me tell you, Giraffe!" added Davy Jones; "look at the other side coming up, would you?"

"Oh! I hope she don't turn turtle, that's all!" bellowed Bumpus; "keep the door open, Thad, and let me have a chance to get out if the worst comes, because I need more time than the rest of you do."

Giraffe was seen to edge closer to the stout scout, as though he had made up his mind to give Bumpus, who knew so little about swimming, all possible assistance should the worst come to pass.

"No danger this time," sang out Thad, "for there she slides off the rock, and our interrupted voyage is on again."

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True enough, the shanty boat began to move, rocked violently for a brief period, and then seemed to be floating once more along the rolling current on an even keel, greatly to the relief of Bumpus, who was holding his breath with the dreadful suspense.

"How long do you suppose now we can keep sailing like this?" Step Hen asked.

"If nothing happens to us until morning comes," replied Thad, "we'll find some way to get ashore, when we can see how to work."

"Sure thing!" added Davy. "But I hope now we don't strike any old cataract or falls, where we'd be swept over a dam, and get wrecked. Seems to me I've heard of such things along the Susquehanna."

His words must have brought a new spasm of alarm to the heart of Bumpus, for he clutched Thad's sleeve, as though imploring him to set that fear at rest.

"If there are," the patrol leader told them, "it must be a good deal further upstream than where we are. While the Susquehanna isn't called a navigable river, except down near its mouth, where it empties into the bay, it's an open stream for a long distance. Don't bother thinking about mill-dams and that sort of thing. The worst terror we've got to face is the everlasting snags all around us. If one punched a hole in the lower part of the boat we'd be apt to sink."

"Wish we had life preservers, then," remarked Bumpus; "I thought every boat was compelled to keep such things aboard."

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"They are, if they carry a certain number of passengers," Thad told him.

"Yes," added Giraffe, as he reached up and took some small object from a shelf, where it had remained all this while, in spite of the movements of the boat, "and this craft was well provided, too, for you can see that this is an empty bottle, the mate to the one the tramps threw away. They all seem to patronize the same brand around this section, too, because it's as like that other flask as two peas in a pod."

Thad looked at the emptied bottle, but made no remark. Had Giraffe been observing the patrol leader closely, however, instead of keeping his eyes fixed on what he was exhibiting, he might have wondered what the little flash of intelligence passing over Thad's face could

mean, and whether the other had conceived a sudden thought of some kind.

They must have entered upon a section of the river where the cross currents became stronger than ever, for the drifting shanty boat's progress became more erratic. Several times the boys found themselves flung in a heap by an unheralded stoppage of the boat, or an unusually wild movement sideways.

"Say, this is getting tougher and tougher the further we go, and I must admit I don't fancy it for a cent!" grumbled Step Hen, after he had picked himself up for the third time and rubbed his knees as though they pained him.

"The worst I ever met up with, suh!" declared Bob White, steadying himself by clutching hold of a hook that was fastened to the wall for some purpose or other.

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"Think of me," groaned Bumpus; "when I come down it's like a load of brick!"

"Yes, that's what I say," added Davy; "'specially to the fellow underneath you, Bumpus. Why don't you sit down all the time, and save yourself the trouble of falling so much? You nearly crunched me last time."

"Yes, and it don't hurt him to fall the same way it does me," Giraffe wanted the rest to know, "because he's padded all over like a football player."

Instead of diminishing, the erratic gyrations of the whirling boat seemed to continually increase, if such a thing were possible. Even Thad became worried, for it was impossible to guess what would happen next. Then again that impenetrable blackness with which they were enveloped on all sides must be anything but reassuring to even the bravest heart. If they could only see out, and prepare for each new and surprising shock, it might not be quite so bad.

Minutes dragged along until they seemed almost like hours to the scouts who, imprisoned in that small cabin, found themselves at the mercy and sport of the flood that was pouring down the Susquehanna. Why, sometimes it seemed to Bumpus he must be living in the time of old Noah, and that this was the ark of refuge, with the forty days of solid rain beating down upon it. Yes, and he could almost fancy that he had some of the animals that were taken in, two by two, around him, judging from the queer attitudes which Davy Jones was striking, for he was on all fours about half the time.

Thad had figured out what they must do in case of a wreck. This was to stand by the boat as long as she remained afloat, and only strike out for the shore in case of a complete collapse. He knew the terrible risk all of them would run if they attempted to swim that swollen stream, without daylight to give them cheer, or show them their bearings; and it was the last thing he wanted to try.

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Perhaps nearly half an hour may have elapsed since the boat had struck that sloping shelf of hidden rock, when once again the same experience came upon them.

This time they seemed to have been driven with such speed that the boat slid far up on the rock, and immediately careened toward the larboard.

"We're going over this time, sure!" shouted Giraffe; and there was not one of his companions but whose mind was filled with the same fear; for it seemed as though nothing could prevent such a catastrophe from happening.

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CHAPTER XII. HEARTS COURAGEOUS.

It was a time of terrible suspense as the boat tilted so far on one side that one or two of the boys slipped, and fell, as though they were straddling a bobsled, and on a steep down grade.

Higher still reared the one side of the cabin, until it seemed as though the hearts of some of the boys were in their throats.

"Get on the other side, everybody, quick!" Thad was shouting now, and the sound of his clarion voice thrilled them as nothing else could have done.

It was not so easy to obey, such was the dreadful slope to the floor of the cabin; but Giraffe gave a helpful hand to struggling Bumpus, and on the other side Allan fastened a good grip on the stout one, so that between them both he was speedily landed where he would do the most good.

Immediately the effect of this change of base began to make itself felt, for instead of continuing to rear up, that side of the boat settled slowly back.

"She's slipping, and turning around!" cried Giraffe; "we're going to get off the old turtle-back rock, don't you forget it! Whoop!"

As he gave that last yell the shanty boat did indeed settle on an even keel, and once more there was a buoyancy and motion to her. This told even Bumpus, who was not supposed to know a great deal about boats, that they were free from all entangling alliances, and once more racing madly down the river at the mercy of the flood.

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Such was the hysterical excitement under which all were laboring that regardless of what might still be awaiting them in the near future the boys began to yell, in order to relieve their pent-up feelings.

They soon stopped that sort of thing, however, when their first exultation had passed, for, as Bumpus remarked, "it was just to begin over again, and perhaps get upset after all."

"Better keep that till we're safe ashore," Giraffe went on to remark. "You know the old saying in pioneer days used to be that an Indian never ought to yell till he was in the woods; and a white man till he was out of the woods. So we'll keep our breath a while. It's all going to come

out right, see if it ain't."

Giraffe undoubtedly added these concluding reassuring words for the particular benefit of Bumpus, who was looking, as the tall scout privately informed Step Hen back of his hand, "just as limp as a dish rag, so to speak."

"I hope so, Giraffe; I surely hope so," the fat scout told him. "Why, I believe I could face being burned up in a forest fire better than being drowned. It's always been an awful idea to me to float along on the water, and have the little fishes and turtles nibbling at you all the while. Thank you for saying we've still got a fighting chance, Giraffe. It was kind of you, and I won't forget it, either."

When Giraffe looked up he saw Thad nodding his head toward him, and he knew the explanation of the encouraging smile on the patrol leader's face. It meant that Thad understood why he had taken the trouble to say what he did, and wished to encourage all such efforts to the limit, as being worthy of the best traditions of scoutcraft.

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"Giraffe, will you do me a favor?" asked Davy, after another period of alternate hope and fear had passed by.

"To be sure I will, Davy, if it's in my power; only I hope you won't ask me to jump overboard, and try to tow the old tub ashore, or anything like that."

"Just take a look at my head, please," suggested the other, bending forward as he spoke.

"Well, I don't see that it's swelled any since the last time," remarked Giraffe; "and, besides, strikes me you haven't been doing any great stunts lately that'd be apt to make you have the big head. Whatever do you want me to do, Davy?"

"Tell me if it's changed white," replied the other pleadingly, "because I reckon the scares we've had thrown into us this last half hour have sure been enough to turn any poor fellow's hair. Will they know me at home, if I'm ever lucky enough to get back there again; or can I expect to have the door shut in my face, and our old dog Tige chase me over the back fence?"

"Oh! you haven't changed much," Giraffe assured him, "except that there's an anxious look stamped on your face like it'd never come off again. I'm surprised at you, Davy; why don't you grin and bear it like I do? This is only going to be another of our *experiences*, and before long you'll look back at it, and laugh at the whole business. Whee! there she rises again, fellows. Everybody *climb!*"

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They were becoming quite expert now with regard to executing what Giraffe called a "flank movement;" for even Bumpus was able to scramble up the sloping floor before anyone could take hold of his arms.

Again they felt more or less concerned while the boat hung in a state of uncertainty, as though undecided whether to keep on turning until the upset came, or slide off again into deep water.

When the latter came to pass all of them

breathed easy again.

"And to think," said Smithy, taking a full breath, "this sort of thing has got to continue for hours, before morning comes. Why, we'll be out of our minds, I'm afraid."

"We're lucky to have any minds at all, to go out of," Giraffe told him. "Some fellows would be that way to start with—present company always excepted, you know."

Giraffe was one of those kind of boys who would have his little fling at a joke, no matter what sort of a scrape he might be in. Such a buoyant nature helped to keep the spirits of his comrades up, and so far it was useful, at least.

"What time is it, anyway?" demanded Step Hen. "Seems to me we've been banging around like this for a whole week or so."

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"Five o'clock!" announced Allan.

"We ought to have daylight at seven, even on such a bad morning," remarked Thad, "which would mean about two more hours of it before we can make any sort of a move to get ashore."

"Two whole hours!" sighed Bumpus, looking as though he feared he would be mashed into a mere pulp by that time.

"Let's try and forget our troubles," remarked Giraffe; "suppose, now, Bumpus here could start one of his jolly songs, and we'd all come in heavy on the chorus. That'd be something worth while remembering in future days, when we wanted folks to know how scouts could face trouble bravely."

"Ugh!" cried Bumpus, starting up, "that makes me think of stories I've read how the British crew on the battleship *Campertown* lined up as she was sinking, and with the band playing went down in the ocean. Do you really think that's what's going to happen to us here, Giraffe; and is it a funeral dirge you want me to start?"

"Not a bit of it, but the liveliest song you know, old fellow; so get busy, and it'll make us feel better all around," the tall scout assured him.

Bumpus swallowed hard several times, as though not at all sure about his voice, and then he started in. At first there was a decided tremolo noticeable, but as he went on he gained assurance, and presently was doing nobly. When the proper time came for the chorus every one of them joined in, so that the volume of sound must have arisen well above the noise of the rushing waters and the wild blasts of the wind through the leafless trees ashore.

Had anyone by chance been within hearing distance and caught the clamor of boyish voices that swelled forth from the cabin of that shanty boat, drifting down on the bosom of the mighty flood, they might well have been pardoned if they found themselves wondering whether some asylum had yielded up its inmates, the whole thing appeared so remarkable.

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Giraffe was right, and Thad, knowing it, had not attempted to raise a hand to prevent the carrying out of the singular compact. That song cheered them up wonderfully indeed; by the

time it was ended even Bumpus felt quite sanguine that they were bound to pass through the fresh trial unscathed. He was ready to carry on the good work as long as his voice held out.

So he started a second school song that was familiar to them, and being in better practice now, they all did more justice to the theme.

It was interrupted by the surging boat striking a rock, so that the sudden jar tumbled them in a heap; but upon scrambling to their feet once more the singing was taken up again as though nothing had happened.

Thad was wondering whether any damage could have been done when that last hard knock came against the timbers of the boat. He did not know what they could stand in the way of resistance. They might be old, and weather-beaten, ready to yield if harshly treated.

And so, as his comrades sang on at a vociferous rate, Thad was trying to discover whether there were any signs of the boat foundering, which was apt to happen in case of a puncture below the water line.

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Of course he could not make absolutely sure, but so far as he was able to tell there did not seem to be anything wrong; the boat floated as buoyantly as before the collision.

When all of the boys found themselves getting more or less hoarse from their strained singing they stopped; but Bumpus by this time felt so heartened that his next move was to clutch his beloved bugle, and proceed to run the gamut of everything he knew, from military calls to "Way Down on the Suwanee River," "Old Black Joe," and a dozen other melodies that he could execute with considerable feeling and sweetness on the silver-tongued instrument.

In this fashion possibly another half hour passed. When Smithy asked for the time, and they heard Allan say there was still a terribly long spell ahead of them, the scouts were at a loss to know just what to do in order to forget their troubles, and make the minutes seem to pass quickly.

They were spared the necessity of inventing some way, for just then there came one of those sudden halts in the forward progress of the drifting shanty boat.

"Another snag!" shouted Giraffe, as though the frequency of these mishaps was beginning to take their terror away.

"But notice that this time we don't seem to tilt over to one side; and it feels firmer, too!" Step Hen wanted them to understand.

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"Then chances are we're stuck here for a while, till the river rises, and sets us free!" commented Davy.

Allan and Thad exchanged significant looks.

"Do you think there's anything in that, Thad, or can it be land?" asked the former, as he saw his chum start for the door, which was partly open at the time.

"The rain seems to have let up some, anyway!" proclaimed Smithy, as though he did not want

them to think he was behind the rest in noticing things worth while.

When the two scouts reached the door and thrust their heads out, they saw the same old gloom there, "thick enough to cut with a knife," as Giraffe would have said. But Thad discovered something more.

"Look up against the sky, Allan!" he cried joyously.

"Trees, as sure as you live!" shouted the other, almost immediately.

"What's that you say?" roared Giraffe, pushing alongside; "trees, is it, and us out in the middle of the flooded Susquehanna? How's that come, Thad? Is this an old island we've bumped against?"

"I calculate that's just what it is, Giraffe," was the reply of the patrol leader; and at hearing this astonishing as well as pleasing news the rest of the inmates of the cabin broke out into a shout that under ordinary conditions might have been heard a full mile away.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah, and a tiger!" was what Giraffe called for and the cheers were given with a vim that took their breath away.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE ISLAND OF HOPE.

"Give me the solid ground every time," Bumpus burst out with; and from the broad grin on his face, no longer pallid, it was easy to see that he meant what he said.

"You need it!" Step Hen told him dryly, which of course was a little thrust at the heft of the stout scout.

"When do we expect to go ashore, Thad, may I ask?" Smithy wanted to know.

"The rain is stopping, as sure as anything, and that's one comfort," declared Davy, knowing the aversion felt by the particular member of the patrol, who belonged to the great Smith family, to getting his nice suit wet.

"The best we can do," came the reply from the chief of the expedition, "is to get our duffel ready, and if there's any sign of the boat moving off, why we could disembark in a big hurry."

"Granny governor! do you really think she *may* take a sudden notion to start out again on another cruise?" asked Bumpus, looking anxious.

"That's hard to say," he was told, "because it depends a whole lot on what the wind does. It's blowing great guns right now, but so long as it holds down-river way I think the shanty boat will stick here on this point. But there's a chance of it changing more into the northwest, and then nothing could hold the boat here."

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"But couldn't we tie her up somehow to one of those trees, you know?" demanded Smithy.

"Yes, if we had the cable to do it with," Thad informed him.

"But—there was a rope, seems to me?" continued Smithy.

"Take a look at it, Allan, and let's hear what you think," said the leader.

At that Allan darted outside, despising the scanty rain that was still coming down, though decreasing constantly. Hardly had half a minute elapsed before the scout was back inside again.

"Well, what's doing?" asked Giraffe impatiently.

"There's a piece of cable there, all right," came the reply; "I dragged it out of the water where it's been ever since we broke away up above. Seems to be a pretty hefty rope, too, even if it did give way under that terrific strain; but for all that, boys, it won't do."

"You mean there isn't enough of it, don't you, Allan?" asked Thad, who apparently had foreseen just such an answer.

"Lacks many feet of being worth while," replied the other; "so you see, Smithy, a rope's something we haven't got."

"'A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse,' only in this case it's a bully old half-inch cable we want most of all," Giraffe asserted.

"Well, I think we'd better take Thad's advice, and get our stuff together, so if it comes to a case of jump we'll be ready to skip out of this," Bumpus remarked; for he evidently dreaded another siege similar to the last, with the shanty boat whirling down the agitated river, subject to innumerable risks, such as kept one's heart jumping up toward his throat in a most uncomfortable way, to say the least.

It did not take them long to do this, for besides their haversacks, blankets, guns, and the few cooking utensils they had with them, their possessions did not amount to much.

"How about the stuff aboard the old boat—had we ought to commandeer that?" asked Giraffe, who did dislike to see anything in the shape of food get away from him, when it might just as well be saved.

"I should think we had a right to grab what food there is. It don't amount to a great deal, and we'd be only too glad to pay for the same if ever we ran across the owner of the tub," ventured Bumpus, also having an eye to the future, and a strong dislike for the first gnawing of hunger.

They all looked to Thad to decide that point.

"Since the chances are the boat will either be wrecked on some of these ugly jagged rocks that lie in wait all along the course, or else fall into the hands of boys who may be watching the flood for driftwood and such stuff, it seems all right to me to take what we want."

"The right of first discoverers!" remarked Smithy grandly.

"There's a piece of breakfast bacon, suh, hanging up behind the stove," quickly announced Bob White, who apparently clung to the ways of his beloved South, where the ordinary salt pork is always called "bacon," and the smoked sides go under the name he mentioned.

"And a package of grits as you call the fine hominy corn, in that box under the table, Bob, which ought to make you as happy as a king. What more could a fellow from Dixieland want more than hog and hominy?" Allan laughingly announced.

They gathered the things wanted near the door, and every scout knew exactly what his identical share of the burden was going to be. This was done so that if there should be any need for a hurried desertion of the boat there might not ensue any disastrous confusion that would cost them dearly.

"I reckon now the old cheese-box-on-a-raft would turn out too heavy for us to drag any further up on the shore, so even the wind couldn't take her off?" Step Hen chanced to remark, after they had finished their preparations for departure, and huddled near the door, taking frequent observations concerning the state of the weather outside.

"I'm afraid so," Thad returned, "though we might give it a try when we do drop ashore, and see what we can do. These scows weigh tons, you know, and get logy in the bargain from being so long in the water. We'd need a block and tackle to manage it decently."

"Well, it's a pity we didn't think to bring one along, then," commented innocent Smithy, at which remark the rest set up a yell.

"I can see you staggering along with the whole outfit on your back, Smithy," he was told by Giraffe; "why, the blocks alone would faze you, not to mention the rope itself. If you've got a boat to carry it in, then it's all right to have the same along. But we started off light on this trip, you remember."

"Like fun we did," grunted Bumpus; "that pack of mine weighs an awful lot; and then the old coffee pot keeps cracking my shins every time I trip. But of course," he hastened to add, as though he hoped they would not believe he was complaining, "we couldn't think of going without our refreshing Java for breakfasts. Life'd be pretty dreary to Giraffe, and a few of the rest of us, if we didn't have their favorite beverage mornings."

"But look out there, fellows, and tell me if you don't think it's really getting some lighter," Step Hen besought them.

"Well, you can see the trees a heap better than before," admitted Giraffe; "but that might come from our eyes getting more accustomed to looking into the darkness."

"No, it's full time for day to break," they were assured by Allan, who had immediately turned toward the friendly little lamp so as to examine his watch.

A general sigh as of relief followed this welcome announcement. That had been a terribly long night, and one those scouts were not apt to forget in a hurry. They may have been through considerable in the way of adventure in the past, but somehow that experience of being carried headlong downstream on the wild flood, with frequent alarms as the boat struck treacherous shoals and half-hidden rocks, made a deep impression on their minds, from the leader down to Bumpus.

"Do you think it's going to clear up?" asked Smithy, who did not pretend to be a weather sharp, and always depended on some of his mates when in need of information along these lines.

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"I don't believe it's raining a single drop now," Davy informed them, after stepping outside on the deck, and holding up his face to learn the truth.

"But it's just as gray overhead as ever," added Giraffe, who could be a pessimist when he chose, and always see the dark side of things.

"I move we have a bite to eat while we're waiting for morning to come," suggested Allan; and from the way both Giraffe and Bumpus started eagerly up, as though they heartily approved of the idea, it was plain that both of them had been thinking along these same lines though not wishing to betray their inclinations, for fear of having the finger of scorn pointed at them.

The suggestion seemed to meet with popular favor; at least it aroused no objections, for all of them realized that with such a deluge, dry wood was going to be a scarce commodity ashore for part of the ensuing day at least; and it was only policy for them to take advantage of the chance they had of obtaining a splendid cooking fire aboard the boat.

The operation of preparing breakfast did not take them a great while, for long experience made them experts along these lines. And while they were doing this the darkness without gradually gave way to the gray dawn.

While the immediate prospect ahead of them was far from cheerful, it seemed such a vast improvement over what they had recently faced that every one of the eight boys felt ready to joke and laugh as they partook of the meal.

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Step Hen was up to his old tricks again, and accusing his chums of hiding some of his possessions that afterward turned up in the very place he had put them. It was generally that way, for Step Hen *forgot*, which was his most cardinal sin. And even when he found that he had his bandanna tied around his neck, though tucked out of sight, after asking Giraffe if he had purloined the same, he indignantly wanted to know who had played that mean trick on him, so as to make him believe he had lost his most cherished possession.

"Step Hen," said Giraffe gravely, "you make me think of one of those pearl divers that go down in the Indian Ocean for oysters. When a big shark waits for him to rise from the bottom what does the native do but stir up the sand, and

make the water so roily that the man-eater just can't see him when he shoots to the surface."

"Oh! so I'm a shark, am I?" demanded Step Hen indignantly.

"No, you're the smart pearl diver," retorted Giraffe; "for when you find yourself caught in a hole, and that all the while you're wearing the lost hat or the bandanna, you accuse us of having put it there, so as to blind everybody's eyes."

"Yes," added Allan, with a laugh, "Step Hen is like the thief being chased by a mob; and who yells out at the top of his voice, 'Stop, thief!' so everybody he meets will think he's the man who's been robbed; and in the confusion he gets off. You're the guilty one who poked that red rag under the collar of your flannel shirt, and the less you say about it the better."

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Whereupon Step Hen, finding himself routed, only grinned, and wisely held his peace, realizing that the boys were "on to him," as Giraffe put it.

So breakfast was eaten, and at least they all felt in better trim to face what new troubles the day might bring in its train.

Bumpus would never be happy so long as they remained aboard that clumsy craft. He haunted the deck, and kept watching the rushing river, as well as the way the furious wind blew.

Whenever a gust bore down upon them that caused the boat to move he would hurry inside, and give Thad a look of mute appeal that was very forceful. It meant that Bumpus wanted the leader to give the word to disembark. Though the island presented but a dismal prospect for the castaways, anything was better than running the risk of being blown adrift again. And Bumpus did want to feel solid ground under his feet again more than words could say.

Thad, however, did not mean to desert their comfortable quarters so easily, and had made up his mind to wait until the danger became more real and apparent. This must all depend upon the force and direction of the wind, which, however, all of them could see was steadily veering toward the northwest.

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CHAPTER XIV.

STILL SURROUNDED BY PERILS.

"We're lucky to be here and not out there on that water," Thad said, in the ear of the stout scout, as he came upon him standing in the lee of the cabin, and looking across the river, which seemed very wide at this point, though probably extremely shallow despite the flood.

"I should say we were," admitted Bumpus, shaking his head. "Looks ugly, doesn't it, with the wind flaws rushing over the water every little way, and making a dark streak with each squall? But don't you think she's still rising, Thad?"

"No doubt about it," he was told. "When I came out here a while ago it stood six inches below that black mark on the rock you can see there, and look what it is now."

"Not more'n three," muttered Bumpus apprehensively; "but, Thad, you don't really think she's going to keep on rising, and that some time the whole island'll be covered, do you?"

Seeing what had been worrying Bumpus, Thad did not do as was Giraffe's usual habit, add to his fears by portentous suggestions. On the contrary he sought to dissipate all such uneasy thoughts by plain common sense.

"That could hardly happen, Bumpus," he told the other plainly; "if you use your eyes you'll see the land keeps on rising as it leaves the water, so that it stands to reason there's quite an elevation about the middle of the island. And as the rain has stopped, with signs of the clouds breaking over in the northwest, I figure that while the river may continue to rise all day, the increase will get less and less, so that by another morning it ought to be back in its regular banks again."

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"Well, I'm sure glad to hear you say that, Thad, because, you know, I'm not near as spry as Davy about climbing trees. He's a born monkey, if ever there was one, and likes nothing better than to hang by his toes from a limb fifty feet up. Now, I'd look nice doing that, wouldn't I? So what you tell me eases my mind a whole lot."

"We ought to be feeling thankful we passed through all we did without any serious accident," Thad told him. "This flood may have caught a lot of people not prepared, along the low lands of the river, and I expect to see pig-pens and chicken coops sailing past here today."

"Oh! and if we could only lasso some of those coops, why, we might find a few feathered songbirds inside the same, which would be a great addition to our menu while we're marooned on this island," Bumpus suggested gleefully.

"But as we haven't any rope to use as a lariat," Thad told him, "I'm afraid that lovely scheme won't pan out very well. Still, I'm glad to see that you're awake to the necessity of invention. Thinking up things is going to do anyone lots of good, even if there's no practical result."

"But what about the wind, Thad?"

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"Still shifting, and going to do the business for this old boat, sooner or later, if it keeps blowing as hard as it is now," the patrol leader replied.

"I was thinking I'd like to be the first to set foot on the island; not that I'm afraid, I hope you'll believe, Thad; but just from a sort of sentimental reason, you know."

"Well, chances are we'll all be doing it pretty soon, Bumpus; so if you really want to, go ahead," Thad told him, keeping a straight face while speaking, but at the same time much amused, for he knew that despite the solemn protest of his companion Bumpus was very

uneasy.

Ten minutes later and Giraffe called out:

"Say, what d'ye think, fellows, we've been left in the lurch. Bumpus has deserted us, and is camped ashore right now, spread his blanket out on a log, and is sitting there like the king of the cannibal island. He must have felt the boat getting wobbly, and thought he'd make sure not to be in the last rush when she broke away."

"I told him to go ashore," Thad informed them; "and I guess the rest of us would be wise to follow his example. So get your stuff and come on, the whole lot of you."

"I just hate to leave all that nice dry kindling wood behind me," complained Giraffe, whose specialty was fires of any and all kinds, and who never failed to keep an eye out for a chance to have one started.

"All right, then, there's nothing to hinder you from coming back after it," Thad told him. "Get Step Hen or Davy to lend a hand. If we have to stay on the island for twenty-four hours, more or less, we might as well have all the comforts going, and at that they won't swamp us."

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"I'll do that same as sure as you live," asserted the lengthy scout, pleased with the suggestion.

So after they deposited their belongings, together with what they had appropriated from the owner's scanty stock of food, Giraffe spoke up.

"Davy, Thad says you might go back with me and help land something we can make good use of, if the boat should be drifted away."

"What! you don't want the old cracked stove, I hope?" ejaculated Davy, guessing that it must have something to do with cooking, or Giraffe would not be displaying so much eagerness about it.

"What! me carry a stove on shore when I know a dozen ways to cook on a regular camp fire?" cried the tall scout derisively; "well, I should say nothing doing along that line. But we'll have trouble getting dry wood to start things with, and so Thad says we might as well throw all that lot on shore here."

Davy was a reasonable fellow, and he saw the good sense of such a move at once; so he readily agreed to go aboard the abandoned shanty boat with Giraffe, and take possession of the fuel supply.

As the wind carried more or less spray across the exposed place where the boys had landed, it was later on agreed that they would do well to go further ashore. The trees were bare, and there would be no drip, as might have been the case in summertime.

"Makes me think of a gypsy caravan on the tramp!" Step Hen announced, after all of them were on the move, laden down with their various burdens, Giraffe even carrying a small package of extra-fine kindling, with which he meant to start his first fire, and Davy "toting" the old ax.

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"But that wind is something fierce when it

comes with a rush and a roar," Smithy was saying, as he watched some of the trees swaying under the blast; "I hope now this isn't going to be a case of dodging one peril to hit another. You know there used to be a rock and a whirlpool that the old Grecian mariners dreaded, for if they missed being piled up on Scylla, they had to run the risk of being sucked into Charybdis. We call it 'jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.'"

"Now, whatever are you thinking about, Smithy?" demanded Bumpus, who had been feeling so well satisfied lately that he disliked to hear any dark hints about new perils hovering over their heads.

"We'll keep close by, Smithy, and be ready to grab you if the wind tries to carry you away any old time," Giraffe assured the other scout.

"Oh! it isn't that, Giraffe; I was only wondering if one of those tall trees took a notion to topple over while we were walking underneath it, why, with all these bundles on our backs, we couldn't very well get out of the way in time."

"Whee! that's so!" Bumpus admitted, as he began to turn his head from one side to the other in the endeavor to cover the ground, without thinking that the peril could only come from windward, if it existed at all.

Now, while Thad hardly believed they had anything to fear from this source, he did not think it wise to take unnecessary chances; and even before Smithy voiced his sentiments the patrol leader was so shaping his course as to avoid every tree that had a suspicious look.

"The one thing that keeps bothering me, outside of our limited stock of provisions, which is always a serious matter," Giraffe broke in at that moment, "is the fact that all our fine tracking work counts for nothing."

"I reckon, suh, you mean that we're bound to lose the object of our chase?" remarked Bob White.

"Why, yes, the hobo with the old blue army coat is going to get such a start on us, before we escape from this river trap, that we never will be able to run him down. I'm sorry as anything, too, because I was hoping another big scoop was headed our way. Now, we'll have to go home like so many dogs, with their tails between their legs."

"Speak for yourself, Giraffe," declared Allan, "because none of the rest of us feel a bit that way. We've done the best we could, and no one is responsible when they run counter to a storm like the one we've struck."

"Besides," added Thad, who did not like the way the tall scout talked, "nobody but the judge really knows a thing about our chase of that hobo who got the old army coat from Mrs. Whittaker; and if we fail to recover the same he isn't the one to give it away. So we can say we had a great hike, got caught in a flood, and let it go at that. But all the same I don't give up hopes of finding this Wandering George yet."

"Which I'm glad to hear you say, suh," Bob

White admitted. "There's nothing like a sticker in my estimation; and I can well remember plenty of times when holding out to the bitter end brought victory along."

"Oh! we've all got a touch of that in our makeup, Bob," Giraffe told him; "even Bumpus here can be as obstinate as a mule when he chooses. Just yesterday I was trying to coax him to give me that fine new waterproof match safe he carries, and d'ye know he actually refused me three separate times."

"Oh! yes," commented Bumpus, hearing this, "you make me think of the Irishman on the jury who, when they were discharged for failing to agree, upon being asked how it happened, said there were *eleven* of the most pig-headed obstinate men on that jury he ever saw, and that try as hard as he could they refused to come around to his way of thinking. If the shoe fits, Giraffe, put it on."

Giraffe laughed just as loud as any of them, for he could at least enjoy a joke that was aimed at himself, which was one of his best qualities.

The ground did seem to rise more or less the further they got away from the northern end of the island, just as Thad had told Bumpus when the latter member of the marooned patrol was expressing his fears of being overwhelmed in the advancing flood.

Now and then they had glimpses of the river, and somehow they felt an irresistible temptation to gaze out over the wind-swept water whenever the opportunity arose.

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"Just look at that squall coming across, would you?" ejaculated Bumpus; "why, it is scooping the water up, and throwing it around like mist. Ain't I glad we're on solid ground right now? And wait till it strikes the shore. Let me tell you it's a good thing this island's firmly anchored, or it'd be blown away. Hold tight to your hats, fellows, I warn you!"

There was a sudden swoop, and a mighty roar, as the squall broke among the trees around them. When there came a startling crash the scouts huddled together and stared in the direction of the sound, being just in time to see one of the tallest trees come toppling over, with a roar that seemed to shake the ground beneath their very feet.

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CHAPTER XV. THE RETURN OF GIRAFFE.

Standing there, gripping their hats as the fierce wind continued to sweep past, the scouts exchanged serious looks. The fall of that tree had given them a feeling of thankfulness that they were not under it at the time.

"Oh! how that would have squashed us!" exclaimed Bumpus, when he could catch his breath.

"Do you know," ventured Smithy, "I had my eye

on that big chap, and was wondering whether he'd hold up against the next squall. So you see I wasn't so silly, after all, when I mentioned such a thing."

"Nobody said you were, Smithy," admitted Giraffe; "but, Thad, how'd it do to stop near where that tree crashed down?"

"Why do you pick out that place in particular?" queried Step Hen.

"Oh! first of all they say lightning never strikes twice in the same place, and so there'd be no danger of another tree dropping on us. Then, again, don't you understand what a lot of chopping it'll save us, having all that good wood ready."

"Guess you're right about that, Giraffe," returned Step Hen; "for it made an awful crash when it hit the ground, and must have busted in many parts. It certainly takes you to think up all kinds of kinks connected with fires and fuel supplies."

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"Well, somebody's got to do the thinking for the crowd, you know," returned the other, assuming an air of importance; "and when others shirk their duty it comes harder for us faithful members."

The patrol leader thought so much of Giraffe's sensible suggestion that he gave the word for a halt; and so they selected a place that looked as though it would make a pretty decent camp.

Here their burdens were only too willingly dropped.

"We get a fair amount of shelter from the wind, you see," remarked Thad, as he looked around him.

"But, Thad, it took that tree over like a shot," remonstrated Bumpus.

"Yes, because it had a clear sweep at its top," he was told, "for these other trees are not nearly so tall as the one that went down. Then if you examine the stump you can see that it was rotten at the heart, though it didn't show outside to any extent. That's the way with lots of men who, as they say, can smile and smile again, and yet be villains."

"When we go to write up this trip for our log book," Davy observed at this juncture, "I think it ought to go down as a sort of Robinson Crusoe story. Because right now we're wrecked on a desert island, with a limited amount of stuff along, and may be compelled to resort to all sorts of things for a living."

"I wonder if there's any game over here to help out, if we have to stay a long time?" ventured Giraffe, the hunter instinct strong within him. "Course we couldn't expect to find wild goats, like Robinson did, but then there might be rabbits, and even squirrels and raccoons."

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"Ugh! I'd just like to see myself eating a part of a raccoon!" exclaimed the particular scout, lifting both hands to further indicate his disgust.

"Well, you may have that pleasure, if we stay here long enough, Smithy," he was assured by

Giraffe; "now, as for me, I'd as soon partake of a 'coon as I would a young pig. 'Possum I know is fine, and I reckon the other would go all right."

"And I happen to have several fishhooks in my haversack that I forgot to remove after our last trip, when we went South with Thad; so you see we might pull in some fish if we got real hard pressed," and Bumpus smiled contentedly as he made this statement, for which he was applauded by Giraffe and Davy.

"Speaking about Robinson Crusoe," said Thad, "our case runs along a good deal like his for other reasons than that we're stranded on an island. You know he hewed out a boat so big that he couldn't get it down to the water; and we've got one on our hands so heavy that all of us couldn't budge her an inch when we tried to drag the same further up on the shore."

"Wonder if the case is going to keep on in parallel lines," mused Bumpus; "for you know how old Robinson found the footprints of savages on the sand one morning. What if we do here on our island?"

"Oh! shucks! what would we care, so long as we're heavily armed, and eight of us all told, when poor old Crusoe was alone? I'd give something just to run across a footprint that wasn't made by one of us, and that's straight, fellows."

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No one doubted but what Giraffe meant every word, for his boldness had never been reckoned a questionable article. Indeed, on some occasions he had even shown bravery bordering on recklessness, so that the scout leader found it necessary to take him to task.

Giraffe soon amused himself in taking stock of their available supply of food, and listing the same in his methodical way. He would soon know just how many meals they could count on before being compelled to hustle for further supplies.

"Now, since we've never struck this island before, and ain't supposed to know a single thing about what sort of animals inhabit it, if any, I'm expecting to hang the eatables out of harm's way. That's why I fetched this leavings of the old cable along with me. I'll take time to unravel the kinks, and untwist the windings, so in the end I'll have quite a fine stout cord that's going to be mighty useful in a whole lot of ways."

Giraffe was happy only when busily employed. At other times he was apt to seem restless, and much like a tiger pacing up and down in its cage.

They were making themselves as comfortable as possible under the strange conditions that prevailed. All scouts are drilled in the art of observation, and constantly keeping their eyes on the alert in order to better their situation. So it was first one fellow who would decide to do a thing this way; and then another would go him one better, always with a spirit of healthy rivalry that was productive of results.

"There's the sun!" announced Smithy suddenly, for he had seen it glint on the agitated water far

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out on the eastern side, where there was an opening in the brush through which it was possible to glimpse the river.

"Welcome, stranger!" called out Giraffe, dramatically saluting; "we hope your stay with us may be long and happy."

"It feels real good, too, after so much gloomy weather, and all that downpour," Bumpus declared, as he opened his coat to let the warm rays strike him more fully.

Giraffe of course had his fire going; life would be shorn of much of its bright features if he were prevented from pursuing his favorite hobby. The old ax served to supply them with heavier fuel, which seemed to burn splendidly after being in part dried out.

Seeing Thad beckoning, the tall scout stepped over beside him.

"Do you want to do an errand for me, Giraffe?" asked the patrol leader.

"Every time, if only you don't ask me to walk on the water to the shore, which is a little more than I can manage," replied the other promptly.

"I'll tell you about an idea that struck me all of a sudden, as I was sitting on this log here," announced Thad. "I hardly know what put it in my mind to think of that shanty boat again. Perhaps it was our joshing about what Robinson Crusoe would be likely to do, if he found himself located like we are. But no matter, I suddenly remembered I had meant to examine that boat better, and then it happened that something put it out of my mind."

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"Examine the shanty boat better, do you mean, Thad?"

"Yes. I remembered noticing what looked like a square consisting of plain cracks, on the floor of the cabin. The more I get to thinking of it, Giraffe, the stronger it strikes me that there may be some sort of trap door there. The boat must be hollow, that stands to reason, and if the water could be kept from getting in, such a place would be a good hiding-place."

"Gee whiz! do you mean for extra grub supplies, or something else, Thad?"

"I was thinking of something else," came the reply. "You remember how we found supper cooking on the stove when we broke into that boat cabin, yet never a solitary soul around? Well, supposing the man who was doing the cooking heard us when we let out those wild yells, and seeing soldiers coming down on him like wild cats, he just dodged below, *and stayed there?*"

"You mean all night long, Thad?"

"Yes, right up to the time we left the boat this morning," the patrol leader went on to say solemnly.

"But could he stand it all that time?" asked Giraffe dubiously.

"It may not have been the most comfortable thing going," admitted Thad; "but a fellow can

stand for a whole lot when he just has to."

"You mean he'd do it, rather than risk coming out, and being gobbled up by the militia, is that it, Thad?"

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"You've caught my idea, Giraffe."

"But, Thad, just think how he must have suffered all the while we rocked in the cradle of the deep like we did?" ventured the other, shaking his head as though he could hardly bring himself to believe it possible.

"It would take a good deal of grit to hold out, for a fact, but then he might be so much afraid of arrest that of two evils he chose the lesser," Thad continued.

"And what do you want me to do?" queried the tall scout.

"Just go to where we left the boat, and see if those cracks mean some sort of trap leading to the hold of the float. Be careful how you open it, because if the owner is hiding in there he may try to do something desperate. Perhaps you'd better take Step Hen along with you."

"Guess not, unless you insist, Thad. I'll carry a gun, and with that I'll be equal to any refugee that ever walked on two legs."

Giraffe liked nothing better than to be dispatched on a mission of this kind. He said nothing to any of the others, only picked up his gun, sang out to Bumpus not to let the fire die down for lack of fresh wood, and then walked away.

Some of the rest looked after him curiously, and wondered what he was up to; but as Step Hen had seen him in consultation with Thad he told them it was none of their business, but that the tall scout had undoubtedly been sent off on an errand by the commander.

Bumpus, feeling a certain sense of responsibility on account of having been especially designated as the guardian of the fire, took it upon himself to make certain that there was a plentiful supply of wood handy. It was a comical sight to see him swing the old ax, and hear him give a loud grunt every time he sent it home. But nevertheless he managed to keep things going, for he was very persistent, and hated to let any object escape him, once he had set his mind on accomplishing the same.

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It was perhaps fifteen minutes later that they heard a shout, and looking up discovered some one running toward them, waving his arms wildly.

"There comes Giraffe, like hot cakes," announced Bumpus.

"And he looks wild in the bargain," added Step Hen. "I wonder now has he run on any savages getting ready for a feast like the ones Robinson saw."

"Oh! you're only fooling, I know, because savages couldn't be here along the Susquehanna!" exclaimed Bumpus; but nevertheless he began to show signs of fresh anxiety; and waited for the runner to come up,

with a thousand questions in his manner.

So Giraffe came along, slackening his pace as he drew near, for he was breathing hard, and casting occasional glances back of him, which latter action in itself was sufficient cause for Bumpus to believe he must have been chased by some one.

"What is it, Giraffe?" he called out, even before the other had arrived.

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"Yes, tell us what ails you, and why you've been running so fast?" Step Hen went on to say, as they all crowded around the panting runner.

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CHAPTER XVI. WHAT DAVY HEARD.

"You guessed right, Thad!" said Giraffe, looking toward the patrol leader.

"About what?" demanded Step Hen.

"Why, that it'd be dangerous for us to try and stick to the old bug of a shanty boat, with all that wind blowing," came the reply.

"Has she gone, Giraffe?" demanded Thad quickly, and the other nodded eagerly.

"Cleaned out, as sure as anything, and not a sign of her around, as far as I could see," he went on to explain.

"Then it must have been the great big blast that set her adrift," Davy added, doing his best to explain the mystery. "It was enough to whip her off the shore, with the water rising all the while. Well, that settles it for us."

"How does it, Davy?" pleaded Bumpus.

"I mean we're Crusoes at last, and the last link binding us to our beloved home is swept away," the other continued, for the especial benefit of Bumpus, who was apt to take things too literally.

"Enough of that, Davy," Thad broke in with; "you know we didn't take so much stock in that clumsy boat, after all. It's true we did talk about cutting some long setting-poles, and trying to make the shore when the water went down, but there will be other ways to reach the mainland when we're ready, never you fear. Tell us about it, Giraffe."

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"Why, I took my time about getting there, you see, because I knew there wasn't any need of hurrying, as we couldn't do a thing to-day. Besides, Thad, I wanted to look around a little on the way, and find out if there was any sort of game on *our* little island. Well, there is, and I reckon, what with our guns and snares, we could keep ourselves from starving to death for a long while."

"Good!" muttered Bumpus, as though that important statement removed a certain dreadful fear that may have been haunting him for quite some time.

"Yes," continued the other scout glibly, "I saw two rabbits at different times, and a number of nut-crackers of the gray order, fine big chaps too, that would make a fine squirrel stew, let me tell you. They must have come out here at some time in the summer, when the water was awful low, and this island connected with the main shore on one side by an isthmus."

"That's the explanation, I expect," assented Allan, who was always very much interested in all things concerning wild animal migration.

"But about the boat, Giraffe?" reminded Thad.

"Oh! yes, that's so. I started in to tell you how I found out she was gone from that point where we left her a while back, didn't I? Well, after I got to the place where you come right out of the woods and sight the point I began to rub my eyes, because I couldn't believe I was seeing straight, for there wasn't any boat on that shore at all, not the first sign of one. Of course I knew right away what had happened, and that it must have been the extra big squall coming out of the northwest that had driven her off."

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"Then you hurried back to bring us the news, didn't you?" continued Thad.

"Say, I just *flew*, because I thought the sooner you knew about it the better. And so we're prisoners on the island now, without any kind of a boat to take us off. We may have to wade or swim after the tide goes down again."

"I don't suppose you stopped to take a look, and see if there were any tracks around?" the patrol leader continued.

"Tracks—what of, the keel of the shanty boat?" asked Giraffe. "Oh! the splash of the water would have washed all those out easy, so what was the use? We know she's gone, and that covers the whole bill. By now, what with that wind and current, if she hasn't been stove in on some rock, the shanty boat must be five or ten miles down the river, and booming along, all the while spinning around like a top. Whee! I'm tickled to death to know I'm not aboard her right now."

"So say we all of us!" roared several of the scouts in unison, showing how they felt about the matter.

"How about making a shelter?" asked Giraffe, his woodsman spirit aroused; which remark proved that he must have been pondering over these things while on the way to the upper end of the island and back.

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"We were talking that over while you were gone," said Thad, "and came to the conclusion that while we might try and put up some little cover good enough for one night, which would keep the dew off, even without the use of our ponchos, it would hardly pay us to go to any great trouble."

"But what if we have to stay out here a long time?" continued Giraffe, whose whole manner told that he would not object in the least, as long as the eating was fairly good; and that the Easter vacation could be indefinitely prolonged so far as he was concerned.

"Well, we don't intend to, and that's all there is to it," Step Hen assured him. "Of course we have to put in one night; but that ought to be all. The river will fall nearly as fast as it rose; and already Thad's thinking up some scheme that's going to take us ashore."

"Any wings to it, Thad?" asked Giraffe laughingly; "or shall we make a balloon, and go flying over Cranford, to make the folks' eyes stick out of their heads with wondering what those frisky Silver Fox scouts will be doing next, to get themselves in the spotlight?"

"Oh! I haven't had time enough yet to get to that," Thad told him; "just give me a chance to sleep over it first. But Step Hen is perfectly right when he says we haven't the least intention of being cooped up here many days. Besides, unless we do get a move on us pretty soon, we'll have to turn back home and get ready to go to school, instead of recovering the judge's treasured army coat for him."

"School!" repeated Bumpus; "my goodness! is there really such a place? Why, seems to me it's been an *age* since I recited a lesson. Just the thought of it makes me feel sad. But if we did have to camp out here for a couple of weeks we'd miss some hunky-dory good times in Cranford. The barn dance comes off next week, you know. And every one of us, I reckon, has promised to take somebody. Oh! we've just got to be home before then, Thad. Think what Sadie Bradley'd do if you gave her the mitten; and then how about Giraffe's roly-poly sister, Polly, Allan; are you ready to forsake her? Perish the thought; the boys of the Silver Fox Patrol never were quitters, were they?"

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Giraffe, whatever he may have thought about staying on the island as long as they could stand it, seeing that popular sentiment was against him, showed enough wisdom to quiet down. Possibly he may not have been one-half as bent on such a course himself as he made out; for Giraffe was notoriously shrewd, and fond of playing all manner of jokes.

They lounged around, some of them engaged in accomplishing certain things, but in the main content to lie on their blankets, with a poncho underneath to keep the dampness off. This was on account of the fact that they had been cheated out of considerable sleep lately, and felt the need of it.

Later on Thad commenced to make a bough shelter, with the assistance of several of the others. In summer time this is readily done, but when the leaves are off most of the trees it is not so easy a task.

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By selecting hemlock and other trees that would afford a dense covering they managed by degrees to build up quite a shelter, under which they might lie without running much risk of being wet by the dews. And after the recent heavy storm all of the weather prophets seemed fully agreed that the air had surely been cleared, so that another rain was not apt to come along for some time at least.

Noon came and went.

They cooked a warm meal, thus reducing the

amount of provisions on hand; but the result was worth all the sacrifice, Giraffe and Bumpus declared, as they lay on the ground afterward, hardly able to move on account of the full dinner of which they had partaken.

"Three more meals like that, and then the deluge!" said Giraffe; "but who cares for expenses? Gimme two cents' worth of gingersnaps, as the country boy said when he wanted the girls in the store to see what a high roller he could be. If our plans turn out O. K. we hope to be where we can buy a dinner for hard cash by that time. No need of worrying any; keep a doin' the smile-that-won't-come-off business. We belong to the Little Sunshine Club, don't we, boys?"

Most of them were there in the bunch, and as usual all trying to talk at once. Davy alone sat off to one side, and seemed to be trying to shut out the chatter, while he wrote in his private log book an account of their recent adventures.

"How did the grits go, Bob?" asked Bumpus, who, in order to please the Southern boy, had prepared a kettle of fine hominy, to which the other had certainly done full justice, if his three helpings counted for anything.

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"Simply immense, suh, and no mistake about it," came the hearty reply; "some of you wonder how it is every Southerner loves that good old dish, and I confess that I'm unable to supply the explanation. I only know it fo' a fact; and that somehow they all say it seems to bring befo' their minds' eye a picture of hanging moss, orange trees, cotton in the field, magnolias in bloom on the green trees, and all sorts of other things connected with the South they love."

"I don't think there's a part of this Union one-half so fond of their section of the country as you Southerners are, Bob," Allan asserted.

"I reckon you're about right, suh, when you say that. It's always been that way with us befo' the war and since. But Davy's beckoning to you, Thad."

"Well, I declare, what do you think of that for pure nerve?" muttered Giraffe, as he saw the scout in question crooking his finger, and nodding to the patrol leader, as though asking him to come over; "if the mountain won't come to Mahomet, he has to go to the mountain. But whatever d'ye imagine ails Davy now? He don't look sick, and in need of medicine, because he ate nearly as big a dinner as—well, as Bumpus here did."

"Speak for yourself, John Alden," retorted the stout boy scornfully.

Thad understood that Davy wished to say something privately, and on this account he did not hesitate to get up and move over to where the other was sitting with his log book in his hand.

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He saw that Davy had a puzzled expression on his face, and from this judged he had run across some sort of enigma which he wanted the patrol leader to help him solve. As Thad was accustomed to this sort of thing, he did not think it strange, though naturally feeling some

curiosity concerning the matter.

"Want to see me, Davy?" he asked, as he carelessly dropped alongside the other.

"Why, we're all here, ain't we, Thad, the whole patrol I mean?" Davy began.

"Count noses, and you'll find there are just eight of us, which covers the bill," Thad told him.

"While you-all were talking there did you hear anything queer?" continued Davy.

"Not that could be noticed," Thad told him. "There were times when the boys made so much noise that it was hard for me to hear anything besides. Did you catch any suspicious sound, Davy?"

The other immediately nodded, and went on to say, at the same time casting a quick look all around him:

"Thad, I sure did. I was sitting here writing, and paying no attention to what the fellows were squabbling about, when all at once it came, as plain as anything, and right from over yonder," with which he pointed across the island.

"Was it the bark of a dog, the mewing of a cat, the bray of a donkey, or the neighing of a horse, Davy?" asked Thad, smiling.

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"Nixey, not any of those, Thad," replied the other solemnly; "but as sure as I'm sitting here it sounded like a shout in a human voice!"

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CHAPTER XVII. LOOKING FOR SIGNS.

"You mean you think you heard some one shouting, do you?" asked Thad, apparently unmoved, though truth to tell he considered this new information of considerable importance.

"That's what I want you to understand, Thad."

"Could you make out what was said?" continued the patrol leader, anxious to get at the kernel of the matter as soon as possible.

"Well, no, I don't believe I did; but it just struck me it was a *yell*, like anybody would let out if something happened to give him a shock. I reckon that's what I'd be apt to do if a rattlesnake jumped at me, and I dodged back."

"Well," continued Thad confidently, "there couldn't be any rattlesnake here on this island, I should think, and even if that was so, snakes never come out so early in the season. But Davy, do you think you could tell which direction the shout seemed to come from?"

"Just where I pointed, over there to the east, which is the side of the island. Now, if there's somebody out here besides us, who could it be?" and Davy asked this question with the confidence the scouts had come to put in their leader, whom they apparently expected to know

everything.

"Oh! it might be some fisherman who had a hut here; or even a fugitive from justice, hiding from the officers. You know we've run across things like that. Once we even met up with a crazy man who had broken out of an asylum, and was living like a hermit in the woods. All that will come later on, when we find the proof that you haven't made a mistake."

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"But, Thad, I ought to know a shout given by human lungs, hadn't I?" pursued the puzzled Davy.

"We all think that, Davy, but you know for yourself that a loon for instance can laugh so much like a man that you'd be ready to take your affidavit there was a fellow out on the lake trying to make you mad. You think you heard a shout; but it may have been one of a lot of things."

"Of course anybody could be mistaken, Thad," the other went on to say; and it is an accepted fact that when your enemy begins to look over his shoulder he is getting ready to retreat.

"You may have heard what you think, Davy; perhaps a boat was being swept past the island, and someone in it, seeing the smoke of our fire, called out for help; though I should think if that was the case he'd keep the ball rolling. Come, let's take a turn across to the shore, and see if anything is in sight down-river way."

"All right, Thad; count on me to go along. No need of saying anything to the rest, is there?" Davy remarked, with eagerness stamped upon his face.

"Not a bit," replied the other.

When the others saw them moving off, very naturally they felt more or less curiosity to know what was in the wind.

"Hello! there, what's up?" called out Giraffe.

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"Oh! we're just going over to take a look around, boys," replied Thad.

"Don't get lost, and give us the bother of hunting you up, whatever you do," they heard Bumpus say; and the audacity of the thing struck Thad as so comical that he could be heard chuckling as he went on.

As there had been no invitation on the part of the patrol leader to the others to come along, they realized that they were not wanted.

"A case of two's company, three a crowd, I reckon, suh!" remarked Bob White, as he tossed a little more wood on the fire, which felt pretty cheerful, since the air was still cool after the storm.

"Who cares?" said Bumpus, stretching himself out again at full length on his comfortable blanket.

Meanwhile Thad and Davy were engaged in making their way through the brush, and heading for the shore on the eastern side of the island that stood in the middle of the flooded Susquehanna.

They found it more difficult work than they had expected. The island could not have been used for any purpose, since under the trees it was a perfect snarl of bushes and creeping vines, some of the latter as thick as one's ankle. Unless the person who was pushing his way through this wilderness of growth kept constantly on the alert he was very apt to catch his foot in a snake-like vine, and measure his full length on the ground.

Davy, indeed, uttered several little ejaculations when his hands came in contact with thorns growing on some of the bushes.

"This isn't what it seemed cracked up to be, eh, Thad?" he muttered. "I guess there's a sample of everything that grows around this region right here on this island, and then some. And seems like I'm finding the same out one after the other. There, that stub of a branch tried to poke my left eye out, and did bring blood on my cheek. I don't see how you manage to get along without any accidents."

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"You're not as experienced as I am in passing through places like this, that's all, Davy. You move too quick, and don't use your eyes enough. If you think I can take the cake at it you ought to see an Indian work, and after that you'd say I wasn't in the same class. He'd like as not glide along like a snake; and try as hard as you pleased, you wouldn't hear so much as a twig break under his feet."

"Then I'm pretty sure I'll never make a first-class scout," commented Davy, "for I seem to be too clumsy. There, I thought that stick would bear my weight; but it broke under me with a sharp snap that would have told the enemy somebody was trying to sneak up on the camp. I guess it must run in the blood, Thad, and I haven't got any of it in me. Yet I had an uncle who was said to be one of the greatest big game hunters that ever went out to South Africa after elephants and lions and all such things. They skipped me when it came to inheriting the instincts of a still-hunter."

By degrees they forced their way through all these obstacles, and Davy seemed to improve as he went along, as Thad took occasion to tell him.

"Anyhow, it'll be easy enough going back again!" Davy declared, "because we've left a fair trail behind us. I wouldn't be surprised now if some of the other fellows take advantage of that to cross over here, so's to get a squint of the river." "Well, here we are, and it looks as if we might get a fairly decent look down stream, Davy."

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"Yes, there's a little point sticking out here, thank goodness. Look at all the water going past, would you, Thad? This is a great flood, all right; and I hope it goes down a lot before we try to cross over to the mainland, to-morrow, or the day after. Do you think it's come to a stand yet?"

"I guess you'll find it that way," returned the other; "and while we're here I mean to make a mark, so as to tell just before dark what's happening. But Davy, can you see anything like a boat down below?"

Davy shook his head, for he had been earnestly gazing in that direction.

"Not a single sign, Thad!" he declared, in a disappointed tone. "And as a boat couldn't have passed from sight in this short time, why, that proves there wasn't such a thing at all."

"Looks that way," assented the patrol leader confidently.

"And," continued Davy, "that if I did really hear a shout, which of course hasn't yet been proved for certain, then there's somebody on this island besides our crowd!"

"We'll have to let it go at that," Thad told him. They looked about for a short time, and Thad arranged a stick at the edge of the river, that stood where the current would not displace it. By means of this he could tell whether the water rose or fell, since he had cut a groove in it to mark the present height of the flood.

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"There, that ought to do the business for us," Thad remarked, after he had finished his little job.

"Do we go back to the camp now?" Davy wanted to know, as though a little fearful that the other might propose a trip around the island, which, on account of the dense thickets of brush, he would not altogether fancy, though not the kind of a scout to easily back down.

"I reckon we might as well," the patrol leader told him; and with this encouragement Davy immediately started off.

Thad used his eyes as he went, but could not say that he had managed to make any discovery that would throw the least light on the mystery of that strange noise his companion claimed to have heard.

Of course, when they joined the others, everybody was curious to know what their little jaunt meant; so they had to tell all about it.

"None of us heard a single thing," remarked Giraffe sturdily, as though that fact ought to settle it, and that Davy must have allowed his imagination to work overtime.

"I should think you couldn't, what with all the row you kept up," Davy answered back sturdily. "All I want to say is this, that I heard something like a shout; and I'll keep on saying that forever, no matter how you laugh, and make fun."

Of course they talked it over, and viewed the happening from all sides. Every fellow had some sort of explanation to make to cover the ground. A few of these followed the same track Thad had hewn when stating his ideas to Davy; and yet after exhausting the subject the boys were no nearer a solution of the mystery than when they started.

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Later on, just as Davy had suggested might be the case, several of them made up their minds they would like to take a look at the river, for Bumpus and Smithy started forth.

"Just follow our trail!" sang out Davy after the pair, "and you won't have any trouble. But keep your eyes peeled every minute of the time if you don't want to get in trouble."

"What from?" demanded Bumpus, halting in his

departure.

"Oh! all sorts of snares, in the shape of concealed vines that grab you by the ankles and throw you down; or branches that smack you square in the face, and nearly blind you. If you get in any hole and want help, just sing out, fellows."

"Thanks, we will!" replied Bumpus scornfully, as though he did not anticipate such a thing happening; if Davy considered that he and Smithy were still greenhorns and must be treated as babes in the woods, he was very much mistaken, that was all.

As Giraffe liked to say, "you never can tell," and stranger things than that can come about when boys are loose in the wilderness.

Those left by the fire continued to sprawl around in favorite attitudes, and take their ease. The day had another hour or so left, and there was Giraffe overhauling the food supply, evidently making out the menu which he meant to serve up for the evening meal—trust Giraffe for taking care of such things.

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The sun was shining cheerily now, and that at least was some comfort to these castaway scouts. They expected that with the coming of another day they would be able to start a scheme looking to making a move to get away; and that thought gave them encouragement.

It was at this moment there rang out a sudden cry that caused everyone to spring up and look startled.

"It sounded like Smithy's voice!" exclaimed Thad, as he gained his feet.

"Yes, that's what it did!" echoed Giraffe; "something must have happened after all! Mebbe they've gone and met up with trouble! Mebbe there *are* some people on this island that don't like us being here! Thad, what shall we do?"

Quick and energetic came the patrol leader's order.

"Step Hen, stay here to guard the camp; the rest of you follow me!"

Without wasting another second the five boys rushed away toward the spot where again and again they could hear Smithy's shrill voice calling for help!

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CHAPTER XVIII. MORE SERIOUS NEWS.

"Help! hurry up!"

That was what Smithy was calling, in agonized tones that thrilled everyone of the other scouts. They were rushing pell-mell along the trail which Davy and Thad had made in going to and coming from the river, and which the other pair had also followed when they went to take an

observation. Now and then one of them would find a root or a vine, and take a header, but only to scramble erect again, and resume the furious forward rush.

The river was close by, and at least Smithy had not lost his voice, for he still kept up his cries; though getting hoarse through the excitement, and the constant strain on his voice.

Then those in the lead discovered their chum. He seemed to be lying flat on his chest at the very brink of the swift flowing river; and while one hand gripped an exposed root belonging to a tree, the other was stretched over the edge of the bank.

"It's Bumpus!" gasped Giraffe; "and he's fallen in!"

No one took the trouble to offer any objection to this explanation. Indeed, from their previous experience with Bumpus it seemed the most natural thing in the world to expect the clumsy scout to tumble overboard every chance he got. They could in fact look back to any number of similar accidents during the time the patrol had been taking these outings in the woods and on the waters.

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"Hold him tight, Smithy!" snapped Thad, trying to increase his pace, which was rendered a difficult thing to do because of the many obstacles that must be encountered and overcome.

"Good boy, Smithy, keep a-going!" cried Davy, greatly excited.

No doubt these cheery symptoms of coming help did much to encourage Smithy to maintain his frenzied clutch upon the one who was in the water; for he was still holding on when Thad arrived on the spot, accompanied by Giraffe, the best runner of them all.

Down alongside Smithy they both dropped. Yes, there was poor old Bumpus in the flood, swimming with hands and legs, and spurting great volumes of the muddy water out of his mouth with each splurge. It chanced that it was quite deep there, and the river ran like a mill race; so that if Smithy had released his grip for a single instant the unlucky Bumpus must have been swept down-stream like a log, in spite of his strenuous efforts.

When his clothes were soaked through, the stout member of the patrol was apt to weigh several hundred pounds; so it was small wonder that, unaided, Smithy could do next to nothing looking to his rescue—just hold on desperately, and shout for help.

But when Thad and Giraffe took a grip it was a different matter. Altogether they started to drag the imperiled scout up out of his impromptu bath.

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"Yo-heave-o! Up you come, my boy! One more pull, Thad, and we've got him. Wow! what an elephant he is!"

So saying, Giraffe bent again to the task, with the result that Bumpus was soon hauled over the edge of the crumbling bank, and dragged to a

place of security. There he lay, sprawled out, gasping for breath, and shedding gallons of water from his soaked khaki suit.

The boys gathered around, staring at him. Although they often poked considerable fun at Bumpus, it was of an innocent sort, for they were exceedingly fond of him.

"Well, you sure look like a great big grampus hauled up on the beach!" remarked Giraffe, with pretended scorn, though to tell the truth in all probability he did not really know what a grampus was, only that it lived in the sea, and stood for something clumsy and large.

"Next time you feel like taking a bath, Bumpus, don't be so greedy. You're some size, but the river's on a flood now, and too big for you!" said Davy; and turning to Thad he continued: "Like as not your stick will show that she jumped up a foot or more when Bumpus dropped in."

"It's a bad time to get your feet crossed, suh, when you-all happen to be on a river bank!" Bob White hinted.

"You're all away off; I didn't stumble, this time, anyhow, and I wasn't trying to take a bath either," spluttered the soaking Bumpus, as he sat up and started wiping his face with a very wet sleeve.

"How about that, Smithy; what happened to him?" asked Thad.

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"The bank caved in under him, that's the truth," replied the other scout. "He was wanting to see just a little further down the river, when all at once he went in. I really couldn't tell you just how I happened to catch hold of him by the back of his coat, because I don't know myself; but I thought it my duty to call out, and try to get some help. You see, he was too heavy for me to lift. I almost broke my back trying, as it was."

"I should think you would!" declared Giraffe; "and it's a lucky thing we heard you calling. Only for that what would you have done, Smithy?"

"I was trying to think all the while," replied the other. "You see, I didn't dare let go my hold, for the current is terribly swift here. I had half an idea that if only I could work along the bank a little, it might shoal some, and then Bumpus would be able to get a footing. But I'm glad you came when you did, for I was rapidly becoming exhausted."

Smithy generally spoke with great exactness, and used words that few of his comrades ever bothered with in their conversation; that was one thing connected with his previous condition that persisted in clinging to the former dandy of the patrol.

"You did the right thing, and that's a fact!" commented Allan; "I don't believe there's a single fellow who could have raised Bumpus. But, Thad, he's beginning to shiver in this air; don't you think we ought to get him over to the fire?"

"Sounds good t-to me; fire's what I w-want, and l-lots of it too!" stammered the stout scout, trying to get to his feet, in which effort he was

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ably assisted by willing hands. "As t-to that bank, how'd I k-k-know it was goin' to c-c-cave in on me, t-t-tell me that, will y-y-you?"

They hurried him along as fast as he could be urged, and all the while he kept shedding little streams of water, as though he carried an almost inexhaustible supply. When finally the camp was reached, with the wondering Step Hen giggling over the comical sight Bumpus presented, they made the late swimmer disrobe, and hung his clothes around so that they would dry in the heat of the fire.

Bumpus himself was wrapped in blankets until he looked like a swathed mummy, and told to just lie there. Under all this manipulation of course his chilled blood regained its normal temperature, and he declared he felt as snug as a "bug in a rug!"

Even this excitement did not cause Giraffe to forget that he had business on his hands, and supper was taken in charge with the customary results; for they presently found themselves sitting down to a "bountiful repast," Davy called it, to the evident complete satisfaction of the eminent cook.

By the time they were ready to roll up in their blankets and try to get some sleep, the clothes hanging from various bushes were thoroughly dry; so that Bumpus could don the same. This released all the extra blankets with which he had been swathed, which was a matter of vital importance to their various owners.

The fire they expected to keep going more or less all through the night. Besides the comfort that it brought through the necessary heat, its bright glow did much to dissipate the gloom around them, and render their situation less cheerless.

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Giraffe insisted on keeping his gun close at his side, for he said there could be no telling whether they were safe there or not. If the island did happen to be the hiding-place of some desperate criminal, who might think to steal a march on them as they slept, he wanted to be ready to repel boarders.

He even had Thad promise to give a certain signal should anything out of the way happen while they slept; just as though Thad would be awake all through the night, and know about the same.

But the long hours of darkness dragged on, and there was no alarm. Some of the boys slept through the entire night without arousing once; but there were others who felt more of the weight of responsibility resting upon them, and who frequently sat up to look around, or else got upon their feet, in order to put more wood on the camp fire.

Morning broke and found them apparently in just the same condition as when they had wrapped their blankets around them, and lay down with their feet toward the fire, hunter-fashion.

Thad was the first up, and when Allan awoke it was to see the patrol leader returning over the trail that led to the river bank.

It was easy to decide that the other must have been over to learn what his tally-stick had to tell about the condition of the flood.

"How about it, Thad; falling, I hope?" Allan asked, as he stretched himself, after getting on his feet.

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"Yes, and rapidly into the bargain, just as we expected would be the case," came the reply. "That rain could not have extended all the way up to the sources of the river, you see; and it will run out in a big hurry."

"Then we may be able to get across to the mainland before a great while?" queried Allan.

"We'll talk about that while we're eating breakfast," Thad told him; "and as the sun is coming up I reckon we'd better waken the rest of the crowd. They've had a grand good sleep, I take it. Give Giraffe a push, Allan, will you, and roll Bumpus over a few times till he says he's awake; that's the regular program with him, you know." One by one the scouts sat up, and yawned, and stretched, as sleepy boys are apt to do when they have not been allowed to have their last nap out. Of course Davy did not forget how Thad had made a flood-tally over at the river, which fortunately Bumpus had not kicked away when he took his unexpected plunge with a portion of the crumbly bank.

"I reckon, now, Thad, you've been over to see what's doing," he remarked, while Giraffe fixed his cooking fire, and set about beginning operations looking to having breakfast under way. "And if that's so tell us how she stands. Did it drop half a foot or more during the time we snoozed?"

"More like three feet," replied the other; "and if Bumpus fell over in the same place again he'd find the water hardly up to his waist, with little current in place of that mill race of yesterday. Yes, things begin to look encouraging all around, boys!"

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"Like fun they do!" bawled out Giraffe just then, as he stood up, and turned a very red and angry face toward the rest of the scouts.

"Why, what ails you now, Giraffe?" asked Smithy, who, generally calm and cold as an iceberg himself, frequently took the others to task when they showed signs of great excitement.

"I'm as mad as a wet hen, I tell you, and I wish somebody'd kick me for not doing what I first meant to last night, ask Thad to set a watch!" exploded the tall scout, stamping on the ground, and grinding his teeth.

Thad smelled a rat immediately.

"Anything been taken, Giraffe?" he asked hastily.

"Anything?" roared the other; "why, there isn't half enough left to give us a decent meal. I reckon I might be satisfied, but where the rest of you are going to come in beats me. Yes, this island is inhabited, all right, and they're a set of low-down thieves at that. You hear me talking, fellows!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRAIL OF THE MARAUDER.

When they heard the dreadful news the rest of the scouts looked almost frightened. It was bad enough to know that some evil intentioned man was on the island with them; but that he should have actually crept into their camp while they slept, and very nearly made a clean sweep of their already limited stock of provisions, seemed close to a tragedy. When you threaten to cut off their food supply it is hitting boys in their weakest place.

There was an immediate start for the spot where they had placed their haversacks and the food on the preceding night. Thad, however, held them back.

"Don't all rush so," he told them. "We want to look around, and see if we can find out anything. If everybody tramples the ground it'll be little use trying. Let Allan and Giraffe help me look first. We'll report anything we find."

The advice sounded reasonable to the rest; so despite their eagerness to take a hand in the game they held back while the three scouts proceeded to examine the ground.

It was not long before Allan made a discovery.

"I think here's where he crawled along," he told Thad, who was close by; "you can see that something's dragged here, which must have been his knees. Yes, and there's where the toe of his shoe made a dent in the soil, with another and still another further on. And now he lay flat on his stomach. Perhaps one of us happened to move just then, and he was afraid of being seen."

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"You're right, Allan," remarked Thad, after taking a good look; "and to think it possible he was crouching here in the shadows when I got up and threw some wood on the fire. If I knew that I'd feel pretty sore."

"Well, he went on again pretty soon, didn't he?" observed Giraffe, who was hovering close by, and keeping close watch on everything that was done.

"Yes, that's what he did," resumed Allan, also starting on once more, following the tracks that looked so strange they would have sorely puzzled members of the patrol like Smithy and Bumpus, who were not noted as trackers; "and headed direct for the place where we stacked our things up."

"It was a lucky thing none of us happened to leave our guns here with all the rest of the duffel," observed Giraffe exultantly, as though it gave him considerable satisfaction to find that he had not been quite as foolish as might have happened.

"He finally got to our stuff," Allan went on, "and rising to his knees started to pick out what he wanted. I guess he must have been pretty hungry, because grub was what he seemed to be

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after. Not one of our haversacks is gone, you can see. He took that piece of bacon we fetched from the boat, the packages of crackers, and—yes, the cheese is lost in addition, also a can of corn and the coffee. Fact is, it looks as if we didn't have much left, outside this package of hominy, and the little tin box of tea you fetched along, Thad!"

Giraffe gave vent to a hollow groan.

"It's just dreadful, that's what!" he said, with a gulp, as though receiving the sad news that he had lost his best friend; "just think of grits and tea for our breakfast, and not another thing! The worst is yet to come, though, for we won't get *anything* for dinner, you know! Why, I'll be all skin and bone if things keep on going from bad to worse like that."

"Bob White won't think it's so tough, if he can have his grits," remarked Allan; "but breakfast to a New England boy stands for ham and eggs, flapjacks with maple syrup, and always coffee and cold pie."

"Stop stretching out the agony, can't you?" said Giraffe, holding both hands to his ears as though trying to shut out the mention of such delightful dishes; "it's cruelty to animals to talk that way, Allan. But, Thad, what are we going to do about this same thing? Can't we take up the trail, and try to get our stuff back? After all, this old island is only of a certain size, and with eight of us in line we ought to comb it from top to bottom. I feel like Sheridan did when he met the Union troops running away in a panic from Cedar Creek, and yelled out: 'Turn the other way, boys, turn the other way! We'll lick 'em out of their boots yet! We've just got to get those camps back!' You see he was thinking of all the good stuff they'd lost with the camps. So are we."

"Allan, suppose we look to see which way he went off, because it couldn't have been along the same line as his advance?" suggested the scout master.

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He knew considerable about these things himself, but trusted to Allan to learn facts that might even have eluded his observation. Allan had been in Maine and the Adirondacks a portion of his life, and picked up many clever ways from association with the guides that made him invaluable when it came to a question of woodcraft.

"That's a good idea, Thad," was what the other said in reply; and already his sharp eyes had begun to look for signs.

These were easily found, for the unseen thief had crawled away in the same fashion as he made his advance, though a bit more clumsily, which was doubtless owing to the fact of his being more heavily laden at the time.

Step Hen, Bob White and the other three were of course watching the every movement of the experienced trackers with great interest. They took some little satisfaction in trying to guess just what each movement signified. Bumpus and Smithy of course would never have been able to figure these things out, but the other three had more practical knowledge and could hit closer to the mark.

"There," Step Hen was saying eagerly; "they're taking stock of what's been hooked, and my stars! just look at the way Giraffe throws his hands up, will you? If that doesn't tell the story, then I'm away off in my guess. I just wager we've been cleaned out for keeps, and our little tummies will call in vain for their accustomed rations. I wonder how it feels to starve to death!"

"Oh! quit talking that way, Step Hen," wailed Bumpus; "we ain't going to waste away like all that. Give Thad a chance to think up how to win out. Besides, didn't you hear Giraffe say there was lots of fat game on this island; yes, and fish in the river to boot. I'm not going to give up so easy; there's always *something* to fall back on, if it gets to the worst."

"Yes," added Step Hen maliciously, "that's what shipwrecked sailors have to do when they cast lots; and I'm glad now I wasn't built like a roly-poly pudding. It's too tempting when hard times come along."

Bumpus, of course, understood that his chum was only joking, but nevertheless he drew a long breath, and remained very quiet for quite some time after that, as though busied with uneasy thoughts.

"Now they're starting off again," remarked Davy, "and I guess it's to follow the trail of the thief away. I wonder if we could track him to where he hangs out, so as to make him hand over our property."

"I allow, suh," Bob White broke in with, "that by the time we did that same there would be mighty little of our food left. He must have been pretty hungry to take the chances he did when he crawled into our camp, and with all these guns around in plain sight."

"Let's keep along after the boys," suggested Step Hen, "and see what they run up against."

The idea appealed to his companions, for they all started off, though maintaining the same relative distance from Thad and his backers, so as not to interfere with the work. Step Hen took occasion to bend down when he came upon a spot where the imprint of the unknown man's knee could be seen, and looked at it intently, though finally giving it up as a task beyond his ability.

"Knees all make the same kind of dragging mark to me," he told the others, who had waited to hear his report, "and I can't tell one from another. If it was Bumpus here, now, who had done this trick in his sleep, I wouldn't be able to say for sure, though like as not he'd bear deeper'n this mark shows."

"Well, since Bumpus wasn't outside of his blanket once all night long, you can't saddle this job on his poor shoulders. He's got enough to carry as it is, see?" and the stout boy put all the emphasis possible on that last word, as though he meant to make it decisive.

"They seem to be getting close to the bushes now," Bob White observed.

"And once he got in there mebbe the thief would rise to his feet to walk away," added Step Hen.

"If Thad beckons you'll know he's settled it in his mind to follow the trail, and wants all of us who own guns to rally around him."

"How about the rest; what will they be doing?" asked Smithy.

"Tending camp, of course," replied the other. "Think now we know we've got a thief for a neighbor we want him to steal our blankets next? A nice pickle we'd be in without some way to keep warm nights. Remember, if you are left on guard, to defend the blankets with your very lives, both of you!"

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This sort of lurid talk of course thrilled Bumpus very much, for he had a habit of taking what the others said literally, and could not see the vein of humor apt to lie back of bombastic vaporings. He was rubbing his fat hands one over the other in a nervous way, and alternately watching what Step Hen did, and then how the others were coming on.

They could see that Thad and his two fellow scouts were just back of the first fringe of bushes. They had possibly made some sort of discovery, because all of them seemed to be down on hands and knees, with their faces close to the earth, and apparently examining certain impressions.

"I wonder what's up now?" ventured Davy.

"They've run on something that's staggered the bunch, you can see easily enough," Step Hen went on to say excitedly; "and I'm trying to make up my mind whether after all it *was* a man crawling along that made those queer marks. P'raps, now, some sort of big wild animal might have done it. We haven't seen a single footprint, you remember, to tell the story. I wish I knew what they've run across. Why don't they call us over, and let us in? It isn't just fair to keep us worrying like we are."

Just as though Thad might have heard this complaint on the part of Step Hen, he turned toward them, and raising his hand beckoned.

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"There, boys, he wants us to come over!" exclaimed Davy, exultantly; "I thought it'd strike us pretty quick; Thad isn't the kind to forget his mates. And we'll soon be put wise to the facts."

They hurried to join the other three, who still stood at the same place, ever and anon looking seriously down at the ground, as though hardly able to believe the evidence of their eyes.

When Step Hen came running with the other four tagging at his heels, Thad held up his hand.

"Hold on right there, boys!" he remarked; "we don't want you to cut in and rub it all away before you've had a chance to look for yourselves."

Of course this caused them to turn their attention to the ground, and it was easy to see that the crawling thief had here risen to his full height, though possibly bending over more or less as he continued his retreat.

"Then it was a man, after all!" was what Bumpus said; and there was a positive air of relief about his voice, as though he had taken Step Hen's

hint seriously, and even fancied a terrible wild beast might be hovering near them.

"Yes, but look closer, and see if you can recognize anything familiar about the marks?" advised Thad.

Accordingly, all of them leaned over and looked.

It was Step Hen who gave the first startled cry.

"Oh! Thad, what does this mean?" he burst out with; "it's the same broken shoe, bound together with an old rag, that we saw when we looked for the marks of Wandering George, in the mud of the road; but how in the wide world could he get over here?"

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CHAPTER XX. SOLVING A MYSTERY.

"What's that you say?" burst out Davy, looking as startled as though, to use the words of Giraffe, he "had seen his great grandfather's spook!"

"Wandering George! Out here on our island, too!" gasped Bumpus, just as though they had a permanent right to the strip of land in the middle of the river—"our" island he called it.

Of course all of them turned toward Thad, as usual, expecting him to give the answer to the question that puzzled them. The patrol leader laughed as he pointed down once more to that tell-tale track.

"No going behind the returns, is there, boys?" he said. "Every one of you knows that footprint by heart, because we took the pains to study it. And the man whose old battered shoe is being held on with a rag we know is Wandering George. He is responsible for taking our provisions. Right now you can imagine how much he's enjoying that cheese and crackers we expected to last us out to-day."

Giraffe groaned.

"And that fine strip of bacon we lifted at the time we left the shanty-boat!" added Step Hen, with a dismal look toward Bob White, who raised his eyes as if in horror at the idea of such desecration.

"It's easy to understand that the hobo's on the island, but how in the wide world could he get here without wings? That's what I want to know," Allan observed; which at least went to show that so far no one had been able to figure it out, for if anybody could, surely the Maine boy, who had followed many a difficult trail in his time, ought to be able to.

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"Mebbe he crossed over to the island when the water was low?" suggested Step Hen, but the idea was instantly scorned by Giraffe.

"You forget that the river's been on the boom for some little while," he said loftily; "and we happen to know that George wasn't far ahead of

us just yesterday. Now, you're wondering if I've got a theory of my own, and I'll tell you what I think. Somehow or other George must have been in a boat, and came that way. How do we know but what he was trying to cross over, and the current swept him down stream? Then, again, he might have been in some house or barn that was carried away by the flood, and managed to get ashore here."

"Say, Thad, don't you remember what I told you last night, when the rest were making so much noise, and I was dead sure I heard a shout?" interrupted Davy, with considerable excitement.

"Is that so?" demanded Giraffe; "well, that might have been the time he landed here, and discovering that we wore uniforms, he was afraid to break in, so like as not he just hung around and watched us, till he got a chance to sneak all our bully grub."

"Thad, you haven't told us what *you* think yet," remarked Smithy, who had been listening to all this excited talk, and hearing so many wonderful suggestions made that he was quite bewildered; "did this tramp fly over here; was he washed up on the island by the flood; or did he find himself castaway on some floating cabin, and manage to get ashore by good luck?"

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Thad must have been using his head to some advantage during this time, for he appeared to have made up his mind decisively.

"To tell you the truth," he remarked, "I don't take any stock in either the flying scheme or the one that brings in a floating hencoop or cabin to account for Wandering George's being here. I feel pretty sure he came on board a boat."

"Is that so, Thad?" Giraffe went on to remark; "what kind of a boat would you say it was, now?"

"Oh! something in the shape of a shanty-boat!" continued the other.

"You mean like the one that brought us here?" demanded Step Hen.

"*The same one!*" Thad shot back, with an emphasis that staggered his hearers, since all sorts of exclamations burst from their lips.

"Thad, do you really mean that?"

"It wouldn't be like you to crack a joke, when we're all mixed up like this."

"A passenger aboard *our* boat, and none of us ever dream of it; well, I must say you've got me guessing, Thad. However could that be?" and Bumpus plucked at the sleeve of the patrol leader, as though thrilled through and through by the staggering announcement just made.

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"Well, you see, it's just dawned on me," Thad commenced to say, "and I haven't had much time to figure it out myself, but the more I think it over the stronger my belief grows. Look back a bit, and you'll remember that we found a light in the cabin when we boarded the boat."

"Yes, that's so, Thad," assented Giraffe.

"And supper cooking, too," added Bumpus.

"With not a soul in sight, which we thought mighty queer," Step Hen went on to say, as his contribution.

"And all the while we stayed there, up to the time the cable broke, there was never a sign of the man that owned the boat, either," Davy reminded them.

"You remember," Thad continued, "that we figured out at first the owner of the boat must have seen us coming, and hid himself somewhere ashore, hoping we'd take a look about and pass on. We even guessed he must have some reason to fear arrest, and thought we were connected with the state militia. But after learning of Wandering George's being here on the island I've hatched up another idea, and I'll tell you just what it runs like."

"Good for you, Thad; we're listening like everything," muttered Bumpus, at the elbow of the chief scout.

"I've come to the conclusion," Thad began, "that the two tramps must have chased the owner of the shanty-boat away some time before we struck in. Now that I'm on the track I can remember there were certain signs of confusion aboard when we first entered; things seemed tossed around, as if someone had been looking in places for hidden valuables. That would be just what these two yeggmen were apt to do, you see. And while one began to cook some supper, the other may have started in to ransack the place."

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"Yes, and about that time they glimpsed us coming along; is that the way you figure it out, Thad?" asked Allan eagerly; for this explanation on the part of his chum appealed strongly to him.

"Yes, they saw a bunch of fellows in khaki running toward the boat," pursued the scout master; "and as it was too late for them to make a safe getaway, they just lifted a trap in the floor of the cabin, and dropped into the hold of the boat."

"Je-ru-sa-lem!" gasped Giraffe, "now, what d'ye think of that? All the time we were aboard the old boat George and his pal were hiding in the hold, and waiting for us to vacate the ranch! Thad, I honestly believe you've struck oil."

"But," interposed Step Hen, who on this occasion seemed disposed to be the only doubter, "why wouldn't they have made some attempt to escape while we slept, before the flood got so bad that the boat broke away from her moorings?"

"There must have been some reason," Thad told him; "and we may be able to give a stab at it, even if we never know the real truth. If you look back again, Step Hen, to how we were sprawled about on the floor of that little cabin, trying to get some sleep, and wrapped in our blankets, you'll likely remember that the eight of us managed to cover about all the limited space there was around."

"Every foot of the floor, for a fact, Thad," Davy admitted; "and I even threatened to hang by my toes from a hook, and sleep like a bat does, only

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Giraffe told me all the blood would run to my head, because that was the only empty place in my makeup.”

“Well, somebody must have been lying on that trap door, and whenever the men below tried to raise it they understood there was nothing doing,” Thad explained.

“Yes, that carries it up to the time we broke loose, and started on our wild ride down the flood,” Step Hen admitted; “but you’d think they’d have let us know about having passengers aboard. Whenever we bucked up against a rock, and the bally old tub threatened to turn upside-down, think how scared George and his pal must ‘a’ been. Whew! it was bad enough above-decks, let alone being shut down there, and not knowing what was happening.”

“Of course I can’t tell you what they thought, and why they didn’t try to communicate with us,” Thad went on. “It might be they felt that if they had to choose between giving themselves up or staying down in the hold and taking their chances they’d prefer the last. But when we left the boat I honestly believe they were aboard still.”

“Yes, and they’d guess she had struck shore, from the steady way she hung there,” Giraffe continued, taking up the story in his turn, “and of course they knew that we were clearing out. So, what did they do but follow suit, as soon as they thought the coast was clear.”

“How about it now. Step Hen; any more objections?” asked the patrol leader.

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“I guess I’m through, Thad,” acknowledged the other slowly, as though still unable to fully grasp the strange thing; “you’ve made out a pretty strong case, and I don’t glimpse a break in the chain. That’s the way you always hammer it in. If that hobo is here, then chances are he did come along with us, even if we never smelled a rat.”

“In the excitement of getting away,” Thad resumed, “I forgot I’d noticed cracks in the cabin floor that looked like a trap leading down into the hold of the boat. That was partly why I had Giraffe go back to where we left the shanty-boat. You remember he came and told us it had been driven off the point by that big squall.”

“I’m wondering what would have happened if you’d thought about the hold under the cabin before we ever quitted our old craft?” Giraffe remarked.

“Oh! we’d have found what was down there, and with guns in our hands could have easily cowed the hobo,” Allan told him.

“Fight or no fight, that’s what we would have done!” declared Bumpus vigorously.

“Listen to him, will you?” chuckled Step Hen; “isn’t he just the fierce Cossack, though? I can see that tramp army wilting when they sighted Bumpus threatening to jump down on ‘em. Who’d blame anybody for throwing up the sponge rather’n be mashed flat by such a hippo?”

“Well,” remarked Giraffe, as he rubbed his

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hands together in a satisfied fashion, "one thing sure, our old luck's still hanging on."

"How do you make that out, Giraffe?" inquired Smithy.

"We started on this hike with the idea of overtaking the tramp who was wearing the coat the judge's wife gave away by mistake, didn't we?" the lengthy scout demanded. "Well, stop and think for a minute, will you, what's happened to us? Here we are, marooned on an island, from which nobody can get away right at present unless he swims, and none of us feel like trying that in such cold water, do we? Did you ever know a hobo who would willingly take a bath? Well, put things together, and what do you get? Wandering George, coat and all let's hope, is shut up here on this strip of ground with us; and all we've got to do is to round him up to-day. Now, do you see, Smithy?"

Somehow this plain way of putting the case appealed to every one of them; for immediately Bumpus was shaking hands with Step Hen, and as if to show their satisfaction over the way things were turning out some of the rest did likewise.

"Course," said Giraffe, as he gave Davy's digits a squeeze that made the other fairly wince, "we can't say just how we'll corner the slippery rat, but there'll be a way, make up your mind to that, boys."

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CHAPTER XXI.

AN EMPTY LARDER.

"I'm only afraid it'll be too late, Giraffe," Bumpus was heard to remark, with a skeptical air.

"Too late for what?" demanded the tall scout, who had dropped to his knees, and was starting to follow the trail left by Wandering George, after the latter had gained his feet, and moved away from the vicinity of the camp.

"Why, there won't be a sign of our grub left by that time, you see; George; he'll be awful hungry, and it's surprising what a lot of stuff a regular hobo can put away when he tries."

"And hoboos ain't the only ones, Bumpus," intimated Davy; "I'd match you and Giraffe here against the best of 'em. But let's hope we'll find a way to get off this island before night comes, and strike a farmhouse where they'll feed us like the Baileys did."

"Oh! do you really think there's a chance of that happening to us, Davy?" exclaimed Bumpus, intentionally omitting to show any ill feeling on account of the little slur concerning his appetite. "I'd be willing to even go without my lunch in the middle of the day if I could believe we'd be sitting with our knees under a groaning table to-night. Seems like when you're beginning to face starvation every good thing you ever liked keeps popping up in your head."

Giraffe at this juncture called out, and his manner indicated that he had made a discovery of some sort.

"What is it, Giraffe?" asked Thad.

"I just bet you he's found where George sat down and ate up every crumb of that grub," muttered Bumpus, whose mind seemed to be wholly concerned with the question of the lost supplies.

"George was joined here by his pal, who must have been hanging out, waiting for him," Giraffe told them; and as he examined the tracks further he added; "and say, I reckon now that second fellow got hurt some way, while he was cooped up in the black hole under the cabin floor."

"Now how do you make that out, Giraffe?" asked Davy.

"Why, I can see that he limps like everything," the other went on to say, doubtless applying his knowledge of woodcraft to the case. "One foot drags every step he takes, and it didn't do that before, I happen to know. That's why George volunteered to do the cribbing all by himself, while the other waited."

"That makes two to handle instead of one, doesn't it?" Allan remarked; and once more Bumpus groaned.

"Two is a whole lot worse than one, to get away with things," he observed, with a piteous air of resignation, as though he was now perfectly satisfied they would none of them ever see the first sign of the stolen provisions again.

"If there's a trail why can't we start in, and track the two hoboes down?" suggested Davy vigorously.

They had followed Giraffe, so that all of them were just back of him at this time. The tall scout, however, shook his head in a disappointing way.

"I'd like to try that the worst kind," he remarked, "but I reckon it's no go. You can hardly see the footprints here, and they get fainter as they go on. Besides, we'd make all manner of noise creeping through this scrub, and they'd be wise to our coming, so they could keep moving off. There's a better way to capture George than that, fellows."

"Yes," added Thad, "we can comb the island from one end to the other. It can't be of any great size, you see; and by forming a line across at the top we could cover about every foot of it. In the end we'd corner the tramps, and make them surrender. We've got the whole day before us, and the sun promises to shine, too, so we can count on its being warmer."

"The whole day," Bumpus remarked disconsolately, "that means twelve long hours, don't it? Well, I suppose I can stand the thing if the rest of you can; but it's really the most dreadful calamity that ever faced us. They say starving is an easy death, but it wouldn't be to me."

No one was paying any attention to his complainings, so Bumpus stopped short in order to listen to what the others were saying. Possibly

he told himself that the best way to forget his troubles was to get interested in what was going on. And it might be there still remained a shred of hope in his heart that if they made a quick job of the surround, and capture, perhaps they might retake enough of the purloined food to constitute a bare meal at noon.

"First of all we've got to have our breakfast, such as it is," Thad observed.

"Tea and grits—oh! my stars!" sighed Giraffe; whereupon Bob White turned upon him with the cutting remark:

"You ought to be thankful for the grits, suh, believe me; it satisfies me, let me tell you. I wouldn't give a snap fo' all the tea in China or Japan; but grits make bone and muscle. You can do a day's work on a breakfast of the same. Only it takes a long time to cook properly, suh; and the sooner we get the pot started the better."

"You attend to that, Bumpus, please," said Giraffe, "and be sure you get enough to satisfy the crowd, even if you have to use two kettles, and the whole package of hominy. I want to talk things over with Thad here."

Bumpus hesitated for a minute. He hardly knew which he wanted to do most, stay there and listen, or return to the fire and begin operations looking to the cooking of that forlorn breakfast.

Finally, as he received a message from the inner man that it was time some attention was paid to the fact that nature abhorred a vacuum he turned away and trotted toward the camp fire.

Giraffe, together with Thad and Allan, tried to follow the trail of the two tramps further, but soon gave it up. After all, the several reasons why they should turn to the other way of rounding up the concealed men appealed strongly to them.

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Later on they returned to the camp, to sit around and wait for their breakfast to cook. Nobody looked very cheerful that morning. Somehow the fact that they were isolated there on that island with only one meal between them and dire hunger, loomed up like a great mountain before their mental vision.

In the end they found that grits did satisfy their hunger remarkably well; and taking Giraffe's advice Bumpus had actually cooked the entire amount on hand, so there was plenty to go around three times.

The tea was another matter, for they had neither sugar nor milk to go with it, and although each fellow managed to drink one cup, some of them made wry faces while disposing of the brewing.

"Kind of warms you up inside," commented Davy, "and that's the only reason I try to get it down; but, oh! you coffee!"

"Here, none of that, Davy," said Thad; "scouts have to make the best of a bad bargain, and never complain. We'd be feeling lots worse if it wasn't for this breakfast."

"Well, suh, I'm quite satisfied, and feel as if I'd had the pick of the land," Bob White remarked stoutly.

"Yes, but you like the stuff, and I never would eat it at home," complained Step Hen.

"Time you began to know what good things are, then, suh," the Southern boy told him plainly.

Even Bumpus admitted that he felt very good after they had emptied both kettles of the simple fare. For the time being he was able to put the dismal future out of his mind, and actually smile again.

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Thad had not told them as yet what plan he was arranging with regard to hunting down the tramps who were on the island with them, and of course most of the scouts were eager to know.

Accordingly, after the meal was finished, they began to crowd around and give the scout master hints that they were waiting for him to arrange the details of that "combing" business he had spoken of.

"It's going to be a simple matter," Thad remarked. "We'll go to the place where the shantyboat went aground, and make our start from there, gradually stretching out until we cover the island from shore to shore, and in that way pushing our quarry further along toward the lower end."

"And," pursued Giraffe, following the plan in his mind, "as the hoboes will of course object to taking to the water, we'll corral the pair in the end."

"Do you reckon they've got any sort of gun along, Thad?" asked Step Hen; though it was not timidity that caused him to ask the question, for as a rule he could be depended on to hold his own when it came to showing fight.

"We don't know, of course, about that," he was told; "though it's often the case that these tramps carry such a thing, especially the dangerous stripe like this Wandering George seems to be."

"He didn't pull any gun on the farmer, when Mr. Bailey caught him robbing his desk, you remember, Thad?" Davy mentioned.

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"No, but he upset the lamp, and then skipped out, leaving the inmates of the farmhouse to fight the fire, which was a cowardly thing to do," Bumpus observed.

"I hadn't forgotten about the chances of them being armed when I spoke of forming a line across the island, and searching every foot of the same," Thad explained; "and the way we'll be safe in doing that I'll explain. Now, we ought to leave two fellows to look after the camp, with a gun between them. The rest can be divided up into three squads, each couple having one of the other guns. We'll manage to keep in touch with each other, as we work along, zigzag-like, and a signal will tell that the game has been started. Do you understand that?"

"Plain enough, Thad," Giraffe told him, as he picked up his gun, and in this way signified that he was ready for the start.

"Huh! but who's going to be left behind?" Bumpus wanted to know; his whole demeanor betraying the fact in advance that he could give

a pretty good guess as to who *one* of the unfortunates might prove to be.

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"I think it would be wiser for me to appoint you and Smithy to that post of honor," he was immediately informed by Thad; "and you want to understand it is just as important that you do your duty well here, as that we carry out our part of the game. A scout never asks why he's told to do a certain thing, when perhaps he'd like to be in another position. Whether he serves as the hub, the tire, or one of the spokes, he feels that he's an important part of the whole wheel, and without him nothing can be done. There's just as much honor in guarding the camp as in creeping through the tangle of vines and scrub bushes. And, Bumpus, I'm the one to judge who's best fitted for that sort of work."

"Thad, I'm not saying a single word," expostulated the stout scout; "fact is, if you come right down to brass tacks, I'm satisfied to stay here, rather than scratch my way along, and p'raps break my nose tumbling. And I'm sure Smithy is built the same way. I hope you'll let me hold the gun you leave with us, which ought to be my own repeating Marlin, because it's already proved its worth. And, Thad, you remember I shot it with some success the time we were out there in the Rockies after big game."

"That's only a fair bargain, Bumpus," he was told by the scout master; "and you can consider it a bargain. We'll look to hear a good report from you when we come back to camp again."

"And with our prisoners in charge, too," added the confident Giraffe.

Bumpus saw them depart with a gloomy look, as though he felt that all chances of winning new laurels had been snatched away when he was ordered to keep camp.

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CHAPTER XXII.

DRAWING THE NET.

Whenever Thad Brewster started to do anything he went about it in a thorough manner. He was no believer in halfway measures, which accounted for much of the success that had crowned his efforts in the past, as those who have read former books in this series must know.

He arranged the beating party in such a way that Giraffe and Davy went together; Allan had Step Hen for a companion; while the Southern lad accompanied Thad himself.

Having given the camp keepers a few last instructions, with regard to remaining on the alert, and listening for any signals such as members of the Silver Fox Patrol were in the habit of exchanging while in the woods and separated, Thad led the way toward the upper end of the island.

They found no trouble in arriving there. The

river had indeed fallen very much, and the flat rock upon which the nose of the shanty-boat had been driven by the fierce current was now away out of the water. Had the craft remained where it struck it would be high and dry ashore.

The boys would not have been human had they not first of all looked yearningly toward the shore, between which and themselves rolled a wide stretch of water. Still, as the sun shone brightly, and the air was getting comfortably warm, the outlook did not seem anything like that which they had faced on the preceding morning. And, besides, they had just eaten a breakfast that at least satisfied their gnawing hunger, and that counted for considerable.

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Thad did not waste much time in looking around, but proceeded to business. He had already apportioned his followers, so that everyone knew who his mate was to be.

"Allan, you and Step Hen take the right third; Giraffe, cover the left side with Davy; and we'll look after the middle," he told them, in his quiet yet positive way, that caused the words to sink in and be remembered.

"And in case we run across George and his pal we're to give a yell; is that the game, Thad?" asked the lengthy scout.

"Our old shout that we know so well, don't forget," he was told. "An ordinary whoop isn't enough, for somebody might let out that kind if only he tripped and felt himself falling. If you want me to come across, bark like a fox three times. In case you get no answer, repeat the signal; and if that doesn't fetch me, call out my name."

"We're on, Thad; is that all?" Giraffe asked impatiently.

"Go!"

With that they were off, three pair of eager human hounds, bent on discovering the hiding-place of the tramps who had for so long been hovering just ahead of them like one of those strange lights in swampy marshes, a jack-o'-lantern they call it, that keeps eluding your grasp, now appearing here, and then vanishing, to crop up suddenly in another place.

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To begin with it seemed easy enough to move along. The scrub was not very dense at the upper end of the island, for some reason or other, but seemed to get heavier the further they advanced.

Acting on the suggestions of Thad, each couple spread out a little more as they continued to push on, although remaining in touch with one another. In this way it was possible to cover more ground than by keeping close together.

Giraffe was certainly in his element. He kept his gun-stock partly under his arm, and was ready to elevate the weapon at a second's warning; in fact, as he prowled along in this way the tall scout looked the picture of a hunter expecting feathered game to flush before him, which he must cover instantly, or expect it to place obstacles between, as a woodcock always will.

Davy did not like to roam along entirely unarmed, and hence he had hunted up a club, which he gripped valorously. He kept just a little behind Giraffe, if an imaginary line were marked across the island from shore to shore. This was because he wished to allow the one who held the firearm a full sweep of territory in case he found occasion to shoot, or even threaten.

Now and then Giraffe would speak to his companion, as a rule asking him to “kindly give a poke in that patch of bushes, where it looks like a man might find it easy to hide”; or “peek into that hole between the rocks, Davy—don’t be afraid a bear’ll come out at you, ’cause there ain’t any such good luck waiting for us.”

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By giving various signals the boys managed to maintain something like a straight line as they pushed on. They could see one another frequently, too, which enabled them to keep from forging ahead in any one place.

“Listen to the crows cawing, will you?” Giraffe presently remarked, as though the noise of the flock might be sweet music to his ears, since it told of the life in the open which Giraffe dearly loved.

“They’re a noisy lot, ain’t they?” remarked Davy; “whatever d’ye s’pose ails that bunch of crows, Giraffe? Would they scold that way if they just happened to see a pair of hoboes eating breakfast, d’ye think?”

“Well, it might be they would,” the other replied thoughtfully; “and come to think of it they’re somewhere down below us, ain’t they? Hunters often know when game is moving by the signs in the sky; for birds can see down, and they talk, you know, in a language of their own. I’ve often wished I could understand what crows said when they scolded so hard.”

Just there Davy began to move away from his partner again, as he tried to cover his share of the territory; so conversation died out temporarily between them.

They had passed the place where the camp fire burned, with Bumpus and Smithy watching their movements eagerly. The thick brush now hid the camp from their sight, and what lay before them they could only guess.

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Once more Davy drew close to his mate, thrusting his club to the right and to the left, in the endeavor not to leave a stone unturned in clearing up the land.

“Wherever do you think they’ve gone, Giraffe?” he asked, as though beginning to feel the strain of the suspense that hung over them, as they continued this strange hunt for the tramps.

“It’s my honest opinion,” the other replied, “that we ain’t going to see a sign of ’em till we get away down to the other end. And they didn’t come through here, either, because we’d have run across some sign to tell us that.”

“Then how could they reach the lower end of the island?” demanded Davy quickly, thinking he had caught Giraffe in a hole.

“Why, they made off to the beach after they got

the stuff, and trailed down that way, which you can understand must have been the easiest, all things considered," the tall scout went on to explain. "I believe in applying that old principle, and figuring what you'd have done if it had been you. And anybody with horse sense'd know it was lots easier tramping on the shore, to this way of breaking through."

"Still, Thad thought we ought to do it?" Davy remarked.

"Thad was right, as he nearly always is," Giraffe pursued doggedly; "because this is the only way we can make dead sure. I've got a hunch that they built a fire and proceeded to cook a warm meal. Want to know what makes me think so? Well, we had an extra box of matches along, and that went with the rest of the things. George knew he needed it. Long before now they've had their fire, and it's all day with that grub of ours. We'll get it back when we surround the hoboes; but you won't know it."

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"What if they won't surrender when we ask 'em?" Davy wanted to know.

"They'd better go slow about that same," he was immediately told, as Giraffe shook his head energetically; "we've got the law on our side, you see, after that pair breaking into the farmhouse the way they did, and showing themselves to be regular robbers as well as tramps, yeggmen they call that kind. If I pinked George, after seeing him threaten me, I couldn't be held responsible for the same. When a man is a fugitive from justice, and the long arm of the law is stretched out to grab him, he hasn't got any rights, you understand. Every man's hand is against him, and he's just got to take his medicine, that's all."

Giraffe had a little smattering of legal knowledge, and he certainly did like to hear himself talk, given half a chance. Just then Davy seemed to be glad to learn certain facts, upon which he may have been a little hazy.

"Didn't I hear you talking with Step Hen the last time you crossed over to his line; or no, it must have been Bob White, because he's with Thad in the middle track?" Giraffe asked, a short time later, as once more he and his partner came into touch.

"Yes, it was Bob speaking to me," admitted the other, "and what d'ye think, he said he believed he had discovered a bee tree, and only wished we would be here long enough to get a chance at the honey."

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"Well, what next, I wonder?" ejaculated Giraffe, with the air of one who had received especially good news; "I always did say I liked honey about as well as anything that grew; but, then," he added, as though seized with a sudden depressing remembrance, "what good would all the wild honey going do a fellow when he hasn't got a cupful of flour to make a flapjack with, or a single cracker to eat with the nectar? Oh! rats! but this is tough!"

"Anyhow," Davy continued, "Bob, he said the tree was a whopper for size, and the hive was away up in a dead limb that we couldn't well reach; so I guess that winds it up for us this trip."

And as you say, Giraffe, what good would just plain honey do a starving crowd? Give me bread before you try to plaster me with honey. Still, it's queer how many things we keep finding on this same island, isn't it?"

"There goes another rabbit right now, Davy; and I could have knocked him over as easy as you please, if I was hunting something to eat, instead of *men*! They always do say what strange things you do see when you haven't got a gun; and with us it runs the other way; for we've got a shooting-iron, but dassen't use the same for fear of alarming our human quarry."

"You do manage to put things before a fellow the finest way ever, Giraffe," Davy told him; "and some of these days I expect to see you making a cracking good lawyer, or an auctioneer, or something that requires the gift of gab. But seems to me we've been poking like this for a long time now. How much further d'ye think the island runs?"

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"It's some longer'n I had any idea would be the case," admitted Giraffe; "but I reckon we're shallowing up now. The shore line looks to me like it's beginnin' to draw in closer, every time I make the beach. If that's so we ought to come together down at the lower end before a great while now."

"Say, what if we do get there and never once sight George and his pal, Giraffe?"

"Aw! don't be trying to get off conundrums on me, Davy; I never was much good guessing the answer," the tall scout went on to complain. "It don't seem like that could happen, because they're here on our island, and we sure haven't left a single place unsearched where a fox could hide. Don't borrow trouble, my son. We're bound to corral the pair down at the lower point; and they'll throw up their hands when they see us coming, six abreast, with guns leveled and all that."

"I hope so, Giraffe; I hope it turns out that way; but I'm not feeling as sure as you are. Something seems to keep on telling me we're due for a big surprise, and I'm trying to shut my teeth, so as to be ready to meet it like a scout should always meet trouble."

He had hardly said the last word when a large object jumped almost under Davy's feet, upsetting him completely. And as he fell over, nimbly turning a complete back-somersault, for Davy was as smart at such things as any circus performer, he managed to bawl out wildly:

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"Bear! Bear! why don't you shoot it, Giraffe?"

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CHAPTER XXIII. THE SMOKE CLEW.

"Bear nothing!" exclaimed the scout who held the gun.

He had instinctively elevated the weapon at the first sound of alarm from his ally; and had it

been necessary Giraffe was in a position to have given a good account of himself, for he was known to be a somewhat clever shot.

Just in time, however, he had managed to get a better view of the creature that Davy had stumbled upon, losing his balance in his excitement.

"What was it, then, Giraffe, if not a bear? Don't tell me it was a dog," demanded the other, having righted himself after his somersault.

"Didn't you hear him grunt as he ran away?" asked the lengthy one contemptuously; for he might have pressed the trigger of his gun only that just in time his ears had been greeted with the sound in question.

"Grunt? Great Cæsar's ghost! was that a *hog*?" almost shrieked Davy.

"Just what it was, a dun-colored hog, and a rousing big critter in the bargain, let me tell you, Davy. I saw him as plain as anything, and he ran back of us, you noticed, so we won't be apt to raise him again in a hurry."

"But what'd an old grunter be doing out here, tell me, Giraffe?"

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"Shucks! how d'ye think I'd know?" returned the other. "Expect I'm up in the hog lingo just because I did say I always wanted to understand crow talk? Why, for all we know, that hog's been living here since last summer; or else he's another flood victim, and got washed up like we did. They're all doin' it, you know."

"Well, well, who'd expect to run up against a porker?" Dave went on to say, as he sought to grasp the full significance of the adventure, having by now recovered from the shock the sudden surprise had given him. "And Giraffe, if a hog this time, what next will we run across? P'raps there might be chickens, and cows, and all sorts of things close by? Mebbe the old island's inhabited, after all."

"One thing sure," Giraffe went on to say, in a satisfied tone, "this beats out Robinson Crusoe by a whole lot."

"As how, Giraffe?"

"Is there any comparison between hogs and goats when it comes to making a good dinner?" demanded the other. "Why, don't you see what this means to us, Davy? No use talking about going hungry as long as there's such noble hunting on this little patch of ground. Me to bag a prize hog, when the right time comes. Hams, and sweet little pork chops, and smoked shoulders—oh! we could live a week off that buster, believe me."

He smacked his lips, as though the prospect gave him unlimited pleasure. Davy himself had known the time when the slaughter of a three-hundred pound hog afforded no occasion for showing more than passing interest; but that was when starvation did not stare him in the face. Circumstances alter cases; and he was almost as much excited over the outlook now as the always hungry Giraffe seemed to be.

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"How do we know that this place we've been

calling an island isn't connected with the mainland?" was Davy's next suggestion.

"How d'ye mean?" demanded his ally, as they started on once more.

"Why, there might be some sort of a link, you see, a sort of isthmus, so to call it, along which the hog made his way, and where we could skip out of the trap; how about that, Giraffe?"

"Nothing doing, Davy," came the scornful reply; "didn't we see that the river ran past on both sides like a mill race? Well, it wouldn't do that if the way was blocked by a strip of land, would it? Not much. We're marooned on a sure-enough island, and you can't get around that. Course we might run across a cow yet; same time we'll keep our eyes peeled for a breadfruit tree, and coffee bushes, and truck gardens. Nothing like being hopeful through it all."

"Can hogs swim, Giraffe, do you happen to know?"

"Well, you get me there," returned the other. "I never saw one doing the same; but seems to me I have heard of such a thing. They can do nearly anything, and so swimming may be on their list. I only hope the old chap don't take a notion to clear out of here before I get a crack at him, that's all."

"I was only going to say that we might capture the old grunter, and hitch him to a log on which the whole lot of us perched, making him tow the same ashore."

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Of course Giraffe understood Davy was only joking when he said this, but he chose to pretend to take it seriously.

"If you leave it to me to choose, Davy," he went on to say gravely, "I'd prefer to have those hams and the bacon, and take my chances of paddling ashore afterward. Besides, I don't believe we've got anything to make harness out of, so your great scheme would fall kind of flat. Give that bunch of bushes another whack with your club while you're about it, will you? We want to clear up things as we go along, so we'll know the job's been done gilt-edged."

"Looks like that's an open place ahead, Giraffe," ventured Davy, after he had complied with the request, and found nothing.

"Yes, it does seem that way, Davy, and p'r'aps now we'll have a chance to look around a bit when we strike it. I was just wondering whether the river could have been up over all this island any old time in the past, and here's the evidence of the same."

He pointed to what looked like drift stuff caught in the crotch of a tree. It may have been lodged there years back, but anyone with observation could readily see that it had been carried to its present location by a moving current.

"As true as anything, Giraffe, and there must have been three feet of water over the highest ground on the island then. Lucky the rain stopped when it did, or we might be perched in trees right at this minute."

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"That's what Thad was saying, when he told us it

was never so bad but what it might be a whole lot worse. Think of the bunch of us being compelled to roost in trees day and night, till somebody came along in a motorboat and rescued us. Well, for one, I'm glad things didn't get quite that bad."

As they drew closer to the open spot they could see the other scouts advancing on their right, and covering the ground. They exchanged signals, and in this way learned that nothing had thus far been seen of those for whom they were searching.

Thad drew them together at this point.

"From here on we'll be much closer," he told them all, "because it looks as though the end of the island must be just a little ways off, and it seems to come to a point like the upper end. Look over there, what do you call that?" and he pointed directly ahead as he spoke.

"Smoke!" announced Old Eagle Eye instantly.

Everyone was ready to confirm his announcement, after they had taken a look.

"And as there couldn't be smoke without a fire, and no fire unless some human hand had started it," the scout master continued, in his logical way, "it looks as if we might be closing in on those we're hunting for, Wandering George and his pal."

"Well, since they've had a fire that means the finish of our grub," commented Giraffe; "but then, it's only what we expected; and, Thad, there's a great big hog on this island—no, don't laugh, because I'm not referring to Bumpus now. I mean a real porker, a whopper of several hundred pounds weight. Davy stepped on him, and I could have knocked the beast over as easy as turning my hand. So we don't need to have any fear of being starved out, if it gets to the worst."

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"That sounds good to me, Giraffe, and I can see that you're not joking," Thad told him. "We heard some sort of a row over your way, but thought it was only one of you tripping over those creepers. A hog may not seem like very fine company, but that depends on conditions. Just now we'll be glad to know him, and to offer him the warmest seat close by our fire. Fact is, we'll take him as a companion, and let him be one of us. Now, let's make our line again, for we want to push down toward that fire below."

"There's another patch of scrub ahead, before we get to the point of the island, and we might lose our game in that if we didn't keep the net drawn across, for a fact," admitted Allan, who of course recognized the wisdom shown by the leader in continuing the carrying out of his plan.

Once more they separated, but this time it was not necessary to put much ground between them. When the line had formed all eyes were turned toward Thad. He waved his hat, which was the signal to begin the advance; so again each scout moved on as before, examining every possible cover for signs of the enemy.

They had thus made a clean sweep of the island. Rabbits may have escaped them by hiding in

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crannies among the rocks; and squirrels could have remained aloft in their nests inside hollow limbs of trees, or secreted amidst the foliage of the evergreen hemlocks; but certainly no larger object had evaded them.

As they continued to close in on the spot where the smoke arose, the scouts very naturally felt more or less the thrill of excitement. They knew full well what it meant, for many times in the past the same queer sensation had almost overpowered them.

This chase had been in progress long enough now to have aroused their hunting instincts. That the old blue army coat should eventually be returned to the judge was to most of them a small affair, for they of course did not know the real reason why its recovery mattered to the former owner; but they had somehow set their hearts on accomplishing the object they had in view. And the more difficulty they met with in doing this, the stronger their desire grew.

The trees became more sparse, so that before long they caught glimpses of the fire itself. It was not burning very briskly, though sending off considerable in the way of smoke, a fact that convinced the scouts these hoboes knew nothing concerning woodcraft, and the habits of Indians in making fires of certain kinds of dry fuel that hardly send up any smoke at all.

Now the scouts, having finished their "combing" process, began to gather together for the final rush. They had reached the open ground, where no object half the size of a man could evade them, so they felt they need have no fear of either one of the hoboes passing by.

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"I see one of them lying there, like he might be asleep, Thad," whispered one of the scouts; and of course it could be taken for granted that it was Giraffe, of the eagle eye, who spoke.

"The second fellow may be on the other side of the fire, back of the smoke," remarked Step Hen; but somehow neither Thad nor Allan could believe this, because the smoke was drifting that way, and they knew very well no one willingly places himself on the leeward side of a smudge like that, suffocating in its effect.

The further they crept the more concerned did Thad and the Maine boy become. They could see the sleeping tramp by now, and it was with more or less uneasiness they realized the fact that he must be other than Wandering George. Besides, not the first sign of the blue army overcoat did they discover anywhere.

While thus preparing to close in on the sleeping tramp, and give him a very unpleasant surprise, the scouts were feeling stunned over the mysterious disappearance of the man they had been following so far, and whom they felt sure must have been on that very island only a comparatively few hours before.

Thad kept hoping that the second hobo would start up from some place when they made their presence known; and it was in this expectation that he finally swung his hat, which started his five companions on a hasty run toward the smoking fire.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAPTURE.

The scouts had been eagerly awaiting this motion with the hat on the part of the patrol leader. It acted on them about in the same way the bang of a starting pistol might with a string of nerve-strained sprinters, anxious to leap forward, with a prize in view to the first under the tape.

Many times before had they found themselves in just this same position, with Thad deciding the start. Giraffe, the fastest in the bunch, was crouched in his accustomed attitude, looking somewhat like a big, wiry cat getting ready to spring; while Bob White, Step Hen, Allan and Davy Jones each had assumed an attitude best suited to his particular method of starting.

At the same time all of them understood this was not going to be a race. They had been instructed to spread out a little, after the manner of an open fan, as they advanced. This was to give the tramp as little chance to escape as they possibly could.

Well, the hat, after being poised for a few preliminary seconds in mid-air, was suddenly swung downward with a violent dip. That meant in the plainest of language "Go!" and every fellow made a forward move.

Giraffe had been given one of the outer lines, since that meant he would have a little more ground to cover; and no one was better fitted for this than the lanky scout. Nature had built him for a runner from the ground up; he did not have a superfluous ounce of fat on him, but was all muscle, and, as Giraffe often proudly declared, his flesh was "as hard as nails."

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It was a pretty sight to see those five fellows in khaki begin to spread out in that systematic way, just as though each one might consider himself a part of a machine.

Thad had purposely taken the center, so that he could keep an eye on every part of the field. It is always considered the best thing for a captain on a baseball club to be posted somewhere in the diamond, preferably on third base, as that gives him a chance to watch the game closely. It also allows him the opportunity of running in frequently and arguing with the umpire over disputed plays.

So far nothing had happened to warn the dozing tramp of their coming. All of the boys had gotten under way without a single mishap in the line of a stumble, which would serve to warn their intended victim.

He was still sprawled out alongside the warm fire, and doubtless enjoying himself in true hobo style, caring nothing as to what went wrong with the world, so long as he did not miss a meal.

Thad would have been much better satisfied could he have glimpsed that badly wanted army coat somewhere around; but its absence, although to be regretted, must not interfere with

the programme he had laid out.

The distance from the shelter of the brush to the fire was not very great, and could have been covered speedily only for the desire on the part of the scouts to take the man by surprise.

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Step Hen spoiled this by an unfortunate stumble, which was rather singular, because as a rule he had proved sure-footed. It chanced, however, that Step Hen was watching the reclining figure by the fire so closely that he did not notice some obstruction lying in his path, so that the first thing he knew he caught his toe, and measured his full length on the ground.

Of course that spoiled the surprise part of the game. Thad knew it instantly, as the tramp's head came up, and accordingly he uttered a quick command.

"Rush him!"

With that each scout jumped forward, eager to be the first to close in on the enemy. Those who had guns displayed them threateningly, while the others waved their clubs in a way that needed no explanation as to what use they expected to make of the same presently.

If the actions of the invaders of the hobo camp were rapid the same could be said concerning the movements of the lone inmate. He must have realized the desperation of his position the very instant he sighted those advancing boys in khaki, with such a ferocious display of various weapons of defense and offense, for like a flash he scrambled to his feet.

As it was hardly to be expected that the tramp had prepared himself against a surprise like this, the chances were he acted solely from impulse.

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Giraffe fully expected he would try and go around their outermost guards, and with memories of similar tactics employed on the gridiron he changed his course somewhat in order to cut off this flight.

It was a mistake, for the fellow never once endeavored to flee. Instead of this he leaped over to a pile of rocks that chanced to lie close by, forming a species of pyramid. The boys saw him throw himself into the midst of this, even while they were rushing forward, though they could not anticipate what his scheme might be.

Events are apt to happen with lightning-like rapidity under such conditions as these, and the first thing the boys knew there was a sharp report as of a pistol, and a puff of smoke burst from the pile of rocks that thrilled them to the core.

"He's got a gun!" snapped Giraffe, looking to Thad to give the order to send back as good as they received.

It was a time for quick thinking. The tramp was evidently a desperate sort of fellow, who, finding himself in danger of arrest, meant to stand out to the end. He may not have tried to injure any of them when he fired that shot, but all the same it gave the boys a chill, and several of them involuntarily ducked their heads, as if they fancied the hobo had picked them out for his

target, and that they had heard the whiz of the lead past their ears.

Thad sized up the situation in that speedy way of his. Occasions sometimes crop up that call for the promptest kind of action; and surely this looked like one of that kind.

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"Allan, keep on in the center, and I'll turn his flank!" he shouted. "Bend down, everybody, and get behind a rock if you can. We've just *got* to land him, that's all there is about it!"

Even while saying this the scout master was on the jump, and, passing Allan as well as Bob White, he sped toward the edge of the water, making a half circle.

There was another sharp report from the rocks, but, although the boys held their breath while watching their leader run, they rejoiced to see that he gave no sign of having been injured by the tramp's firing.

Every boy was keyed up to what Giraffe would call "top-notch" condition; doubtless hands quivered while they clutched gun or club, and hearts beat with the rapidity of so many trip-hammers. But to their credit it could be said that not one of them as much as looked back over their shoulders, to see if the way for retreat was open. That spoke well for their courage, at least.

Thad reached the spot which he had set out to attain, and instantly whirled, to aim his gun toward the rock pile. It was just as he had anticipated, for the tramp, while sheltered on the one side, was fully exposed on that looking down the river.

"Surrender, or it'll be the worse for you!" shouted Thad.

"Jump him, boys!" roared Giraffe, utterly unable to keep back a second longer, while his nerves were quivering in that furious fashion.

When Step Hen and the other four saw the impetuous right end start straight toward the rock pile, they gave a shout, and proceeded to imitate his example. Boys are a good deal like sheep in many ways, and when one takes a venture he is certain to be copied by others.

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From all sides they were thus closing in rapidly on the hobo who was at bay, and every fellow was giving vent to his excitement in shouts and screeches calculated to complete the collapse of the tramp's defiance.

He knew when he had had enough. Serious though arrest might appear to him under the present conditions, it would be a dozen fold worse should he fire that weapon of his again, and succeed in injuring one of these brave lads. Besides, he must have been more or less influenced by the handy way they carried those guns.

This being the case, the tramp at bay suddenly threw up both his hands, at the same time bawling:

"Hey! don't shoot; I'm all in, gents; I surrender!"

The furious shouts now ceased, since the object of their rush had apparently been accomplished.

Thad, however, was too smart a leader to lose any advantage that fortune had placed in his hands.

"Throw out that gun!" he called in his sternest voice; "and be quick about it, if you know what's good for you!"

The man hastened to obey the order. No doubt he understood that his captors were only boys; but there may be circumstances where cubs are just as dangerous as full-grown men; and this is the case when they happen to be provided with firearms.

"Come out here, and keep your hands up!" continued the patrol leader, who did not trust the fellow, and while speaking he kept his gun leveled so that it bore straight upon him.

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The hobo looked disgusted, as well he might at finding himself a victim to such humiliating conditions, with boys his captors. He scowled darkly as he left the partial shelter of the rocks, and advanced several paces toward the scouts.

"That'll do," Thad told him; "now lie down on the sand on your face, and put your hands behind you. We've got to tie your wrists, you understand. Here, don't think to play any trick, because we won't stand for it! Down on your knees, and over you go!"

Realizing that such a young chap was not to be trifled with, the tramp, muttering to himself, did as he was ordered. Lying there on his chest he pushed both hands behind his back, and crossed his wrists, just as though this might not be the first time he had run up against a similar situation.

"Giraffe, you fix him up!" said the patrol leader, for the lengthy scout had a reputation as an expert in tying hard knots, and was never known to be without more or less stout cord on his person.

It had come in handy many a time in the past, as Giraffe could explain if asked, and he produced his coil now with a satisfied grin that told how much he enjoyed his new job.

After Giraffe had completed the fastening of the hobo's big wrists, there was not one chance in a thousand the fellow could free himself, even if he were a second Houdini, capable of slipping handcuffs from his person by doubling up his pliable hands.

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This done, Giraffe got up, and helped the man rise to his feet.

"Behave yourself now, and we'll treat you white," he told him; "but just try to make trouble, and see what you get, that's all. But, Thad, where d'ye reckon his pal has disappeared to, that he ain't around here? We covered every foot of the island from the other end, and didn't scare him up. Half a loaf may be better than no bread, but we didn't come after this fellow at all. We want Wandering George, and we want him bad."

Thad himself was bothered to tell how the second tramp had disappeared. If the ground had opened and swallowed him he could not

have vanished more completely; and apparently there was only one source of information open to them. This was the prisoner, who stood there, listening to what they were saying, and trying hard to conceal a grin that would creep over his face in spite of him. That very cunning expression convinced Thad the man knew the important fact they wanted to find out, if only they could force him to speak.

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CHAPTER XXV. FORCED TO TELL.

"Where's your partner?" asked Thad, turning suddenly on the prisoner.

The tramp tried to look at him as if in surprise. Undoubtedly he was hugging the one hope to his heart that as long as his companion remained foot-free there might be a chance for his release. That idea of self-interest was undoubtedly the only thing that would account for his desire to remain mute.

"My partner?" he went on to say, as though not understanding what was meant.

"Yes, the man who was with you, Wandering George, the fellow who wore the blue army overcoat that was given to him by a lady in Cranford a few days ago?"

"Oh! you mean him, does you?" the hobo replied, with a knowing nod; "that guy gimme the slip yesterday, and never divvied with me either. I'd like right well to set eyes on George myself, and that's no lie. I got a bone tuh pick with him."

"You're telling what isn't true, now," said Thad severely. "We happen to know that you two came here in the hold of the shanty boat we were on. Last night George crept into our camp, and got away with nearly all our food stuff. There's a piece of the bacon right now, Giraffe, which ought to please you some. What have you got to say about that, Mr. Tramp?"

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"It was me sneaked your camp, kid; I was nigh starved out, and nawthin' couldn't keep me from takin' chances," the other boldly replied.

"Tell that to the marines!" Giraffe blurted out. "Thad, you don't believe him, do you? We know better than that, don't we?"

"The man who crept into our camp had a rag tied around his right foot to keep the torn sole of his shoe on," Thad went on to say positively, as though clinching matters beyond all question; "and we can see that both your shoes are fairly decent, so it couldn't have been you. Besides, there were two pairs of tracks making the trail. You waited for him back of the bushes, and both went off together. Now, you see how foolish it is trying to yarn out of it. Where is George?"

The man looked into that flushed but determined face. He saw something in those steady eyes that convinced him the leader of these boys in khaki was not the one to be further trifled with.

So he gave a nervous little laugh.

"Well, you sure got me twisted up, and kinked tuh beat the band, kid," he said. "I got a pal, jest as you sez, an' his handle is George. But jest where he might be at this minit is more'n I c'n say."

"But he's on the island, isn't he?" demanded Step Hen.

"He shore is, 'less he's took a crazy notion to try an' swim over tuh the shore, which wouldn't be like cautious George a bit."

"He was here with you, how long ago?" asked Allan; "you must have cooked breakfast this morning with that fire, and he sat right here, where I can see the mark of his broken shoe. Where did he go, and when?"

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"That's what we want to know!" added Giraffe sternly.

The tramp saw that he was cornered. One by one his defenses had been beaten down. These energetic boys would not stand for any further holding back on his part; and unless he wished to invite rough treatment it was now up to him to tell all he knew.

"Well, George was sittin' there, as you sez, younker, an' he takes a sudden notion that he wants tuh find out what the rest o' the folks of this island 'spected to do so's tuh get away. That bein' the case, he sez to me, sez he: 'I reckons I'll stroll up a ways, and take a look around. If there's anything doin' in the boat line we might want tuh cop it, and clear out.' And so he goes off, an' I ain't seen the first sign o' George since then."

"How long ago might that have been?" asked Thad.

"I been asleep nearly all the time since, so how could I tell?" came the reply.

"By looking at the sun," the patrol leader told him; "you know how high it was when George went away. And hoboos never have any need of a watch."

"'Cept to hock, and get cash on the same, kid," the man remarked, with a grin, at the same time casting a quick glance upward; "well, I reckon it might 'a' been all o' an hour back when George, he passed away."

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The boys looked at each other in some perplexity. Since they had certainly covered the whole island, they could not understand how it came they had missed the other tramp. He was a big fellow, and could not have hidden in any hole among the rocks that they had noticed. The mystery bothered them, from Thad down to Step Hen and Davy.

"What if he did take a notion to try and swim for it?" suggested the latter, as Giraffe was scratching his head, and looking in a helpless fashion at Thad.

"Not one chance in a thousand that way," replied the patrol leader; "I call myself a fairly good swimmer, but I'd hate to take the chances of that current, and the rocks under the surface."

No, he must be on the island still."

"But whereabouts, Thad; didn't we cover the ground, every foot of it, while we came down here?" pleaded Step Hen.

"I wonder, now?" Thad was saying half aloud, as though a sudden inspiration had broken in upon him.

"What is it, Thad?" begged Giraffe; "sounds like you've got an idea, all right. Let's hear it, won't you?"

"There's only one way we could have missed him," replied the other; "and that would mean he hid in a tree."

There arose a series of exclamations from the other scouts.

"Well, what d'ye think of that, now?" cried Giraffe, apparently taken aback by the suggestion; "we kept our noses turned to the ground so much none of us ever bothered looking up, did we?"

"But, Thad, the leaves ain't on the trees yet, so how could he hide from us? Do you mean he got behind a big limb, and lay there like a squirrel?" Davy demanded.

"You forget there are some hemlocks on the island, and every one of us knows how easy it would be for a fellow to hide in their bushy tops any time of year," Thad told him.

"What's the answer?" snapped Giraffe, always wanting action, and then more action.

"We've got to go back again, and find him, that's all," said Thad, with a look of grim determination on his face.

"How about this fellow?" remarked Allan. "Do we want to trot him along with us?" and he jerked his thumb at the prisoner as he said this.

Thad considered for a short time.

"That would be poor business, I'm thinking," he concluded. "We'd better leave him here until we want him again."

"I've got more strong cord," Giraffe suggested; "and we could tie him to a tree, like the Injuns used to do with their captives."

"Oh! there ain't any need tuh do that, boys," argued the hobo, who apparently did not fancy such an arrangement. "I'll set right here, and never move while you're gone, sure I will."

"We'll make certain that you stay where we leave you," Thad told him.

Giraffe only waited for the word, and immediately backed the tramp to a tree that seemed suited for the purpose. Then he wound the cord around as many times as it would go, and tied it in hard knots. As the hobo still had his hands fastened behind him, and could not begin to get at the knots with his teeth, it looked as though he would have to stay there until the scouts were pleased to release him.

"Now what, Thad?" asked the energetic Giraffe,

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picking up his gun again.

"Go back the same way we came," the other replied.

"Covering the ground, you mean, only this time we'll look into every tree in the bargain; that's the programme, is it, Thad?" asked Step Hen.

"Yes."

Again the boys began to spread out, and in this manner was the captured tramp left behind. He realized that it was useless trying to influence them to change their minds, and so resigned himself to his fate.

Giraffe had secured the remains of the strip of bacon, and was dangling this from his left hand as he went along. Apparently he did not mean to take any chances of it getting away from him again; and of course Bob White noted his action with a nod of appreciation.

It was slow work now, because they had to investigate each likely tree that was approached. Some of these were of a type calculated to afford a refuge for anyone who wished to hide. Several times one of the boys, usually the spry Davy, was sent aloft to make sure the object of their search was not hiding there.

Thad began to wonder if anything could have happened at their camp. He remembered that they had left the two weakest scouts on guard, and this worried him.

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Often as he pushed on, Thad had strained his hearing, dreading at the same time lest he catch sounds of serious import. But beyond the chatter of the crows that flew scolding ahead of them, and the scream of an early red-headed woodpecker tapping at a rotten tree trunk, there was no sound, unless he took into consideration the fretting of the water sweeping past outlying spurs of the island shore.

They had passed nearly halfway when Giraffe beckoned to the leader, without saying a single word, upon which Thad of course hastened toward him.

When the lanky scout pointed to the ground, Thad immediately turned his eyes in that quarter. He was not very much surprised at discovering the plain imprint of a shoe there in the soil.

"George made it," said Giraffe solemnly, "because there's that old rag tied about his foot, as we've always found it. And, Thad, of course you notice that he was heading up country when he passed by here?"

"Yes, that's certainly a fact, Giraffe."

"Showing he came down out of his tree, and went on after we passed him. Davy was right when he said he believed he could see signs in that last hemlock as if some one had broken the bark with his heels. It was Wandering George, all right; and this time we've got him ahead of us. We'll not let him give us the slip again; and it'll be something of a joke to get a tramp at each end of the island. But what are you thinking about, Thad, to look so serious?"

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"I was wondering whether anything could have happened to our two chums, Giraffe."

"Oh! you must mean Bumpus and Smithy!" ejaculated the lanky scout, with a quick intake of his breath, as though a thrill had passed over him at the same time; "but, Thad, they had a gun, you remember; and if they kept on the watch, as you told 'em, what could happen to hurt the boys?"

"I don't know, only it bothers me," replied the other; "and if we can hurry on any faster now I'd like to do it."

The word was passed along the line, and after that they tried to increase their speed, though trying not to neglect their work, if it could be avoided.

As they drew closer to the region where the camp had been made, Thad was conscious of feeling a strange sensation in the region of his heart, which he could not wholly understand.

Giraffe made out to wander close to him on occasion, and was at this time saying with more or less confidence:

"Only a few minutes more, Thad, and we ought to raise the camp. Sure we'll find everything lovely, and the goose hanging high. George would know better than to bother two fellows, and one of the same handling a gun in the bargain. Course he sheered off, and gave them a wide berth when he saw that, Thad. It's going to come out all right, I tell you!"

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Nevertheless the patrol leader felt very anxious as they drew near the camp, and he tried to prepare himself for the worst.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

THE KEEPERS OF THE CAMP.

When Bumpus and Smithy saw their comrades pass away toward the north, leaving the camp in their full charge, they were immediately impressed with a sense of great responsibility.

The stout scout in particular seemed to feel that it was a post of honor to which they had been assigned by the patrol leader. Of course this was partly due to what Thad had told him at the time he picked out the pair to remain behind and take care of their few possessions.

"We've got to be faithful and wide awake, Smithy," Bumpus told his comrade; "for it'd be a terrible calamity if the boys came back here, tired and played out, only to find that the enemy had captured the camp in their absence. And let me tell you, that would reflect on you and me forever and a day afterward. You know that Thad expects every fellow to do his duty. So we'll keep on the watch every minute of the time till they come back again."

Smithy appeared to be duly impressed with the gravity of the occasion. Bumpus of course made sure to carry the only weapon that had been left

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in their charge; but as it was his gun, and he knew more about handling it than Smithy did, it seemed only right that this should be so. But the other member of the home guard had seen some of the boys who went off arming themselves with stout cudgels, and he thought it wise to imitate their example, though at the same time seriously doubting his ability to make good use of the same, should an emergency arise.

"Yes, what you say is true, Bumpus," he remarked seriously. "The motto of all good scouts is 'Be prepared,' and we must surely live up to it. While I sincerely hope nothing will happen to call for a defense of the camp, still I'm ready to assume my share of the burden in case of necessity."

Now, Smithy always liked to use long words, and his manner was something like that of an important pedagogue; but the boys had learned that under all this surface veneering Smithy was true gold, and, as Giraffe said, "O. K."

He had never been the one to indulge in rough-and-tumble "horse play" while in camp, like Giraffe, Step Hen and Davy, for instance; but on several occasions the others had seen his metal tested, and Smithy had come out with flying colors.

His face might get white when danger impended, but he had the right kind of nerve, and would stand up for another, no matter what threatened. Smithy was exceedingly modest, and always apologizing for his lack of stamina; but Thad knew he was no coward under it all.

The minutes passed slowly as the two boys sat there by the cheery fire. Naturally they kept listening eagerly, half expecting to hear some sudden wild clamor that would announce the discovery of the tramps, and a desperate effort on the part of their chums to make them prisoners.

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They remembered that these men were both big fellows, and undoubtedly more or less to be feared, especially when their passions were aroused.

"Don't seem to be anything doing so far," Bumpus remarked, as he poked the fire, and immediately afterward raised his head, as well as his fat neck would allow, the better to listen intently.

"And you'd think they'd had sufficient time to reach the upper end of the island, too?" Smithy went on to say reflectively.

"Oh! well, the real drive only begins then, you see," Bumpus informed him, with rather an important air. "Thad said they meant to strike straight for the place where we landed, and then comb the ground as they came along. I don't just know what he meant by that same word, but it sounds good to me. When you comb a thing you get everything out, even the tangles; and if the tramps are hiding somewhere on the island they'll be found."

"Trust Thad for that," assented Smithy, who had the greatest admiration for and confidence in the scout master.

"What was that moved then?" exclaimed Bumpus, reaching out, and taking hold of his gun with hands that trembled more or less, though at the same time his teeth were grimly set, and his eyes shone with determination. "Sho!" he added, after a half minute of terrible suspense, "look at that, will you, only a sassy little striped chipmunk, after all, frisking around to see if we hadn't spilled some crumbs when we had our breakfast. But I'm afraid he'll be badly disappointed, because there ain't any crumbs when you've only had grits for your morning meal."

After that they sat there for some little time with senses on the alert, waiting for some sign from the chums who had recently left them.

"One thing sure," Bumpus finally remarked, showing what was constantly on his mind; "they've just got to pass by this way sooner or later. Course we'll see 'em then; and so don't be surprised if the brush begins to move over yonder, because it'll be one of our chums."

"But wouldn't it be the proper caper for them to warn us before they show up?" asked Smithy. "They know you've got a gun, and that's always a dangerous toy for a boy to handle, according to my way of thinking. Why, you might imagine they were the tramps, and give them a shot before you saw they were our chums."

"Listen!" said Bumpus, with a broad grin.

There came from amidst the thick brush a peculiar sound that was supposed to resemble the barking of a fox. Of course both guards recognized it as the well-known signal with which members of the Silver Fox Patrol made their presence known to one another when in the forest, or in the darkness of night.

"Answer him, Bumpus," exclaimed Smithy, "because you can do it better than I've ever been able to. There he goes again, and louder than before. It must be Giraffe, I should think. Let him know we hear him, Bumpus."

Accordingly the stout boy did his very best to imitate the sharp little bark of a fox; it did not matter whether red, black or gray, so long as the sound carried out the idea intended.

At that a head arose above a line of brush, and the smiling face of Giraffe was discovered. He made a motion with his hand to indicate that he and his five fellow scouts were headed south.

"No signs of 'em so far, Giraffe?" asked Bumpus, in a cautious tone; and in answer the other shook his head in the negative, after which he once more dropped out of sight, and doubtless moved away on his mission.

The pair by the fire now prepared for quite a long siege. They guessed that it would take the others quite some time to cover the balance of the island, although of course no one in the patrol knew as yet just what the dimensions of their strange prison might be.

"Supposing they run across George and his companion, will they let us know of their good fortune?" Smithy asked, after a while, when nothing came to their ears save the sound of the

running river and the cawing of the noisy crow band in the tree tops.

"Why, yes," Bumpus told him, "Thad promised to send the news along if they were successful, and bagged both hoboos. I keep hoping every minute to get the call. You know, Smithy, lots of savage people have a way of sending news by sound, and by smoke, from one station to another. They say in Africa they can get word over hundreds of miles in less'n no time. I'm a great believer in that sort of wireless telegraphy."

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"Yes," remarked Smithy, with something approaching humor, at least as near as he ever was known to get to the joking stage, "I've noticed that, when you start to shouting for your supper, because you can make the greatest racket going. But all the same this thing of keeping camp while the rest of the boys are on the move is rather prosy, I think."

"Why, Thad assured me that any kind of a fellow could just push through all that scramble of brush; but it takes a different sort to be trusted with the responsible task of guarding the home base. He begged me not to think it meant any reflection on our abilities, Smithy. Yes, he even called us the hub of the wheel, of which each of the others was only a spoke."

That information rather bolstered up Smithy's drooping spirits for a little while; but the solemn stillness that surrounded them on all sides soon began to make him drowsy again.

He had not secured his customary sleep latterly, and the warmth of the fire assisted in causing his eyes to become heavy.

Bumpus noticed this. Several times he talked to his companion, with the sole idea of keeping Smithy on the alert; but in the end he found that it did not seem to avail to any extent, for the replies he received were inclined to be hazy, as if the brain of the other had begun to yield to that drowsy feeling.

"Oh! well," Bumpus told himself, "what's the use bothering the poor tenderfoot? Smithy isn't used to this, even if he is a pretty good fellow. He's still mamma's darling boy more or less, and not accustomed to roughing it, like the rest of us. He'll learn in time, I reckon. Fortunately there's no danger of *me* failing to stand the great test. Huh! I've been through the mill, I have, and proven my worth more'n once."

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All the same it seemed that despite his brave words Bumpus also felt his eyes growing heavy before long. Once he even aroused with a start, as his head fell forward with a lurch, giving him a little twinge in his neck.

"Here, this won't do, Bumpus Hawtree!" he told himself severely; "you just get busy, and show what a loyal, faithful scout you are. Want Thad to drop in here, and find you sound asleep on your post, do you? Well, that would be a nice pickle, believe me. Smithy is only a poor tenderfoot at best, and not a seasoned veteran. He might be excused, but what would happen to you, tell me that?"

The idea seemed so monstrous that Bumpus immediately scrambled to his feet, although his

actions did not seem to interfere at all with the peaceful dreams of the sleeping scout. Smithy still sat there, with his head bowed down on his breast, and no doubt resting under the happy belief that he was once more safe at home, after all this trying flight along the flood-swept valley of the Susquehanna.

Bumpus walked away.

He thought he would feel more wide-awake if he gave that fire the cold shoulder, and exercised his benumbed limbs some. He took his gun, of course, for Bumpus had learned a certain degree of caution through his former experiences; and it turned out to be a most fortunate thing he had that sagacity.

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After walking about for a little while Bumpus settled down alongside a tree, and once more allowed himself to think of a number of events connected with the past, as well as his pleasant home, now so far away.

He was aroused by what seemed to be the crackling of a twig. This startled him, because his scout training declared that such a sound must always be accounted exceedingly suggestive.

Bumpus silently arose to his knees, and, gripping his gun tightly in his fat hands, looked all around him. A slight movement caught his attention. It was directly toward the fire that he looked, and what he saw thrilled him through and through.

A man was actually creeping forward on hands and knees, stealing along with a manner suggestive of a cat. Bumpus did not need to note the fact that this party was wearing a blue army overcoat, now muddy, and rather forlorn-looking, to realize that it could be no other than the long-lost Wandering George, the tramp whom they had trailed all the way from far-distant Scranton.

That he had some evil design in approaching the camp so secretly there could be no possible doubt. Smithy was still dozing there, and would fall an easy prey to the scheming tramp, unless some comrade came boldly to the rescue. So Bumpus drew in a long breath, clinched his teeth, and rising to his feet moved forward.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

HEADED FOR HOME—CONCLUSION.

"Just hold on there, George; you're under arrest!" Bumpus called out; and if his voice happened to be a trifle shaky, the fact did not seem to interfere with the clever way in which he swung that gun up, so as to cover the tramp.

Smithy awoke, and was stunned at what he saw. He sat there, turning his head, to stare first at the figure clothed in the blue army coat, and then at his comrade, seen just topping the bushes, and looking so like he meant business. Smithy would long remember that fine sight.

The hobo knew he was caught. Guns had a very persuasive way with George, and he had learned long ago to fight shy of all farmhouses where it was known the owner possessed firearms.

"Don't shoot, young feller!" he immediately bellowed, with astonishing energy; "I ain't goin' ter try an' git away. Say, I was jest a-wantin' ter surrender, so's ter git off'n this island. I ain't never yet starved ter death, an' I don't wanter try the same. I'm a prisoner o' war, an' ye wouldn't be so mean's as ter pepper a harmless man, I hopes, Boy?"

Bumpus proceeded to advance, all the while keeping that menacing gun leveled. He had had a previous experience in capturing a supposed-to-be desperate rascal, and felt that he must be cautious in how he handled matters.

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"Smithy, is there a piece of that rope handy?" he demanded; and the other scout after a hasty look around made an affirmative reply.

"There certainly is, Bumpus, and it seems to be a good strong piece, too," he went on to say. "Please tell me what you want me to do with it. I know how to tie all sorts of perfectly splendid knots; if only the wretch won't seize hold of me, and make use of me as a shield. They're all so very treacherous, you know, Bumpus."

"Sure, I understand that, Smithy," he was told, "but I'm up to a trick or two on my own hook. Here, you George, just drop down on your marrow bones—that means get on your knees."

The tramp looked anything but happy, but when he hesitated Bumpus swung his gun up again, and it could be easily seen that he was ready for business. So George immediately dropped down on his knees, with his hands still raised in a really grotesque fashion above his head.

"Now, I don't mean to ask you to say your prayers, because I reckon you never learned any," Bumpus proceeded briskly; "but continue the forward movement. In other words, fall flat on your face, and stretch out there, with your nose rooting in the ground. No back talk now, but do what you're told!"

George did so. He evidently knew better than to refuse so modest a request, especially while threatened with a load of shot at close quarters.

Then Bumpus advanced close up.

"Smithy," he said, with a grand air, as became a conqueror, "use your rope, and tie his wrists behind his back. If there's enough left, give a turn around his ankles, will you, please? And whatever you do, let it be thorough. That's what scouts are taught to always be, you know."

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Under the immediate eye of Bumpus the tramp was triced up, after which the two boys dragged him behind a screen of bushes. Bumpus was in constant apprehension lest the second hobo appear on the scene, and managed to keep his eyes turned this way and that as the minutes passed on.

It seemed as though the morning must be wearing away when finally the barking of a fox, so excellently done that it would have deceived

an old hunter, announced the near presence of Allan and Thad, and likely the others besides.

When they entered the camp they seemed to be laboring under some excitement; but Bumpus had warned Smithy not to give their secret away immediately.

"Well, what luck did you have, boys?" asked the stout lad, as one and then another of the six filed past him to the vicinity of the fire.

"We cornered one of the precious pair down at the extreme end of the island," acknowledged Giraffe; "but George gave us the slip somehow. We figured he must have hid in a hemlock top, and after we passed come on up here; and since we ran across his trail not far from camp some of us began to get cold feet for fear that you two might have been surprised and taken prisoner. We're all as glad as hops to see that was a false alarm, Bumpus and Smithy."

"But have you seen anything of George?" asked Thad, who believed there was something decidedly odd about the way the features of the two guards were working, as though they might be doing everything in their power to conceal some secret.

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Of course Bumpus had by that time reached the limit of his endurance, especially since Smithy gave a big yell, unable to hold in any further.

"Go and take a look back of the bushes there; that's the answer, boys!" Bumpus remarked, trying to look indifferent, though really trembling all over with the joyful excitement.

There was an immediate rush in the quarter pointed out; and then shouts that might have easily been heard at the lower end of the island.

"Well, what d'ye think of that, now?" Giraffe was saying, in his usual boisterous manner; "if they haven't gone and done it, capturing the long-lost George as nice as you please! Yes, and there's that old engineer's army coat, too; mebbe the judge won't be glad to get that keepsake back again!"

Thad was especially well pleased. Of course this was partly on account of having finally accomplished the task that had been set before him, because he always felt satisfied when he could look back to duty well done.

Besides, he fairly gloried in the fact that the two tenderfeet of the patrol, as they might still be called, had succeeded in covering themselves with honor in having captured the second desperate rascal.

The first thing Thad did was to stand the tramp up, remove his bonds, and make him strip off the blue coat that had once kept the judge's son warm while serving Uncle Sam during our late war with Spain, after which he saw to it that George had his hands bound again.

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Two of the boys were dispatched along the shore, where the walking was better, to bring back the other prisoner. To another pair was given the task of setting up a pole on an elevated part of the island, bearing a white flag, which, if seen by anyone on the distant shore, might be

the means of bringing a boat to the rescue of the marooned ones.

Meanwhile Thad investigated, and found that apparently George had had no suspicion that there was anything sewed inside the red lining of the army coat given to him by Mrs. Whittaker. Feeling carefully along the sides, Thad discovered that at a certain place there seemed to be something nestled; and when he held the garment close to his ear he was able to catch a slight rustling sound when he bent it back and forth; so he concluded the paper must be safe.

There was enough of the bacon and other things left, it happened, to give them a scanty feed at noon; and they had high hopes that before another night came the conditions would be vastly improved.

This confidence proved well founded, for along about three o'clock Giraffe, who had set himself to be the lookout, came running into camp with the cheering news that two boats were coming from the shore, and that the period of their captivity on the island had reached its end.

It turned out that those rowing the boats were men who had been sent out by the authorities to look for any families in distress because of the flood in the Susquehanna region. There was ample room aboard for the eight scouts, as well as their two prisoners; and in due time they landed on the bank, overjoyed to know that not only were they free once more, but that their principal object in making this long hike had been handsomely accomplished.

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Giraffe and Bumpus shook hands solemnly when the fact was mentioned that they had been invited to stay over at a neighboring farmhouse, where they could obtain a bountiful supper and sleep in the barn. That meant supreme happiness to the lengthy and the stout members of the patrol, the "fat and the lean of it," as Giraffe himself would say.

Thad was careful to see that the two tramps were handed over to the authorities. All the evidence needed to convict them of the robbery of the Bailey home was discovered on their persons, for they had been tempted to take several little valuable bits of jewelry that fastened the crime on them when found in their pockets.

He felt that they were well rid of the rascals when the two men were led away; nor did any of the scouts ever set eyes on Wandering George or his companion again.

Since all of the patrol were exceedingly tired, it can safely be assumed that they slept soundly on that night. The hay was sweet; they had been given a bountiful supper, such as only farmers' wives know how to spread before guests; and Bumpus had done himself proud when called upon to entertain their host's family with a number of favorite songs, as well as by the dexterous use of his bugle, upon which he dearly loved to play, and with considerable effect.

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When another day dawned the boys were given a breakfast they would not soon forget, nor would the kind lady accept a single cent in payment for the same, declaring that she and her family had

enjoyed having the scouts remain a night with them, and that they had learned a thousand things about their work such as they had long been wishing to know.

The homeward march was begun; and as time was passing rapidly now, Thad thought it only right they should take advantage of the fact that a trolley covered a considerable number of miles between Cranford and the point they were at. None of them objected to this means of lightening their labors, for several among the scouts had complained that their feet were beginning to swell and pain them.

By clever work they managed to arrive home that same evening, pleased with their last adventure. Its successful termination would long be a source of gratification to those who had participated in the chase after Wandering George and the blue army overcoat that the judge wanted to keep "in memory of his son."

Thad could not wait for morning to come, but immediately after supper he took the coat, once more brushed clean, over his arm, and set out for the home of old Judge Whittaker. When he was ushered into the library, and the eminent jurist saw what he was carrying, he expressed himself pleased in no uncertain tones.

As the good lady of the house happened to be out at a neighbor's just then, the judge did not hesitate to rip open the lining of the coat, and then triumphantly extract a thin paper, which he seemed to prize exceedingly.

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He declared that he was under great obligations to the scouts, and expressed an earnest desire to do something grand for the troop; but of course Thad was compelled to decline, assuring him they had enjoyed the little adventure greatly, and that at any rate the rules of their organization would prevent them from accepting any pay for such a service.

Thad and his friends were looking forward to another outing in the woods during the coming summer, and expected to have a delightful time. None of them, however, so much as suspected what a strange turn of fortune would alter their plans, and allow some of the scouts to visit foreign lands while the greatest war in the history of the whole world was breaking out. What wonderful things happened to them abroad will be found recorded in the next volume of this series, published under the title of "The Boy Scouts on the Rhine; or Under Fire with the Allies."

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- Obvious typographical errors were corrected without note.
- Non-standard spellings and dialect were left unchanged.
- A Table of Contents was added for the convenience of the reader.

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