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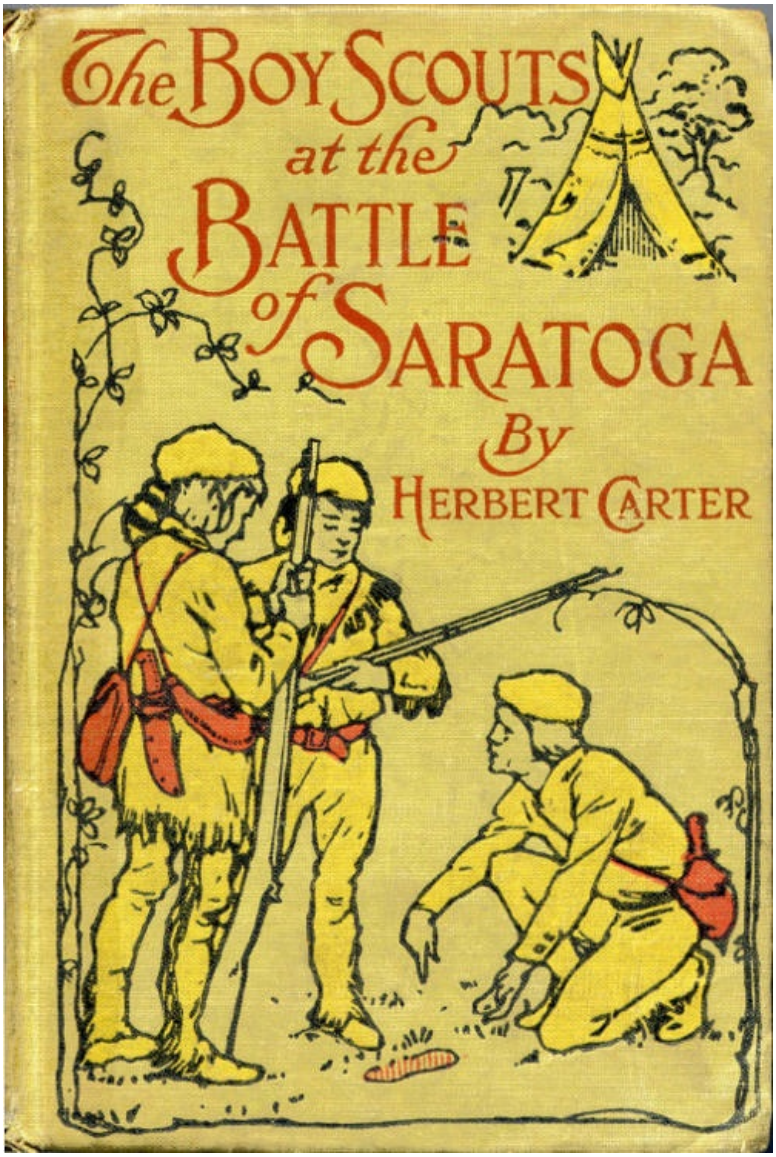
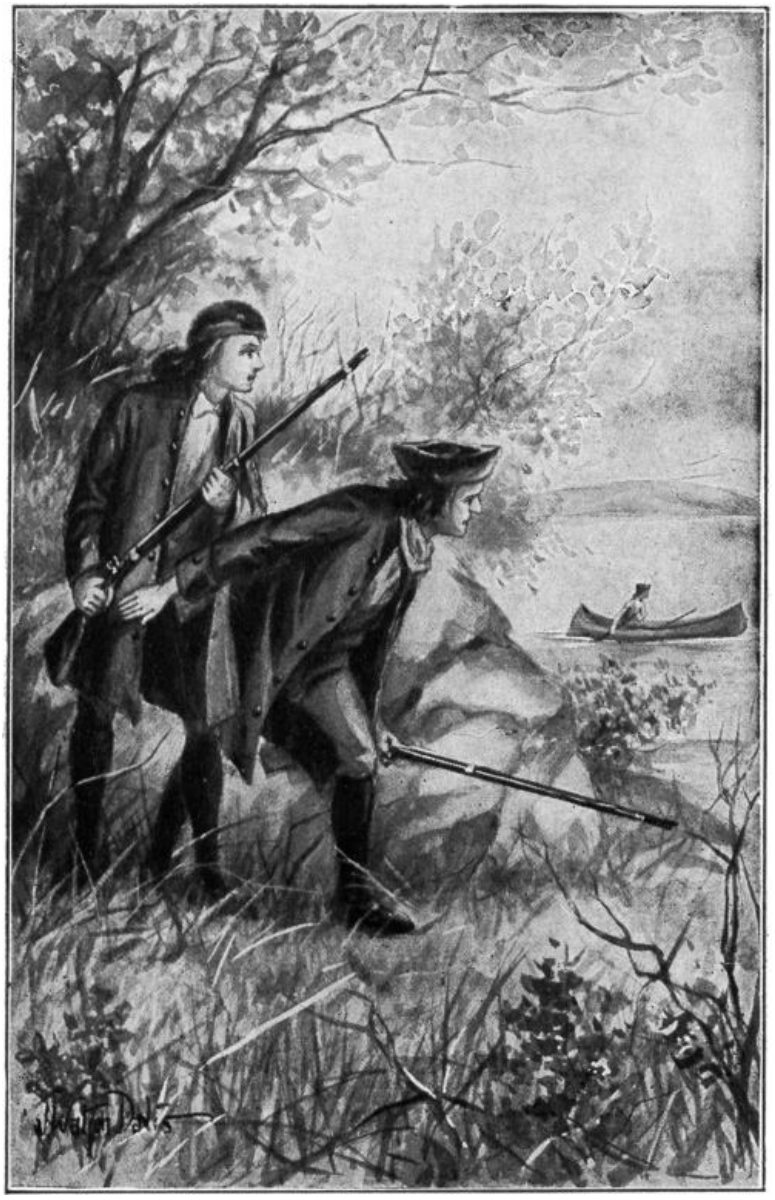
By Herbert Carter





“It is the courier, George Preston!” said Dan in a whisper as the canoe swept around the bend.

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The Boy Scouts At the Battle of Saratoga

The Story of General Burgoyne’s Defeat

By HERBERT CARTER

Author of
“The Boy Scouts Through the Big Timber.”
“The Boy Scouts In the Blue Ridge.”
“The Boy Scouts’ First Camp Fire.”
“The Boy Scouts In the Rockies.”
“The Boy Scouts On the Trail.”

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The Boy Scouts At the Battle of Saratoga

CHAPTER I.
THE CAMP IN THE WOODS.

The sunset had brought to a close the hottest day of the season (June, 1777). With the fading of the light a cool breeze came in from Lake Champlain, sweeping across the big promontory, near the foot of which a single tent was pitched. As the wind rustled in the tree tops above the canvas shelter, its occupants arose from the

rude beds of fir boughs, and sought the outer air. This act revealed their number and character—three lads, not far from eighteen years of age, whose rugged faces, brawny muscles and rude clothing suggested, as was the fact, that they had been bred to a frontier life.

“I say, Dan,” the tallest of the group remarked as he yawned and stretched himself to his full height, “ain’t it ’bout time that feller we are waitin’ for hove in sight?”

“He’s got an hour longer, Late,” the boy answered, “an’ may show up in that time. General Schuyler,[1] when he tole me to find you an’ Joe an’ come up here, said: ‘Pitch your tent on that big point to the left of the Narrows, an’ wait three days for the feller I’ve sent to watch Burgoyne’s fleet that’s comin’ down to attack Fort Ticonderoga. He’ll jine ye by that time, an’ tell ye what to do.’ That’s plain ’nough even for your thick head to understand, an’ as we ain’t been here three days till it’s pitch dark, I say thar’s an hour for him yet.” 2

“It’s queer the general didn’t tell you who it was,” commented the third lad, who had been spoken of as “Joe.” “I wonder you didn’t ask him.”

“You’ve said that six or seven times already,” Dan retorted somewhat sharply, “an’ I’ve told ye as often that it wasn’t my style. I always leave it for the general to tell me what he thinks I orter know, an’ leave unsaid what he’d rather keep to himself. Whosomever this feller is, he’ll be likely to explain, an’ I can wait without worryin’ over it.”

“That’s ’cause your habit for askin’ questions wasn’t ever fully developed,” Late broke in with a chuckle. “But we shan’t have to wait long ’fore we at least see the feller, for, if I’m not mistook, thar he comes now down the lake,” and he pointed to a dark object which was approaching. 3

“He’s in a canoe, an’ a youngster like ourselves,” Dan added a moment later.

“I don’t know how you make that out,” Late cried. “I can only see that it’s a boat of some kind.”

“That’s ’cause your eyesight was never fully developed,” Dan retorted with a grin. “I can see him well enough. But since he’s a-comin’ we better get to hustlin’ an’ have supper ready. If he’s traveled far he’ll be hungry, an’ we may make a good impression by showin’ we are liberal providers. I’ll start the fire, an’ Joe can get the water, while you, Late, bring up those fish we caught this mornin’.”

For the next half hour the campers were too busy with their preparations to give more than an occasional glance up the lake at the approaching boat. But what they saw confirmed Dan’s words. The newcomer was a lad of about their own age, and was able to handle a canoe with the grace and skill of an Indian.

At length, however, the potatoes were baked, the fish broiled, and the corn-cakes done to a turn. Then Late spoke:

“We are ready, an’ he’s nearly here. Let’s go 4

down to the shore to meet him."

His comrades followed him without a word. Clambering down the steep bank to the water's edge, they waited in silence the arrival of the voyager. He could see them standing there, and, though several rods away, paused in his paddling long enough to raise one hand and wave it above his head. They returned the salutation; but refrained from the cheer all longed to give. They were not sure of being alone in the forest, and, with that caution which comes to all accustomed to a frontier life, made no noise that might attract the attention of an enemy.

Two minutes later the canoe touched the beach, and its occupant leaped out. For an instant he stood there, running a keen eye over the three lads whom he knew would be his associates in the hazardous work of reporting the movements of a hostile army. They, in their turn, gazed critically at the one who was for a time to be their leader.

He saw three youths, rough, uncultured, and yet as stout of heart as the great trees among which they had lived, as keen as the steel of the knives that graced their belts. They, on their part, beheld a lad a trifle older than themselves, taller by an inch than Late, and as stalwart in frame as he, yet a lad whose studious face suggested the school; whose air of refinement seemed more in keeping with the town than the woods; and whose every movement told of one accustomed to command. **5**

The brightening of his and their faces told that he and they had alike been pleased with what they saw; then, before the stranger could speak, the waiting lads picked up the canoe, and started toward the camp with it. The newcomer added his own strength to the burden, and almost noiselessly they ascended the promontory, dropping the boat aside the tent.

"I am here at last," the unknown lad now said in a low and pleasant voice. "Have you waited long for me?"

"Three days, lackin' a few minutes," Dan replied, acting as spokesman for the party.

"Then you were here at the earliest moment suggested by the general," the first speaker said heartily. "I like that. It shows that he has given me assistants who can be relied upon for promptness. The silence in which you met me proves that you can be discreet. The supper you have ready bespeaks your hospitality. They are all traits I appreciate—especially the last, after my pull of thirty miles. Let us eat and get acquainted."

Sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree near the fire, which now was no more than a bed of coals, he began to eat with that relish which long exercise in the open air always imparts. **6**

At once the entire party was engaged in the same agreeable task. As they ate their conversation was, during a time, of little importance; but when the keen hunger of the leader had been somewhat appeased, he paused long enough between mouthfuls to say:

“I have your names, comrades; but which is which I do not yet know. I wonder if I can pick you out,” and again he ran his keen eye quickly from one to the other. Late laughed.

“My knife ’gainst yours that you can’t tell who I am on the first guess,” he said.

“It would hardly be a fair wager,” was the reply, “for my knife is worth more than yours. But I’ll venture a guess without a bet. You are Latham Wentworth.”

“You’ve seen me somewhere ’fore now,” the crestfallen youth cried when the laughter of his companions had subsided.

“No; but you gave yourself away when you made the bet. I have been told that you are always ready to wager anything you possess, from the shoes on your feet to the cap on your head.” 7

“I reckon that’s so,” he admitted, joining in the laugh at his expense.

“What is it the good book says ’bout ‘their works do follow them’?” asked Dan at this point. “I guess that is true of the livin’ as well as the dead, Late.”

“A remark that proves you are Daniel Cushing,” was the comment of the newcomer. “You see I am nearly as well acquainted with you, as with Wentworth.”

“It looks as if the general, or somebody, had sized us up ’bout right to you,” young Cushing said curtly.

“There’s no chance for me to hide it, so I’ll admit I’m Joseph Fisher, at your service,” that young man cried laughingly. “I’m quick to say it, too, for fear you’ll show up some of my failin’s. But you haven’t told us your own name, an’ the general didn’t, either. I think we orter know that.”

“If you had put your last sentences first, your confession of your identity would hardly have been necessary,” was the significant answer.

“Your demand is a fair one,” the lad replied, “and though it was my first thought to withhold my real name, you shall know it, but you must never call me by it, nor use it between yourselves when I am absent. It is not, in fact, to be spoken aloud. You will understand later why I make this strange request.” 8

With these words he drew from the bosom of his hunting-shirt an iron cross, which evidently was attached to a chain about his neck. Taking hold of the top above the horizontal bar, he gave it a vigorous twist. It came off, showing that the lower portion was hollow, and contained a tiny paper. This he took out, and passed to Daniel Cushing, who sat nearest him.

“Read, and then pass it on,” he directed.

The parchment was so small, that only a few words could have been written on it. These Dan slowly spelled out, and then exclaimed:

“I understand, sir. It shall be as you say, an’ you’ll find that Dan Cushing never yet broke his word.”

He handed the paper to Late, who, after a little effort, mastered its contents, and then cried:

“I never dreamed of such a thing, sir. You are right. ’Twon’t do to whisper the name even to each other, lest the woods hear us. But ’twill be a pleasure to serve under you, sir.” 9

Joe now had his opportunity to peruse the writing, and, being a better reader than his companions, quickly gathered the meaning of the brief lines. Running over to the leader, he seized his hand and shook it vigorously.

“I deem it an honor to serve under you,” he declared, “an’ you’ll find I can keep a secret, if I am always eager to solve one. But what are we to call you?”

“For the present I am to be known to you, as I shall be to the British, as Ira Le Geyt,” was the smiling reply.

“The Tory!”

“The spy!”

“The renegade!”

These three exclamations escaped the lips of the hearers in sheer amazement.

“Tory, spy, and renegade,” was the quiet reply. “Do you fear that I can’t play the part?”

“Not that, sir,” Dan answered hastily. “It’s the danger you run. ’Spose some one happens into the camp who knows the real Ira, or what if he happened to show up? You’d be in a tight place.”

“General Schuyler has the real Ira where he can’t make any trouble,” was the reply, “and I have the young Tory’s entire outfit in yonder canoe—rifle, clothes, commission as a scout in Burgoyne’s army, and, as you have seen, his iron cross, the token by which he was to come and go among the Indians. Some say that in form and feature we are not unlike. I hope, therefore, to pass myself off for him. Of course there is a risk, but I am willing to take that for the sake of the Cause.” 10

The last declaration was made modestly, almost reverently, and a few moments of silence followed. Then the lad went on:

“This reveals my plan, and shows why I need you. As a trusted scout at the British headquarters, I hope to learn enough about the commander’s movements to keep our officers between here and Fort Stanwix fully posted. But some other must carry the news. That is to be your work. At regular appointed places just outside the British lines, one or more of you will always be in waiting. To you I will come with everything our men should know. I hope, too, we may be able to delay, if not thwart altogether, many of the red-coats’ plans.”

“Will they soon be here?” Joe asked.

“Some time to-morrow,” Ira (as we shall now call him) replied. “I have kept just ahead of the fleet since it started down the St. Lawrence. At noon it was becalmed thirty miles up the lake. But a breeze sprang up, as you know, at sundown, and it must be under way again. The British will 11

come slowly; but by daylight we ought to see the first vessels from this headland."

"I don't s'pose you know how many there are?" questioned Dan.

"Vessels? yes," was the answer. "There are sixty-one in all, frigates, schooners, sloops, and transports. But the number of the troops I have not yet got at clearly enough to make a report. That will be our task as they land. We'll stay here to-night, and early in the morning move camp to the place I have chosen as our rendezvous while the enemy is in this locality. Then we will return here, or to some other place where we can watch the landing."

For some time longer they discussed the exciting situation, and then sought their rude beds within the tent.

Nothing disturbed their slumbers during the night hours; but with the first light of the morning all were astir. Ira had been the first to awake, and, rising, he hurried away to the edge of the promontory and looked up the lake. The next instant he wheeled about, and went back to the camp rapidly. **12**

"Quick!" he cried in a low tone. "The fleet is not over five miles away, and we must be on the move. It won't do to stop here even long enough to get breakfast."

His companions needed no other warning. Springing up they aided in emptying the canoe of its contents, after which the light craft was carried some distance into the forest, and hidden in a dense thicket. Returning to the camp they speedily took down the tent, packed it and all their belongings into four bundles, and, shouldering these, hastened off toward the west under the guidance of their chief.

With the directness of one who knew where he was going, he led them to a narrow ravine a mile away. Entering this, he descended to a small brook, which with a noisy murmur ran through it. Along the bank he traveled until the ground was so wet and soft that walking became difficult. It was clear they were now on the edge of a great swamp. Beneath a huge maple he paused.

"Mark this tree," he said in a low voice to his followers, "and for two reasons: We must here enter the stream in order to reach the place where we shall make our camp. See, between those two limbs is a small cavity. Every day after I enter the British lines one of you must come here and look into the hole. When it is impossible for me to visit you at the rendezvous, I shall put my messages in there." **13**

While speaking he had pulled off his boots. His companions removed theirs, and in single file they began the descent of the brook. Denser and denser grew the underbrush, until with great difficulty they forced their way between the branches which overhung the tiny stream. For a quarter of a mile they struggled through the tangle, and then it abruptly ended at the edge of a small pond, near the middle of which was a tiny island. Here Ira spoke again:

"Do you see that big hemlock on the island

nearly opposite us?" and as the lads nodded assent, he went on, "Keep a straight line for that, and you'll find the water shallow enough for wading."

He continued the journey, and a minute later all had gained the island, where they found the ground firm and dry, while the trees were large and far enough apart to let in the bright sunshine. A carpet of thick grass added to the beauty of the spot, while a sparkling spring gurgled at the foot of a great bowlder.

"This is fine!" exclaimed Joe, dropping the pack from his shoulders. "How did you find it?" **14**

"No one would think of looking for us here," Late said contentedly, "an' that trail down the brook hides every trace of our steps. A dog couldn't follow us."

"Wood an' water right at hand, an' fish in the pond," added Dan with a quick glance around him. "Sure ye didn't make it to order, Ira?"

The lad leader laughed.

"I fancy some people would say I found it by chance. I prefer, however, to believe that I was led to it, and to a dozen other places between here and the Hudson fully as good, by the same kind Providence that is watching over our Cause, and will eventually give us the victory."

"'Twon't hurt us to think so," young Cushing replied cheerily.

Then the little party fell to making camp. In a short time the tent was pitched, beds of fir made, and breakfast cooked. Quickly breaking their fast, they began the return to the lake.

In a half hour they reached it, to find the advance vessels of the British fleet at anchor in the large bay just above the promontory where they had first camped. Two boats, loaded with soldiers, soon came ashore. **15**

From their hiding-place the lads watched these men, only to learn that their object was to select and arrange a camping ground. Hardly was their task finished when the work of landing the men was begun.

Soon it was proceeding so rapidly, and at so many different places, that the young scouts were obliged to divide forces in order to count the troops. Four stations were, therefore, selected, covering the entire bay, and from these the lads kept account of the constantly increasing numbers.

It was not until late on the afternoon of the second day that they were able to come together again to compare notes. Then a little mental reckoning enabled Ira to say:

"We are now ready for my first report. I shall never send written messages to our officers unless I am forced to do so. There will then be nothing to fall into the enemy's hands should you be captured. Late, you are to go to Fort Ticonderoga, and say to General St. Clair[2] that General Burgoyne has landed and is now encamped near the great promontory at the foot of the lake. He has with him eight thousand British and Hessian troops, four hundred **16**

Indians, and forty cannon. Should he give you any message for me, put it in the big maple. Dan, go to Fort Edward and deliver precisely the same message to General Schuyler. Both of you are to return to our island camp as soon as possible. Joe will be there when you arrive. I shall stay there to-night, and early in the morning will enter the British camp."

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CHAPTER II.
THE MISSING MESSAGES.

The sun had been up a full half hour the next morning when Joe awoke. Raising his head he looked about him. He was alone. Springing to his feet he hastened to the door. The camp-fire had been built; the breakfast was slowly cooking; but Ira was nowhere to be seen.

A low splash, as though some one was wading across the pond, reached his ears. The tent faced south, while the approach to the island by the way of the brook was from the east. He was obliged, therefore, to step outside his shelter in order to obtain a view of the direction from which the sound came.

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The moment he did so he found it difficult to suppress the cry of alarm that rose to his lips, for there, not more than two rods away, was a stranger, who, having just put on his huge boots after wading over to the island, looked up in time to catch sight of him. Instantly bringing his rifle to his shoulder the intruder called out in loud, gruff tones:

"Stand where you are, youngster. Any attempt on your part to get a gun will force me to fire."

Seeing his words had the required effect, he came a little nearer, and continued:

"Your companion ran away when I came up. Is it he, or you, who has my iron cross?"

For an instant Joe could do no more than stare at the speaker. Could it be that the real Ira Le Geyt had escaped from the hands of General Schuyler, and in some way traced out the lad who was intending to personate him in the British camp?

"Who be ye?" he finally questioned, using the time he gained thereby to examine the newcomer carefully.

He certainly resembled the other Ira. This fellow did not appear to be quite so tall; he was more stout; his hair was a shade or two darker; his nose was more prominent; and he looked older.

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There was a greater difference in his dress. He wore high top-boots, an English hunting suit of costly material, a belt of polished leather, containing a brace of pistols and a silver-handled knife, while on his back was a huge knapsack, apparently filled to overflowing.

Scarcely had Joe learned all this, when the answer to his query came in an angry voice:

“Who am I? You ought to know. Again I ask, have you my iron cross?”

This settled matters with the listener. Here was the real Ira, and the thing to do was to outwit and capture him, call back his friend, and then their plans might go on as arranged. With this object in view he edged slowly along towards the intruder, saying innocently:

“I never saw you before, an’ I’ve nothin’ belongin’ to you, sir, but—” and with a tremendous bound he caught his antagonist’s gun, tearing it from his grasp. Flinging it away, he seized the owner by the body, pinning his arms to his sides, and then finished his sentence, “I’ve got you.”

To his surprise there was no struggle. Instead, a voice he knew well cried out laughingly:

“Well done, Joe; but you must admit I as neatly fooled you. I guess I shall be able to play my part at the British quarters.”

“It looks like it, I swaney,” Joe said a little sheepishly. Releasing his prisoner, he stepped away a few feet and looked him over again, this time more critically. **20**

“It beats anythin’ I ever heard of,” he at length declared. “Though I knew you were goin’ to rig up in some way, I thought the real Ira had stolen a march on us, an’ got into camp—leastwise, you seemed like the real Ira to me, though I’ve never set eyes on him. Unless the red-coats know him better than I do, they’ll take you for him, sure.”

“Of course it is possible more than one of the British officers may know Le Geyt,” the lad said thoughtfully, “or some person come into the lines who has seen him. But I think the risk is small. His visits to this part of the state have not been frequent, and, while his name is familiar, his face and form are not. I flatter myself I have a make-up that quite resembles him, and believe I can successfully carry out the part. Let us have breakfast, and then I will be off.”

As he spoke he dropped his pack beside the gun, and, going to the fire, helped himself to the smoking food. Joe followed his example, and they ate almost in silence.

The meal finished, Ira removed his huge boots, and, adding them to his bundle, started down the brook. His comrade followed as far as the great maple, and from there watched, as he, after resuming his foot-gear, walked slowly toward the British camp. **21**

He would have been greatly excited had he witnessed what befell the traveler a few moments later. Emerging from the ravine, he had gone but a few rods when a stalwart Indian leaped from a thicket and grasped him by the shoulder. The next instant a half-dozen more surrounded him. Though offering no violence, it was clear they intended to make him a prisoner.

Instead of being disturbed by this mishap, the captive seemed to rejoice over it. He smiled pleasantly, laid his hand gently on the shoulder of the man who first seized him, and who was apparently the chief of the party, saying in the native tongue:

“My brother, you are from the great camp by the lake.”

A grunt of assent came from the captor.

“Take me there at once,” the prisoner continued with some show of authority. “I have important business with General Burgoyne, the commander.”

His words were not without their effect. Releasing him, the Indian said in a tone of inquiry: “Ira Le Geyt?”

“Ira Le Geyt,” the youth repeated, and at the same moment he drew from the bosom of his coat the iron cross. 22

At sight of the bit of metal the chieftain gave a peremptory order to his men to fall in behind him, and then, side by side with the captured lad, strode away towards the encampment.

They were not long in reaching the first outpost. To the guard the Indian uttered the two English words, “King George,” and was allowed to pass with his entire party.

Once within the lines the chief sent his followers to their quarters, and then led his companion swiftly across the enclosure to the tent of the commander, which he entered without ceremony.

“General! Ira Le Geyt!” he said, and then vanished.

Two men turned to face the newcomer; one in the uniform of a major-general, the other in the garb of a private citizen, for their backs had been toward the entrance, while they were giving undivided attention to a rude map or chart which was spread out upon the camp bed.

“I beg your pardon for this intrusion, General Burgoyne,” the young scout began, bowing low before that officer, “It was due to my conductor, one of your Indians, who ran on me in the forest.” 23

“It is all right, Master Le Geyt,” the commander replied good-naturedly. “Indeed, your coming is most timely. My companion, who, by the way is Master George Preston, a courier who came from Quebec with us, and is to go on to New York with a message for General Clinton from Lord Germain, and I, were trying to trace out on this map the best route for him to follow down the river. Perhaps you, who, I am informed, are familiar with this entire region, may be able to help us. Would you advise him to take the east or west side?”

Ira stepped to the bed, ostensibly to examine the map, which proved to be a crude and inaccurate affair, but really to gain time in which to think over the situation. Here was work for him immediately. If this man had a message for General Clinton from Lord Germain, the War Secretary in London, it was altogether too important to be allowed to reach its destination. But how should he prevent it, and obtain possession of the paper?

He cast a furtive glance at the courier to ascertain the kind of man he had to deal with. The look was hardly reassuring. Clearly George 24

Preston was not a man to be easily thwarted. Forty years of age, nearly a giant in strength and stature, with a face that suggested courage, resourcefulness, and faithfulness to duty. It was certain he had been selected for the task assigned him because he could be thoroughly relied upon.

All this the lad took in during the brief minute he stood silent, and at once decided upon a plan which he believed would enable him to accomplish his purpose. Then he said in answer to the question asked him:

“Both, sir. He better make directly for the river from here, and, crossing it, go down the west side until below Albany. Then, recrossing it, follow the east side to his destination. In this way he will escape the main forces of the enemy, and so lessen his chances of being captured.”

“That is what I told you, Master Preston!” exclaimed the general in triumph. “I need the aid of Clinton too badly to run any risk of your message failing to reach him. Take the safer way, even though it involves a longer journey. Twenty-four hours delay in the delivery of the letter is nothing, if it in the end reaches the general.”

“My chief objection to the plan lies in this:” the courier said quietly. “It is unlike the route laid out for me in St. John. I had rather obey the letter, as well as the spirit, of my orders.” **25**

“A good practice, truly,” General Burgoyne replied heartily, “and one that proves you are the man for this work. But our friends in St. John did not know what might arise, and therefore left you to your own judgment. I am exceedingly anxious that you use every precaution possible to carry Lord Germain’s message safely through the enemy’s lines.”

“You cannot be more anxious than I,” Master Preston said calmly, “and I have something more to say, provided our friend here is all he claims to be. It may be over-caution on my part, but if I recollect rightly, he has nothing but the word of that Indian to back him,” and he gave the officer a glance which caused him to flush slightly.

“Master Le Geyt answered so fully the description I had received of him,” the general replied somewhat haughtily, “that I was at once satisfied he was all he claimed to be. Nor is the Indian’s word of so little value as you seem to think. He must have known the young man, or he would never have brought him here. But since you have your doubts, he can, I am sure, show what will convince us that he is as trustworthy as yourself,” and he glanced confidently at the youth.

“I thank you, General Burgoyne, for so much confidence in me,” Ira replied, “and I commend the caution of Master Preston. He has a perfect right to demand full proof of my identity before giving me any information which might be of value to an enemy. I will then, with your permission, hand him my credentials first,” and, ripping open the lining of his coat, he took out two slips of paper, which he gave to the courier. **26**

“The first is my commission as a scout from the general here,” he explained. “The second is from

our good friend, Lord Germain, and bears his official seal. You will see that he vouches for my loyalty, and suggests that General Burgoyne employ me during this campaign. I believe it was this paper that led the general to send me the other, though he had never seen me."

"I also had a personal note from the Secretary, giving me a description of you, and setting forth in detail how you could be of special service to me," the commander hastened to add. "Are you satisfied, Master Preston?"

"I ought to be," the latter declared, "and to prove it I will now make a disclosure, general, which I have up to this time withheld, even from you." 27

As he spoke he took a small package from his coat pocket, and opening it, brought to view three papers.

"This," he said, "is the letter to Sir Henry Clinton; this is my passport into any and all of our army lines; and this is the document I wish to show you. You will notice, General Burgoyne, that our friends at St. John were not in ignorance of the best route for me to follow in going to Yew York, and also will understand the real reason why I hold for the path they have marked out."

Unfolding the paper with these words of explanation, he showed his companions a carefully prepared route of the entire distance he was to travel. Each day's journey was laid out; every stopping place, with the name of his host, was written down, and, now and then, beside a name was a peculiar mark.

"Note these references," he continued, "are concerning those men who are to give me special tidings as to the number and position of the rebels in their vicinity. James Graham of Hubbardtown, where I make my first stop, will tell me the latest news about Fort Ticonderoga; William Erskine will report as to the condition of affairs about Fort Edward. The other men will in turn post me about matters in their neighborhood, so that when I reach my destination I expect to be the bearer of information to General Clinton which will greatly aid him in despatching a force up the river to join you at Albany." 28

Before he finished speaking Ira had read and fixed in his memory the names of the men who were to assist the courier. He knew some as rank Tories, but there were others who had the reputation of being friendly to the Cause, and, therefore, were allowed to come and go freely in the encampments near them. This revelation of their true character he regarded of sufficient value to repay him for all the risk he had run in entering the British camp.

"I had not thought of that, Master Preston," the commander admitted. "The additional information you gain may be worth the chances you take in following that route. It is clear the authorities at St. John believed it would be. But I advise you to travel only in the night, and lay quietly in quarters during the day."

"Precisely what I have planned to do, general. Leaving here to-night I count, unless I lose my 29

way, to reach the house of Master Graham before sunrise. After that I shall have no trouble, for, if need be, a guide can be furnished me from station to station."

"And you may have a guide to Master Graham's door," the young scout said modestly. "That is, if you are willing to accept my humble services."

"I certainly am, and thank you for the favor," the courier answered heartily. "It removes the only anxiety I had about this first stage of my journey. We will start about nine o'clock, if that suits you."

"Perfectly."

"And you, General Burgoyne, can have your letter to Sir Henry ready by that time?" he asked.

"Yes; but I hope you have some safer place than your pocket for it and those other papers," the general replied, as Master Preston began to wrap up the documents he had exhibited.

"Don't borrow any trouble on that score, my dear sir," the man replied with a peculiar smile. "I may be captured, and my garments picked to pieces, but I assure you the missives will not be found," which declaration was credited by one, and doubted by his other hearer.

An orderly now appeared, saying that General Fraser was without and desired an interview with the commander.

"Show him in," was the reply of that officer, and then, turning to his other visitors, he added, "I shall be busy during the remainder of the day, but an half-hour before you begin your journey I will be glad to see both of you here. The tent at the right, Master Le Geyt, has been prepared for you," and then he turned to greet his subordinate, who had already entered. **30**

"I shall spend some hours in a much needed rest," the young scout announced to his companion, when they were outside; "but will join you at sundown, if you so desire."

"I will call for you when I come to report to the general," Master Preston replied, and then hastened off to his own quarters.

Ira left his tent but once during the day. That was just after dinner, and for a stroll in the forest. He was absent about two hours, and on his return brought a fine string of trout he had caught.

"A present for the general," he said to the courier, whom he chanced to meet soon after he entered the lines.

"I wish you had taken me with you," the latter cried enthusiastically as he inspected the speckled beauties. "If there is anything I enjoy more than running the lines of the enemy, it is angling, and you have the finest catch I have ever seen in this country." **31**

"Then that shall be a bond between us," was the hearty response. "I knew of a pool a mile or two from here, and could not resist the temptation to pull out a string. You'll be here in a few hours?"

“Yes,” said Master Preston, strolling on, apparently unsuspicious that his new acquaintance had been out of the camp for any other purpose than that of fishing.

Their interview with General Burgoyne during evening was brief. He gave a letter he had prepared for General Clinton, to Master Preston, who asked to be excused for a few moments. Somewhere in the outer darkness he concealed it about him, for when he returned he said:

“I’ve put it with the others, sir, and promise you that it shall not fall into any hand than that for which it is intended.”

Ten minutes later he and his guide had left the encampment, and were gliding swiftly and noiselessly through the forest toward Master Graham’s.

32

Several times the heavy step as of some belated traveler caused them to shrink back under the cover of the dense brush until it had ceased. Now and then came the cry of some wild beast to startle them, but they kept steadily along the trail until nearly midnight. Then they had arrived at a small brook, which crossed the path at right angles, and here Ira, who was in the lead, stopped.

“Our journey is half done,” he announced. “We may as well halt here, and have something to eat.”

On a rock beside the stream, amid darkness that could almost be felt, surrounded by a silence that seemed oppressive, the two in silence partook of the food they had brought with them. Quenching their thirst from the rivulet, they were about to resume their tramp, when came the hoot of an owl from the rear. It was repeated at a short distance down the trail, and a moment later sounded nearer yet, but from up the brook.

“Can it be we are followed and surrounded?” the courier asked apprehensively in a low tone.

“It is a singular circumstance,” his companion admitted in a whisper. “There it is again,” and, listening, they heard the cries again in precisely the same order. Then came the sharp snap of a twig as though some one was approaching.

“The way is open to the right,” Ira continued in the same low tone. “Quick! we may yet escape.”

33

He led the way down the stream, going as rapidly as the darkness and underbrush would permit, his comrade keeping close at his heels. After a while the ground became soft and miry, and the bushes were so dense as to render progress exceedingly difficult.

“We must take to the brook,” Ira said to his companion. “Pull off your boots!”

“But is it necessary?” the courier asked. “Can’t we wait here awhile, and then go back to the trail?”

“Listen!” was the answer. Through the stillness of the night came to their ears the sound of footsteps.

“I have it,” the young scout whispered to Master Preston. “We’ll take to the stream here, and

keep it down a few rods to where another brook joins it, which last we'll follow. It will enable us to work toward the old trail, and at the same time throw our pursuers off the track."

Stepping into the water a moment later, they waded slowly and cautiously along to the tributary of which Ira had spoken. Entering this they began its ascent. During a half hour they kept on, pausing occasionally to learn if they were still followed, but no sound broke the stillness of the forest.

"Those fellows have lost our trail; can't we leave the brook now?" the courier at length asked, becoming tired of his slippery and uncertain footing. **34**

His companion's answer was also a question:

"What's that ahead of us?"

Master Preston stepped beside his guide, and then replied:

"It is a fire of some kind!"

"A camp-fire," was the rejoinder. "I can now see a tent beyond."

"What shall we do?"

"Keep straight on. Whoever may be there are probably fast asleep at this hour."

Noiselessly they advanced.

"We are in a pond," the courier whispered an instant later.

"That's a fact," his companion agreed, "and that is Boulder island. I know where we are now. I don't think we have anything to fear, still we'll keep our guns ready for immediate use."

The next moment they gained the shore of the island, and stopped in front of the fire, at the tent door. The canvas dwelling was empty.

Ira laughed loudly.

"This is a joke on us!" he exclaimed. "See! there are the fellows' fishing rods. They were doubtless out hunting when night came on, became separated, and are trying to find each other and their camp. We've run away from men who had no thought of pursuing us," and again he laughed heartily. **35**

Before his comrade could speak a cry came from the main shore.

"Hello there! Who are you in our camp?"

"I ought to know that voice," the young scout said to the courier. Then he replied:

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Yes, but who are you?"

"Ira Le Geyt."

"Hurrah!" came back across the little pond. "We'll jine ye in a minute."

There was a noise as of splashing water for a moment, and then two young lads came into the

dim light of the camp-fire.

“Glad to see you, Ira,” they both exclaimed, shaking hands with him, and he introduced his companion to them.

“Master Preston, this is Joe Fisher and Late Wentworth, two friends of mine, who are of the right sort.”

When the courier had acknowledged the introduction, his guide continued:

“Was it you who were hooting like owls up where the stream crosses the Hubbardtown trail?” 36

“Yes,” Late replied. “We were separated, an’ tryin’ to come together again. Why do you ask?”

“We thought it was some one who wanted to hem us in on the trail, and so took to the brook,” the young scout explained, “and here we are, three or four miles out of our way.”

“Well, ye better stay until mornin’,” Joe said. “You are both welcome to our shelter an’ fodder, such as it is. Ain’t that so, Late?”

“I reckon,” his camp-mate replied, “an’ if we don’t turn in soon, mornin’ will be here ’fore we get a wink of sleep.”

“I leave it to you, Master Preston,” Ira said. “Shall we go on, or stay?”

“Go on,” he answered. “I must reach my destination before light, if it is possible.”

“Very well,” his guide replied, stooping to pick up the big boots he had thrown down upon reaching camp.

The courier bent over for the same purpose, but before he could recover himself, Late and Joe seized and threw him to the ground. Ira came to their aid, and in a few moments the man was bound and disarmed.

“What does this mean?” he demanded with an ugly glance at the young scout. 37

“That I want the papers you carry,” Ira replied quietly.

“Find them then,” he retorted with a grin.

His clothing was examined, his boots, hat, belt, the stocks of his pistols and gun; but the important papers could not be found.

38

CHAPTER III.

THE SPIKED CANNON.

“We’ll put him in the tent, and make further search in the morning,” Ira said at length.

The three scouts lifted their prisoner, and, carrying him into the tent, laid him gently on the fir boughs.

“I would loosen your bonds if it were safe to do

so, Master Preston," Ira said; "but as it is, you will have to make yourself as comfortable as possible under the circumstances."

"I have been in a worse fix," he replied shortly.

"You may both lie down and get what sleep you can," the lad then said to his comrades.

"You are the one to sleep; we'll take turns watching the prisoner," Late said stoutly.

"No," their leader answered decisively. "You will have a long journey to-morrow and need the rest, while I can sleep after returning to the encampment."

They yielded reluctantly, and were soon slumbering soundly. Ten minutes passed, and the courier was so quiet the lone watchman thought he too must be asleep; but suddenly he tried to raise himself, saying: **39**

"Look here!"

"What is it?" Ira asked kindly. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," the captive answered. "Tell me whether you are really Le Geyt, or some one who is personating him."

"What difference does that make to you?"

"Much. If you are Le Geyt, you are a low, contemptible traitor, and when I get the chance I'll crush your life out as I would that of a snake."

"I don't blame you for feeling that way," Ira replied with a slight laugh. "I should in your place. But what if I am not Le Geyt?"

The courier struggled until he had raised himself slightly on one elbow, and looked straight at his captor for a moment. Then he continued:

"If you are some Yankee personating him at General Burgoyne's headquarters, I say it is the boldest scheme I ever heard of, and I have only the profoundest respect for you. To be outwitted by such a man isn't half as bad as having a sneaking traitor get the best of you."

"That is where the shoe pinches, is it?" the young scout asked with another laugh. "Well, I'll let you judge as to my real character by this night's work." **40**

Silence reigned for some time, to be broken again by Master Preston, who said, as if he had been thinking over the events of the night:

"We are not far from the British camp?"

"What makes you think so?"

"You were not gone long enough from the encampment during the afternoon to have traveled very far and also caught that string of fish."

"You are a good reasoner, Master Preston."

"I believe we haven't been very far from the camp at any time to-night," the prisoner went on a moment or two later in tones of disgust. "I wonder I didn't suspect you were leading me in

a circle."

"The circle was too large, and you were not familiar enough with the locality to see the change in our course," Ira explained. "You can't be blamed, I assure you. The way you have hidden the letters I know you carry, is proof you are nobody's fool."

The compliment evidently pleased the prisoner, for he laughed silently, and then remarked significantly:

"You haven't found them yet, have you?"

Ira made no answer, and in a few minutes the prisoner was sleeping soundly notwithstanding his uncomfortable situation. **41**

The little camp was astir early, for Dan Cushing arrived at dawn from Fort Edward. He looked the prisoner over, heard the story of his capture, and then turned to Late.

"When did you get back?" he asked.

"Yesterday about noon," his friend replied.

"Any special news at Ticonderoga?" he next inquired.

"Nothin', except General St. Clair has over three thousand men," was the reply. "Colonel Seth Warner has come with his regiment from Bennington."

"And General Schuyler is gettin' reinforcements all the time," Dan announced. "Give him a little more time, an' he'll have ten thousand men at his back, 'nough to drive the red-coats back into Lake Champlain."

"He must have the needed time before Burgoyne reaches him," Ira declared.

"That is what the general told me to tell you," the lad continued. "He will leave the road open to Fort Edward until General St. Clair finds out whether he will have to retreat from Ticonderoga. If he does, he is to destroy bridges, and cut down trees across the way to hinder the red-coats as much as possible. I carried that order to him before comin' back, else I'd been here sooner." **42**

"You're here in time," the leader replied, "though I shall have to send you back to the fort in a few hours. I want our prisoner in the custody of General Schuyler, rather than that of General St. Clair. I shall feel safer. And all three of you will make none too strong a guard. He must not be allowed to escape under any circumstances. Shoot him down should he attempt it. But we'll have breakfast first, and then search him again for those missing messages."

In a half-hour they and their prisoner had eaten. Then the latter was stripped to the skin, and every rag of his clothing examined. Then his boots and weapons were again inspected, lest some secret cavity had been overlooked. But the search was as fruitless as the previous one. It was evident that the captive enjoyed their discomfiture.

"It matters little," Ira finally declared. "As long **43**

as he is a prisoner he cannot deliver the letters, and that will answer our purpose. It is possible, too, that the general may find a way to make him disclose their hiding place. At noon you are to begin your journey. Take the west trail to the river, and keep on to the fort. When you go, I'll start for the British camp. Until then Dan and I will sleep."

The noon-day sun, therefore, looked down upon a deserted island. The three boys with their prisoner had gone over to the western shore of the little pond, and from there struck through the forest towards the Hudson river; while Ira re-crossed to the brook, and, descending that to the larger stream, retraced his steps to the point where the latter met the Hubbardtown trail. From this point he began his journey back to the lake. He took such a roundabout route as a precautionary step. Should he meet any one who knew him, it would be supposed he was returning to the encampment directly from Master Graham's house.

On his arrival he found General Burgoyne too busy with his arrangements for breaking camp on the morrow to give him more than a passing notice.

Greeting him pleasantly, the officer remarked:

"I trust that you made a safe journey, Master Le Geyt."

"I did, and left Master Preston in good hands," he replied, an answer which satisfied the unsuspecting commander.

By easy stages the army crept down toward Ticonderoga until only Sugar Loaf Mountain[3] stood between it and the fortress. Here a halt was called that the engineering corps might examine the hill with a view to placing a half-dozen cannon on its summit. **44**

With some anxiety Ira went over to the officer who was watching his men as they clambered up the steep sides, measuring distances, and selecting the surest footing.

"It is a difficult place to carry guns, captain," he said, as he stood by the officer's side. "The enemy have always regarded such a feat as being impossible."

"It may be for them, but not for us," the Britisher replied loftily. "Before night I shall have my cannon yonder on that level spot you see below the big tree. From there it will be an easy task to run them over on the south side."

"The fort will then be at your mercy," the young scout suggested.

"Yes," the captain replied with much satisfaction. "As soon as I have the guns in place, the general will throw his army about the fortress, and it will have to surrender, or be blown to pieces. The cannon isn't yet made that can throw a shot six hundred feet straight up in the air to harm us."

"That is so," the lad admitted, and turned away with a heavy heart. **45**

From his tent door he could watch the work of the engineers. A derrick was made of a tree

some distance up the precipitous side; a pair of horses was attached to one end of the rope, and a gun drawn up to a level spot which had been cleared away a few feet below the tree. Then the tackling was carried to another improvised derrick farther up the hill, and again the horses swung the cannon toward the summit. It was a slow task, often beset with unexpected hindrance; but within two hours the first gun was lying on the level spot which the captain of the corps had designated.

"If one cannon may be put there, six can be made to follow," muttered Ira as he saw the end of the task. "It is only a question of time. The officer was right; before night he will have his battery where it can be put in place. I must get word to General St. Clair, and let him and his men slip away before they are surrounded."

The opportunity came to him unexpectedly. About dusk General Burgoyne sent for him.

"Master Le Geyt," he said, when the young scout was in his presence, "I want you to go below the fort and keep watch over the road the enemy would take if they should attempt to retreat to-night. Select as many men with you as may be needed, and in case you discover any suspicious movement, report promptly to General Fraser. He has his division ready for immediate pursuit the moment we know the Yankees are trying to escape us. Before another night I shall have a force where they cannot leave the fort however great their desire." **46**

Concealing the exultation he felt at this order, the lad replied promptly:

"I will make arrangements to leave camp at once, general, and shall need but one other man, provided we may have horses. There are two routes by which the Yankees can leave the fort; my comrade can watch one, while I look after the other, and the first to detect any movement of the enemy will report at once to General Fraser."

"Very well. Go to Colonel Baume; he will furnish you with horses and man, and you can be off by the time it is fairly dark."

"Yes, sir," and the lad hurried away.

Twenty minutes later he rode out of the lines, accompanied by a stolid Hessian whom he had chosen as his attendant. They went down the south road until arriving at another running westward. Here he stationed his comrade, saying to him in his own tongue: **47**

"Stay here until I return, unless the Yankees come along in full force, in which case you are to ride to camp as fast as your horse will go, and tell your colonel. Do you understand?"

He grunted an assent, and Ira rode off to the east, saying to himself: "You'll see no Yankee force to-night, my good fellow."

A mile further on he came to a farm-house, up to which he rode boldly, and dismounted. Three rapid knocks on the door brought an immediate response.

"I'll join you in a moment," a voice said, and

soon a stalwart form stepped from the darkness within into the darkness without. Approaching the horseman, he peered into his face an instant, and then exclaimed:

“Ho, Ira! It is you! Well, what is up?”

“I must go into the fort to-night,” the rider explained in low tones. “I will leave my horse here. What is the password?”

The man placed his lips to the lad’s ear, and whispered the information he desired. **48**

“All right,” he replied. “I will be back in a few hours.”

He then gave the reins of his steed into the farmer’s hands, and, passing around the house, crossed an open field to the nearest thicket, into which he plunged. When he emerged from the timber he was near the fortress. Boldly approaching the sentinel, he replied to the challenge by giving the password, and in a few minutes was in the presence of General St. Clair.

The officer’s greeting was a warm one. Grasping the newcomer by the hand, he exclaimed:

“I am glad to see you——” here he hesitated a moment, and then went on with a grimace, as though the name was a disagreeable one to him —“Ira; but I fear your coming means bad news for me. What is it?”

“I had no time to find my messengers,” he began, “so came myself. The engineers of Burgoyne have succeeded in hoisting six of their best cannon up the north side of Sugar Loaf Mountain. To-morrow morning they will be run across to the south edge, and the fort will be at their mercy. You must retreat to-night.”

“If I do, it means leaving my cannon and stores for the enemy,” the general growled, more to himself than to his visitor. “Tell me how they did it? I thought such a plan impossible.” **49**

Rapidly the young scout described the methods used to accomplish the feat, and added:

“I also have another item of news. General Fraser’s division is in readiness to pursue you, if you attempt to leave the fortification. I have been sent here to see that you do not get away,” and he and the officer laughed. “The general has orders to put his troops in your rear in the morning.”

“Hum! hum!” the commander muttered. “That does look as though I must move quickly, if I am to save my men for future fighting,” and he relapsed into deep thought.

In silence Ira waited. At length the general spoke.

“If I could have until to-morrow night, I believe it might be possible to slip away with men, guns, stores, everything. Is there any way by which the movements of the red-coats could be delayed, say for twenty-four hours?”

It was a full minute before the lad replied: Then he said slowly: “If those cannon on the mountain were disabled, they would have to spend another day hoisting up a second battery, and in all **50**

probability General Fraser would not be sent to your rear until the guns were in position."

"Exactly," broke in the officer eagerly, "if those guns can be spiked to-night, I am likely to secure the delay I need. Now the question is, can it be done? Are those cannon under guard?"

"I think not," his visitor replied. "The British camp is so close to the foot of the hill, and as you are not supposed to know that the guns are on its summit, they have not deemed such a precaution necessary."

"It is worth trying," the commander said half to himself. "If I can only find a man who is willing to undertake the job," and again he relapsed into deep thought.

"I will undertake it, general."

"You?"

"Yes. I believe I can do it without much risk. Once I climbed that hill from this side, just for the pleasure of saying I had accomplished the feat. I am sure I can do it again. Give me the implements needed; say nothing to any one, and I will make the attempt. Two cries of a night-hawk from the south edge of the mountain, twice repeated, will be token that I have succeeded. Three cries, unrepeated, is that I have failed. There will be time for you to slip away with your men if I am obliged to report a failure." **51**

During several minutes they discussed the matter, General St. Clair offering to send others to perform the task, and the lad insisting that he be allowed to try it. In the end the officer yielded, and, with a hammer and files in his pockets, the young scout left the fortress.

There was no difficulty in gaining the steep side of the mountain. It was there the hazardous work began. For some moments Ira studied the rocks as best he could in the darkness. Finally he gave an exclamation of delight. He was certain he had hit upon the place where he began his ascent several months previous.

Up the cliff, using hands and feet in every crevice he could find, grasping narrow ledge, or projecting root as he came to them, stopping to rest at intervals, he clambered slowly on. A half-hour passed, and then the toiler's efforts were rewarded. He gained a ledge from which he found safe footing to the summit.

Drawing a deep breath of relief, he sped noiselessly to the opposite side. Finding the guns unguarded, he commenced the work which he believed meant so much to his friends in the fort. Wrapping a bit of cloth about a file, and placing his folded handkerchief over the top to deaden the sound, he drove it into the touch-hole of the nearest cannon. **52**

The task accomplished, he listened attentively. There was no token that his work had attracted the attention of any one in the British camp six hundred feet below. Congratulating himself on such supposed fact, he moved on to the next gun, and set firmly a second file. Again he listened, but could hear nothing.

"The sound does not reach the camp," he said to

himself, and as rapidly as possible disabled the other four cannon. Straightening up from the labor, he found himself face to face with the captain of the engineer corps, who demanded:

“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Rejoicing that he had not yet been recognized, Ira, with quick wit, replied:

“I am watching the guns.”

“I was not aware we posted any guard here to-night,” the officer said sharply. “Unless you can give a better reason for being here I shall run you through,” and there could be heard a certain rustling which told that he was drawing his sword from its scabbard. 53

“The general sent me,” the lad replied, not thinking it worth while to explain what general.

“Oh!” the officer stammered. “I—I didn’t think a sentinel was necessary here. I received no orders to that effect.”

“That is nothing to me,” was the cool reply.

This answer appeared to anger the engineer.

“I am sure I heard a hammering up here,” he declared.

“Very likely. I was pounding on the guns. A man must do something to keep himself awake.”

The answer apparently satisfied the officer, for he turned to retrace his steps down the mountain side. After going a few paces, however, he paused to say:

“You may tell the general that I came up here myself to see if the guns were all right.”

“That is fair,” the young scout agreed, wondering if the officer had recognized him.

He stood motionless until every sound of footsteps had died away. Then he hurried across the summit and gave utterance to the cries which told the listening Yankee general that he had succeeded in his undertaking. 54

But that gratified officer little fancied that the lad was even then mentally asking if it was safe for him to return to the British camp.

55

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAM ACROSS THE CREEK.

Ira did not stop to debate the question there on the mountain top. He had a more difficult problem, which was, how to descend in safety to the plain below.

Down the slanting shelf to the face of the cliff, he slowly groped his way; and then lowered himself inch by inch down the rocks. Sometimes he was forced to cling with his hands to a bush or sapling while he swung to and fro in search of a footing. Often he was forced to guess what was below him, and, at a venture, drop himself down

where he believed he would find a crevice large enough for his feet. It was many minutes, and to him it must have seemed hours, before he gained a place from which he could descend without danger.

Once at the foot of the hill he ran quickly through the woods, to the place where he had left his horse. The farmer answered his summons quickly, and the lad was astonished when once within the house, to learn that it was only a few minutes past midnight. **56**

“I will sleep until three o’clock, Master Lewis, if you don’t mind calling me at that time.”

“I can do that much for one who has been through what you have,” the farmer replied with a significant glance at his guest’s clothing.

Ira smiled. “My garments are a bit soiled and torn,” he admitted, “but I hope they will look a little better before I go back to camp.”

Then a woman’s voice could be heard from the next room. “Let him go into the front chamber, pa, and send his clothes here by you. I will clean and mend them while he sleeps.”

“Thank you, good mistress,” the lad cried. “It is a case where a woman’s hands can help me out of an awkward fix. Under your skilful fingers I shall be able to return to the British encampment without a trace of the work I have done this night for the Cause.”

Nor was he disappointed. It would have required sharp eyes, indeed, to have discovered any evidences of mountain climbing upon his clothing when he dressed himself a little before dawn.

A sharp ride down the road brought him to the place where he had left the Hessian. He found the fellow fast asleep in a thicket, his horse hitched to a near-by tree. Waking him, he asked in well-feigned anger: **57**

“Hey, there, Hans, how long has this been going on?”

The trooper arose, rubbed his eyes sleepily, and stammered:

“I—I had only just laid down, sir. I knew it was most morning, when the Yankees wouldn’t be likely to come now, and I was so tired.”

“How many times did I ride back here during the night, then?” Ira demanded sternly.

The man looked puzzled for a moment, and then answered boldly:

“Three times, sir. I saw you every time.”

The young scout laughed heartily. “There is an old saying in our language, Hans, to the effect that ‘a lie well stuck to is as good as the truth.’ It may prove so in your case. Mount, and we’ll ride back to camp.”

The sun was rising when they passed the pickets, and the first person they saw beyond the guards was the captain of the engineer corps. He was viewing his work of the previous day. Seeing the horsemen, he crossed the **58**

enclosure to meet them. Understanding his purpose, and eager for the interview, Ira reined his horse down to a walk. They soon met, and the officer was the first to speak.

“You have taken an early ride this morning, Master Le Geyt,” he said.

“It was an all-night job,” the scout replied in a friendly tone. “Hans and I have been five or six miles out into the country doing special work for the king. I am on my way now to report to the general,” and, putting spurs to his horse, he, followed by his attendant, rode to the tent of the commander.

There he gave his steed over to the care of the trooper, who went off to his own quarters. Watching him, while he stood waiting to be admitted to the presence of General Burgoyne, Ira saw that the engineer halted and held quite an extended conversation with him.

“It is certain he thought he saw me on the hill,” the lad muttered; “but he won’t be so sure of it after talking with the Hessian. On finding that the guns have been spiked, he’ll be in such a muddle that there’ll be nothing said about our meeting.”

This prophecy was not quite correct. There was a single exception. The engineer did mention the affair to Ira himself. Calling on him that evening, after the second battery had been hoisted up on the mountain, he first enjoined the utmost secrecy, and then said: **59**

“I had a peculiar experience last night in connection with that first battery. About ten o’clock I was enjoying a smoke, when I heard a muffled click, click, up the mountain side. Wondering what was going on, I climbed up, and found a fellow of about your size standing by the cannon. When I asked his business, he said he was guarding the guns; that the general had sent him there. I was certain then that it was you, and felt quite sore because I had failed to post a guard. Hoping to put myself right with the commander, I said that he should tell the general I was up there to see that the cannon were safe. He promised to do so, and I returned to the camp. The first inkling I had that it wasn’t you, came when I saw you and the Hessian riding into the lines. I never once suspected it might be some blasted Yankee, until my men reported that the guns had been spiked. To think that I talked with the rascal, and yet he was sharp enough to hoodwink me, fairly makes me boil. Why, I one time had my sword drawn, and could have run him through, but yet let him go. Don’t tell any one that I have been such a fool.”

“You may be sure I shan’t mention the incident to a single soul,” was the truthful promise. **60**

Elated as Ira was at his own escape from detection, he rejoiced even more because General St. Clair had gained the delay in the movements of the enemy which he had so much desired. General Burgoyne, when he found he could not command the fort until a second battery had been placed on the hill, countermanded the order given General Fraser to advance his division to the rear of the Continentals.

It was not until a Tory, living on the Hubbardtown road, came into the camp in the small hours of July fifth, with the startling tidings that the Yankees were running off bag and baggage past his house, that a new order was issued for the waiting forces to move. As the bearer of the news offered to act as guide, the young scout was not disturbed, and, therefore, it was not until after sunrise that he knew pursuit had been made. He waited in much anxiety for the outcome, and was filled with dismay when at noon a report came that General Fraser had overtaken and defeated the retreating Yankees, capturing enormous quantities of ammunition and stores.

He learned the real facts about the battle, however, a little later, and from the lips of Dan Cushing. He had gone to meet his aids in a deep cave on a rocky hill a mile or two below the British encampment, and arrived there just in time to meet Dan, who had come from where the engagement took place. **61**

“Don’t you worry, Ira, ’bout the braggin’ those red-coats are doin’ in the camp,” the boy began. “They’ll make a mole-hill look like a mountain any time, ’specially if it’s in their favor. Now, the facts are these, an’ I have them from some of the fellers who were in the fight: General St. Clair left Colonel Seth Warren’s regiment in the rear to look out for the British if they came chasin’ down after him. He was on the Hubbardtown and Castleton road when General Fraser overtook him. To give the main portion of the forces a chance to escape, the Colonel turned and pitched into the red-coats. What’s more, he would have whipped them, had not a reserved force of Hessians come up in the nick of time. That turned the tide in the British favor, and our men had to run, but they got away as did the others ahead of them. Our people are tearin’ up the bridges, an’ droppin’ great trees ’cross the road as they go, an’ I’m thinkin’ General Burgoyne will go mighty slow ’tween here an’ Fort Edward.”

“I have a scheme in mind that will do more to hinder him than destroying bridges or felling trees,” the leader said when the story was finished; “but we can’t carry it out until we are several miles below here, near our next meeting-place. When you move down to it, provide yourselves with pick-axes, shovels, and iron bars. I’ll get a day off in some way, and though we will have as hard and as big a job as we ever undertook, I doubt if we’ll ever do another turn that will mean more for the Cause,” and with this mystifying statement he hurried away. **62**

A week passed. During that time General Burgoyne garrisoned the abandoned fort at Ticonderoga, and moved his main force down the Hubbardtown road. His progress was necessarily slow, since he was compelled to clear the way, and rebuild bridges before he could make any headway. At length he arrived at a passage between two hills, so narrow and so completely blocked with logs and bowlders, that it was evident his engineering corps had at least a two-days task to remove the obstruction. Here his patience became exhausted, and he sent for Ira.

“Master Le Geyt,” he said when the young scout **63**

was in his presence, “I am tired of this snail’s pace at which I am obliged to crawl. Is there not some other route I could follow, and so get rid of these obstacles the rebels have thrown in my way?”

The guide shook his head. “Not without a long detour which would consume more time than clearing the way,” he declared. “There is a big swamp on ahead, and the only hope of getting through it is to keep along this road.”

“Is there not at least some way we can get around these hills?” continued the exasperated commander. “Even if we are twenty-four hours doing it we shall save time. Captain Howell of my engineering corps declares it will take two days, if not longer, to remove these latest obstructions we have encountered.”

It suddenly occurred to Ira that here might be his opportunity to get a few hours to himself, as he had been hoping to do, therefore he replied quickly:

“I might take a tramp around the hills and see. It’s worth looking into, sir.”

“I wish you would, and take Captain Howell with you. He can readily reckon the length of time required to clear the way.”

This was something on which the lad had not counted; but if disturbed by it, he gave no sign.

“Very well, sir,” he replied. “I will see the captain at once, and get away as soon as I can.” **64**

“It is odd,” he said to himself while searching for the officer, “that I should for the second time be forced to fool that man. But I must do it, if I’m to accomplish the job on hand, and it’s time it was attended to.”

He had formed no definite plan of action when he found the captain, and they began their tramp together through the forest. It was just after noon, and they went to the eastward, as the hill on that side of the road seemed more likely, from its shape, to have a pass through it.

This proved to be a fact. After walking two miles they arrived at a narrow valley, through which ran a small brook. Following this they came into some lowlands, over which they made their way to the road at a point where it wound into a swamp heavily wooded.

“We are beyond the great barricade,” the captain announced as they stepped out upon the road.

“Yes,” his companion admitted. “Do you think the route we have come over is feasible for the army?”

“It can be made so with less trouble than is possible on the other road. But let us go into the swamp a short distance; so far as I can see the way is open.” **65**

“But you can’t see very far,” Ira replied. “Two rods away the road twists entirely out of sight. To my mind, it is just the place where the Yankees would be likely to put in their obstructions thick and fast.”

“We can at least look at it.”

They were soon at the turn, and found, just beyond, was a huge pile of fallen trees. Over these they clambered and continued on to the next bend, where was a second collection of fallen timber.

“I wonder if it is like this throughout the entire swamp?” the officer growled as he and his comrade made their way with difficulty over the second pile of hewn trees to the clear road beyond.

“I believe so,” the young scout answered.

This surmise proved correct; over more than a score of such stacks of timber they were forced to crawl before arriving at the lower edge of the swamp. By this time the sun had set, and with a shrug of his shoulders the captain said:

“I’m too tired to go back over those barricades to-night. Isn’t there some place on this side where we can find shelter?” **66**

His guide was silent a moment as though thinking, and then replied: “Yes. Come on!”

Instead of continuing on the road as the officer had expected, the lad struck into the woods on the left, where the ground was still of a swampy nature. But, leaping from log to log, he led the way with a rapidity that made it difficult for the Britisher to keep pace with him, and impossible to carry on any conversation.

After traveling for a few rods they lost sight of the road, and then, instead of decaying logs, they found trees which had been felled so that they lay end to end, clearly to furnish a firm footing for any who wished to go deeper into the forest. If the engineer noted the singularity of this circumstance, he had no chance to comment upon it, for Ira was still a rod or more in the lead. At length, however, he stopped and allowed the captain to come up with him. They were then on the edge of a sluggish creek of considerable width and depth.

“What does this mean?” the captain demanded. “What have you come here for, jumping from log to log like a frog? We cannot ford this stream.”

“We don’t need to,” his guide replied. “We’ll go down a bit,” and as he spoke the lad bent over, searching with his hands until he found a rope. Pulling on this, he drew out from under the overhanging bushes, a small canoe. **67**

“Get in,” he said, holding it steady for his companion to embark.

“You have been here before,” Captain Howells remarked as he sat down in the light craft.

“Certainly, or I should not have known the way.”

As he stepped in, cast off the rope, and took up the paddle, the young scout added:

“Of course I wasn’t sure of finding the boat here. Some one else might have used it, or a freshet carried it away. There was a risk in coming; but this course will take us to the nearest house where we can pass the night, so I concluded to run the chances.”

He was already paddling down the stream, which soon turned sharply to the eastward, and a little farther on plunged into a narrow gorge with a low, hollow sound that could now be plainly heard.

“There are falls ahead,” the engineer cried in some alarm.

“Yes; but we shall not go over them. Look on the right side, and you will see a log cabin at the foot of the south cliff. We shall stop there.” **68**

In another moment he dexterously swung the canoe into a little basin just below the hut, exclaiming:

“Here we are!”

Springing out, he steadied the craft while his comrade leaped ashore. Securing the boat he led the way into the building, saying:

“This was built a few years ago by a half-crazy old fellow who gained a livelihood by hunting and fishing. Since he died it has been public property for those who know of it. I have been here now and then with others on ’coon hunts. We’ll gather some fir boughs for a bed, and it won’t be a bad place in which to pass the night.”

From their knapsacks they carried they first satisfied their hunger, and then collected the material for beds. In doing this it was necessary to approach near the place where the creek made its downward plunge, and Ira said carelessly:

“How easy it would be to dam the stream here.”

“Yes; but if you did that it would flood the whole swamp.”

“How deep?”

“That would depend on your dam. As the water is now standing on the surface nearly everywhere, you would get nearly a foot of water for each twelve inches dam.” **69**

“Four feet here then, would give the same depth through the forest?”

“Practically, unless there is some other place where the water can run off.”

“You are up in all these things,” the young scout continued with a laugh. “I fancy you can tell to an hour, how long it would take for the water to rise until it overflowed the dam again.”

“Not exactly,” the engineer confessed, “since I do not know the exact dimensions of the swamp. But the stream is deep, and the land low. It would fill fast, and in a few days be impassable.”

“There isn’t much stuff here with which to make a dam,” Ira said in a careless tone.

“Oh, yes there is,” the captain insisted. “Give me a half-dozen men, and in a day I could build all that would be needed.”

“I’d like to know how you would do it,” Ira cried.

“No trouble at all,” retorted the officer, warming up to his subject. “Do you see this big tree? I’d cut that down so it would fall across the gorge. **70**

Then I'd go on the other side, and fell the big hemlock. It could be done in such a way that it would interlock with the other, and the two trunks, when trimmed, would give you the timbers against which you could place your barricade. That I would build of posts, driving them side by side across the bed of the stream. It won't take many, and after stuffing the cracks with leaves and moss from the forest, I would pack in dirt and stones from the hillside until it was water-tight. I wish I never had a harder job than that."

His comrade shook his head. "It is all in knowing how," he commented. "What would be easy for you, would be hard for some one else." And then the discussion was dropped for the time. But after they were lying on their rude beds, Ira suddenly raised his head to ask:

"I say, captain, suppose the Yankees should catch on to this thing."

"What thing?" the officer asked, quickly rising.

"Why, building a dam across the creek here. It would not only flood the swamp, but the road as well. We couldn't get the army along until the waters subsided."

"Bet your life we couldn't," the engineer replied. "It is a great scheme; but then a Yankee would never think of it," and he settled back on his bed.

Not so with his comrade. He appeared uneasy about something, and sat up. Then he arose and went to the door, fumbled with the bar that fastened it, as though making it more secure; in reality to remove it entirely. After this he went to the window and looked out. **71**

"What's the matter?" the officer asked sleepily.

"I can't get it out of my head about those Yankees coming here to-night to build that dam," was the reply. "I was now looking out to see if we could jump through the window if they should appear."

"Oh! that is all right. But how about getting up the sides of the gorge. Can we do that?"

"Yes, after a fashion. It is better than taking to the swamp in the night-time. I shall go that way, if needs must."

Ira now returned to his bed and lay down, but tossed restlessly about, which uneasiness his companion soon shared. At length they both dozed, but only to be awakened within a short time by the sound of voices on the river below them.

"There is the hut! Be careful, and keep well in to the bank, or we shall go down the falls!" one voice exclaimed.

"Hello! there's another canoe. Some one else is here!" another cried. **72**

"Hush! The red-coats may have a guard here, and we will be able to capture them," a third said in a lower tone.

Both sleepers were now awake; but Ira, for reasons of his own, kept quiet, and breathed

heavily. The next instant the captain leaped to his feet, and came noiselessly over to him. Shaking the lad vigorously, he whispered:

“Quick, Master Le Geyt! The Yankees have come, and we must run for it!”

The young scout arose, and the officer, running to the open window, jumped out, evidently expecting his companion to follow, as he ran toward the hill. At its foot he paused, and looked back. Several dark forms were near the cabin, and in another instant the door was burst open.

“There they go,” some one shouted, and then two or three guns were discharged.

One of the bullets whistled dangerously near the Britisher’s head, and, believing he had been seen, he clambered on as stealthily as possible. Gaining the summit, he stopped again and listened. There were shouts to be heard, and lights at the hut; but no sound of any one following, and, concluding that his comrade had been killed or captured, the engineer plunged on down the other side of the ridge, disappearing in the thicket at its base. 73

Could he have looked back, it would have been possible to see Ira shaking hands heartily with the six persons who came into the building, three of whom were his own comrades, and the others no less loyal to the Cause. Had he remained in hearing he would have heard Dan Cushing’s explanation:

“We were at the lower edge of the swamp-road, waitin’ for you, Ira, when we saw you comin’ along with that British officer. We hid until you came up, an’ heered him ask you ’bout a place to stay all night. I caught your sign ’fore you took to the swamp, an’ followed to the creek, findin’ the note you put in the tree ’fore the captain jined ye. When that had been read we knew what to do, an’ that red-coat has gone over the ridge as if the devil was after him!”

All laughed, and then Ira said:

“Let him go. He has done us a good turn, for he gave me some ideas about dam-building which we’ll make use of to-morrow.”

They were at the task early in the morning, following many of the suggestions of the British engineer. One of the men who had accompanied the lads had some practical knowledge of dam-building, however, and neatly hewed two edges of the posts before they were driven into place, thus securing joints that were almost water-tight. Heavy moss from the forest, and gravel brought in baskets from the hill-side, made up the filling, and before the workers sought their well-earned rest they knew that the water was rising. 74

The dam in the forest, which indirectly was to hinder the advance of the British army for days, had become an accomplished fact.

75

CHAPTER V.

THE SUSPICIOUS TORY.

At dawn on the following morning one thing was clear to every occupant of the old hut: The water was rising so rapidly that they would soon be compelled to vacate the building. Therefore, after breakfast, they looked about for a place in which to build a new shanty. After considerable discussion it was decided to put the structure on the heights across the creek.

There were two reasons for such decision. If the cabin was built there, it would be above the reach of the rising waters; and a small party at that point might protect the dam in case the British sent down a force to destroy it.

“It may be that Captain Howell will ask General Burgoyne to let him lead a company down here for the double purpose of rescuing me and preventing the building of a dam,” Ira said laughingly. “If so, we better be prepared for it. With the river between you and them, five on the hill could drive off any force he is likely to bring with him.”

“There are seven of us,” Late said quickly.

“True,” the lad admitted, “but there will soon be only five. When you have moved the stuff, I shall set off for the encampment, taking Dan with me as far as the swamp-road, for I count on sending him to Fort Edward with a report.”

An hour later the site for the new shelter had been selected, and the goods carried over. Then Ira and Dan embarked in one of the canoes, and paddled off up the swelling stream. The water had risen so high that the voyagers were able to push the light craft through the forest to a place where young Cushing could step directly out upon the highway. As he did so, he gazed over the increasing waters and said:

“Give us another twenty-four hours, Ira, an’ this road will be covered.”

“It looks so,” the latter replied, “and I think, by picking my way, I can push up the swamp to the north side.”

“You surely can by goin’ back to the creek, an’ runnin’ on that till it turns to the west. Hide your boat somewhere up that way, an’ you can come down to us any time you’ve a mind.”

“Very-well,” Ira answered; “but now for the message to General Schuyler. Here is a rough drawing of the road, the swamp, and the dam. I have written no description, and it will mean nothing to any one but you. Do you understand it.”

“It’s clear as a bell,” the lad admitted a moment later.

“Then you can explain it to the general. Tell him why we built the dam, and what we hope to accomplish by it. Give us two days more, and I see no way for the red-coats to pass the swamp while the dam holds.”

“That’s ’bout the size of it,” Dan replied grimly, “an’ no one will see it quicker than the general. ’Twas a lucky minute when it popped into your head, Ira,” and with this compliment he swung down the roads towards the fort.

Ira watched until he was out of sight, and then

paddled leisurely back to the creek. Up this he went to its westward bend, and, leaving it, glided through the woods as long as he found any depth of water. Then, picking up the light craft, he carried it to a point where the land rose into something like a hill.

“The water can’t rise much farther than this,” he thought, glancing back over the route he had followed. **78**

Concealing his burden among the bushes, he strode on towards the camp, arriving there a little before noon, and going directly to the tent of the commander.

“Master Le Geyt!” exclaimed that officer as he saw his visitor, “I had decided you were in the rebels’ hands.”

“Hasn’t Captain Howell come back?” the young scout asked, eager to learn all he might about that officer before telling the story of his prolonged absence.

“Yes,” the general replied; “but he can explain nothing.”

“How is that?”

“Last night he crawled over the barricade on which his corps was at work, and fell unconscious among the men. They brought him into camp and called the surgeon. He examined him, finding one leg broken. Evidently he had crawled many miles in that condition, and was nearly exhausted. When did you part with him?”

“Has he not been able to tell you any thing?” asked the lad, giving no heed to General Burgoyne’s question.

“He has been in a delirium ever since, and we can get nothing from him save fragments of a story. He has spoken of the Yankees, your capture, and his fall. We could only suppose that you two had run against some of the rebels during the tramp; that you had been captured, he got away, and was injured during his flight. We shall have to depend on your report to straighten matters out.” **79**

“There is not much to tell,” the lad replied. “We stopped in an abandoned hut for the night, and were awakened by the sound of voices. He jumped from the cabin window and got away; but half a dozen rebels entered the building before I could escape. I stayed there until this morning, when they let me go, deciding, perhaps, that I was not worth keeping.”

“You were fortunate indeed. I presume, then, you discovered no road around the rebel barricades?”

“No,” Ira replied. “They increase rather than diminish in number, and below here a few miles is a huge swamp, which, for some reason, is flooding rapidly. By the time we arrive there I believe it will be well-nigh impassable.”

“What a way in which to fight!” exclaimed the officer in disgust. “If they would only come out in the open and give me a chance I would soon scatter them like chaff before the wind. But here they are blocking the way, exhausting my stores, forcing me to change all my plans of campaign; **80**

it is enough to make a saint angry!” and by this time he had worked himself into such a rage that the hearer was glad, on the plea of being tired, to retire to his own quarters.

When he next saw the general the latter was in a better mood. He had sent for the scout, and when Ira entered the tent he found there a young fellow, scarcely older than himself, to whom the officer at once introduced him.

“Master Le Geyt,” he said, “this is Master Bowen, a courier like yourself, which is a bond that ought to make you fast friends. He has come from Quebec bringing me good news. In a short time Colonel St. Leger is to leave that city for Oswego. From there he will march against Fort Stanwix,[4] and, capturing that, sweep down the valley of the Mohawk, driving the rebels before him, until he joins me at Albany. Now how large a force remains at Fort Stanwix?”

Startled as Ira was by these tidings, he nevertheless replied calmly:

“The last I knew, General Burgoyne, there were two hundred men in the fort. Of course I can’t tell you whether any reinforcements have been sent there within a week or two.”

It was the number that caught the general’s ear. **81**

“Do you hear that, Master Bowen?” he cried. “Only two hundred men there, and how large a force did you say St. Leger has?”

“Seven hundred regulars, and one thousand Indians,” the courier answered.

“Seventeen hundred in all!” the officer announced with exultation. “We shall hear great things from him I do not doubt, and the rebels, being caught between our two forces, must be crushed to powder. Ha! ha!” and he laughed loudly.

For some time he discussed the matter with his young visitors, and then dismissed them. Ira took Master Bowen, as a matter of courtesy, to his own tent, where he bade him make himself at home.

“I shall have to come and go on my regular duties,” he explained; “but you are welcome to all I have so long as you remain with us.”

“It will be but a few hours,” the courier replied. **82**
“The authorities in Quebec are eager to know what progress our army is making, and as soon as the general can prepare his report I shall start on my return. I hope it may be some time to-night. I can then reach the lake, where I have a sailboat, in time for the morning breeze.”

For reasons of his own Ira stuck close to his new friend during the rest of the day, and when the hour came for the latter to depart, asked permission of the general to accompany him a mile or two on his way.

“Certainly,” that officer replied. “I said you would be fast friends, and the fact that you are loath to part with him proves it. Go as far as the lake, if you wish.”

“Thank you,” the lad replied, and he and the courier left the lines together.

When they had traveled no more than two miles on the trail Ira bade his acquaintance good-bye, and turned back towards the camp. He did not enter it, however. Passing to the eastward, he hurried through the hills to the place where he had left his canoe the day previous. Carrying the boat to the waters, which had risen many inches since he was there, he embarked and pulled with feverish haste down to the dam. Landing, he climbed up to the new Shelter and, arousing the inmates, astonished them by his sudden appearance and startling news.

"Quick, Late and Joe," he began. "You must go down to the fort at once. I am sending both, for it may be that General Schuyler will want you to go on to Fort Stanwix. Tell him that a Colonel St. Leger with seven hundred regular troops and one thousand Indians will land at Oswego about August first. His purpose is to capture the fort, and then to sweep down the Mohawk valley to Albany, where he hopes to join forces with Burgoyne. As I have said, if he wants you to go to the fort with the tidings, do so. I can get along for a while with one helper. Should you meet Dan on his way back, let him return to the fort with you, learn the general's plans, and bring me word. I must know what is going on entirely along our lines, if I am to do my work here intelligently. Tell Dan I will be here the second night from this to hear his report." **83**

While the messengers were preparing for their journey, he turned to the three men who, after helping build the dam, had remained to help guard it, saying:

"Captain Howell got back to the camp, but with a broken leg and in a high fever. His condition is such that he is not likely to take any interest in military affairs for several days. Therefore the British officers know nothing about the dam, and it is safe. You may go back to your homes, if you so please." **84**

Ira waited until the five continentals had disappeared down the south ridge. Then he closed the cabin, went back to his canoe, and began his return to the encampment.

Entering the enclosure from the same direction he had departed a few hours previous, his absence created no suspicion, and soon after midnight he was sleeping soundly in his own bed.

During the following day the engineers succeeded in removing the obstructions from the narrow pass, and the entire army advanced among the hills to the margin of the swamp. Here they were again stopped, not only by great barricades, but by a flood over the road-bed to the depth of at least three feet deep. The uncertain footing either side the way, the many turns in the road-bed, the numerous barricades, and the depth of the water, all forced the impatient commander to halt, while he sent forth men in every direction to learn, if possible, the cause of the flood.

It created no surprise when Ira joined that company which went to the north end of the great swamp, and when they, wearied by a long tramp and fruitless search, turned to retrace their steps, no one noted that he lagged behind. **85**

When night fell he was far enough in the rear to make his way to the hidden canoe and paddle off among the trees towards the creek. Once in this watercourse, he made rapid progress, and soon was in the cabin listening to Dan's tale.

"First," he said, "I'll tell you 'bout my own trip. After leavin' you I struck out pretty smart for the fort. Reachin' it, I found the general away, so had to wait till the next mornin' 'fore I could see him. He understood your plan at once, an' was mighty tickled with it. He told me to say that in two weeks we could let the water off, an' 'low the red-coats to come on as fast as they might. He'd be ready for them."

"What are they doing?" Ira asked eagerly. "Are they strengthening the fort?"

"No," was the answer. "The general has chosen Bemis Heights, 'cross the Hudson, as the place to get in his work, and Kosciusko, that Polish officer, is plannin' the fortifications. It's there our troops will fight it out with Burgoyne."

"General Schuyler counts on abandoning Fort Edward, then?" Ira remarked musingly.

"Yes, when the British get near enough to chase him. He'll keep just out of their way till he's enticed them 'cross the river. Then he'll wallop 'em." **86**

"What forces has he now?" was the next query.

"His own, an' General St. Clair's," Dan replied, keeping tally on his fingers. "Then there's General Benjamin Lincoln with the New England troops, General Nicholas Herkimer an' eight hundred militia, Colonel Daniel Morgan with his rifle corps, and Colonel Benedict Arnold with twelve hundred regulars, more than ten thousand men in all. We'll whip the red-coats yet, Ira."

"I hope so," was the hearty rejoinder. "Now tell me what has been done about Fort Stanwix."

"I was on my way back," the lad explained, "when I met the boys an' went to the fort with them. The general was quite stirred up by the news; but, noddin' to me, said, 'Tell Ira there's time to get plenty of reinforcements up there.' Then, turnin' to Late and Joe, he went on, 'I'll have General Herkimer an' his troops on the way to-morrow, an' Colonel Arnold with his regulars shall follow.' He looked at me agin, an' asked, 'Did you take that in, Dan?' An' when I said, 'Yes, sir,' he continued, 'Put that in your report to Ira, too, an' give him my love,' all of which I've done accordin' to orders."

"Exactly, Dan. No one could have done it better," his companion replied almost gleefully. "But I must be off, or we'll have a troop of Britishers looking me up. I'll drop in on you as often as possible." **87**

"Don't worry 'bout me," was the reply. "I can stay here a week alone, if it means in the end some good work for the Cause."

Before arriving at the British encampment the young scout met half a dozen soldiers who were looking for him. The explanation that he had but just got out of the swamp was deemed sufficient

to account for his delay, and the entire party went back together.

Two weeks later a heavy thunder-storm raged. The rain literally fell in torrents for hours. The first effect was to swell the flood in the swamp; but on the following day it subsided with great rapidity. In a single day the road-bed could be seen above the water, and General Burgoyne, with much delight, ordered his corps of engineers to begin the work of clearing away the obstructions.

Ira at once surmised that the dam was gone, and that night received the full particulars from Dan. **88**

“First the rain swelled the creek,” he said, “an’ poured over the dam with a noise like thunder. Then trees, uprooted by the wind, came down, and went agin the timbers with a deafenin’ crash. They piled up for a while, and then, all at once, the strain became too great. The dam gave way, an’ water, trees an’ timbers went down the gorge together. I took the liberty to scurry off to the fort as soon as it happened, an’ told the general. He said ’twas all right. Let the army come ’long as fast as they could, he was ready for them.”

“It will be some days before they reach there,” Ira said, curtly.

In this he was correct. It was more than a week before the British army reached Fort Edward, and then they found it, as they had the fort at Ticonderoga, abandoned. General Schuyler, with all his forces, stores, and guns, had crossed the Hudson to Bemis Heights.

On the river bank that night Dan and Ira had a brief interview.

“We are here at last,” Ira began.

“Yes, but it took you twenty-four days to come twenty-six miles,” the other retorted drily. “I reckon it is the most remarkable journey on record.” **89**

A few days after General Burgoyne had established his head-quarters in the abandoned fort, he sent for his young scout.

“Here is some one you will be glad to meet, Master Le Geyt,” was his greeting. “A relative of yours, I believe.”

Ira’s face blanched as he turned to meet a man he had never seen before. At a loss for words, he could only gaze at the fellow, a tall, gaunt man of sixty years or more, who promptly asked:

“Be you Ira Le Geyt?”

“Yes.”

“Son of Hiram Le Geyt over on the Mohawk?”

“Yes.”

For a moment the questioner gazed at him from head to foot, and then blurted out:

“You don’t look like him!”

90

CHAPTER VI.
THE BEND OF THE WALLOOMSAC.

Not a little startled by the words of the stranger, Ira glanced at General Burgoyne to see what impression they had made upon him. Seeing a look of amusement, rather than suspicion, on the officer's face, he grew bolder; but was still at loss what reply to make, when he saw a piece of paper lying upon a table in front of the general, on which a name was written in an irregular, scrawling hand.

Instantly the lad recognized it as that of a zealous Tory in an adjoining state, of whom he had heard much. In a twinkling he understood that it was the name of the man before him, who had sent it in to the British commander when he sought an interview.

The glance, the reading, the conclusion, were as a flash, and the next minute he was gazing smilingly at the visitor, as he said:

"I am surprised that you don't know me, Uncle Horace; but then, it is a long time since we met."

"Do you know me?" the stranger exclaimed, every line of doubt on his face changing to an expression of delight. **91**

"Of course I do," the young scout replied confidently. "You are Horace Lyman of Bennington, who——"

"Who married your ma's sister," the Tory interrupted. "It's queer you look so different than you did when over at my house, but, as you say, that is some time ago."

"It must have been before father and I went to Europe," Ira went on boldly.

"So it was, and a year over there must have changed your looks, though I begin to see the old face now. How is your pa and ma, and the younger children?"

"All well when I last heard from them," was the reply. "How is Aunt and Cousin Fred?"

"Your aunt is poorly, very poorly," Master Lyman answered. "Sometimes I think she is a little bit out here," and he touched his forehead, "for she persists that the rebels will in the end gain their independence. But Fred, he's all right, physically and mentally. He has done some good work in the last week or two, about which I have been telling the general, and now he wants to enlist in the king's service. That is one reason why I am over here to-day."

"And I have promised to give the matter my consideration," General Burgoyne remarked, as though growing impatient with his visitors' family affairs. "If you will take a turn about the fort for an hour or two, Master Lyman, I will then tell you what I can do in regard to both matters you have spoken about," and he bowed him from the room. **92**

Turning to Ira, he said:

"Before I give your relative a definite reply, I

must talk with you about the revelation he has made, and the favor he desires. You have been in Bennington, Master Le Geyt?"

"Yes, sir, two or three years ago."

"Do you know where is located the inn known as the 'State's Arms' house? I mean its position in the village, and its relation to the other public buildings?"

"Yes, sir. It stands on the summit of the hill, near the church," and the young scout rapidly described the town, its surroundings, and its approaches, wondering all the while what could be his commander's reason for this information.

"I learn through your uncle," the general said, **93**
"that the rebels are gathering large quantities of ammunition and stores there. He believes I can make an easy capture of them. Your cousin Fred, as you call him, has been keeping watch over the doings in the town and the neighborhood. Now in your judgment, how large a force of men would be necessary to make the raid on Bennington?"

"Would it not be better for me to go back with Uncle Horace, and look around?" Ira suggested, hoping to gain time in which to warn the people of the danger that threatened them.

"I was going to ask that of you," the general replied. "According to your relative, the stores are still being brought in, and it will be well for us to defer our raid until they have finished the work. But there is another part of Master Lyman's tale which greatly interests me. He declares that there is an opportunity for me to secure from the neighboring farms, horses in sufficient numbers to equip a regiment of cavalry. If this can be done, it would give me a great advantage over the rebels. I would, therefore, like to have you spend a few days in that locality looking carefully into the matter. In such task you may find occasion to employ your cousin, and thus learn whether he can be of further value to us as guide, courier, or staff officer. It is the latter position your uncle desires for him."

"When does Uncle Horace intend to return **94**
home?" questioned the scout, still thinking how he could serve his friends and save the stores.

"To-morrow. I believe."

"I will be ready to go with him," Ira said, rising to take his leave.

"May fortune favor you," were the parting words of the general.

Though the lad saw Master Lyman upon the walls of the fort, he did not think it wise to seek another interview with him. Something might arise in their conversation to awaken the suspicions of the Tory as to his identity. When in Bennington, some months previous, he had, by the merest chance, learned of the royalist, and that he had a son Fred, who was as ardent a supporter of the king as the father. This information had served him a good turn; but while he really meant to accompany the man to Bennington, he had no intention of putting himself in a position where either husband, wife,

or son would be likely to discover he was not the real Ira.

Leaving it, therefore, for General Burgoyne to explain to the visitor the plans which had been decided upon, the young scout went into his own tent to devise, if possible, some way by which the purpose of the British commander could be thwarted. 95

When night came he slipped out of the fort, and went over to the place where he had arranged to meet Dan Cushing. He found the boy in waiting, and after a brief conversation with him, did what he had not expected to do when he left the British camp. At the risk of being seen by some sharp-eyed picket, or more alert Indian, he, in company with Dan, crossed the river and entered the Continental lines.

For an hour he and his comrade were closeted with General Schuyler, and then the two lads came forth, Ira to make his way back to his quarters in the fort, and Dan to mount a horse when, after a long detour to the south of Fort Edward, he was to ride toward Bennington.

Not far from nine o'clock the following day Master Lyman and Ira Le Geyt left the fort, and, taking the nearest route for Bennington, rode leisurely along.

"I am sure you will find Fred of great help to you in this work," Master Lyman said, "and a good word from you will surely give him the place he wants on the general's staff." 96

"He prefers that to the position of scout or courier?" the latter questioned, more to keep up appearances than for any other reason.

"Yes," the Tory replied emphatically. "If he is only a scout or courier he must wear his ordinary dress, but if put on the general's staff, with the rank of a lieutenant or captain, he would have the regular uniform, and that is what Fred wants. Ever since he was in Quebec last fall he has just been about crazy to get on some regimentals."

"And yet he might be of more service in ordinary clothes," Ira said grimly.

"Yes, and run a bigger risk. The reason Fred sticks for a place on the staff of the general is, that there won't be as much danger, as in the regular service. There'll be more honor and less fighting."

"I've known others to choose the humbler place because it called for more dangerous work," the young scout said in the same grim tone.

The Tory looked at him sharply. "Do you question Fred's courage?" he demanded.

"How can I, until I see it put to the test?" was the demure response. "I was merely thinking of the difference between Fred's view and mine. I am a scout because it gives me an opportunity to render a greater service." 97

The Tory scowled, but made no reply, and soon the conversation turned to other matters. At noon they ate dinner with a friend of Master Lyman's, of whom the latter declared: "He is as true a servant of the king's as I am," a fact of

which Ira made mental note for future use.

At nightfall they were within a few miles of their destination, and by pushing on could have reached it before a very late hour; but Master Lyman evidently had another plan in mind. As they arrived at a road leading northward, he said:

“A mile or so beyond is the home of James Earle. I promised to stop on my way back from the fort and tell him what I had seen and heard. We’ll go there for the night.”

“It is for you to say,” his comrade replied, turning his horse to follow his leader.

A tract of woodland could be seen just ahead, and as if to pass through it as rapidly as possible, the Tory spurred his horse to a canter. As he disappeared beneath the shadow of the trees, Ira suddenly reined in his own steed, and, turning toward the road they had left, uttered the cry of a night hawk. Almost immediately it was repeated at no great distance in the rear, and, apparently satisfied, the lad dashed away after his companion. **98**

In a few minutes the two had arrived at Master Earle’s house, where they were warmly received, and provided with a hearty supper. When the meal had been eaten, the travelers and their host went into the front room of the house, leaving the women to clear away the table. Soon the two Tories were busily engaged discussing the situation and condition of the British army, and its prospects of success. Both were confident that in a few days they would hear of the overwhelming defeat of the Continentals.

Ira, left to himself, sauntered across the room to an open window, and looked out. The night, although there was no moon, was not very dark, and his sharp eyes detected a party of horsemen, just leaving the forest below the house, and coming rapidly up. He did not seem to be alarmed, however, at his discovery, and waited for the sound of the horses’ hoofs to reach the ears of the men behind him. But they were so engrossed in conversation as to hear nothing until the approaching riders were almost opposite the dwelling. Then, springing to their feet in alarm, both cried:

“What is that?” **99**

As if arousing from a revery, Ira exclaimed:

“I declare, Master Earle, you have more visitors!”

The farmer was at his side in an instant, and, with a glance at the coming troopers, turned and ran toward the kitchen, crying:

“Quick, Master Lyman! They are rebels, and we must hide!”

But he and his friend gained the back door too late to escape. The lad followed in time to see both fall into the hands of four stalwart men, who were lying in wait. Two others seized the young scout as he appeared, and then the commander of the company, a long, lank, grizzly-bearded man, not far from the age of the

Tories, came forward.

"What does this mean, Sam Adams?" Master Earle demanded. "It is an outrage to treat men this way in a free country."

"We ain't free yet," the lieutenant retorted, "that is, we ain't free of red-coats or Tories, though we are likely to be before a great while. Howsomever, if you want to know by whose authority I have arrested you and Squire Lyman, I'll say the Committee of Safety sent me for that purpose, and they'll tell you what's wanted. But who's that young chap?" **100**

"He's my nephew, Ira Le Geyt," Master Lyman replied quickly. "He was going home with me for a visit."

"Ira Le Geyt," repeated the officer slowly. "Seems to me I've heard that name before, though I can't tell where. But I've no orders to take him. Let the lad go, men, and we'll hope the next time we see him he will be in better company."

Then he gave orders to bring horses from the barn for his prisoners, and shortly the entire party rode away.

Ira, left alone with the women, tried to soothe them by saying:

"General Burgoyne will send an army down here as soon as he hears of this, and tired as I am, I will be off at once if I can have a fresh horse."

A small boy went to the barn with the scout, showing him which animal to take, and within fifteen minutes after the horsemen had departed, Ira was following them toward the main road. Arriving there, he found Dan Cushing in waiting, and, after heartily greeting each other, both started for the village, Dan saying as they rode along:

"When I left you last night, Ira, I pushed straight on to Bennington, arriving at Captain Park's house before he was up; but he wasn't slow after readin' General Schuyler's letter. First he gave me a fine breakfast, after which he said I was to go to bed an' get some sleep. Then he hurried off to consult with the town committee. They must have hustled, for when I awakened a little after noon, the captain told me there were already four companies of militia in the village, guarding the stores, an' that a messenger had been sent off to Derryfield, New Hampshire, after Colonel John Stark to take command of the troops, which are expected to number two thousand by to-morrow night." **101**

"They mean business, don't they?" his comrade interrupted; "but go on, Dan, with your story."

"The rest is soon told. Captain Park sent me down the road to be on the lookout for you an' the Tory. He thought the old feller would stop at Master Earle's, because the two are great cronies. I got to the cross-roads an hour 'fore you did, put a red rag on the bush so you'd know I was 'round, an' then hid in the woods. I heerd an' answered your signal, then went back to town for the troopers. There's only one thing more to tell you. The Safety Committee want to see you when we get into town. They've got

something to talk over with you."

"I expected it," Ira replied. "Where am I to find them?" 102

"At the captain's, where we're to stop. They thought you would be tired, an' so agreed to be right there when you arrived."

In less than an hour the two lads were at their destination, and when a servant had taken their horses, both entered the huge kitchen of the mansion to find themselves face to face with twelve men, whose resolute countenances said more plainly than words that they were not to be trifled with when the enterprise they were engaged in was a righteous one. The men were seated around a long table, and Dan, stepping in advance of his comrade, announced:

"Governor Wentworth, this is the feller 'bout whom General Schuyler wrote, an' who is now known as Ira Le Geyt."

The twelve committeemen turned their eyes upon the newcomer, and he on his part gazed earnestly at them. Several he knew by sight, though he had no personal acquaintance with them; the others were strangers, save him at the foot of the table. As Ira's glance fell on this man he recognized him as a citizen whom he had met when on a former visit to the town, and he understood by the look given him, that the recognition was mutual. A slight shake of the head, however, gave this patriot to understand that the lad did not wish to be known, and then Ira listened to the governor, who now said: 103

"Though unknown to us, young man, we cannot doubt your faithfulness to the Cause we represent. The endorsement of General Schuyler alone is sufficient for us, and when to that is added the service you have already rendered, I, speaking for the others, may say that besides our welcome, you have our gratitude."

"He is not unknown to me," broke in the committeeman at the other end of the table. "Although not at liberty to declare his name, I can vouch for his patriotism. No one of us loves the Cause more than he."

"No one ever yet doubted your word, Master Whipple," the chairman replied, "and we shall not do so now. Still, does not the work this young man has voluntarily taken upon himself tell, as no other words can, of love for country?" and he looked around upon his companions in a way which told he believed the matter of the young scout's standing was settled.

As no one contradicted him, he turned again to Ira, asking: 104

"What can you do for us, my young sir?"

"In the matter of the coming raid?" the lad questioned. "I cannot prevent it, sir."

"We would not have you do that," was the quick reply.

"I am glad," the boy went on; "but I think I can control the time of that raid, and the size of the raiding force. At least, I am to report to General Burgoyne on those two points, and have reason to believe my words will have weight with him."

“How long can you wait before making that report?”

“Two or three days.”

“Forty-eight hours will answer our purpose,” the governor declared. “Within that time we expect Colonel Stark will be here, and prefer to have him look over the field to decide on a plan of defense before your report is carried to the British commander.”

“I know the colonel personally, and would say you cannot have a more brave leader,” Ira replied. “I shall be glad to take to the general any report the colonel may suggest.” **105**

“We congratulate ourselves that we have the outcome of this raid within our own hands,” the chairman added, “and we promise that you shall carry back an accurate list of the stores held by us, as well as of the cattle and horses we have collected. General Burgoyne will have no reason to suppose that you have been otherwise than busy during the time you have been away from him.”

“It will be good bait,” one of the company remarked laughingly as the meeting broke up.

The young scout went over to Master Whipple. “May I ask a favor of you?” he inquired.

“Certainly,” was the hearty reply.

“Will you, then, see Colonel Stark before I meet him, and ask that he know me now only as Ira Le Geyt? Should my own name reach the ear of any Tory, no matter who he may be, my usefulness in the British camp would be over.”

“And your life would be in danger,” suggested his hearer.

“That is a small matter,” was the calm reply; “but we cannot just now afford to lose the advantage which comes by having a friend amid the enemy.”

“I rather think not,” Master Whipple said emphatically, “and if you are willing to stay there, we should use every precaution to keep your secret. I will see the colonel as you desire.” **106**

The next morning Ira was on the street with Captain Park, when his attention was called to a lad not far from his own age, who was loitering around the building in which the arms and ammunition of the Continentals were stored. There was something in his appearance that seemed familiar, and after looking at the fellow a few seconds, it suddenly flashed upon the young scout that he was Fred Lyman. It was the resemblance to his father that had made the lad’s face seem familiar. To make sure that his surmise was correct, he asked the officer by his side, the name of the youth.

“Fred Lyman,” was the prompt answer. “His father and Master Earle are confined in one of the rooms of the store-house, and doubtless he is hanging around there hoping to get into communication with them.”

“I am not sure but it would be wise to put him into the room with them,” said the young scout as he eyed the fellow again.

"He has never shown any qualities that has made us consider him dangerous," was the laughing reply of the officer, and they passed on. 107

That night, to the surprise of every one, Colonel Stark arrived in town. His early arrival was explained by his own words:

"Five minutes after your message was brought to me, I was on my way here. Call your committee together. The sooner we come to an understanding about matters the better."

The result of that secret session was to give the experienced officer absolute control of the defense of the town. The next day he looked over the village and its immediate surroundings, and then sent for Ira.

"How are you, Ira Le Geyt?" was his greeting, with special emphasis on the name. "How is—well, my friend General Schuyler?"

"There is nothing the matter with him, or me, colonel," was the lad's laughing reply.

"I wish he was as sure of whipping Burgoyne, as I am of the force the Britisher may send down here. But now to business. Come with me!"

He led the way to the Heights, where was a bend in the Walloomsac river, and into which, on the left, a smaller stream entered. Calling the attention of his companion to these features, the officer asked: 108

"Do you suppose you can induce the red-coats to make an encampment here?"

"Let me understand you perfectly, colonel, and I will make every effort to put the British forces where you want them."

"Advise General Burgoyne to send a thousand men," the officer explained. "Before they get here I'll have my skirmishers hanging around them, and, finding he is going to meet with opposition, the commander will naturally look for some place in which to entrench himself. Show him this spot, and let him make his stand here. That is your part; I'll take care of the rest."

"It shall be done, if it lies within my power," the young scout promised.

Half an hour later, with a complete list of the Continental stores, and a rough outline of the village and the surrounding hills in his pocket, Ira, accompanied by Dan Cushing, rode toward Fort Edward.

109

CHAPTER VII.

CLIPPING THE LEFT WING.

When the lads arrived at the cross-road leading to Master Earle's, Ira gave his horse to Dan, and sent him to the farm to exchange the animal for the one he had left there.

Dan appeared so dull, and knew so little about affairs in Fort Edward, whence they supposed he

had come, that the inmates of the house at length decided he was some half-witted fellow who knew enough to bring their horse home, and but little more.

“You better follow him down to the main road, and make sure he turns the right way,” Mistress Earle said to her eldest son, a boy of a dozen years. Therefore he, unnoticed by Dan, came down the road, and was near enough, when the latter joined his comrade, to recognize Ira.

Surprised at seeing the young scout there, the boy stood staring after the horsemen until they had disappeared from view down the Fort Edward road.

Then he turned toward his home to make known the wonderful discovery; but getting a glimpse of a horseman coming from the direction of Bennington, he waited that he might see who he was. The surprise he had felt on seeing Ira Le Geyt, was deepened upon beholding in the third rider none other than his friend Fred Lyman. When he was within hearing, he cried: **110**

“Hello, Fred! Your cousin, Ira Le Geyt, is just ahead of you.”

“What’s that?” young Lyman asked, reining in his horse.

“I say your cousin, Ira Le Geyt, has just gone down the road. Don’t you remember that ma told your folks about him when she let you know my pa and your pa had been captured by the rebels?”

“Yes; but she said he had gone back to the fort to get help.”

“That is what she thought—what I thought until just now,” the boy explained, and he quickly told of his discovery.

“I don’t understand it,” the young Tory said in a puzzled tone. “It looks as if he had been in Bennington ever since night before last, and if that’s so, I don’t see why he didn’t come out to our house.”

Discuss the matter as the boys would, neither could explain the mystery, and finally Fred said: **111**

“I’ll overtake him and find out,” and, whipping up his horse, he trotted rapidly down the road in the trail of the two scouts.

They must also have ridden fast, for it was not until the two were breaking their fast beside a wayside spring, that young Lyman came up with them.

He was clattering down a small hill when he first caught sight of them, and would have been glad to stop and reconnoiter a little, for he recognized them as the two lads he had seen at Bennington, in company with the rebels. But his horse had seen the other animals, and with a loud whinny dashed on toward them.

The young scouts heard the noise of the horse’s hoofs before he came into view, and were on their feet, rifles in hand, ready for any emergency the moment he appeared. Recognizing the rider, Ira exclaimed:

“It is Fred Lyman! What can he be doing here? We must stop him and find out.”

“We won’t have to do that,” Dan replied. “He’s trying to hold up his beast. Perhaps he has been trying to overhaul us.”

In another moment the young Tory drew up within a few feet of the lads, eyeing them somewhat suspiciously. They, on their part, looked sharply in return, but waited for him to speak. **112**

“Hello! are you Ira Le Geyt?” he asked at last.

“That is what they call me,” the young scout replied pleasantly, “and you are my cousin, Fred Lyman?”

The newcomer leaped to the ground and gazed at the speaker earnestly before he spoke, and then it was to use almost precisely the same words his father had a few days previous in the British camp:

“You don’t look like him.”

“Well, you look like cousin Fred,” Ira replied, “though you may have grown a little since I last saw you,” (and he added under his breath, “but it is mighty little, for I saw you only yesterday”).

“I have grown lots since you visited us,” young Lyman declared with evident pride, “but see here, Ira, where have you been all the time since the rebels captured father?” and there was an angry tone in his voice.

But the young scout was not to be caught in that way.

“In Bennington,” he replied truthfully. **113**

“I thought I saw you there hob-nobbing with the rebels.”

“One must sometimes appear friendly with the enemy, if he wants to learn all he can about them,” the lad answered meaningly. “See here!” and he drew from his coat the list of the Bennington stores and his rude map of the village, handing them without hesitation to the young Tory, as he added, “Does that look as if I had been idle?”

“No,” Fred admitted with some reluctance; “but why didn’t you go back to the fort after the soldiers? You might have had them here by this time, and rescued pa and Master Earle.”

“Because my orders were to obtain all the information about the goods and the town, that I could, and I am in the habit of obeying General Burgoyne’s commands,” was the reply, with a slight emphasis on the last three words.

“Well, you might have come to the house and seen us, so’s to explain what you were doing.”

“When with the enemy it is sometimes wisest to ignore your best friends,” Ira retorted, stating another general truth, and leaving it for his hearer to make the application.

Lyman was for the time silenced, and the young scout in his turn became questioner. **114**

“How is it that you are here, Fred?” he began. “On your way to the fort?”

“Yes, I, too, have important news for General Burgoyne,” he replied with a show of pride.

“What has happened since I came away?” was the next query, and in a tone which implied, “not a great deal.”

Stung by the tone rather than the words, the young Tory replied sharply:

“You needn’t think you know everything, Ira Le Geyt. I learned this morning that Colonel John Stark has arrived and is to take charge of the Yankee forces.”

“He came last night, and I had a long talk with him this morning.”

“There’ll be two thousand militia in the village before night, and the general ought to know that,” young Lyman added, but not quite so confidently.

“Two thousand, two hundred and fifty,” Ira added quietly. “Anything else, Fred?”

“No,” he at length drawled.

“Hardly necessary for you to take a long ride down to the fort for that news, seeing that I have gathered it already,” the young scout said curtly. “Have dinner with us, and then you may go back home. I promise that by day after to-morrow, if not before, General Burgoyne will have an army in Bennington.” **115**

“But I wanted to see the general,” Fred confessed. “I’m going to ask him if he will give me a place on his staff. Do you know anything about that, cousin Ira?” and there was an eagerness in his voice which showed how much he coveted the position.

“Uncle Horace spoke of it,” Ira replied, “and I’ll tell you what I advise.”

“What?” the listener asked eagerly.

“Go home now, and when the king’s soldiers march out of Bennington loaded with plunder, follow them. Put in a claim that you were the one who first discovered that the rebels were gathering stores. Your father will swear to it, I’ll back him up, and the general will be so good-natured, because of the victory, that he’ll give you anything.”

“A captain’s commission?”

“Perhaps a major’s.”

“I reckon I’ll ask for a colonel’s,” the young Tory declared. “What I have done is worth it,” and he fastened his horse to a tree, after which he went toward the food. **116**

Ira introduced Dan, adding:

“He is my right hand in the special work I am doing,” and then all chatted merrily together as they ate.

An hour later Fred shook hands with his companions, and started back to town. As he rode over the brink of the hill, he cried:

“I’ll see you later, boys.”

The scouts glanced at each other, and Ira remarked:

“We got rid of him more readily than I expected. He might have made us much trouble had he gone on to the camp.”

“He’ll be dreamin’ of that colonel’s commission,” Dan added laughingly.

They resumed their journey, and after a time, Ira said:

“Fred’s coming has given me an idea, Dan.”

“I take it that it’s a good one,” was the confident reply.

“That you go with me into the fort as Fred Lyman, and stay there while I go back to Bennington with the British forces. Somehow I can’t get over the idea that we shall need a friend to the Cause there while I’m gone. Something might happen, you know, that should be reported to General Schuyler immediately.” **117**

“If you say that’s the thing to do, I’m ready. You’ll find I’ll make a good cousin,” and he laughed to himself as though the idea was a pleasing one.

They fell to discussing the details of this new plan while riding slowly along, for now they did not care to reach the vicinity of the fort until after nightfall. A mile or two further on Ira rode into the woods, where he waited until Dan had made a long detour and crossed the river to General Schuyler’s headquarters to acquaint him with what was transpiring in Bennington, as well as to tell him of the arrangements made for the former, under the name of Fred Lyman, to enter the British lines.

He was so long delayed that Ira had grown impatient, and on his appearing cried:

“I thought you would never come!”

“Lay it all to the general,” the lad replied. “He hated to let me go into the fort wuss than pizen.”

“What did he say?” Ira asked, as he remounted his horse.

“That ’twas bad ’nough to have you thar without riskin’ another life.” **118**

“What did you say?”

“That I entered the service to risk my life, an’ I might as well do it thar, as anywhere.”

“Then he let you go?”

“Nope. Not till I had said, ‘Let us s’pose a case, general. S’posin’ the first Britishers sent to Bennington get whipped, as they will, an’ the commander sends back for reinforcements. How be you goin’ to know it in time to send a force to wallop them? Howsomever, if I’m thar in the fort, you’ll get the news mighty soon, an’ can ’range to beat the red-coats out the second time. I reckon that is what Ira is providin’ for, though he hasn’t said so.’ Then he shook his head, sayin’ kinder proudly, I thought, ‘You don’t fool that

boy a great deal. Go ahead, Dan,' an' ahead I came."

Ira laughed softly to himself as they galloped on to the fort. Arriving, they were allowed to enter, and, late though it was, sought General Burgoyne at once.

"My cousin, Fred Lyman, general," the young scout said, presenting his companion.

The officer looked at the boy searchingly, and said:

"I like your looks, Master Lyman. I believe you want a place on my staff?" **119**

"I did," the lad began slowly, "but now that I've been workin' with Ira, I'm thinkin' I'd like a job suthin' like his."

The general laughed. "You shall have it," he promised. "Train him, Master Le Geyt, so he can take your place when you are away. He will have the same pay."

Then he gave his undivided attention to the papers the young scout had spread out. The list of goods greatly interested him.

"Such a haul will mean everything to us," he muttered, and then turned to the plan of the village. After a moment he called an orderly, saying:

"Tell Colonel Baum to come here."

When the Hessian arrived Ira explained the drawing to him, and for some time the two officers discussed the paper in German. At length General Burgoyne remarked in English:

"You understand the situation, colonel?"

"Perfectly," he replied in the same language. "With this young man to guide me, I see no reason why I may not make a successful raid."

"When can you start?"

"At dawn." **120**

"How many men had he better take?" the commander asked of the scout.

"The rebels will make some pretense of a defense," Ira replied carelessly. "I would take enough to give them a good drubbing. Say one thousand."

"A larger force than I had supposed necessary," General Burgoyne added musingly. "Still, as you say, Master Le Geyt, we better have enough to teach the Yankees a lesson." Then to his subordinate he said:

"There are the two companies of Loyalists, Colonel Baum, who have asked permission to go on this raid. You could take them, and five hundred of your own men, making up the thousand with a squad of Indians. They would be useful in scouring the surrounding country."

"It shall be as you say, general," the colonel replied.

"Here are your orders," continued Burgoyne. "Seize those supplies; scour the country; test the

disposition of the people; levy contributions on the towns, and last, though not least, bring back with you twelve or thirteen hundred horses."

His subordinate repeated the orders, and then hurried away to get his troops ready for their long march by sunrise. 121

To the waiting scouts the general said:

"Go to your own quarters for a few hours' rest. But you, Master Le Geyt, will hold yourself ready to guide Colonel Baum and his forces to Bennington to-morrow. Master Lyman, you will remain here to guide a second force to the same town should such a movement be necessary."

At dawn the two lads stood side by side, watching the soldiers as they marched out of the gates. First went the trained Hessians, moving as perfectly as a piece of machinery; then came the Tories, trying to imitate the regulars in their military precision, but making poor work of it; finally came the Indians, straggling and sullen because they had been placed in the rear.

"The colonel should reverse the order of march," Ira said in a low tone to Dan, as he noted the scowling faces of the savages.

"It isn't the only mistake he'll fall into 'fore he gets back," was his comrade's reply. Then he asked, "What day is it?"

"The thirteenth of August," was the reply. "But why do you ask?"

"The thirteenth," Dan repeated. "I thought so; it means bad luck for the expedition," and he looked straight into the face of his companion. 122

Both smiled, and as Colonel Baum and his staff now came riding by, Ira mounted his own horse and joined them.

For a distance of ten or twelve miles the army advanced quietly; then they came upon a party of skirmishers, who, after some sharp firing on both sides, retreated toward the town. A mile farther on the advance guard, while passing through a wooded country, ran into a small ambuscade, from which was poured a deadly fire. These Yankees were soon driven back; but not until a score or more officers and men had been killed or wounded.

"I had no idea the rebels would be so bold," Colonel Baum said to Ira. "If this keeps on we shall be disabled before gaining the town."

"Why not send the Indians on ahead," the scout suggested. "They ought to be able to smoke out the Yankees, and drive them from their holes."

"I'll try it," the officer replied, and ordered the savages to the front, a position they were now reluctant to take, for it began to appear as if the enemy would make a stout fight.

The only result was to change as targets the Hessians to the Indians, and so many of the redskins were shot down that the entire company became demoralized, falling back upon the rear troops. 123

Disheartened by these unexpected circumstances Colonel Baum sought out a safe

halting-ground for the night, and sent back for reinforcements. Ira offered himself as the messenger, but received the reply:

“No, I need you here. You know the ground before us, and to-morrow I must have you select some place where I can entrench, and wait for troops from the fort to come up.”

Next day the skirmishers were no less vigilant, and it was under a harassing fire that the Hessian commander pushed forward past Mount Anthony, to the bend in the Walloomsac river, where, at the suggestion of his guide, he went into camp.

Before nightfall he had thrown up light entrenchments, and for the first time within twenty-four hours rested in fancied security, believing he could hold out any length of time against an enemy which he was now convinced outnumbered him two to one.

During the night a score or more Tories from the neighborhood joined his force, among them, to Ira’s surprise, Master Earle, Horace Lyman, and his son Fred. All were hearty in their greetings, and the young scout, taking the young Tory into his own tent, asked: **124**

“How did Uncle Horace and Master Earle escape from the Yankees?”

“They were set free,” Fred replied. “Father thinks it was because they had no spare men for guards. The rebels are so afraid of being whipped by the king’s troops that they are turning out to the last man.”

“It looks that way,” Ira replied curtly.

When the sun rose on the morning of the fifteenth, it disclosed the Continental forces gathered on the opposite bank of the river and along the road to Bennington. Believing an attack near at hand, Colonel Baum arranged his forces in three lines, the Indians first, behind them the Tories, and his own troops in the rear. With the first skirmishing the redskins, unaccustomed to fighting pitched battles, began to slip away. Alarmed by this fact, the commander, knowing his young scout was familiar with the savage tongue, sent him off to stay, if possible, the flight of the fugitives, and, if unsuccessful in that, to go down the road toward the fort and hasten the coming of reinforcements.

This enabled Ira to refrain from fighting against his friends. He was an interested spectator, however, of what took place on that day and the next. **125**

Content with an occasional skirmish, Colonel Stark allowed the first day to pass without decisive action, in the hope that another regiment of militia, which was hourly expected, might arrive. But early on the morning of the sixteenth he decided to wait no longer. Calling his men together he addressed them in words which have since become memorable:

“There are the red-coats. We must beat them to-day, or to-night my wife sleeps a widow.”

He then sent detachments on both flanks to

gain, if possible, the British rear. He led the front attack himself, and after two hours broke the line of the few remaining Indians, who fled, crying:

“The woods are full of Yankees!”

The center of the attack now fell upon the Tories, who were driven back upon the Hessians, and the entire British force, yielding slowly, was at length pushed across the stream on their left.

Colonel Baum now attempted to retrieve himself by heading a new attack in person, but with no better success. He was mortally wounded, his troops routed, and his artillery captured. **126**

Meanwhile a reinforcement of five hundred Hessians, under Lieutenant-Colonel Breyman, was coming to his aid. The messenger, asking for help, had reached the fort promptly, but for some reason the second force of regulars was not started for Bennington until the following morning, and Dan Cushing had ample time to get word to General Schuyler of the new movement. Therefore when Colonel Breyman left Fort Edward, Colonel Seth Warner, with a force of fresh militia, was close at his heels.

After the defeat of Baum the Continentals broke ranks in order to plunder. The watchful Ira succeeded in getting word to Colonel Stark that British reinforcements were to be expected at any minute. In vain that officer tried to rally his men, and Colonel Breyman, finding the Continentals unprepared for a second fight, would have made short work of them but for the arrival of Colonel Warner and his men.

The battle that now followed lasted until sunset, when the enemy fell back, and were pursued by the victorious Continentals until dark.

It was a straggling force of less than one hundred that finally reached Fort Edward, for the British loss numbered nine hundred and thirty-four, including one hundred and fifty-seven Tories. The guns, ammunition wagons, tents, baggage, and one thousand stand of small arms belonging to the red-coats, were left in the hands of the victors. **127**

The next morning Ira and Dan walked over the scene of the conflict. In a thicket across the little brook they found the body of Fred Lyman. Apparently he had been in hiding when struck in the back by a stray bullet. Farther down the Heights were the bodies of Horace Lyman and James Earle. Both had been slain during the battle.

“There will be no need for you to go back to the fort with me,” Ira said a little later to his comrade. “The young Tory is dead.”

“But Dan Cushing is very much alive,” that lad retorted, “and is ready to take your report to General Schuyler.”

“I can give it in a sentence,” his companion said. “Tell him Burgoyne’s left wing has been clipped at Bennington.”

128

CHAPTER VIII.
THE NIGHT ON THE ROAD.

We will now follow Latham Wentworth and Joseph Fisher in their long journey to Fort Stanwix. When they left General Schuyler they found the quarterly-sergeant, and went with him to secure the supplies which would be needed. This sergeant, named Wilson, was a talkative fellow, and as he aided them in making up their packs, asked:

"Has any one told you about the latest act of the Continental Congress, lads?"

Receiving a negative reply, he went on:

"We only got the word a few days ago. It seems that on June 14th Congress passed this act, I saw a copy and remember every word: 'Resolved, that the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars white on a blue field, representing a new constellation.' So we have a national banner at last, and I hope, before the next fight with the red-coats, that we'll have them floating above all our fortifications."

"I wonder how it would look?" Late asked of himself, half-closing one eye, and gazing in the air as if viewing the flag from a distance. **129**

"Fine," the sergeant declared. "I'll show you," and he drew from his coat-pocket a piece of paper. Unfolding it he showed the boys a miniature flag, drawn in its proper colors. There were seven red and six white stripes, and the stars on the union were arranged in a circle.

"There!" he exclaimed, "isn't she a beauty? I drew this myself, and at the first chance I'm going to show it to the general, in the hope that he'll let me make one."

"We'll get ahead of you by making one for Fort Stanwix," Joe remarked sportively, never dreaming that his words would come true.

The boys were ready for their long tramp, and, bidding Master Wilson good-day, they left the fort, turning their faces westward. Gaining the Hudson river, at that point where the Mohawk flows into it, they crossed over to the northern bank, and plunged into the great forest, intending to avoid the settlements as much as possible, lest their hurried trip to the fort awaken needless alarm throughout the valley. **130**

Scarcely had the scouts disappeared amid the foliage when an old man, of gigantic size, with hair that fell upon his shoulders and a beard that came nearly to his knees, arose from a thicket on the easterly side of the river, and, wading across, plunged into the forest on the trail of the boys. Like them, he was armed with a rifle and knife, and carried a pack upon his back. He muttered to himself while striding vigorously along:

"I'll catch you yet, you young devils! I'll catch you yet!"

His rapid gait told of a strength quite unusual

for one of his years, and it was clear he would prove no mean antagonist for the lads whom he was following.

The scouts started late in the day, and by the time they had traveled ten miles the shades of night were falling fast.

“It’s time to go into camp,” Late suggested.

His comrade agreed to this, and selecting a cleared space beside a small stream, they erected a shelter of bark and brush, made a bed of fir boughs, and sat down to eat their supper.

Owing to this labor, and the noise they had made while at work, neither of the boys heard the sound of footsteps, nor did they suspect that a man stood behind a huge tree a few rods away, watching and listening while they ate and talked. **131**

“Think we better keep guard to-night, Late?” Joe asked.

“Hardly worth while,” the former replied. “I sleep light, you know, an’ any noise out of the ordinary will waken me. We ain’t far enough away from the fort yet for Indians or red-coats to bother us, an’ we’ll have all the watchin’ we need when farther up country, so I guess we’d better turn in tonight.”

“We must have come at least ten miles,” Joe continued.

“All of that.”

“Then we have ten times as many before us yet. Can we do it in four days?”

“I’d like to make it in three,” Late declared. “We can’t get to the fort any too soon, an’ my long legs are good for the thirty-odd miles a day. How is it with yours?”

“I reckon they’ll hold out.”

“We’ll start early, make brief stops, an’ travel late, if need be; but we must deliver the message to Captain Swartwout by Saturday night.” **132**

At these words the listener behind the big tree leaned out sufficiently from his place of concealment to shake his fist at the boys, after which, as he shrank back into the gloom again, he muttered to himself: “Perhaps you will, youngsters; but not if David Daggett can prevent it.”

He still stood there when the lads stretched themselves out upon the fir boughs, and fell asleep. Then, smiling grimly, he slipped the pack from his back, sat upon it with his back against the tree, and waited.

An hour passed; the heavy breathing of the occupants of the shack told the old man that the young scouts were sleeping soundly. He arose cautiously, leaned his rifle against the pine, drew the hunting knife from his belt, and, gripping it between his teeth, slowly crept on all fours toward the camp.

Gaining it, he paused and listened. A loud snoring told him that the lads were unconscious. Again he smiled, and creeping noiselessly to the

open end of the rude shelter, he gazed at the sleepers. They lay with their feet toward him; and far enough apart for him to crawl between them, a feat he accomplished so stealthily that they were not disturbed.

Then, rising to his knees, he took the knife from his teeth with his left hand, clutched the handle firmly with his right, and raised it aloft, intending to plunge it rapidly into first one and then into the other. 133

But before the weapon could descend Late moved, and the man, lowering the blade, shrank back a little, waiting for the boy to sink into slumber again.

Instead of quieting down, Late stretched out one of his long arms, striking the intruder in the face, and knocking him over. Both lad and man were on their feet in an instant, one seeking to grapple with the other, but the stranger, too quick for the young scout, arose and disappeared in the darkness.

Joe, aroused by the brief struggle, sprang up crying loudly:

“What is it, Late?”

“Some one crept in here to steal or to kill,” was the reply as the speaker darted out of the shack to peer through the gloom, hoping to see or hear something of the fugitive.

But all was still, and, satisfied that the intruder had made good his escape, he turned to Joe, “I awoke suddenly, an’ felt, rather than saw, a man on his knees ’tween you an’ me. I swung my arm ’round an’ knocked him over, an’ ’fore I could grab him he vanished. If it wan’t for the ache in my arm where I whacked him, I should think I’d been dreamin’.” 134

“I don’t ’spose it’s safe to light a torch,” his companion whispered.

“No, it might give him the very chance he’s waitin’ for, an’ we better have our guns ready, in case he sends a bullet this way.”

They seized the rifles and sat motionless a long while, but the forest was as silent as if they alone were in it. At length Late stepped softly out under the trees until he could get a view of the stars, when he went back to his comrade, saying:

“It isn’t much more than midnight now, Joe. Lie down an’ get what sleep you can. I’ll call you in ’bout two hours to take a spell of standin’ guard.”

In such manner they spent the remaining hours of the night, and when it was light enough, made a thorough search of the woods all around the encampment, but not the slightest evidence could they find that any one had been in that vicinity.

“We’ll have to give it up,” Late finally said, “an’ get breakfast so’s to be off. But I swaney, my arm is still lame where I struck some one or something last night. I know ’twasn’t a nightmare.”

Half an hour later the boys were moving 135

westward again, and not until the sun was directly overhead did they halt. Perhaps they might not have stopped just then, but, on coming into a little clearing, the lads caught sight of an old man cooking fish near the river bank. A canoe was drawn up near him, in which was the usual outfit of a voyager. He clearly was not suspecting any danger, for his rifle lay in the boat, and he made no effort to reach it on seeing them. Instead he cried cheerily:

“Good day, lads. Come along and have a bite with your uncle David. There are fish enough for three, and you are as welcome as if you had caught and cooked them yourselves.”

Holding their guns ready for instant use the boys advanced, and he, noting their caution, laughed merrily.

“Put up your shooters, youngsters, for David Daggett never yet hurt a human being, white or Indian. It isn’t his mission,” and then, lowering his voice as though he was imparting a profound secret, he continued, “Don’t you know who it is? Haven’t you heard of me before?”

136 Being told by the young scouts that they had never seen or heard of him before, and, therefore, could not know what his mission might be, he seemed disappointed.

“Never heard, eh? I thought the whole world knew of me. I am David Daggett, and my mission is to reckon up the birds of the forests. I have traveled miles doing it, and do you see that one flying across the river? He makes exactly twenty thousand I have counted. It’s slow work, lads, but David Daggett will some day be able to tell just how many birds there are in the Mohawk valley.”

The young scouts could but believe that the old man was crazy. They laid down their rifles, threw off the packs, and partook of the food which he, with a liberal hand, gave them. When, however, the boys would have contributed their share to the noon-day meal, he stopped them.

“No, no,” he said. “You are my guests now,” and, with a cunning glance, “though no one knows where I get my money, I always have enough to buy food for myself and my friends.”

137 While they were eating he told them many things about the birds which flew through the clearing. Evidently he knew the names and was familiar with the habits of all the feathered visitors, and as each passed, he counted it, adding ten to his number before the meal was at an end.

When the lads, thanking him for his hospitality, arose to resume their journey, he asked:

“Were you going up the river, my sons?”

“Yes,” they replied.

He seemed lost in thought during a dozen seconds or more, and then said:

“I like you, lads. You don’t make fun of the old man and his whims as some do, so I’ll carry you a piece up the river, though I’ve just come down stream. Get into the canoe; it will be a sight easier than tramping, and save you many a mile

around the great swamp."

Joe turned to Late, waiting for him to decide. Both knew of the swamp not far away, and understood that the old man was correct. It would be easier, and much time might be saved by paddling up the stream a few miles. They were two to one, and it was broad daylight. Surely there could be no risk in accepting Master Daggett's invitation, therefore Late said:

"All right, sir; but let Joe and me take the paddles. We know how to handle them, an' oughter be willin' to do that much in return for your favor."

The old man made no protest to this proposition, and during two hours or more the boys drove the light craft up the river until arriving at a considerable waterfall. **138**

"We'll have to land here," the bird missionary said, "and carry the boat around."

"We can hardly ask you to take us any farther," young Wentworth replied. "We are now beyond the swamp, an' you have saved us a good five-mile tramp, so we'll thank you again for your kindness, an' push on afoot."

"Not by any means," Master Daggett declared. "It makes no difference where I am. I find birds, birds, everywhere. I have counted seventy-two since we came up the river. I'll see more above the falls. We'll go on together until night."

The boys could not persuade him to any other course, therefore they carried their packs above the falls and returned for the canoe, the old man walking by their side and assuring them he had not found such pleasant companions for many a day.

"I cannot bear to part with you," he declared. "We'll go on together as long as you can get along with the old man."

The voyage above the falls differed greatly from that below. There the course had been through an unbroken wilderness; now they occasionally passed small clearings, in which were the cabins of hardy settlers; but they made no stops, and when the day was nearly spent entered again a long tract of forest. After having paddled another mile they came to a series of rapids, where a portage became necessary. **139**

To their urging that he accompany them no farther, the old man grew indignant.

"I shall stay with you to-night," he declared. "We'll go around the rapids, and then make camp. You'll have to land on the south bank for the portage, because the north side is impassable, except by making a long detour."

Believing this statement to be correct the boys steered the canoe to the southern shore, and disembarked. The lads carried their packs around the rapids, while Master Daggett remained by the boat. Returning in a few minutes, they waited for him to shoulder his own traps, when they lifted the light craft and followed the old man up the bank. Traveling somewhat slower than he did, they had a chance to talk over the situation.

“We must get rid of him,” Late said in a whisper.

“Yes,” Joe agreed. “Let us cross over to the other bank for our camp, and then we can slip away in the mornin’ ’fore he wakes up.” 140

“A bright idea,” was the reply.

Therefore when they arrived at the upper end of the rapids, young Wentworth, turning to Master Daggett, said carelessly:

“There’s a better place for a camp across the river, Uncle David. Why can’t we go over there for the night?”

“Because I don’t want to,” the old man growled. “I never spend the night on the north side of the river. It gives me rheumatism.”

“An’ Late an’ I never camp on the south side; it gives us the chills and fever,” Joe retorted, thinking the separation with the old bird missionary might as well come then as in the morning, “so we’ll get you to set us across.”

For a moment the old man glared at him angrily, then said curtly:

“All right. Stow in your traps. I’ll leave mine here, for I shall come back after taking you over.”

Pleased with their success the young scouts put their packs into the light craft, and stepped in themselves. The owner of the canoe followed, taking up the paddle.

“I’ll row the boat across,” Late said, reaching for the oar. 141

“Sit where you are,” was the stern command. “I can handle this craft without any of your help.”

Apparently Master Daggett was in a surly mood, but the lads cared little for that, so long as he granted their request. With a vigorous stroke the old man sent the boat into the middle of the stream.

“See!” he cried. “I can whirl it around and around and around,” and as he spoke he set the canoe spinning with a rapidity that made his companions dizzy.

“Now we’ll go down the rapids,” he shouted, and drove the craft straight toward the falls.

Satisfied that the old man had suddenly gone mad, the lads sprang up to wrest the paddle from him, when, with a loud yell, he leaped on the gunwale, overturning the boat.

The water was deep, and the young scouts sank, as a matter of course. Joe was the first to get his head above the surface, only to find Master Daggett on the lookout for him. Seizing the boy by the neck, the crazy man forced him beneath the water again, shouting:

“Now you shall drown! Now you shall drown!”

Late got his head into the air just in time to see this attack, and swam to his comrade’s assistance. But the old man caught him by his hair with a grip as of iron, crying at the full strength of his lungs: 142

“I’ll drown you both, you young devils! I’ll drown you both!”

At this instant Joe succeeded in freeing himself from the grasp of the madman, and, nearly choked though he was, sprang upon the old fellow’s shoulders, forcing him beneath the surface.

This proved to be a fortunate move, for, finding himself in danger of drowning, Master Daggett let go his hold of Late, and, by a tremendous effort threw Joe off his back, swimming vigorously for the southern shore. The boys, still believing him crazy, made no attempt at pursuit; but struck out for the opposite bank.

“Quick!” Late cried as soon as he was out of the water. “If we hurry down below the falls we may save our packs.”

“But we’ve lost our guns,” Joe added, following his comrade as rapidly as his wet garments would permit.

They found, despite the statement of the old man, that there was a fair trail around the rapids on that side, and were soon at the lower end. But, rapidly as they moved, the lunatic outstripped them, and not only secured the packs, but began dancing about with, his rifle in hand, crying: **143**

“I’ll shoot if you attempt to come over here! I’ll shoot you!”

The boys watched him in silence a few minutes, and then Joe exclaimed:

“This is a pretty fix! Our rifles are lost, the food is gone, we are wet to the skin, night is comin’ on, I’d like to know what we are goin’ to do?”

“Go back to the upper end of the falls and build a fire. Dry our clothes and camp out till mornin’. Then fish up the guns, an’ go our way!” his comrade said sharply, fumbling to see if the flint and steel were still in his pocket.

When they gained the higher bank it was to find that Master Daggett had been equally active, for he stood on the opposite side, still threatening to shoot them.

“We’ll get out of range before building a fire,” Late said as he led the way into the woods.

They soon came to a small clearing in which was a huge oak tree.

“Here’s a good place,” Joe cried.

“Yes,” his companion admitted. **144**

They soon had a fire built under the tree, on the branches of which they hung their outer garments. The inner clothing they took off, wrung out and put on again, standing near the blaze to “dry out,” Joe meanwhile scolding.

“Talk ’bout gainin’ time by takin’ to the canoe. I guess we’ll know better than listen to a madman again.”

“I’m not so sure he is a madman,” Late said with emphasis.

“Why?” his companion asked in surprise.

“There’s too much method in his actions. Think it over. He’s managed to rob us of our guns an’ packs, an’ put us in a place where we may easily be shot down. I suspect he’s the fellow who visited us last night, an’ don’t believe that we have seen the last of him.”

“That may be,” Joe replied after a time of thought, “an’ we’ve got nothin’ but our knives to fight him with. It looks dubious, Late.”

The hours passed drearily. The garments dried slowly; there was nothing to eat; they could not sleep while half-clad, and there was the danger that the enemy would appear. Therefore they spent the time gathering fuel, and in keeping guard lest they be surprised. As the night grew older a cool breeze sprang up, and the boys began to feel uncomfortable. **145**

“We shall have to put on our clothes, even if they are not entirely dry,” Late at length said, leaning over to feel of the garments.

Just as he stretched out his hand the sharp crack of a rifle rang out, and a bullet whistled close to his head. Then came a second report, and Joe, who appeared to be the target, dodged behind the huge oak.

His comrade joined him, and from behind this shelter they peered into the darkness mystified by the rapid firing. Then, from the rear could be heard a third report, and a ball buried itself in the tree-trunk.

“We are surrounded!” Late exclaimed in a low tone. “Quick! We must run before they have time to re-load. It’s our only hope of escape!”

Hatless, bootless, without breeches, coat or vest, the two scouts fled into the darkness, running as they never had before.

During a short time they heard the sound of footsteps, as of some one in pursuit, and then the noise grew fainter and fainter until it finally died away. The boys halted beneath a great pine, panting heavily.

“We are as safe here as anywhere,” young Wentworth declared, “and may as well stay where we are until mornin’.” **146**

His comrade made no answer for a full minute, when he said:

“I don’t understand those three shots. Where could old Daggett have found any one to help him?”

“I don’t know,” was the reply, “but there must have been three in the party. No one had time to re-load.”

Slowly the moments passed, and then Joe spoke again:

“What shall we do in the morning?”

“Go back, an’ see if they have taken our clothes.”

“And if they have?”

“Keep on without them.”

The thought was not pleasing, and yet they could devise no other plan. If the hours had been long and dreary at the camp-fire, they were now tedious. Yet the young scouts made the best of a bad matter, and at the coming of day crept back to the clearing, only to find it deserted. There, in the slumbering coals, were the charred remains of their boots, their garments, and their guns.

When Late’s eye fell on the stockless barrels of the weapons, he exclaimed in anger: 147

“Old Daggett was the only one here last night! See, Joe, he fished out our rifles, and cleaned and re-loaded them before attacking us! After driving us away he burned everything, and cleared out.”

To confirm this supposition they went back to the river, and looked over to the opposite side where they had last seen their enemy. His traps were gone. The great forest had swallowed him and them.

During a moment only did the discomfited lads stand there inactive. Then, turning their faces for the third time westward, hungry, footsore, unarmed, scantily clad, yet undaunted, they set out through the forest toward their destination.

148

CHAPTER IX.
UNFURLING THE FLAG.

After traveling a mile or two the young scouts came to a break in the forest, where the big trees gave place to low bushes covered with wild berries.

“Here is our breakfast,” Late said, helping himself to the sweet, delicious fruit. Joe followed his example, and not until their keen appetites were somewhat appeased did the boys resume their journey.

“I don’t s’pose blueberries are very lastin’,” Joe muttered as they went on, “but they are better than nothin’.”

“They’ll last until we get somethin’ more substantial,” his companion replied, as he turned sharply into a rough cart path.

“Where does this lead to?” Joe asked.

“I don’t know any more than you do,” was the answer; “but it will bring us to a settlement of some kind, where we can get help.”

“What if the owner is a Tory?” 149

“Then we’ll be Tories,” was the decisive response. “We need food, arms, and clothes, an’ some friend or foe must furnish them.”

Latham was evidently fast approaching a desperate mood.

Before many moments they arrived at a cultivated field, and saw below them a valley of

considerable size, in which were a large house, barns, cabins, and other outbuildings.

“Quite a place,” Late exclaimed as he and his comrade halted.

“Yes, an’ whoever lives there ought’er be able to furnish us with everything we need. But how are we goin’ to find out whether the people are for the colonies or the king?”

“By those chaps there,” was the reply, and the speaker pointed to two small boys, who, with baskets on their arms, had just clambered over a wall farther down the hillside. “They are goin’ berryin’. Draw back so they can’t see you till they get here. We don’t want to scare them to death.”

The young scouts drew back from the brink of the slope until hidden from view of the approaching lads, and waited. Five minutes later the youngsters came in sight, but were so busy wrangling over some matter as not to take heed of the half-clad strangers until almost upon them. Then their first inclination was to run away; but under the assurance of Late that they would in no way be harmed, the children drew nearer, staring with wondering eyes at the sorry objects they beheld. **150**

“Who lives down there?” Joe asked.

“Father,” the elder of the boys replied.

“Yes, but what is his name?”

“Hiram Le Geyt.”

The scouts looked at each other in dismay an instant; then Late asked: “Have you a brother Ira?”

“Yes, but he’s serving the king,” the younger lad said proudly.

“Is your father at home?”

“No,” the other boy replied, evidently eager to impart information as well as his brother; “he has gone to Oswego to see Colonel St. Leger. He’s going to show him the way down here so he can lick the rebels.”

“I understand,” the tall scout said grimly. “Who is at home?”

“Ma and Grandmother, Lucy, Jane, Hiram, and me,” the lad explained.

“And Grandpa,” added the younger boy quickly. **151**

“Yea, and Grandpa,” was the prompt assent. “I forgot him, he’s away so much.”

It would have been well for the questioner if he had asked more about “grandpa,” but another matter seemed more important just then.

“I wonder if we could get some old clothes down there?” he asked.

“And something to eat?” Joe added, perhaps because he thought that was fully as important.

“I reckon so,” both boys replied. “Ma’s awful good to the poor.”

The scouts laughed. “That fits us,” Joe cried, and they started down the slope almost on the run. They arrived at the big barn first, and entered it to find a negro at work. He stared at them a moment in amazement, and then asked gruffly:

“Who be ye? What ye doin’ here?”

“We were comin’ up the river last night, an’ our boat capsized,” Late explained. “Can’t you go to the house an’ get us some clothes an’ food? Tell Mistress Le Geyt we know Ira, who is with General Burgoyne.”

After a little persuasion the servant went off with their message. He was absent some time, but finally appeared with his arms full of old clothing. **152**

“Missus says ye are to get inter these, an’ then come to the house,” he said. “She wants to talk with ye.”

The boys put on the garments, finding that they fitted fairly well, and then, conducted by the negro, went to the dwelling. Showing them into the living room, the colored man said curtly:

“Sit down. Missus will be here soon.”

Five minutes later a woman of about forty years entered, and with a smile said:

“Caesar tells me you are friends of my eldest son Ira, who is with General Burgoyne. May I ask your names?”

Her visitors told her in turn. “Latham Wentworth and Joseph Fisher,” she repeated. “I don’t recall the names; that is, I don’t recollect that Ira ever spoke of you. How long have you known my son?”

“Only a few weeks,” Late answered. “We met him first up at Lake Champlain, while he was waitin’ for the army to arrive.”

“We work under him,” Joe added. Then a bright thought came to his mind. “He carries an iron cross that can be taken apart, so he can hide his papers in it,” he continued. “He shows it to the Indians, an’ they let him come an go ’mong them.” **153**

“I know now that you are indeed his friends,” she cried joyously, “for I gave him that cross myself. It is an heirloom in our family. But how do you happen to be here? Cæsar said you were capsized on the river.”

“We would not tell every one, good Mistress Le Geyt,” Late said in a low but significant tone, “but we do not mind tellin’ you that we are sent up country on a special mission.”

She nodded her head in a way that indicated she understood him, and said:

“Please come with me.”

She led them out into a great hall, where on a rack of deer horns were several rifles and fowling-pieces. Seeing that her visitors noticed the arms, she said as they passed:

“We have quite an arsenal. It is because all our men folks are fond of gunning; my husband, Ira,

grandpa, and even the younger boys have their own favorite weapons."

Coming to the great staircase, they ascended and entered a large chamber, where, spread out on the bed, were two costly hunting suits, and beside it two pairs of hunting boots, scarcely worn. 154

"I must apologize for sending those old garments out to you," she said. "They might do for strangers, but not for friends of my boy's. Those on the bed are much more suitable, and by the time you have put them on, breakfast will be ready," and she left them to themselves.

"We shan't know ourselves," Joe cried as he began to put on the finer garments.

"No, an' it's all due to that happy thought of yours regarding the iron cross. What do you s'pose she'd say if she knew our Ira wasn't her Ira?"

"Hush!" his comrade cautioned. "Some one is goin' down the hall, an' might hear you. But I do feel a little 'shamed to impose on so fine a woman as Mistress Le Geyt seems to be."

"I don't know 'bout that," was the low reply. "One enemy robs us; another makes it good. Sort of evens up things, it 'pears to me. Though I confess I wish it was Master Le Geyt we were imposin' on, instead of his wife."

A bell now rang loudly at the foot of the stairs, and, taking it for the signal to come to breakfast, the young scouts hastened down to the lower hall where they found their hostess waiting. She led them into a large dining-room, saying: 155

"Sit down, and Matilda will wait on you. I shall have to ask you to excuse me for a while, as I have some household duties that must be attended to."

After thus speaking she left the apartment by another door, and in another moment a negress came in to attend to their needs.

Fried chicken, vegetables, bread, pie, cheese, and coffee were furnished them in abundance by the waitress, who seemed delighted at their enormous appetites.

"Ye makes me think of Master Ira," she declared. "He's always mighty hungry when he's been on a long tramp."

At length they could eat no more, and arose to leave the table, when the hall door was suddenly thrown open, and David Daggett strode in, followed by four stout negroes.

"Seize those rebels," he said to the men. "Stand still, you young devils," he cried to the surprised lads, "or I'll fire," and he leveled a pistol at each.

In another minute they were surrounded, dragged from the room into the hall, carried bodily up the stairway, and thrust into a back chamber, whose windows were covered with heavy shutters securely fastened on the outside. Then the door was closed and locked. 156

"I have you at last," an exulting voice called from without. "You may fool Sarah, but you

cannot fool David."

In the gloom the prisoners gazed into each other's faces for some time before either uttered a word. Then Joe exclaimed:

"I never heard of a thing like this afore, Late! Here you an' me have put ourselves right into that old man's hands. I reckon he's the grandpa those boys told about."

"I reckon he is," his comrade replied. "Do you s'pose they'll take these clothes from us?"

"I hope not. I never had such a good suit before."

The day passed; night came, as the prisoners could tell by peering through the cracks in the window shutters.

"Will they starve us?" Joe asked. "I'm as hungry as when we first came here."

"So'm I," Late replied. "I wonder if there's any way out."

He went from window to window, examining carefully and trying the shutters in turn. Neither alone, nor with Joe's help could he move them. **157**

"We are here to stay," he said in a despondent tone.

But he was mistaken. About midnight a key was thrust into the lock, the bolt turned back, and the door opened. There stood the negro they had seen at the barn in the morning, with a candle in his hand.

"Come," he said in a hoarse whisper.

They followed him down the stairs and into the dining-room, where they found an abundance of food on the table.

"Eat," he said grimly.

Without a word they obeyed, and when their hunger was appeased, he led them back to the hall in front of the rack of arms.

"Take two," he directed. Each lad took a rifle, with horn and pouch, and followed him again, this time through the front door into the yard.

Leading them around to the barn, he showed them two horses, saddled and bridled.

"They're yourn," he announced. "Go down that lane to the road. Turn to the left, and you'll be at Little Falls 'fore mornin'. Here's a note from Missus."

He thrust the paper into Late's hand. Then the lads mounted and rode slowly away. A half-mile beyond the house they came to the road of which the negro had spoken. Turning into this they galloped along as rapidly as the rough way and darkness would permit. At dawn the tiny settlement was in sight. Pausing to rest the panting steeds, they opened and read Mistress Le Geyt's letter. **158**

"My dear guests," it began, "I regret greatly that my father, David Daggett, imprisoned you. He is not quite himself, and insists that

you are rebels. No persuasion of mine can convince him you are Ira's friends. He declares he saw you come from the lines of the enemy, and followed you all the way up the river. I suspect your misfortunes were due to him, and, as far as possible, make restitution. Cæsar will fix your room so that it will look as if you made your own escape. Tell Ira, when you see him, that I did all I could in your behalf, for his sake. Your friend,

"Sarah Le Geyt."

"Look here, Late," Joe exclaimed after they had read the note, "these horses are goin' back to that woman! The clothes an' guns I'm willin' to keep in the place of those that crazy old David burned; but I won't take anything more." 159

"I reckon that's the proper figure," his companion said after a little thought. "We can send them back from the settlement. It's less than forty miles to the fort, an' by hard walkin' we can fetch there 'fore midnight. Can't you write a note tellin' her why we send the horses back?"

"I'm not much at writin'," Joe replied; "but I can fix up somethin'. Guess we can get what's needed on ahead here."

The young scouts were more fortunate than they had expected. At the falls they met a man who wanted to go down the river to his home, a few miles below Hiram Le Geyt's. He readily consented to take the animals back, and deliver their letter to the mistress. Therefore Joe, with some suggestions from Late, wrote:

"Good Mistress Le Geyt: We are rebels, so we send back your horses. We keep the other things 'cause your father destroyed ours. We can't tell you how we came to know 'bout Ira. Thank you for all you did for us. We'll be kind to the next Tory we meet, for your sake. Good-by.

"Late and Joe."

"I feel better," the latter said, when the man, who was taking back the horses, had disappeared. "It don't seem as though we'd imposed on that woman quite so much." 160

"I was wonderin' if she'd have been so kind to us had she known we were rebels," his comrade said. "Howsomever, we've ben purty square with her, seein' she's a Tory."

A few moments later they set out for the fort, striking off through the forest, as their custom had been, instead of following the regular trail, a fact which saved them from another encounter with David Daggett, for he, with a half-dozen servants at his heels, had come in hot pursuit.

But they, ignorant of all this, tramped steadily along mile after mile, stopping but once for a brief rest, and about nine o'clock that night delivered their message to the commander of the fort, Captain Abraham Swartwout.

He rubbed his hands gleefully when they told of

reinforcements on the way.

“I can hold out until they get here, even if St. Leger sweeps down on me with his whole force,” he declared. “I don’t like that Indian business, though. It means burning and butchering all the way from Oswego here. Some one ought to go up along the road, warning the settlers, and telling them to come in here with their families for protection.” 161

“We will go,” the young scouts said in the same breath. “General Schuyler told us to remain as long as we could be of any service to you.”

“Well, rest to-night and to-morrow,” the captain replied, “for you need it. Monday morning I’ll send you out for the double purpose of warning the settlers, and watching the movements of the red-coats. I’ll arrange a set of signals by which you can let me know what is going on outside, without coming into the fort. You’ll run less risk of being discovered and shot down;” then he called an orderly who took them first to the mess room, where they were given supper, and then to the barracks. In an hour both were sleeping soundly.

The following day the young scouts “did nothin’ but sleep and eat,” as Late expressed it, but immediately after breakfast on Monday they went to the commander’s quarters. He received them kindly and led the way to one of the bastions. From there he pointed out a tall tree on a hill opposite, asking:

“Do you see that big pine?”

“Yes, sir,” the lads replied. 162

“It is across the river, and likely to be beyond the lines of the enemy when they are besieging the garrison. Here are four strips of cloth, red, black, white, and green, each of which will have a different meaning when tied in the top of that tree. The white will be taken that reinforcements are close at hand; the red, that they have been discovered and are about to be attacked; the green, that they need help; the black, that they have been defeated. The red and white will tell me that the Indians are deserting the British; the red and green, that the British are about to be attacked in the rear; the red and black, that they have been defeated; while the white and green will signify that they are advancing on the fort; and the white and black that they are preparing to give up the siege.”

The boys repeated these instructions until they had them fixed in mind, and then Joe said:

“You can’t see these colors in the night, captain. We might want to signal then.”

“These are only for the day; we will have another arrangement for the night,” he replied. “Can either of you hoot like an owl?”

“Yes; both of us,” Late replied.

“Then one hoot takes the place of the white, two of the red, three of the green, and four of the black. From that you can make up your combinations,” the officer explained. “These cries are to be given from the tree, and the man stationed on this bastion will be prepared to 163

report them promptly to me."

"Very well, sir, we'll do our best to keep you posted on all outside movements," Late promised, "an' should anything occur that you ought'er know, which can't be reported by signals, we'll bring it in to you at the risk of our lives."

"Let it be something very important, then," Captain Swartwout replied with a smile, after which he led the young scouts to the great gate of the fort, where he bade them Godspeed.

During several days they were busy among the settlements for many miles around. In some cases their warnings were promptly heeded, and the people fled to the fort in time to escape the Indians, who in a few days were scouring the entire region in search of victims. Others delayed too long, and fell a prey to the merciless foe. Before arriving at Oswego, the young scouts themselves were compelled to turn back before the advance guard of the enemy.

By exercising great caution, however, they kept just out of reach, and yet near enough to make out the movements of the enemy. **164**

One night, as they stealthily avoided a small party of Indians that had made camp on the banks of Wood Creek, the young scouts became aware that some one else was engaged in the same work as themselves. Eager to learn who he was, they followed his trail for some distance through the brush. At length the man emerged into an open space, where the moonlight fell upon him, and with suppressed exclamations of surprise both lads recognized their old enemy, David Daggett.

"I wonder what he is doin' here?" Joe whispered in his comrade's ear.

"We'll find out," Late replied in the same cautious manner.

Therefore when Daggett moved on, they kept as close to his heels as was possible with safety to themselves. Having passed the Indian camp, he walked rapidly, with the air of one who knows where he is going.

"He's bound for the British army," Late said, speaking scarcely above his breath. "Probably he has a message of some kind. I wish we could find out what it is."

Fortune soon favored them, and in a way they little expected. A half-mile farther on the old man was hailed by a picket. To the call, "Who goes there?" he answered, "A friend," and received the customary direction: "Advance, friend, and give the countersign." **165**

This Master Daggett could not do, and for some time he parleyed with the guard, trying to persuade the man to allow him to pass.

"I'm a loyal subject of the king," he cried, "and have come with important news for your commander. Let me go on!"

But the sentinel was firm. Then the Tory grew angry.

"I'll show," he screamed, "that you have no right

to stop me. Your own commander will come to let me in," and he drew from his pocket a small silver bugle. Putting this to his lips, he sounded a few sharp, shrill notes. Twice he repeated the call, and then, restoring the instrument to his pocket, calmly folded his arms and waited.

A moment later the captain of the guard, followed by a squad of soldiers, came running down to the post where, finding the sentinel with his gun trained on an old man who stood a few rods distant with folded arms, he demanded: **166**

"What does this mean? Who blew those bugle notes?"

Before the picket could speak Master Daggett answered:

"I did," he said. "It is a call to your commander. Step one side, please, and wait. He'll be here in a moment."

"More likely it was a call to the enemy," the officer cried angrily. "Here, boys, seize that fellow and bring him into camp."

"That command will cost you your commission, young man," the old Tory said sternly. "And, soldiers, unless you want to go to the guard-house, you'd better keep your hands off."

"Seize him, boys; we'll find a way to put a stop to his nonsense," the officer cried, running forward at the head of his men; but before he could touch the old man, a stern voice in the rear cried:

"Let that man alone, and go back to your stations!"

They knew the voice and obeyed, leaving the triumphant Tory face to face with their commander and a second man in the dress of a civilian.

"Hello, colonel! Hello, Hiram!" was Master Daggett's salutation. "I thought those bugle notes would fetch you." **167**

"Why did you call, father?" the man in plain clothes asked.

"Because yonder numskull wouldn't let me in," was the angry reply, "and now I won't go in for anybody. If you want to hear my news, you'll have to get it here."

"The picket was only obeying orders," Hiram Le Geyt said in a soothing tone. "Come up to the colonel's tent. You can give us your tidings there."

"I won't! I won't!" screamed the old man, jumping up and down. "Let General Herkimer come with his eight hundred men and reinforce the garrison, if he wants to. Let him camp at Oriskany, where he can be surprised before morning and defeated, for all of me. I would have given you the chance of your life, but you are all fools, fools, fools! Not one of you knows enough to strike a good blow for the king. I'll leave you alone, and let the rebels walk right by you."

He had now worked himself into such a passion that he pulled his hair, tore his whiskers, and

stamped upon the ground in a fury.

It was Colonel St. Leger who pacified him. He laid his hand on the old man's arm, saying: 168

"It is men like you, Master Daggett, that I need. You must advise me, yes, lead my troops to the place where I can destroy that Yankee force. Come with me, and we will arrange for the forced march which will be necessary if we are to reach Oriskany before sunrise."

The soothing words, the gentle touch, calmed the raging man, and soon he followed the officer and his son-in-law into the lines.

As the three disappeared the young scouts arose from their hiding-place, and crept off down the creek. For three miles they moved in silence, and then, coming to a place where the trail emerged into another, both paused.

"Go and signal the fort," Late said to his comrade in a whisper. "I will warn General Herkimer," and he hastened along the trail leading southeasterly.

Joe gained the great pine, and, climbing into its branches, gave the hoots which told the listening sentinel that the approaching reinforcements were to be attacked. Then he slipped to the ground, intending to follow his comrade to Oriskany, when he was seized by two Indians. A desperate struggle followed, but at length the lad succeeded in breaking away from his captors, and ran toward the fort.

The report of a rifle rang out, and the fugitive spun around like a top until he fell to the ground. The lad regained his feet in an instant, however, and sped on, but his right arm hung limply by his side. 169

"I must get into the fort," he thought as he ran into the river. Crossing it, he hurried on, and ten minutes later was pounding at the great gate. The guard heard him, and called the officer of the night, when he was taken in and put under the surgeon's care.

No one warned General Herkimer of the foe, and at sunrise he was on the move anxious to traverse the six miles which separated him from the waiting garrison. While passing through a dense wood he was suddenly attacked by a heavy force of the enemy, who poured in a terrific fire from both sides, cutting down his men like swaths of grass. A terrible hand-to-hand fight ensued. General Herkimer seemed to be everywhere, gallantly directing his men. At length he fell, mortally wounded.

"Here, boys," he called to two men near him, "pick me up, and place me against yonder tree."

They did so, and then, taking his pipe from his pocket, the brave commander filled and lighted it. Puffing slowly away, he directed his men in a struggle which, owing to the superior numbers of the enemy, seemed hopeless. But unexpected help was at hand. After Captain Swartwout heard from the lips of the wounded scout the full particulars of the proposed attack he said: 170

"St. Leger will not come here until after that battle. I may as well have a hand in it," and,

therefore, leading an hundred picked men, he hurried toward Oriskany. Falling upon the rear of the red-coats just as they were about to claim a victory, he put them to flight.

Before they could realize the weakness of the reinforcements and rally again, he, with the wounded hero and the remnant of his gallant force, beat a safe retreat to the garrison.

That evening he sat beside the cot of Joe Fisher, telling him of the events of the day.

“Then Late did not find the general,” the lad said sadly. “I wonder what happened to him?”

“I fear he fell into the hands of the British,” the captain replied.

“Were they badly whipped?” asked the lad.

“Not so but that they have been able to surround the fort,” the officer replied. “We are hemmed in at last.” **171**

“Then there will be a battle here?” the boy continued.

“It looks like it.”

“You must have a banner, captain!” exclaimed Joe, sitting up.

“What do you mean?” the officer asked.

Eagerly the scout told him of the Act of Congress, and, describing the appearance of the miniature flag he had seen, he continued:

“Can’t we have one made, Captain Swartwout, to float from the highest bastion?”

“We will,” the commander replied. “I have a tailor in the fort. He shall make it to-night under your directions, and we’ll unfurl it at sunrise.”

A few moments later the tailor was at work. Sheets were cut for the white stripes, bits of scarlet cloth joined to form the red, and the blue ground for the stars was made from a cloak belonging to the captain. At sunrise, amid the cheers of the men and a salute of thirteen cannon, it was swung to the breeze from the highest staff.

Colonel St. Leger saw and gazed in wonder at it for some time. Then he sent for a prisoner whom some of his Indians had captured the previous day. **172**

“What does that mean?” he demanded.

The captive, a lad of perhaps eighteen years, looked at the floating banner and replied with a grin:

“That? Why, it’s the new flag of a new nation!”

With a great oath the enraged officer cried:

“It is the first and the last time it will ever confront a British army, for I shall carry it away with me.”

173

CHAPTER X.
CLIPPING THE RIGHT WING.

The young prisoner in the British camp, as the reader may have surmised, was Latham Wentworth. How he came to be there is easily explained.

After parting with Joe at the junction of the trails, he traveled with the same caution as when coming down Wood Creek, lest he might happen upon straggling Indians. After a time, however, he believed there was no longer any danger of falling in with the savages, and carelessly advanced regardless of noise. Then, from the top of a small hill, he saw the glimmer of fires in the Continental camp and, increasing his speed, took the most direct line through the woods.

A small party of Indians, however, separated from the main force earlier in the day, had wandered so far east of the garrison as to be attracted by the same camp-fires.

Unconscious of danger, Late continued on his course until, before he had heard anything to cause alarm, five savages leaped upon him. One seized his rifle; two threw him to the ground; a fourth clapped his hands over the captive's mouth to prevent an outcry, while the remaining Indian proceeded to tie the lad's hands behind him. Then they picked him up and hurried through the woods for some distance. Finding, however, they were not followed they soon put the prisoner on his feet, and, compelling him to keep pace with themselves, carried him to their encampment. Thrusting him into a wigwam they placed a guard over him and the young scout was left alone until morning. **174**

On the following day, when the Indian encampment was changed to the vicinity of Fort Stanwix, Late was taken along as a matter of course, and, later, brought with other prisoners to Colonel St. Leger for his personal inspection.

By the side of the colonel stood David Daggett and Hiram Le Geyt, and immediately the old Tory saw Late he gave vent to a cry of delight.

"We've got you at last!" he shouted. "We've got you at last!" and then to the commander and his son-in-law he told how he had followed the prisoner and his comrade on their journey from the Hudson to the fort. The attempt to kill them, the overturning of the boat at the falls, driving the half-clad boys into the woods, the destruction of their property, their visit to the farm, and his further pursuit, were all rapidly related. Then he continued: **175**

"The young devils have more lives than a cat. I couldn't kill them. But now that you have this one, why not string him up to the nearest tree?"

"I could hardly do that," the colonel replied. "He is not a spy."

"Yes, he is," Master Daggett shouted. "He was caught because of hanging around your encampment trying to spy out what was being done."

“He may be a scout, or courier, but hardly a spy,” the officer persisted.

“But is his entering my house, deceiving my wife, and running off with my property, to pass unnoticed?” interrupted Hiram Le Geyt. “The very clothes he wears belong to me!”

Colonel St. Leger was silent for a moment, and then said:

“I cannot condemn and hang him, according to military rules; but I might turn him over to the Indians. They would make short work of him.”

“That is it. Let them kill the fellow at the stake!” cried the old Tory in glee. “I’ll go and watch the flames as they curl around him. Ah! it will be a great sight to see him sizzle and burn.” **176**

“He deserves the fate,” the younger Tory said angrily. “Let the savages have him, I say.”

The British commander, naturally more humane than his Tory friends, appeared to be shocked by the cruel proposal. He hesitated to give an order which would send the lad to the stake; but finally said:

“Let him go with the other prisoners now. I will decide later what is to be done with him.”

On the next morning when the young scout, unmindful of the terrible fate which might be his, declared that the banner floating over the fort was the flag of a new nation, the officer in his wrath sent for the men who had made the capture, and turned the lad over to them.

“He is your prisoner. Do what you please with him,” he said.

Therefore back to the Indian encampment Late was taken, and a day or two after a council was summoned to decide his fate. The terrible slaughter of the savages during the battle of Oriskany, and the fact that the captive had been found in the vicinity of that place, may have had something to do with the sentence imposed. He was condemned to the stake. **177**

Just before sunset, surrounded by a score of braves, he was taken across the river and tied to a small tree, whose branches had been trimmed away for that purpose. Around him the fagots were piled, and the death dance was begun.

Pale, but unflinching, the heroic lad watched the grotesque dancing, at the ending of which he knew the flames would be kindled. It was not the form of death he would have chosen, but, after all, it would soon be over, and what difference did it make? He had long since given his life to the Cause, and if this was the method by which the sacrifice was to be made, he would die like a man.

The dance was at an end, and two of the savages, taking brands from a fire which had been kindled near-by, came toward the helpless boy. In another instant they would have kindled the wood about him; but at the critical moment a great shout was raised, and some one, darting out from the thicket, dashed across the little clearing to push aside both braves with one sweep of his strong arms.

Late had hardly more than understood that the newcomer was his friend, Ira Le Geyt, when the latter, holding aloft his iron cross, poured forth in the native tongue a torrent of words which held fixed the attention of the Indian band. When the speech was ended, each savage brandished his weapons, as he hurried across the river toward the camp with loud yells, leaving the two lads alone. 178

Drawing his knife, Ira cut the cords that bound the young scout to the tree, saying as he did so:

“I was just in time, Late.”

“That you were,” was the emphatic reply. “But how came you here?”

“It is too long a story to repeat now. I will tell you later, and you can explain how you happened to be in this fix. But now I must go to the British camp.”

“No, no,” his companion cried. “You mustn’t go there!”

“Why not?”

“Because Hiram Le Geyt and his father-in-law, David Daggett, are there.”

“Whew! I came pretty near getting into a bad scrape!” Ira exclaimed. “Well, suppose we go into the forest, where we shall be less likely to be disturbed.”

Soon they were sitting under the great pine, which Captain Swartwout had pointed out as a signal station, and Late told his story, concluding by saying: 179

“Where Joe is now I don’t know.”

“He must have sent word to the commander about the attack on General Herkimer,” Ira said half to himself.

“How do you know? Have you heard anything about the battle?” Late asked eagerly.

“Yes, I met two or three of the soldiers who had been separated from the main body during the fight. Because you failed to see the general, he knew nothing about the ambush, and walked directly into it. A hand to hand fight followed, and the general himself was wounded; but with his back against a tree, he lighted his pipe, and, puffing away, directed his men in what seemed a hopeless struggle. Then came reinforcements, the men who told me did not know where from, that attacked the British forces in the rear, driving them back. It was then that the soldiers I saw became separated from their companions, and all they could guess was, that our army, having dispersed the red-coats, went on to the Fort.”

“The reinforcements must have come from there,” Late declared, “and it shows that Joe gave the warning. We’ll know about it later. But now tell me how you happen to be here.” 180

“I’ll go back to the time you left me,” Ira said, and related all the incidents already known to the reader, down to the defeat of Colonel Baum at Bennington.

“When I got back to Fort Edward, I found General Burgoyne in an ugly frame of mind. Baum’s defeat deprived him of the stores he so sadly needed. No word had come from Clinton, and nothing had been heard from St. Leger. In his desperation he decided to send me up here to hurry the colonel down the valley. He is afraid to attack our forces at Bemis Heights until he receives reinforcements. Of course I got word to General Schuyler before beginning the journey, and he suggested a plan which, judging from the flight of those Indians, will prove a success.”

“What did you say to them?” Late interrupted. “I never saw redskins run as they did after your speech.”

“I told them,” his friend replied, “that Colonel Arnold was coming with a large force, and would capture them all if they did not run away. The cross was proof to them that my message was true. Before to-morrow morning the entire Indian force will hear the news, and vanish like fog before the rising sun. In two days St. Leger will have only his regulars to confront our men.” **181**

“And we’ll whip him as the patriots whipped Baum at Bennington,” Late cried with a laugh.

“My only regret is that I cannot go to the colonel with the message I had,” Ira said.

“What was it?”

“I was to tell him of Baum’s defeat, Clinton’s failure to meet Burgoyne’s demands, and the latter’s critical condition before an overwhelming force,” was the answer. “I hoped to discourage him so he would go back into Canada.”

Late remained silent a few moments as though thinking the matter over. Then he asked:

“Can’t you make up a report from General Burgoyne, bringin’ in all those things, an’ advisin’ him to give up his campaign?”

“I can make up the report readily enough,” his companion admitted. “The difficult thing is to send it in such a way that he will believe it comes from his chief.”

“Give it to one of the Indians,” was the quick suggestion; “he can make any explanation you have a mind to give him.” **182**

Ira laughed. “What is that old saying?” he asked. “‘Two heads are better than one’? I believe we can make the scheme work. It is getting too dark to write the message to-night; but I will prepare it early in the morning.”

They went back a little farther into the woods, built a temporary shack, and, after partaking of some food Ira had with him, took turns in sleeping and watching until dawn.

After breakfast young Le Geyt took from his pack the necessary writing materials, and, “as General Burgoyne’s secretary,” so he said in sport, wrote a letter to Colonel St. Leger, telling of the misfortunes which his commander had experienced, setting forth the direful condition he was in, and urging the colonel to come to his assistance; but adding, “If, however, you find it impossible to do so within a few days, then, to

save yourself and men from capture, you had better abandon the campaign and return to Quebec, for I hear the rebels are sending a large force against you."

This he read to his companion, who said:

"That'll fix him. Once he gets them idees into his head, he'll run away faster than the redskins did." **183**

"I'll go on to the Indian camp and find some one to carry this to headquarters. Will you be here when I get back?"

"Somewhere in call," Late replied. "But, say, how near is Colonel Arnold and his men? Perhaps I ought to signal Captain Swartwout that they are comin'."

"I passed them near Little Falls, and, of course, traveled faster than they can. To-morrow will be ample time to give warning of their approach."

"All right; but give me those lines an' hooks I saw in your pack, an' I'll have some fish cookin' when you come back."

"I'll leave my outfit here, and then you may help yourself to anything that is needed."

It was several hours before he returned to find that Late had kept his promise, for half a dozen fine fish were ready to serve. As they were eating them Ira related his experiences.

"Before I got to the Indian encampment, I saw a young brave slowly crawling toward it. Watching him, I soon understood that he had been wounded and was trying to get back to his friends, therefore I quickened my steps to overtake him. Upon first seeing me he was alarmed; but when I showed my cross and spoke in his own tongue, he dismissed all fears and told me his story. **184**

"He was in the battle at Oriskany and got a bullet in his body which for a time rendered him unconscious. When he came to himself the fighting was over, and, fearing he might be found and made captive, he crept into a thicket near a small brook, staying there until his wound was partially healed. Since then he had been endeavoring to get back to the camp. I did not leave him until he was safe with his own people, for he proved to be a chief of high rank. But the exertion had been too much for him, and before his friends could do anything, he died.

"I saw my chance at once for getting the letter I carried into the hands of the colonel. Watching for a favorable moment, I concealed it on the person of the dead chief, and waited for it to be discovered. Within half an hour it was brought to me with the question:

"'What is it? Who is it for?'

"Pretending to be surprised at the finding, I explained that it was a message of some kind, and was intended for Colonel St Leger. **185**

"'It should be carried to him at once,' I declared.

"Immediately a brother of the dead man hurried off to headquarters with it. Fearing there might be an investigation into the circumstances

attending the discovery of the letter, I hurriedly visited the other tribes in the encampment, learning that many of the savages had already left for their villages, and that others were preparing to go. My announcement to the Indian squad last night was clearly beginning to bear fruit; but I added a little more seed as I went from band to band.

“Once I had gone the rounds, I left the encampment and sought the shelter of the forest. Choosing a spot where I could watch the Indians, I remained several hours, noting with no little pleasure that every few minutes a squad of savages went away. More than two hundred must have left while I sat there.”

“Didn’t the red-coats make any effort to stop them?” Late asked.

“Judging by the way the British officers were continually coming and going, I should say they did,” was the answer; “and once I saw a delegation of chiefs marching to Colonel St. Leger’s headquarters, probably for a council with him. But the yeast is working, and he cannot prevent the stampede which has already begun.”

“He’ll wonder where that redskin got the message,” young Wentworth said with a chuckle of satisfaction.

“Yes, and who the white man was that came and went so suddenly. But I can stand the mystery if he can,” was the laughing reply.

Next morning the Indian encampment was so nearly deserted that Ira advised that the fact be signaled the fort. Climbing the great pine, Late took from the lining of his coat the strips of cloth which had been given him, and in a few moments the red and white colors were waving gently in the light breeze.

Joe Fisher, who was now able to walk about, although his arm was still in a sling, chanced to be on the bastion. Gazing carelessly toward the big tree, as he had done many times before without discovering anything, and without really expecting to see anything unusual this time, he was astonished at beholding the bits of cloth waving in the air. Then he ran down the wall, and across the parade to the captain’s quarters. Bursting unceremoniously into the officer’s presence, he exclaimed:

“Captain, Late is alive, and has escaped from the red-coats!”

“How do you know?” the commander asked eagerly.

“Because there are signals on the tree. It is the red and the white, which means that the Indians are deserting.”

“So it does,” admitted the captain. “I’ll go and see for myself.”

Man and boy soon stood on the bastion looking across the river, and while they gazed the red cloth was drawn in, and the white left alone to toss in the gentle wind.

“Reinforcements are comin’!” shouted Joe in his excitement. “Reinforcements are comin’!”

His words rang through the garrison, and in an instant came back in answer a mighty cheer.

“The signals are changing again, captain,” the lad cried. “See! Late has put the black beside the white. It means that the red-coats are makin’ ready to run away!”

“In that case we’ll give them something to run from,” Captain Swartwout declared, and immediately issued orders for all his force, save fifty men, to prepare for a sally. 188

But before the little army could be made ready, Colonel St. Leger was on the move. Rendered uneasy by the desertion of his allies, alarmed by the tidings contained in the letter which had reached him so mysteriously, he lost hope when a Tory came into camp with the report:

“Old Schuyler and his whole army are only a few miles away.”

The Britisher gave orders to raise the siege. The cheers of the soldiers in the Yankee fort quickened his movements, and when the so-called rebels rushed out from the great gate, he and his regulars were on the run.

Reasoning that the small force in the garrison would not dare to make a sally unless reinforcements were close at hand, St. Leger did not even stop to skirmish with his pursuers; but hastened toward Oswego at a pace which soon forced the daring patriots to abandon the chase. When Colonel Arnold and his twelve hundred men arrived a few hours later, there was no foe to fight.

But some time before the gallant colonel appeared, Ira Le Geyt, Late Wentworth, and Joe Fisher were comparing notes and telling their experiences under the walls of the fort. When the latter heard of the victory at Bennington, he exclaimed: 189

“Well, if General Burgoyne’s left wing was clipped at Bennington, he has lost his entire right wing here at Fort Stanwix.”

190

CHAPTER XI.
THE OLD HUT.

When Colonel St. Leger abandoned the siege at Fort Stanwix, he left behind him two very angry men. One was old David Daggett, and the other Hiram Le Geyt. The former, cherishing his hatred for Latham Wentworth, had tried to keep informed of his fate; but the Indians who held him captive were, for some reason, very reticent about what they were going to do with the lad. So it happened the old Tory did not learn that the young scout had been condemned to the stake, until the afternoon of the proposed torture. He hurried toward the scene; but gained the bank of the river just in time to meet the band of yelling Indians in full flight.

Unable to speak their language, he could make out but little regarding the reason for flight; but turned and followed them to their encampment. 191

There he met a brave who could speak a little English, and succeeded in learning that a white man, with an iron cross, had suddenly appeared, telling the Indians that there was no time for their cruel sport, because a great army of Yankees were near at hand.

“It was Ira!” he cried, and retraced his steps to the stream, expecting to meet his grandson on the way. Disappointed in this, he crossed the river to the scene of the death dance. There was the tree that had been used as a stake, the scattered wood, the severed cords, but no prisoner.

“I know who it was,” he muttered, after carefully examining the clearing. “It was that other young devil, Joe Fisher. He not only in some way learned about Ira’s cross; but has got one in imitation of it, and just fooled those redskins to rescue the prisoner.”

In his rage he hurried back to Colonel St. Leger’s tent with the tale.

“A skilful trick,” was the only comment of that officer, who, now that his anger had cooled, was secretly glad the young scout had been saved from a terrible death.

“But you ought to send out men to find and make certain both are burned at the stake,” Master Daggett growled.

“Look here, my friend,” the colonel replied, becoming tired of the constant interference of his guest, “why don’t you search for them? When you have located the lads, I’ll give you as many men as may be needed to capture them.” **192**

“A capital suggestion, colonel,” the half-crazy man cried. “I’ll do it. Good luck to you, as well as to myself,” and he hurried away to the tent he shared with his son-in-law.

Hiram Le Geyt was within, and listened eagerly to the story his father-in-law poured forth while making ready for the tramp. He took the same view of Late Wentworth’s rescue that the older Tory had; but it suggested to him two possibilities which had not entered the former’s mind. Had something happened to his son, and the talisman fallen into rebel hands? The question awakened his fears, and he decided to visit Burgoyne’s camp at the first opportunity. Then again, might not the announcement of an approaching army of rebels so fill the Indians with alarm, that they would desert Colonel St. Leger, leaving him with a force too small to cope with the Yankees?

Like his son Ira, he was familiar with the language of the savages, and, leaving his father-in-law to follow out his own whims, he hastened to the encampment of the dusky allies. He found that the tidings of a coming army had already spread among the savages like wild-fire, and although none had yet started for their villages, there was an uneasiness among the entire company which betokened grave disaster. **193**

Doing what he could to allay the fears among the braves, he learned some facts which greatly mystified him. The description which the warriors gave of the person who had so suddenly come among them, did not accord with the ideas

he had formed of young Fisher's appearance, while what the Indians had to say about the man who had given them the friendly warning, did tally well with the likeness of his own son. Could it be that his father-in-law had made a mistake? If so, why had Ira set the captive free? Where had he gone? Was the report of a great force, coming to the rescue of the fort correct? Perplexed by the many questions which were crowding into his mind, he turned abruptly on his heel and went back to the British camp to talk the matter over with Colonel St. Leger. He found the officer so little disturbed by the strange occurrence that he was angered.

"If it was a Yankee trick to scare away that squad of savages and save the youngster," the colonel remarked, "it has been a success, and we can afford to laugh because it was so cleverly done. If it was indeed your son, he will in due time present himself here. Meantime we can afford to await his coming, for I put no faith in the belief that the Indians will run away." **194**

Colonel St. Leger changed his mind, however, the next day, for he had barely eaten breakfast before a messenger arrived announcing that during the night two bands of his allies, numbering over a hundred, had left the camp.

"That's bad!" he muttered; "but I'll send an officer to bring them back, and a little later will call the head men into consultation. Surely there cannot be very much alarm come from an idle rumor."

An hour later he received another shock. A young brave appeared bringing a sealed note, addressed to himself. Tearing it open he read the few lines, noted the signature of General Burgoyne, with which he was familiar, and then demanded of the waiting Indian where he had got the missive. As best he could in broken English, the savage told the story. It was not plain to the officer, and he sent for Hiram Le Geyt to act as interpreter. Then the facts came out.

A chief, wounded at Oriskany, had, assisted by a white stranger with an iron cross, crawled into the encampment, but soon died from exposure and suffering. While preparing him for burial the message had been found on his body. When shown to the white man he knew nothing about it; but, after looking it over, said it was for the British commander, therefore he, the messenger, had brought it. The explanation involved so much of mystery that the colonel asked: **195**

"Is this white man still in the encampment?"

"He was when I left it," was the reply.

"Bring him here," was the command, and it was a stupid mistake on the part of the officer. Had he sent an orderly, the latter would doubtless have found and brought in the strange visitor. As it was, the warrior, when he found Ira, was easily persuaded that the lad could go to the commander alone, and he did not do so.

Meanwhile the colonel and his friend discussed the genuineness of the message. The former, perhaps because its contents gave him a chance to withdraw gracefully from an unpleasant

situation, was firm in the belief that his chief had sent the letter. Hiram Le Geyt felt positive the note was a skilful forgery, designed by the rebels to frighten the officer into an abandonment of the siege.

“It is absurd to think the general would send you such a message except through the regular channel, an accredited courier,” the Tory declared. **196**

“He may have done so,” the officer retorted.

“Then where is he? Why don’t he appear?” demanded Master Le Geyt.

“Because he is dead, injured, or captured,” replied the colonel calmly. “Finding he could not deliver it himself, he gave it to the wounded chief, who crawled miles, sacrificed his life, in fact, that he might place it in my hands.”

“A pretty theory, but one no sane man would accept,” the Tory cried angrily.

“What is your belief?” asked Colonel St. Leger, growing cool as his companion grew angry.

“That the white man who helped the redskin into his camp hid the letter on the dead body, a much more sensible view than your own,” sneered the Tory.

“We shall soon know who is right. It cannot be long now before the fellow is here.”

They waited an hour, and then an orderly was sent to the encampment to learn the reason for the long delay. He returned with the word that the white stranger could not be found, and that the Indians were rapidly deserting. **197**

During the entire day efforts were made to hold the Indians; but with only partial success. After nightfall the red-men departed in such numbers that barely an hundred were left at dawn. Then came the Tory with his startling news that General Schuyler’s entire army was close at hand, and Colonel St. Leger gave orders to abandon the siege.

In vain Hiram Le Geyt and David Daggett, who had now returned, argued.

“I am obeying the orders of my superior,” Colonel St. Leger declared stiffly.

“But they are false,” both Tories cried in a rage.

“You must permit me to be my own judge,” was the withering reply.

Cheers from the Yankee fort interrupted the conversation, and when the sally was made, the angry Tories were themselves forced to flee. But, as soon as possible, they left the retreating army, and turned their faces toward home.

Compelled to make a long detour because of Colonel Arnold’s forces, they could not decide as to the number of soldiers, and were not certain but that the entire army of the north was advancing to strengthen the fort. For the first time they also were compelled to acknowledge that there might be some truth in the message which had so mysteriously come into the hands of the British colonel. **198**

Once at home, Hiram Le Geyt discussed with his wife the incidents connected with the use of the iron cross by the white lad, and while she agreed with him that Joe Fisher and the stranger were probably one and the same, yet she was fearful that it betokened some misfortune to her son. She urged him to visit Burgoyne's headquarters immediately, and, therefore, on the morning following his arrival at the farm, he and his father-in-law embarked in a canoe to journey down the river.

Soon after Colonel Arnold arrived at Fort Stanwix, the three young scouts set out on their return to the Hudson. They traveled on foot, taking the nearest way through the valley. Arriving at Little Falls, they spent the night at the house of a well-known patriot, and early next morning resumed their tramp. As they passed the lane leading to the Le Geyt farm, Late asked Ira if he was going to stop and see his "mother."

"I'm afraid she wouldn't be glad to see me," he replied with a smile.

"I wonder if Hiram and David have come home yet?" Joe added, "or if they are still with St Leger?" **199**

"I shan't run any risk to find out," Ira declared. "You waste words, lads, for dear as the old place is to me, I am not going to stop there now."

They all laughed and went on, little dreaming that at about the same time the men of whom they had been speaking were setting off down the Mohawk. Toward evening the coming of a severe thunder storm forced them to seek a shelter of some kind.

"There is an old hut not far away," Ira said. "I spent a night there on my way to the fort. It is in fairly good repair, and will give us decent refuge from the storm."

While speaking he had turned into the woods, and was followed by the other lads. A short walk brought them to the cabin, and just in time, for hardly were they inside when the rain began to fall.

It was not a terrific storm, and soon resolved into a steady down-pour of rain, which caused the young travelers to be thankful for so good a shelter. They ate supper from the contents of their packs, and swept a corner of the room, intending to make their beds on the hard floor.

Before lying down, however, Late made ready to close the door against any chance intruders; but he stepped back quickly, exclaiming in a low tone: **200**

"David Daggett and some other men are comin'! Hark! don't you hear their voices?"

His comrades listened a moment, and Ira said:

"Quick! we must get into the loft!"

The next instant he had climbed up the rude pole to the floor above. Joe followed, while Late delayed only long enough to throw up their guns and traps, after which he also ascended. Pulling the pole up after him, he covered the opening with a sort of trapdoor, and none too soon, for in another minute the old Tory entered the cabin

accompanied by three men.

“Feel in your pocket, Hiram, and see if your flint and steel are handy,” Master Daggett said. “If there’s any wood here, we’ll build a fire to dry our clothes.”

“Don’t bother, Master Le Geyt,” a strange voice replied. “I have mine handy, and am sure there is enough stuff for a little blaze. Or there was the last time I looked in here.”

Then the boys saw through the crevices of the floor the glare of a tiny flame.

“We have it,” the same man added, “and here is the wood. Soon there’ll be fire enough to dry us within as well as without,” and he laughed at his own attempt to be witty. **201**

“How fortunate we were to meet you, Captain Brant,” Hiram Le Geyt now said; “but for you we shouldn’t have known of this shelter. But who is your companion? You have not introduced him to us.”

“I haven’t had the time. When our canoes crashed into each other and sank, it was all we could do to look out for ourselves, and while running for the cabin there was no chance for introductions. But I am now glad to present him to you. Hiram Le Geyt, this is Alexander Turnbull; Master Daggett, Master Turnbull.”

While the men below were acknowledging the introduction and greeting each other heartily, the lads above strove to get a view of the famous Mohawk chieftain, and the no less famous British spy, who had so many times escaped capture.

The blazing fire below gave them a full view of both men. Brant, a stalwart Indian in civilized dress, and speaking English fluently;[5] Turnbull, a little man, almost womanly in appearance, and yet known to be brave with a facility for assuming disguises which so far had never been detected. **202**

The boys would have been glad to talk with each other just then, but prudence forced them to remain silent, and, therefore, gave their undivided attention to the conversation which followed.

“Are you from below, captain?” Hiram Le Geyt asked, as he was wringing the rain from his garments that he might spread them in front of the fire.

“Yes,” the Indian answered. “I was not pleased with St. Leger’s movements at Oriskany, and went down to meet Burgoyne.”

“With what result?” the Tory asked eagerly.

“He sustains me; gives me a colonel’s commission, and hereafter I am to have a voice in all campaigns where I and my men serve as allies.”

“It won’t help you any,” the Tory said bitterly.

“Why not?”

“Because St. Leger is already on his way back to Quebec,” was Master Le Geyt’s reply, and he

rapidly detailed the events which had led to the Colonel's flight.

"Did you see your son?"

"No."

"He was up there." **203**

"How do you know?"

"Burgoyne told me he had sent him."

The younger Tory was silent for a minute or two, and then he asked:

"Father, what do you make of that?"

"I can hardly believe it," the old man gasped. "Why didn't he make himself known?"

"I don't know," Brandt answered bluntly, "unless it was a freak, such as you have sometimes shown."

Instead of being offended, the old Tory laughed.

"Hiram would hate to admit the boy was anything like me," he said.

"Well," the captain went on, "Burgoyne speaks in the highest terms of the lad's services, of his loyalty, his fidelity, and ability. When he returned from Bennington, where the general sent him to spy out the land, he brought with him a list of all the stores, and of every farm in the vicinity where cattle and horses could be found. I saw it myself, and told the general if he had given Ira command of the forces, instead of Baum, he'd have brought everything back with him."

"What did Baum do?"

"Allowed his force to be crushed, or nearly so. With St. Leger's retreat Burgoyne will feel that he is left alone." **204**

"Where is he now?"

"Across the Hudson making ready to advance on the rebels who are entrenched at Bemis Heights. Now that the colonel has retreated I shall get together my men and go to his help."

"What is the outlook?"

Brant was silent for some time, as if thinking the situation over, then said frankly: "I cannot tell. Now that the rebels have a new commander, I believe Burgoyne has fair chance of success."

"A new rebel commander?" cried David Daggett. "What has become of old Schuyler?"

"He has been removed, and a man named Gates, [6] from New England, put in his place."

"Removed for what?" interrupted Hiram Le Geyt.

The Indian laughed. "It is a long story. Master Turnbull will tell it."

To say that the three scouts in the loft were amazed at this revelation, is a mild statement. Even in the darkness they gazed at each other with an intensity which could be felt if not seen. **205**

Then, with ears strained to catch every word, they listened to the tale of the spy.

“It has been my latest work,” Turnbull began, “and one I am proud of. We may as well admit what we all know, that Schuyler is the ablest man the rebels could have chosen for this northern campaign. Too able, as many of us who were watching the movements of both armies, soon discovered, and we decided he must be removed if Burgoyne was to win.

“I was sent into New England, as a good patriot of course, to stir up a feeling against him, and raise a clamor for his removal. I claimed that by allowing St. Clair to abandon Ticonderoga, and by evacuating Fort Edward, he had left an open gate for the enemy to pour into the East. I said nothing about his fortifying Bemis Heights, nor of the skilful way in which he had maneuvered to delay his opponent until the latter’s stores were exhausted. I dwelt only on what seemed to be grievous mistakes. And I succeeded, the clamor was raised, and now the mighty is fallen. Schuyler is down and out.”

The four men discussed the matter for some time, and all were agreed that the work of Master Turnbull meant much for the king’s cause. Then they stretched themselves on the floor and slept. **206**

The boys in the loft followed their example, making as little noise as might be when they laid down on the rough planks. The heavy rain on the roof did much to drown the creaking of the timbers and the heavy breathing of the sleepers.

They were awakened by the singing of David Daggett. There was not a musical note in the old man’s voice; but he believed there was, and, arising just as the sun was breaking through the clouds, he threw open the door and screamed:

“When I was young, I served the king.
I thought it was the proper thing.
When I was old and my hair was gray,
On the king’s side I did stay.”

He was soon silenced. Captain Brant, and Master Turnbull, as well as his own son-in-law, were aroused and striving to shut off the old Tory’s clamor by the threat:

“If you don’t stop, we’ll duck you in the Mohawk.”

This commotion enabled the lads to make a change of position without betraying their presence, and then they waited until the occupants of the lower room had eaten and departed. **207**

Just before leaving the younger Tory said to the older:

“Father, if Ira went up to Fort Stanwix, he will stop at the farm when he returns. Likely he is there now, so we may as well go back. I hope, since they are on their way up the river, that Captain Brant and Master Turnbull will go with us, to be our guests for as long a time as possible.”

“That’s right, Hiram,” the old man replied, and with such understanding the four friends of the

king left the hut, striking off through the thicket toward the road that led to Master Le Geyt's home.

Two minutes later the three scouts had descended from their hiding-place and were making preparations for breakfast. While working they talked.

"It's lucky for you, Ira," Late began, "that those Tories decided to go home."

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"I wish we had been outside the hut when those fellers came," Joe said half to himself.

"Why?" asked young Wentworth.

"We might have captured the whole gang," the former explained. "It would have been a great haul." 208

"I should have been glad to put my hands on that spy," Ira said grimly.

He had hardly more than spoken when the door was flung open, and Master Turnbull stood before them.

209

CHAPTER XII.

THE REAL IRA.

"Excuse me, lieutenant," he said looking at the leader of the little party. "I think I left my knife here, and as it is a valuable one, I came back for it."

There was no question but that he had heard Ira's remark, and it was equally evident he knew who the young scout really was. He must also have understood how dangerous was his position, yet he spoke as calmly as if he had suddenly happened upon a party of friends, rather than enemies.

While Late and Joe stood motionless in bewilderment, Ira showed himself fully a match, both in coolness and politeness, for the spy.

"We have seen nothing of the weapon, Master Turnbull," he replied, "but perhaps it is here. Come in, and we'll help you find it."

"Thank you, lieutenant," the fellow replied as he entered and advanced to the corner where he had been sleeping. "It should be here," he continued, stooping down to look for it. "Yes, I have it," he cried a moment later, and came forward holding a beautiful dagger in his hand. Passing it to Ira, he asked in a tone of pride: 210

"Did you ever see anything finer than that?"

The scout gazed at it admiringly. The scabbard was of fine leather, curiously embroidered with threads of gold. The hilt was silver, and on it the letters "A. T." were engraved within a wreath of myrtle leaves and flowers; the blade was of finest steel.

"A gift from my lady-love," the owner explained

with a laugh. “Do you wonder I valued the toy enough to come back after it? I carry it in a pocket in my waistcoat, as an extra weapon for a special time of need. Somehow it slipped from its hiding-place last night, and I did not discover it until I was a half-mile down the trail. Return it to me, please, and I will rejoin my companions.”

“The weapon you may have,” Ira replied, passing it back to Turnbull; “but I must insist that you stay to breakfast with us.”

With a shrug of his shoulders the spy replied:

“I suppose I must, if you insist upon it, lieutenant,” and he quietly seated himself upon a short log which served as stool and awaited the pleasure of his hosts. **211**

“Late, take your rifle and keep watch against the return of the Indian or Tories, while the rest of us eat,” the young scout commanded.

“You need not trouble yourself to do that,” Master Turnbull explained. “I told my friends to go on, and I would overtake them. It will be an hour or two before they think it worth while to turn back for the purpose of hunting for me.”

“I do not doubt your word, sir,” was the reply; “but we will run no risk of either surprise or capture.”

“Exercising your usual caution, lieutenant——but I will not speak the other name, for it may be you do not care to have even your comrades know it. Had I been as careful, however, I would not now be in your power.”

“Why in the world didn’t you run away as soon as you caught sight of us?” Joe asked bluntly.

“Because I preferred to be captured rather than lose my knife,” the spy explained with a smile. “That may seem queer now; but you will understand it later on in life.”

“When I get a sweetheart, I s’pose you mean,” the lad replied, with a grin. “Well, it’s lucky for us you’ve got one,” and he turned his attention to the food. **212**

When he had finished the meal he changed places with Latham, while Ira sat with his eyes fixed upon the prisoner.

“The more I think the matter over,” Master Turnbull said after a brief silence, “the surer I am, lieutenant, that you have adopted my trade.”

“I have sowed no seed of discord against General Burgoyne,” Ira replied in a meaning tone.

“No, but you would have done it had such a step been possible, or necessary to your purpose. You know the old saying that ‘Everything is fair in love and war?’” was the smiling reply.

“Yes, I presume so,” Ira said slowly; “but it comes a trifle harder to admit it in this case, than in some others.”

“I understand,” the man replied with a show of sympathy; “but you have this to console you, that every charge made against the general was false.”

“That is something I readily acknowledge,” the lad said with a laugh; “but you are a dangerous fellow to be at liberty, Master Turnbull, and I shall be doing the Cause great service if I see that you are put where it is no longer possible to do any harm.” 213

“I might have known you would take that view of it,” the spy said gloomily, “and yet I have a proposition to make.”

“What is it?”

“I said you had taken up my trade,” he began, “for I venture to guess you have been up country as Ira Le Geyt. You steered clear of Colonel St. Leger’s headquarters, knowing there were those near-by who would recognize you.”

Ira’s reply was a smile.

“I venture more,” the speaker continued. “It is that you have been the Ira Le Geyt who for weeks has been a close adviser of General Burgoyne. How you have brought it about, lieutenant, I don’t know. Where the real Ira is I cannot say. But, if the disasters that have befallen my general are due to you, the injury you have done the king is greater than any I have worked against the colonies.”

“Thank you,” the scout replied. “That is no mean compliment, coming from one who has been so uniformly successful in his work as yourself.”

“I see we understand each other,” the spy added. “Your work has offset mine. Why not continue to let it do so?” 214

“What do you mean?”

“Let me go now, and I give my word of honor that I will in no way betray you, either to the men I have just left, or to the general. In other words, you may go on in your work unmolested by me, if you allow me to continue mine.”

“You can afford to make such an offer,” Ira said with a smile. “I have you where I can put an end to all your work. More than that even, for once I deliver you into the hands of our commander, your life is not worth a farthing. What gain have I personally in releasing you? I can continue the work I am doing more successfully with you in our hands, than at liberty.”

“Do not be so sure of that,” the spy returned quickly.

“I will run the risk anyway,” the scout answered decisively. “You must go with us,” and ten minutes later the three lads and their prisoner were moving rapidly down the trail.

Not until they were twenty-five miles below the old hut, did the little party go into camp. A rude shack was the only shelter, and in this the prisoner and two of the scouts were soon sleeping. It fell to Late’s lot to stand the first watch. His time of guard duty had nearly expired when he heard the spy moving restlessly. Going quickly to his side, the lad found Turnbull sitting upright. 215

“What is the trouble?” he demanded.

“I want to have a talk with you,” the man said in

a low tone. “Can’t I come outside? I don’t want to awaken your comrades.”

Wondering what the fellow had in mind; but believing himself capable of caring for him, Late said:

“All right! Come on! But understand that if you attempt to run away I’ll let daylight through you.”

Master Turnbull made no reply to the threat; but, rising, followed Late into the open air. It was starlight, not very dark, and quite warm. Sitting on a rock, a rod or two from the shack, the prisoner began to fan himself with his hat.

“My!” he cried. “I’m glad to get into the fresh air. It was so hot in there, I couldn’t sleep.”

“Nevertheless, you’ll go back faster than you came out, if you don’t hurry up an’ tell me what’s on your mind,” Late growled, beginning to grow suspicious of the fellow.

“I want to get away,” he said, coming immediately to the subject in hand. **216**

“Of course you do,” the lad retorted. “I should if I was in your place,” and he changed the position of his gun as token that he was not to be trifled with.

The captive noted the movement, but was not disconcerted by it. “I can make it an object for you to go to sleep, and let me steal away,” he continued.

“Will you give me that dagger?” Late asked, although, as he afterward explained to his companions, “I was mad enough inside to bite the rascal’s head off. To think the fool thought he could bribe me.”

“No, I couldn’t do that,” the prisoner replied; “but I’ll give you this,” and he drew a purse from his pocket, shaking it so that Late could hear the clink of the gold.

“How much is that?” the lad asked, with well-feigned eagerness.

“See, they are all sovereigns,” Master Turnbull said, opening the purse and dropping the coins into his hat one by one. “Ten,” he added. “More money than you are ever likely to have again, and it’s all yours if you’ll only be careless enough to let me get away.”

“Careless ’nough to let you get away,” the young scout repeated in a voice loud enough to awaken his comrades. “I’ll show you I’m not to be bought, you old fool, at any price,” and he advanced angrily toward the spy with gun upraised, as if to strike him down. **217**

But before he could do so Turnbull leaped to his feet and made a dash for the nearest tree, evidently hoping to get that between himself and his guard, and so effect his escape. But he was not quick enough. Bringing his rifle to his shoulder, Late fired, and the fugitive fell headlong to the ground. In another moment all three lads were bending over what appeared to be a lifeless body.

“Get a torch,” Ira cried, thrusting his hand

beneath the unconscious man's shirt.

When Joe came with a light, he added:

"He is not dead. His heart still beats. Help me, Late, and we'll take him to the shack."

Gently they carried him to the shelter, and made careful search for the wound.

"There it is on the back of his head," Joe cried, holding the torch so that his companions might see.

"The bullet has not shattered the bones," Ira said a moment later. "It was a glancing shot. He is only stunned. Bring some water, Late."

They bathed the prisoner's temples; forced liquid between his lips; washed and bandaged the wound. When this had been done the man opened his eyes, and, looking up into their faces, smiled faintly. **218**

"I didn't make it," he said feebly.

"Hardly," Late replied. "I'm sorry I had to do it; but you shouldn't have tried to run away."

"I'm not blaming you," he answered. "You're of the right stuff even if you are a rebel. But I ought to have known as much. Your leader don't select any other kind of men to help him."

After a short time he sank into a troubled sleep, and, leaving Joe to watch him, Ira and Late also laid down. A few hours later the former changed places with the watcher, and thus the night passed. At dawn the wounded man showed signs of fever, and was unable to walk.

"What shall we do?" Late asked.

"Make a litter and carry him," Ira replied. "He must be taken where he'll have better care than we can give him here."

Late and Joe hurried off to get material for a stretcher; but a moment later the latter came hurriedly back.

"We have found a canoe that was hidden in a thicket on the river bank," he cried. "Late is putting it into the water, and will then come to help you carry Master Turnbull. I would take hold, but don't believe my right arm is strong enough yet." **219**

"It isn't," his comrade said with decision; "but you can carry our guns and other traps."

Late returned speedily, and slowly he and Ira carried the prisoner to the stream. Fortunately the boat was large enough to carry them all, and embarking, they sailed rapidly down the current, escaping only by a few minutes five horsemen who rode along the river bank in search of them.

One of the riders leaped from his animal and examined the ground near the river carefully.

"What do you make out, captain?" one of his companions asked.

"The fellows found a canoe in those bushes, and, putting the wounded man in it, have gone down the stream," he replied.

“How long ago?”

“They are not a mile away.”

“Then we can head them off,” his comrade cried. “The river makes a bend a few miles below. By riding straight across the neck we should be able to cut them off.”

“Easily,” was the reply, and when the captain had remounted his horse, all hastened back to the trail. Gaining it, they put spurs to their steeds and galloped off in pursuit of their prey. Three hours later they were near the river again. 220

“We must be ahead of the rebels,” the former spokesman said.

“I am sure of it, Hiram,” the eldest of the party replied.

“There they come,” Captain Brant cried five minutes later, pointing to the bow of a canoe which was just coming into view. “We’ll hitch our horses and be ready for them.”

Dismounting, they secured the animals behind a clump of trees, and then crept cautiously along to the edge of the river, concealing themselves behind some rocks.

Ignorant of the ambuscade, the occupants of the light craft paddled rapidly on. They had made good progress, and in another hour would arrive at a settlement where they could secure the aid the wounded man needed. For some reason, however, which they could not themselves explain, they hugged the south bank, and the river at that point was quite wide.

Suddenly one of the hidden horses broke its halter and ran wildly through the woods, startling the other animals until they neighed loudly. 221

“There must be a squad of horsemen over there,” Ira cried. “Quick! pull under cover of the right bank until we can look about us!”

Late obeyed hurriedly, and the canoe was turned toward the shore.

Crack! Crack! Crack! came the reports of three rifles, and the bullets struck the water behind, ahead, and below the craft.

Then she glided under the cover of the overhanging trees, but as she disappeared two more shots were fired from the ambush, a ball struck the prisoner, who had raised himself to learn the cause of the firing, in the breast, killing him instantly.

“He is dead!” Joe exclaimed, catching the spy in his arms as he sank slowly back into the bow of the boat.

These words were heard on the opposite shore, and immediately old David Daggett leaped upon the rock behind which he had been concealed. Swinging his hat above his head, he shouted:

“Hurrah! We’ve killed one of them! We’ve killed one of them!”

Late seized his rifle and fired at the old man, muttering as he did so: “I’ll fix you, you old 222

Tory!”

His bullet, however, struck, not the old, but the younger Tory, Hiram Le Geyt, who at that moment had sprung up to pull his father-in-law down behind the barricade.

The occupants of the canoe could not tell whether he was killed, or only wounded. But they heard Captain Brant’s voice directing two negroes to carry their master into the woods where he would be out of range of the flying bullets. Then Ira, without exposing himself, called to the Indian:

“Captain Brant, one of your shots struck our prisoner, who was only slightly wounded, in the breast, killing him instantly. We will leave his body, and everything that belongs to him, in the canoe. You may take possession of the craft at any time. We will not disturb you.”

Then he and his comrades, after securing the boat to the nearest tree, leaped ashore and entered the forest. Before they were out of hearing, however, the reply of the Mohawk chief could be heard:

“Thanks, lads! I’ll care for him as soon as I can leave my friend here, who is, I fear mortally wounded.”

“That hardly sounds like the bloodiest chieftain in the valley,[7] does it?” Ira said, as he and his companions hastened along. “Even he seems to appreciate a thoughtful act.” **223**

When opposite the next settlement, they called to a lad who was fishing in the river, and he, coming across in a boat, ferried them over. There they passed the night, and on the following morning hastened on down the valley.

As they advanced Joe referred to the change in the commanders of the Continental forces, asking:

“Will you report to this General Gates, Ira, the same as you did to General Schuyler?”

“Certainly,” he answered. “He is now in General Schuyler’s place, and should be treated precisely as was our former leader.”

“But Late and I don’t know him,” he objected.

“Neither do I,” was the reply. “But it will be easy to fix all that. You will find General Schuyler, even though he has been relieved of command, in the camp, doing all he can for the Cause which is dearer to him than life.”

“It isn’t many men who would do that,” Late interrupted. “Do you remember how it was with Colonel Stark? When he thought he had been misused, he surrendered his commission and went back to his farm in New Hampshire.” **224**

“But he responded to the call from Bennington,” Ira replied, “and, recognizing his mistake, will now go back to the regular army.”

“But our general don’t make such mistakes,” cried Joe in tones of admiration. “He’s large enough to overlook any personal slight, for the good of the Cause. Some day the people of the colonies will know the truth, and count him one

of their heroes."

"Thank you!" Ira said with glistening eyes. "May we all live to see your prophecy come true!"

At sunset they were in the vicinity of Bemis Heights, and had no difficulty in locating the British camp.

"Well, lads, we'll part here," Ira said. "You will find Dan with our army, and after you have reported to the general, he will show you the place I have chosen as our rendezvous on this side the Hudson."

"But is it safe now for you to enter the British lines?" Late asked anxiously. "What if David Daggett should show up there within a few hours?" 225

"He'll hardly arrive as soon as that," was the quiet reply, "though doubtless he will appear later. Meantime I have the opportunity to report to General Burgoyne, and learn the present condition of his forces. It will probably be the last work I shall do as Ira Le Geyt," and he left them.

Before they gained the entrenchments of the Continentals, the two boys met Dan Cushing.

"Where is Ira?" was his first question.

"Gone into the British encampment," they explained.

"He ought not have gone there!" Dan cried.

"Why not?"

"'Cause General Gates has let the real Ira go; an' also set free that courier, George Preston," was the startling announcement. "General Schuyler, soon as he heard of it, sent me to meet you an' stop Ira. Those fellers will make straight for Burgoyne's headquarters, an' get thar 'fore our Ira does. It means they'll hang him soon as he shows up."

For some moments his hearers stood as though stupefied, and then Late gasped:

"What can be done?"

"I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do," Dan said stoutly. "I shall follow Ira into the British lines, if necessary, to save him, or hang with him," and he walked away toward the enemy's encampment. 226

There was need for him, or some other friend, to take such an heroic step, for before he had gained the nearest British picket post, the young scout was in General Burgoyne's tent, face to face with the real Ira Le Geyt.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIDNIGHT FIRE.

Confident that he had ample time to report Colonel St. Leger's flight to his superior, and learn when and how that officer intended to

engage the Continentals, before any of his enemies could disclose his identity, Ira, after parting with his lieutenants, walked rapidly on to the nearest picket-post of the British camp.

Here his first trouble began. In no way could he convince the sentinel that he had a right to pass through the lines. The fellow was a Hessian, who could not read, and the scout's paper, written both in English and German, directing that he be allowed to go in or out of the camp at all times, was of no avail. Therefore the captain of the guard had to be summoned.

He knew Ira, and permitted him to pass the picket, but, to the surprise of the lad, held him up at the guard tent until his arrival could be made known to the commander of that division, General Fraser. At length an order came for him to be allowed to report to the commander-in-chief, and he went on, believing it was the nearness of the enemy that had caused this unusual caution on the part of the British officers.

When he finally reached General Burgoyne, that officer, instead of greeting him with his usual warmth, merely nodded towards a camp stool, saying:

"Sit down, Master Le Geyt, I will hear your report in a short time," and then he left the tent, remaining away at least ten minutes.

On his return he gazed searchingly at the scout for an instant, and then, with an apparent effort to control himself, said:

"I am ready to listen to anything you have to tell me, sir."

His manner convinced the lad that something was wrong; but he was there and must speak, therefore, acting as if he suspected nothing amiss, he began:

"I believe, General Burgoyne, that you have heard of the battle of Oriskany through Captain Brant, therefore know of its outcome, and I need not dwell upon it."

The officer merely bowed assent.

"The ill-feeling created there," Ira continued, "soon showed itself throughout the Indian encampment, so that when I first visited it some of the warriors had departed, and before I came away a bare hundred of the original force remained."

"You are sure you said nothing to hasten their departure?" the general inquired pointedly.

"I only told them that large reinforcements were on the way to strengthen the fort, which was true, sir. I passed Colonel Arnold with twelve hundred men as I went up country."

"It makes a difference sometimes how even the truth is told," the commander said, and again he gave the scout a searching glance.

"Yes, sir," the lad admitted; "but to continue my report, Colonel St. Leger, finding himself deserted by his allies, and unable to stand against the Continental reinforcements, decided to abandon the siege. Retreating to Oswego, he

has sailed for Canada."

"What!" screamed General Burgoyne, and it was evident there was dismay in his tones. "St. Leger gone without any order from me? Without sending to me for a force sufficient to meet the rebels? Are you certain, sir, that you are telling me the truth?"

Ira flushed a trifle; but answered gravely:

"It is as I have said."

For the third time the commander gazed fixedly at his visitor, and then remarked: **230**

"I have a few questions to ask you, Master Le Geyt."

With no little misgivings the lad replied simply: "Yes, sir."

"Did you not tell me that you conducted the courier, George Preston, to Master James Graham's in safety?"

Instantly the question was asked the lad knew that in some way the officer had obtained an inkling of his real character. There was nothing to do but brave it out, therefore he replied promptly: "No, sir."

"What then did you tell me?" thundered the enraged officer.

"I reported that I had made the journey, and left the courier in safe hands."

"Read that," the general cried, pushing a letter towards him. It was on a single sheet, and the words were written plainly. **231**

> "General Burgoyne, Honored Sir: I write this to make known to you the real character of your scout called Ira Le Geyt. He is a rebel. He delivered me into the hands of the rebels, and I have been imprisoned by them for weeks. But they did not find the papers I carried, and when this reaches you I shall be on my way down the river to deliver them. I trust it may be in time to secure the aid you desire. The bearer of this will tell you more about the young man. For the King,
>
> "GEORGE PRESTON."

"Pray tell me, are those statements true?" the general asked sternly.

"No man need incriminate himself," Ira replied with a pale but resolute face.

"Captain Howell declares that he saw you on Sugar Loaf Mountain the night the guns were spiked, and that he has reason to believe you guided him to the place where the dam was built, using information he gave you to accomplish that purpose. Have you any answer to make to these charges?" the general demanded.

The scout remained silent.

"How far you are responsible for the defeat of Baum at Bennington, and the flight of St. Leger, which you now report, I probably shall never

know. But one thing is certain, sir. I have facts enough to hang you," and the enraged officer looked at the scout as if it would be a pleasure to do it.

The lad returned the look without a token of fear; but made no answer. 232

"Possibly you think I do not know who you are," General Burgoyne continued after a moment; "but wait," he stepped to the door of the tent and spoke to some one who was evidently standing there to be summoned.

The false Ira arose to find himself face to face with the real Ira Le Geyt. On one face there was a smile; on the other a frown. The look one gave said: "I will kill you"; the look the other bestowed, said: "You cannot do it."

During a full minute the two stood there. Then the real Ira spoke.

"Give me that cross."

Without a word the young scout drew it from his bosom and, unfastening its chain from his neck, handed it to the rightful owner. He pulled it apart, and taking a tiny paper from the hollow tube, passed it to the general, who read: 233

"FORT EDWARD, June 1, 1777.

"To all officers of the Northern Army:

"This is to certify that the bearer of this paper is Lieutenant Philip Schuyler Jr., my son. He will personate the Tory, Ira Le Geyt, at the headquarters of General Burgoyne. You may rely upon all information he sends you.

"(Signed) PHILIP SCHUYLER,
"General Commanding."

Before any other could speak, the young Tory, his eyes flashing, said:

"It is as I have already told you, general. This fellow, with a squad of soldiers, seized me while I was crossing the Hudson on my way to meet you at Lake Champlain, and carried me to Fort Edward, where I was imprisoned. They took not only papers, but my entire outfit, including the clothes I had on. I did not understand why then, but learned later. When your courier, Master Preston, was thrust into the dungeon with me, he told me how an Ira Le Geyt, who was serving as a scout for your army, had betrayed him into the rebels' hands. Then I saw through the Schuyler plan, and knew that as long as the son, using my name and wearing my clothes, was at your headquarters, nothing but disaster would befall you. I tried desperately to escape. I offered bribes to the guards; I attempted to tunnel out of the fort, but failed. When the new commander, Gates, came, I persuaded him I had been wrongfully confined for weeks, and he ordered my release. I hastened here, too late, I fear, to be of any service. But in justice to myself, I demand that the man who has deprived me of my rights be properly punished."

"Don't fear about that, Master Le Geyt," the officer replied with a cruel laugh. "Out of justice 234

to you, and because of injustice to me, this fellow shall be hanged. I only wish I could string the father up beside the son. In all my military career I never met with, or heard of, so infamous a scheme as they have conceived and carried out. I can see, as you have suggested, that all the disasters have come through this young rascal. I will put him under guard to-night. To-morrow he shall be tried and sentenced. Before another twenty-four hours have passed, he will be executed."

He called out, and a sergeant with four men entered and took the prisoner away.

Within the stout walls of a log hut, which had been turned into a temporary prison, Philip (for now he should be called by his right name) was left to himself. Naturally he could not avoid dwelling upon the horrible fate that awaited him, for his conviction and execution were foregone conclusions. Many a man had been sent to the gallows by far less evidence than could be brought against him. In the heart of the British camp as he was, he might not look for rescue. There was little hope of escaping through his own efforts. **235**

He recalled all that he had been able to do, through the place he had held in the British camp, for the Cause he loved. The stores at Bennington on which Burgoyne depended for the sustenance of his army, had not been secured, and in the attempt to obtain them that officer had lost a thousand men. The reinforcements he ardently expected from New York had not come, and they could not arrive now in time to save him. St. Leger had been frightened away, and with him had gone the last hope of the British commander for any addition to his forces. With his army weakened, on short rations, and unable to retreat, he had but one alternative, which was to face a foe that outnumbered him. From the human point of view there could be but one outcome, defeat, and with that defeat all the plans of Lord Germain, the war secretary in London, would be shattered. Philip was satisfied. Remembering all he had helped to accomplish, he could, if necessary, surrender up his life.

Philip Schuyler was calm when, on the following day, he faced his accusers. He did not attempt to deny his identity, or make excuse for a single act. He did not flinch when he was sentenced to be hanged twenty-four hours later as a spy. When asked if he had anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon him, he replied: **236**

"I knew I ran a great risk when I consented to do the work I have done. I am glad I was permitted to do so much. I only regret I could not longer have escaped detection in order to accomplish more. I shall die happy because I have surrendered my life for a Cause which I know, and which every one of you gentlemen knows, to be holy."

To his surprise he had a visitor during the afternoon. It was old David Daggett. After assisting Captain Brant to carry Hiram Le Geyt back to his home, the old man had again turned his face toward the Hudson to learn something of his grandson Ira.

Arriving in the camp shortly before noon, he had

found the lad, and heard the story of his imprisonment, of the false Ira, and of the latter's sentence. He rubbed his hands in glee.

"I want to see him!" he cried. "I want to tell the young devil just what I think of him. I'll stay until to-morrow to see him die."

To humor him, General Burgoyne gave orders that the old man be allowed to visit the condemned lad. 237

There were other prisoners in the guard-house, and after his sentence the young scout had been carried to a two-story house used as the barracks for a company of soldiers. In one of the upper rooms of this he had been placed in solitary confinement. There was a guard outside the door, a company of soldiers below, and sentinels around the building. Every avenue of escape was supposed to be closed, and the young lieutenant awaited the hour of his death.

Here David Daggett came. When allowed to enter the room, he stood for a time gazing at the prisoner, who arose to meet him, while a smile played on his lips. Without being invited, he sat in the one chair the chamber contained, and still stared at the lad. Then he laughed long and loudly.

"It just tickles me to see you," he at length said.

"What is there about me that pleases you?" Philip asked.

"It makes me laugh to think how you will kick and squirm to-morrow, when the rope is put around your neck," was the cruel reply.

That the captive made no reply, seemed to anger him. "If I had my way you wouldn't hang!" he cried. "You'd burn! burn! burn! The Indians know how to torture their victims, when they kill them at the stake. I wish you might be scorched to pay for that fellow you saved at Fort Stanwix. He ought to have died, and you ought to burn. Every rebel in the land should be burned. I'll tell the general to burn you—" and ran from the room. 238

But when he went to General Burgoyne with his request, he was told that the sentence of the prisoner could not be changed. He brooded over the answer.

"I'll change it," he muttered, and with a cunning look in his eyes, he went to the building in which the prisoner was confined, walking around it again and again.

The structure had been intended for a shop, with living-rooms above. At the rear was a small lean-to, once used as a stable. In this last a large amount of rubbish had collected. The sharp eyes of the old man took in all this, and his plan was formed. Late in the night he slipped out of the tent he occupied in company with his grandson, and made his way to the rear of the barracks.

"The soldiers can get out," he muttered to himself; "but that young rebel can't. I'll burn him, burn him up!"

Into the shanty, unobserved, he crawled. In the farther corner he pulled some of the most inflammable material together, and then took 239

out of his pocket his flint and steel. Into the rubbish the tiny sparks fell. Slowly the flame grew. He waited until it was under good headway, and then slipped away to his tent.

Ten minutes passed, and then the alarm rang through the encampment. “Fire! Fire! The barracks are on fire!” some one shouted, and others took up the cry.

Ira Le Geyt awoke and called to his grandfather, but the old man apparently slept soundly. Not until having been shaken vigorously did he arouse himself, and then, rubbing his eyes, he asked innocently:

“What is it?”

“Some building is on fire,” his grandson explained and ran out.

David Daggett followed in the direction of the blaze his hands had kindled. The lean-to was gone; one side of the house was a mass of flames, and with an exulting cry on his lips: “The rebel will burn! the rebel will burn!” he hastened to join the crowd that had collected around the doomed building.

CHAPTER XIV.
THE DRAWN BATTLE.

Dan Cushing was not to be turned from his purpose even when he found that his friend had already entered the British lines. His only question was as to how he could get there? He had not been seen by the guard, and, drawing back into the woods, he walked cautiously along to learn how far it might be to the next picket. To his delight he discovered that the sentinels were several rods apart, and each had been stationed on a ridge, with a small hollow, running directly up into the encampment, between them. Lying down in a thicket, he waited.

Slowly the minutes passed. Not until it was dark did he make a move. Then, as noiselessly as an Indian, he crept into the hollow, and again paused. No other sound than the regular tread of the soldiers as they tramped to and fro on their beat came to his ears; but both were coming toward him, and, hugging close to the ground, he remained motionless.

As he suspected, they did not enter the gully, but, on gaining the opposite banks, called to each other, and then turned to retrace their steps. Waiting until their footsteps had nearly died away, he arose and ran swiftly, but without noise, up to the higher ground. He was beyond earshot before the guards again hailed each other, and within the enemy’s lines.

Unacquainted with the formation of the camp, it required some time for him to locate the headquarters of the commander, and, when he had done this, he was just in time to see a prisoner in the hands of four or five soldiers brought forth and hurried to a log hut. Keeping

far enough from the squad to remain unnoticed, yet near enough to hear the conversation, he learned beyond all doubt that the arrested man was his chief.

The arrest of the young scout, and the reason for it, soon became known in that part of the encampment, and created no little excitement. It was discussed in tents and barracks, and even at the guard-house, therefore it became easy for the lad to ascertain two facts without in any way attracting attention to himself. He learned that his friend was to be tried the next morning as a spy, and that the general opinion was the trial would be but a form; the condemnation and execution certain.

Perhaps this fact prevented the soldiers from taking the punishment of the prisoner into their own hands. Dan, hearing their comments, realized they were thoroughly angered with the lad who had so completely hoodwinked officers and men for weeks, thwarting their purposes and overwhelming them with misfortunes. But what seemed to anger them more than all, was the identity of the lad. **242**

“To think that that rebel general sent his own son into the tent of our commander, and knew all about his plans before we did, is enough to make the pope swear,” Captain Howell said to a group of officers. “I don’t forget that the young rascal twice pulled wool over my eyes, and I’d like the privilege of putting the rope around his neck.”

Private as well as officer seemed to entertain much the same ill-will toward the prisoner, and it was evident nothing save the assurance that he was to be summarily dealt with, kept them from taking his life.

After the excitement had subsided somewhat, and the encampment was comparatively quiet, young Cushing made as careful an examination of the building in which his chief was confined as he could and escape the notice of the sentinels. The conclusion arrived at, was he could do nothing immediately to secure the release of his comrade. **243**

“I might slip back to camp an’ let the general know how things are goin’,” he said to himself. “He may think of some way to help Philip that don’t come into this head of mine.”

He gained the ravine and was nearly across, when he heard a sentinel cry:

“Who are you down there? Speak, or I will fire.”

He neither spoke nor stirred.

Bang! went the gun, and the ball whistled so near his head he could not help dodging. Fortunately he made no sound, but remained quietly where he was.

Then came rapid footsteps toward the edge of the opposite bank, and the picket there called out:

“What is it, Spencer?”

“I heard some one in the gully, and as he didn’t answer my challenge, I fired,” was the explanation.

At that moment the captain of the guard, followed by a squad of men, came running up.

“Why did you fire?” he asked.

Spencer told him.

“We’ll start the fellow out,” the officer said, and, turning to his men, he ordered them to fire a volley into the ravine.

They obeyed; but centered their fire on a spot several yards beyond the lad, and he was not injured. The bullets dislodged some animal, however, that ran up the opposite bank, and, scudding by the sentinel on that side, disappeared in the bushes beyond. **244**

“It was a fox,” he cried. “Spencer mistook a fox for a man. Ha! ha!” and the officer laughed loudly.

The men on the other bank joined in the mirth.

“I don’t care,” Spencer declared. “It shows I was looking out so sharply that even a fox could not escape me.”

The laugh subsided; the squad returned to their stations; and the pickets resumed their beat.

As soon as they had departed Dan hurried on, and in a few minutes gained the road leading to Bemis Heights. Down this he ran until halted by three hoots of an owl, twice repeated. Stopping suddenly, he gave the same cry, and after a few seconds Late and Joe came out from the forest.

“We are glad to find you at last,” they said. “We have been looking for you half the night.”

“I’m glad to run in with you,” he declared, without asking why they were there. “Joe, will you go back to the fort an’ tell General Schuyler that our Ira has been arrested. The Britishers have found out who he is, an’ to-morrow mornin’ he’ll probably be condemned an’ hanged. Whatever we do must be done quickly. Late, come with me. We won’t give up hope of rescuin’ him till we have to.” **245**

In another moment they had separated, Joe hastening to the general with his sad tidings, and Dan and Late hurrying back toward the British camp. Before gaining the ravine Dan explained how he had entered the enemy’s lines earlier in the night, and how he hoped to return.

“We shall have to move along slow an’ quiet like,” he added; “but I believe it can be done.”

He was correct, and a half-hour later he and his comrade emerged from the ravine within the British lines. To gain the hut in which their friend was imprisoned was not difficult; but they decided it unwise to run the risk of being found when dawn came, therefore the lads looked about for a hiding-place. Attracted by the lean-to at the rear of the barracks they crept into it.

In this place of concealment they heard enough of the soldiers’ conversation to learn the result of Phillip’s trial, and knew there were yet twenty-four hours before he would be executed.

“We may be able to do a good bit in that time,” Dan whispered to Late. **246**

They learned also, in the same way, that the prisoner had been brought to the barracks and put in solitary confinement in one of its upper rooms. They also saw David Daggett prowling about the building; but did not know of his visit upstairs, or of the secret resolve he had made.

It was nearly dusk when two soldiers met near the door of the lean-to. One said to the other:

“Have you heard the latest news about the spy?”

“No,” replied the other. “What is it?”

“A messenger came from the rebel camp under a flag of truce,” the first explained, “and wanted to make an exchange. They offered four men—a colonel, two captains, and a lieutenant—for him.”

“What did our general say?” the other soldier asked.

“He said: ‘Go back and tell your commander I would not exchange him for your whole army.’”

“Good! I reckon the rebels will understand now that the young rascal must pay the penalty for his misdeeds.” Then they passed out of hearing.

“It means that you and I have got to do something,” Dan said to his comrade in a low tone.

“What?” asked Late. **247**

“I have an idee,” was the answer, “but will wait a little later to see whether ’twill work.”

An hour or two passed. Then Dan whispered: “Come, Late,” and he led the way out of the building.

Going around to the rear end, he said in the same low tone:

“Boost me.”

That edge of the roof was not more than five feet from the ground, and, catching hold of it, the lad waited for his companion to lift him up. In another instant he was on top the shed.

“Give me your hands, Late,” he said in a hoarse whisper, and soon the two were on the roof.

Lying at full length, the lads listened anxiously for any sound which might betoken that their movements had been seen. Ten minutes passed, and then they arose on all fours, creeping up the slanting roof to where it joined the main building.

Just above their heads was an open window. **248**
Rising to their knees they peeped in, only to find themselves looking into a small, unoccupied room. Laying his hand upon his comrade in token that he was to follow, Dan stepped into the chamber, Late joining him a moment later.

There was no furniture in the room. The young scouts stretched themselves out on the bare floor, and again waited. During a long time there was coming and going about the barracks; then loud conversation below; but at length all was silent.

Dan went cautiously to the door. Lifting the

latch slowly, he pulled, and without further effort on his part the door swung open a few inches. Through the narrow crevice the lad gazed. He could see little; but the low tread of the sentinel outside of the prisoner's door reached his ears. Evidently a long passage was before him, and the soldier was at the farther end.

Turning to his companion, Dan whispered in his ear, and then both, removing their boots, went softly out into the hall. Inch by inch they advanced until within a few feet of the guard.

Here they waited until he, in his efforts to keep awake, came down the passage toward them. In another moment they had seized him as previously planned, one by the feet, and the other by the throat.

There was a struggle; but it was brief and noiseless, for while one lad choked the fellow, the other lifted him from the floor. Fortunately he was not heavy, and could be easily subdued. When the Britisher had been rendered helpless Late took him in charge, while Dan examined the door of the room in which was the prisoner. **249**

He could hardly believe his good fortune when he found the fastening to be only a piece of iron thrust through the handle of the latch. Pulling out the bar, he opened the door and entered. On a narrow bed against the opposite wall the young lieutenant was quietly sleeping, but with the first movement of his rescuer he was aroused, asking:

"Who is it?"

"Hush!" was the cautious reply. "Late and me have overpowered the guard. Wait until we put him in your bed. Then we'll be off."

The lad went back to his comrade, and together they carried the soldier, still unconscious because of having been choked so severely, into the chamber. The lieutenant helped them bind the Britisher's hands and feet, and to muffle his mouth so that he could not cry out. Then all three left the room, fastening the door behind them. Down the hall, into the little room at its rear, and out of the window upon the roof of the lean-to they went cautiously.

At this moment they heard footsteps not far away, and laid down on the slanting roof. The intruder evidently crawled into the shed, and, believing he had gone there for the night, the fugitives slipped down to the lower edge of the building, when, swinging themselves to the ground, they made off through the darkness. **250**

The young scouts were at the mouth of the ravine when the cry of fire startled them. Looking back they saw that the lean-to they had just left was in flames.

During a moment they silently gazed at the burning building, and then Dan said:

"The whole barracks will go."

"I hope that guard may get out," Late added.

"The fellow we heard crawling into the shed set fire to it, and I'll tell you who he was," Philip said solemnly.

“Who?” Dan asked.

“David Daggett,” the lieutenant replied, and then told of the old man’s visit and his wish that he might be burned at the stake.

“We saw him prowlin’ ’round the lean-to in the afternoon,” Dan explained, “an’ that’s what he was plannin’ for. You’ve hit the nail on the head, Ira—I mean Phil—this time.” 251

The rescued lad laughed.

“No more ‘Ira,’ please. It is ‘Phil’ for you always. I shall never forget this night’s work of yours, nor will my father and mother,” and his voice grew tremulous as he pronounced the last word.

Then they continued the flight. Possibly the glare of the fire through the trees chained the attention of the guards. At least, they gave no special heed to what was going on in the ravine below them, and the fugitives passed through it unchallenged. Once outside it was only necessary to walk rapidly for an hour, and they had arrived at the Continental camp.

General Schuyler met his son as one come from the dead, while Joe’s delight knew no bounds.

“I only wish I could have been thar to help in the rescue,” he said over and over again.

Even General Gates, when introduced to the young lieutenant, congratulated him on his escape, and said:

“I did not understand that the young Tory was held to secure your safety. Had I known it, he would not have been allowed to go free.”

Early next day it became evident that General Burgoyne was preparing for some desperate move. Before night he had advanced his lines within two miles of the Continentals, and the skirmishing parties sent out from the entrenchments of the latter reported that the British forces were resting on their guns. 252

“It means that on the morrow he will attempt to force his way to Albany,” General Schuyler said to General Gates.

“Well, if you really think so,” the officer replied indifferently, “you may notify my subordinates to stand ready to stop him,” and at an early hour he sought his bed.

Not another officer closed his eyes that night, and when the memorable nineteenth day of September dawned it found the rival hosts confronting each other.

The main body of the Continentals was on the right under General Lincoln; the left under Poor; the center was mainly made up of Learned’s brigade. Morgan’s riflemen and Dearborn’s infantry stood under Arnold, who had returned from Fort Stanwix, on the heights, nearly a mile from the river.

At ten o’clock General Burgoyne advanced his army in three columns; the left consisting of artillery under General Phillips, and Hessians under General Riedesel; the center and right were commanded by Burgoyne himself, but covered by General Fraser and Colonel 253

Breyman. The Canadians and Indians were sent forward to occupy the Continentals in front.

No order came from General Gates for his forces to advance, and Colonel Arnold, growing desperate, rode off to the commander's tent urging him to allow the troops to engage the enemy, until he finally gave orders for the Indians to be driven back.

Taking this as permission for a general charge, the Continentals rushed like a mountain torrent upon the foe. Arnold, with Morgan's assistance, held Fraser while he was endeavoring to reach the American rear. Here the fighting became desperate, but the patriots, encountering the British under Burgoyne, and played on by Phillips's guns, were, at three o'clock, forced back into line. For four or five hours Colonel Arnold had maintained the fight with the choicest English regiments. A lull now occurred during which both armies drew breath.

"It's been tough work, lieutenant," Dan Cushing said to Philip Schuyler, as he wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Yes," the lad replied, "an' our comrades are all right. When the fightin' ceased they went down into the ravine for a drink of water. They'll be back 'fore the lull is over." 254

"They will have to hurry then, for the red-coats are coming again."

"And here are the boys," was the laughing reply as the lads arrived.

The Continentals kept within their camp until their foes were close upon them, then, springing out, drove them back to the position they had occupied earlier in the day.

It was, however, not an easy task, and night came by the time it was accomplished, putting an end to the conflict. The Continentals withdrew to their entrenchments; the British lay on the battlefield. Both parties claimed the victory; but the British had failed to force their way to Albany, while the Americans held their ground. It was, therefore, a drawn battle, in which the losses of the Yankees were less than three hundred, while those of the king's troops were more than five hundred.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE CHANCE MEETING.

On the following morning the British retreated to their old camping ground, and thus each army occupied precisely the same position it did prior to the battle, but with the difference that one was disheartened, and the other was encouraged.

"It is clear we have Burgoyne in our power," Colonel Arnold said to a group of fellow officers, as he watched the movements of the red-coats.

For a brief time there was no response, and then Colonel Morgan replied in a low tone:

“He would be, if Schuyler was our commander. When I remember that General Gates did not appear on the field at any time yesterday, it makes my blood boil.”

“It appears as if some one else is expected to do the work, while he reaps the reward,” another said.

“He won’t reap the reward of my labors long, if he don’t get a move on,” Colonel Arnold retorted with a frown. “I shall resign my commission rather than serve under such an officer.” **256**

The conversation was interrupted by the appearance of General Schuyler, without uniform, however, suggestive of the fact that he was there without rank or command. He greeted each member of the group with a hearty shake of the hand, and asked:

“Which of you dare beard the lion in his den?”

“I do,” Colonel Arnold replied promptly.

“Suppose we all join,” the general continued, “it seems to me a wise move. If we are agreed, Colonel Arnold as our spokesman may suggest the plan to our commander.”

The officers looked meaningly at each other, and some shook their heads as if to say, “We don’t understand how you can remain here and do all you can to bring about a victory, when the entire credit of it will go to another.”

If the ex-commander observed the looks and head-shakes, he gave no heed, but added:

“As you all know, the enemy is in a condition which grows worse every day. Counting his sick and wounded, there are nearly a thousand in the hospital; many are deserting the ranks; provisions are becoming exhausted; a few miles in their rear is an impassable wilderness, and we proved yesterday that he cannot advance. Let us then send troops in sufficient number to prevent foraging on the west, and to cut off connection with his base of supplies on the east. Then, in a few days, he must either fight or surrender.” **257**

“The eye doesn’t need be more than half open to see that,” Colonel Morgan replied.

“Since the general need not endanger his own head by issuing such an order, I may be able to secure the permission,” Colonel Arnold said in a tone of contempt, and he walked rapidly toward the headquarters of the commander-in-chief.

How he presented the matter is not known; but an hour or two later it was rumored about the encampment that he had been removed from command of his regiment, for attempting to coerce a superior officer. When this rumor crystallized into fact, the entire army was threatened with insubordination. Only the most strenuous efforts of the division and brigade commanders, ably assisted by Schuyler, their former commander-in-chief, prevented open rebellion.

“This is terrible,” Lieutenant Schuyler said to his three scouts a little later in the day. “To have our army demoralized in the face of the enemy, is a good deal like throwing the victory away after it is in our hands.” **258**

“But, thanks to the efforts of the other officers, the worst seems to be over,” Late replied.

“For the present, yes,” Philip admitted; “but the lightest breeze may fan into a flame the smoldering fire, and who can tell what General Gates will do next?”

“General Lincoln an’ General Poor have gone to his quarters for a consultation,” Dan announced. “I’m hopin’ something may come from that.”

“So’m I,” Joe added.

Their hopes were gratified. An order was issued before nightfall for skirmishing parties to be sent out on all sides of the enemy. Within the hour the work was begun, and from that time the British were so hemmed in that it was nearly impossible for any one to enter or leave their lines without falling into the hands of the patriots.

One day Lieutenant Schuyler, at the head of a squad of men which included Dan Cushing, Latham Wentworth, and Joe Fisher, was scouring the woods to the westward of the English encampment. He soon found that his chief work was not to capture soldiers seeking to enter the camp, but those who were leaving it. Before noon so many deserters had fallen into his hands that it required more than half his force to guard the prisoners. **259**

“If the other skirmishers are picking up as many fugitives as we,” the lieutenant said when the latest captures had been sent within the American lines, “Burgoyne’s whole army will be in our hands before the month is out.”

“Here come some more,” Dan, who was on the right of the squad, said in a low tone. Then, suddenly, he ran to the side of his leader. “There are a half dozen Tories,” he added, “an’, will you believe it, one is old David Daggett, while another, I reckon, is his grandson, Ira Le Geyt!”

The young lieutenant followed Dan to the other end of the line, where he could better see the approaching men. “You are right,” he said a moment later. “David and Ira are both there, and it is well worth our tramp out here to capture them.”

He divided his followers into two parties, directing one to creep cautiously through the forest to the rear of the royalists, while the other, with himself at its head, moved back to a place where the thicket offered a place of concealment.

Unaware of the ambush, the Tories advanced, discussing loudly the reasons which led them to return home. **260**

“When I found that the regular troops were put on short rations to furnish the rest of us with something to eat, I thought I’d better go home,” one man said.

“I believed it was time Ira and I went up to the farm to get food for the others,” David Daggett added. “I tell the boy we’ve got enough there to feed a hundred men for a week, and that’s something.”

“How will you get it down here?” another asked.

“Ira’s long head has found a way,” the grandfather explained. “If you fellows want to join us in the venture, come on. All of us, working together, ought to bring stores enough to supply a regiment for quite a while.”

“I suppose the general will see we are given good prices for all we take in,” a third man remarked.

Then David Daggett grew furious. Whirling around he shook his fist in the face of the speaker, crying:

“Curses on your mean, stingy soul, John Tarbox! The man who at such a time as this is not ready to give up all he has for the king, ought to be kicked into the rebel camp, and I’d like to be the one to do it!” **261**

Whether the men would have come to blows is uncertain, for at that moment, the young lieutenant sprang out from the thicket and seized Master Daggett by the shoulders. At the same instant Late and Joe clutched Ira Le Geyt, while the remainder of the squad gave their attention to the other Tories. A brief struggle ensued, but when the second party of Continentals closed in upon the royalists, they yielded to the inevitable by surrendering.

Owing to the surprise and excitement incident to the moment, David Daggett did not at first recognize the leader of the skirmishers. When he did, however, he gave way to the harshest epithets and the bitterest invectives he could think of, ending by crying:

“You young devil, that is what I think of you!”

“Your opinion of me is so much better than mine of you, that it is unnecessary for me to say a single word,” the young officer replied calmly, ordering his men to fall in with their prisoners.

“What are you going to do with me?” Ira Le Geyt demanded. “Since you can no longer personate me at General Burgoyne’s headquarters, I should be allowed to go home, where my father, wounded by you or some of your men, lies dangerously ill.” **262**

“We must prevent that long head of yours from devising some means of getting stores into the British camp,” Joe replied. “You ought to be grateful to us for saving you from so strenuous a task.”

The young Tory frowned, and relapsed into silence. But not so with the older one. His wrath had now given place to curiosity, and he asked:

“How did you escape from that building after I set it on fire?”

“Perhaps I got out before,” Philip answered with a smile. Then, to learn whether the soldier he and his comrades had bound and left in his bed was yet alive, he asked, “Didn’t the guard tell you how I got away?”

“He didn’t know anything,” the old man replied angrily. “Some men who went up there found him bound and gagged, so brought him down. But when it was possible for him to talk, he had nothing to tell. Never knew who tied him, or when it happened. He was certain, though, that

the door was fastened on the outside, and it puzzled him to know how you got at him, unless some one lent a hand."

"I had good friends," Philip replied, glancing with a smile at Dan and Late, who were behind him. 263

The old prisoner failed to see the glance.

"They say the devil helps his own," he retorted, "and he must have been the one who helped you."

Again Philip looked over his shoulder at his friends, and laughed outright, while Joe, who was near enough to hear what old David had said, remarked:

"Rather rough on you lads, ain't he?"

At the sound of his voice the old Tory turned and, seeing both Late and Joe, cried:

"You here, too, you young devils? It seems to be a good day for the breed." Then he sang:

"Devils on ahead!
Devils in the rear!
If the devils were all dead,
You rebels wouldn't be here!"

Some of the soldiers laughed, others showed signs of anger, and the lieutenant said warningly:

"If you keep that up long, Uncle David, my men will serve you as your friends threatened to do at the old hut." The song came to a sudden close.

A half-hour later the prisoners were in the Continental camp, confined with an hundred others who had been brought in that day. Then Philip and his friends went to the mess-room for supper. While they were eating an orderly came in, and, touching the lieutenant on the shoulder, said: 264

"General Gates wishes to see you at seven o'clock."

The lad looked at his watch.

"I will go immediately," he answered.

On entering the quarters of the commander-in-chief he was surprised to find his father there. General Gates's first words, however, explained why the former commander was with him.

"Lieutenant Schuyler," he said, "I sent for your father to consult with him about a matter which gives me considerable anxiety. Ever since I learned that the courier, Preston, whom I ignorantly set at liberty, had papers for General Clinton in New York, I have been fearful lest that officer should send a force up the river to the aid of General Burgoyne, and attack us in the rear.

"I regard your father as altogether too sanguine when he declares it impossible for Clinton to force his way up the river. It may be so, I hope it is so; but that I may be certain there is no danger of such a happening, I have decided to send a trustworthy messenger down the Hudson to learn the exact condition of affairs there. Your father suggested yourself as one who could 265

perform the task to my satisfaction. In my judgment you are rather young for such a trust; but there is some truth in your father's declaration that, 'boys can sometimes pass unnoticed where older messengers would excite suspicion.' Therefore I have decided to try you. Take as many friends as you think advisable; tell my quartermaster to furnish you with horses and whatever else may be needed, and get away to-night if possible. Go only far enough to make certain we are safe from a rear attack for at least two weeks, and then return with your report. Within that time we hope to overcome the enemy in front of us."

"I can be at Albany before daylight," the lad said, and with a bow to the commander and a whispered "good-by" to his father, he left the room, but General Schuyler followed him.

"You will stop at our home, Phil?" the father said when they were out of the building.

"Yes, for a few minutes."

"Then assure your mother that my removal from command was due to no fault of mine; that I hold enmity toward no one, and shall remain here to do my full duty to our country."

"I can tell her that, and also give her proof that you were removed through the scheming of the enemy," the boy answered, and then, as they walked along, he told his father that of which Alexander Turnbull, the spy, had boasted. **266**

General Schuyler listened with the deepest interest, and when Philip had concluded, exclaimed reverently:

"I thank the good Lord that He permitted you to overhear those statements, my son. I did not dream that the Tories of this region were back of the movement to oust me. No greater compliment could have been paid, and I can now bear the seeming disgrace with more fortitude. In time the world will know the truth, of that I am confident."

"So am I," the younger officer replied, laying his hand in his father's "and I can only hope to imitate the unselfish devotion to the Cause which you, sir, are showing in an experience when many men would falter in, if not wholly abandon, their efforts."

Before nine o'clock Philip, accompanied by his three friends, all well mounted and well armed, rode rapidly toward Albany. Two hours before sunrise they had arrived at the town, and at one of the finest estates on its outskirts drew rein. Phil, dismounting, pounded heavily on the lodge gate with the stock of his rifle. Soon a voice cried:

"Who's there?" **267**

"Get up, Bill, and let us in," the young officer replied.

"Ho! 'Tis you, Master Phil," came the reply. "I'll be there in a minute."

Then the bolts were shot back, the gate was thrown open, and the four lads entered.

"We'll go right to the barn with you, Bill, and

turn in there for a few hours," the leader of the little party said. "I don't care to disturb mother until her usual hour for rising."

"As you say, Master Phil," the old servant replied, and in a few minutes he had taken their horses, while the weary riders, throwing some blankets on the soft hay, stretched themselves upon them and went to sleep. They were aroused by a girlish voice calling:

"Phil! Brother Phil, where are you? Bill said you had come home."

"Here I am, Susan," Philip answered, and, rising, he went to the door of the barn where he met his sister, who was a few years younger than himself. After greeting her affectionately, he said: "I have three lads with me. Will you tell mother? Then we'll join you at the house."

"Let me meet your friends first," she said, **268**
waiting for them to come forward. After they were presented, she remarked pleasantly:

"I've heard of you all through my father's letters, and you will find a warm welcome here." Then she ran on ahead to announce their coming.

In a few minutes they were in the presence of Mistress Schuyler, who received her son as only a fond mother can, and extended to the other lads a most cordial greeting. A hearty meal was served a little later, and then the daughter entertained the other boys while Phil and his mother had a half-hour together, during which he delivered his father's message. With a heroism that matched her husband's she sent back the reply:

"Tell him we may be wronged, our best motives misunderstood, our most earnest efforts unappreciated, but nothing can really disgrace us so long as we are true to our duty."

Changing horses at the stables, the four scouts continued their journey. Down the west bank of the river they hastened, stopping occasionally at the houses of well-known patriots, but hearing nothing of any reinforcements for Burgoyne. Two days later they were at West Point, closeted with its commander. When they had made known the purpose of their long journey, he said:

"Return to your commander-in-chief with the **269**
assurance that he has nothing to fear from any force General Clinton can send up the Hudson. He has attempted that move already, and after capturing Fort Clinton and Fort Montgomery, was compelled to turn back. Burgoyne has no hope of succor from this quarter."

Their mission accomplished, the young messengers, after a night's rest, set out on their return. Ten miles above the fort they halted in a beautiful spot to allow their panting horses a breathing-time. The heavy trees in their autumn foliage screened the travelers from any one on the river, unless very near at hand, therefore it happened that a canoe, sweeping around the bend a little below, was seen by them before its single occupant became aware of their whereabouts.

While Late and Joe led the horses back farther

among the foliage lest they attract attention, the other two scouts concealed themselves behind a large rock to watch the approaching voyager. At length Dan Cushing's keen eyes recognized him, and he whispered in greatest excitement:

"It is the courier, George Preston!"

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CHAPTER XVI.
THE BITTER AND THE SWEET.

"Yes, it is the courier sure enough," Philip said, "and he is probably going to Burgoyne's camp with a message from General Clinton. If we could capture him, we might find out what Sir Henry proposes to do."

"We wouldn't unless we had better luck than when we caught him the time before," Dan replied grimly.

The lieutenant laughed. "You are right; but we'll hope for better luck this time."

"How are you goin' to get him?" Dan asked a moment later. "It don't look as if he was comin' ashore right away."

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"Probably not for several hours," Philip replied. "I suspect he passed the night at the house of Beverly Robinson, near West Point, for he had that Tory's name on his list. Likely he is intending to take his dinner with Isaac Neale, another Tory living five or six miles above us. We'll follow and see; if I'm correct, we'll plan to seize him there."

Master Preston was now opposite the lads, and paddled swiftly by, unconscious of his danger. They waited until he had disappeared around a bend in the river, and then went in search of their companions. Then it was they arranged for Late and Joe to stay well in the rear with the horses, while they kept the courier in sight.

Now and then a curve in the shore-line forced them to mount their horses in order to keep pace with the voyager; but when they were come within a half-mile of Isaac Neale's house, the steeds were hidden in the woods while all four scouts went up the trail on foot.

Snugly hidden behind one of the Tory's barns, they watched Master Preston as he came ashore and went up to the house.

"It lacks an hour of noon," Philip said, looking at his watch, "and the men are doubtless at their work. It is a good time to capture the courier, and we'll set about it at once."

He gazed intently at the house. It was a two-story building, standing bare and alone.

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"I wish there were two more of us," he added; "but we must do the best we can. Joe is to take a station where he can watch the south and east sides. Late is to stand guard over the north and west ends. Dan and I will enter the house. Now!" and he led the way at full speed.

By the time Philip and his comrade were at the door, the other lads were at their stations. The lieutenant and Dan entered without ceremony, to find the courier in the act of ascending the stairs. Recognizing them instantly, he ran swiftly, the scouts at his heels, into the nearest chamber, the door of which he quickly closed and fastened.

Philip and Dan threw themselves upon the barrier, forcing an entrance just in time to see Master Preston go out of the window. Dan ran back, down the stairs and out of the main door; but Phil followed the fugitive, intending to leap after him. But that act was unnecessary, for Master Preston was already in the clutches of Late and Joe.

Philip noted that the man had been injured by the jump, and had lost not only his hat, but the hair from his head.

“He wore a wig!” Philip cried in surprise. “There is where he hid his letters,” and he hastened downstairs to where the prisoner lay.

“You have me this time,” the courier exclaimed as he caught sight of Phil. **273**

“And your papers,” the latter replied, picking up the wig to find a pocket on the inside where was a small, thin, sealed package.

“That is what I meant,” Master Preston said with a groan. “Now you know where I concealed the messages when you captured me before.”

“Where are you injured?” the young officer asked, stooping beside his captive.

“He broke his leg when he jumped,” Late answered.

“When I struck the ground, you mean,” the courier added with a faint attempt at a smile. “But for that I should have escaped.”

“Not much,” Joe interrupted, “for I had my rifle trained on you, an’ in another minute would have fired.”

“Shall we carry him into the house?” Dan asked.

The women of the family had already gathered near, some crying hysterically, others looking on with pale and frightened faces. The eldest, Mistress Neale as her words proved, said somewhat timidly:

“Yes, take him into the house, good sirs, and I’ll send one of the girls for her father, who is in the field. He will know just what to do.” **274**

“Much as I regret it,” the leader of the squad replied gently, “I am forced to ask you to delay sending for Master Neale.” Then to Joe, he said, “Bring up the horses,” and to Late, “Keep guard here.”

Philip and Dan lifted the injured courier, carrying him up to the chamber, where he was laid on the bed.

“I trust, Master Preston, that you will not be overlong in recovering,” he said as he turned to leave the unfortunate fellow.

“A few weeks here will pass more pleasantly than months, perhaps, in the dungeon of a fort,” Preston replied. “You are kind to leave me with my friends.”

Before gaining the outer door, the boys heard him say to Mistress Neale, who was striving to relieve his suffering:

“There goes the smartest Yankee I have fallen in with since I came to this country. Burgoyne will be whipped, and it is largely due to him.”

“Who is he?” she asked.

“The son of General Schuyler,” was the answer.

The words could be heard in the yard, where the daughters of Mistress Neale were still waiting. The eldest, a fair girl of sixteen or seventeen years, turned and gazed at the young officer, who was mounting his horse, with a look of admiration, and as he rode away said to her younger sister: **275**

“I don’t care if he is a rebel, he is handsomer than any British officer I ever saw.”

Joe, who was nearer her than either of his comrades, heard the confession, and it was a long time before he ceased teasing his chief about the “Tory sweetheart.”

Four or five miles up the trail Philip opened the letter he had taken from the wig of the courier. It read: **276**

“New York, October, 1777.

“To General John Burgoyne,

“Commanding His Majesty’s Army in Northern New York,

“Honored Sir:—Your message, and also that of Lord Germain, reached me two weeks since by the hand of Master George Preston. He had been apprehended and held by the rebels for months, yet succeeded in keeping and at length delivering to me the messages entrusted to his care, an unusual exploit, for which he deserves the highest commendation. On receipt of them I immediately undertook to comply with your request and with the order of the war secretary, but, after reaching and capturing the forts known as Clinton and Montgomery a few miles up the river, I was compelled to abandon the enterprise. I regret greatly, therefore, to inform you there is no hope of my forcing the passage of the Hudson this season. I would suggest that you entrench yourself in some suitable place where you can maintain a defense during the winter, and doubtless in the spring I shall be able to come to your aid.

“I remain your obedient servant,

“Henry Clinton,

“Commanding His Majesty’s Army in Southern New York.”

Handing the missive to his companions in turn,

Philip said:

“It would have done no great harm if we had not captured Preston.”

“It looks to me as though it would have discouraged Burgoyne a little more,” Dan added.

“I guess he is blue enough now,” Late suggested.

“He is if matters have worked after the style they were goin’ when we came away,” Joe added. **277**

“Still, this letter confirms our report, and is from a source that cannot be doubted,” Philip said cheerily. “General Gates need no longer fear a foe in his rear.”

“An’ will have no excuse for not advancing,” Dan Cushing declared.

The lads finished their journey without other incident, and on the evening of October sixth arrived at Bemis Heights. In a few minutes later the commander-in-chief had heard their report and received the letter from Sir Henry Clinton. The latter interested him greatly, and he insisted on hearing a full account of how it came into his scout’s hands.

“Your father was right, lieutenant,” he said graciously when the story had been told. “I could not have sent one better fitted for the mission than yourself. With no enemy to attack us in our rear, we can give our undivided attention to those in front. I will soon issue an order for an attack.”

But on the following morning such a step was unnecessary. At an early hour, prompted by a threatened famine, General Burgoyne directed that a foraging force, numbering fifteen hundred, break through the western line of skirmishers and scour the surrounding country in search of food. This movement was immediately detected by the Continentals, and, mistaking it for the beginning of a general attack on the part of the red-coats, they prepared for battle. **278**

Leaving the breastworks they dashed down the hill upon the enemy’s front. It was an attack which the British could not withstand, and they gave way before it. Rallying, however, a little later, they drove the assailants back.

To and fro they struggled, sometimes the British, sometimes the patriots having the best of the contest. So evenly balanced were the contending forces that the same cannon changed hands five times. Finally the patriots succeeded in holding the piece, and their colonel leaping upon it cried:

“I now dedicate this to the American cause.” Then he ordered it wheeled around, and, having been loaded with British ammunition, it was discharged again and again into the ranks of its former owners, becoming an important factor in driving them from the field.

At the same time an extraordinary flank movement was being executed. General Fraser, with the finest corps of the English army, fell upon the left of the Continentals. Colonel **279**

Morgan's riflemen drove the attacking party back, and they in their turn charged impetuously upon the British right. During the entire day there was no hotter fighting than that which centered at this point.

Upon the heights stood an interested spectator. It was Colonel Arnold, who, though deprived of his command, had not yet left the encampment. As he watched the progress of the battle he could no longer restrain himself. Mounting his horse, he rode at breakneck speed toward the left field. General Gates immediately ordered one of his staff officers to follow and recall the daring officer. But the aide could not overtake him. Into the thickest of the fight, and on to the head of his regiment, the impetuous colonel rode. His men recognized and received him with cheers; then, rallying, they followed him in a charge before which the red-coats wavered like grain before a tempest.

Colonel Morgan had already discovered that **280** General Fraser was the inspiration of the British forces, and, selecting some of his best marksmen, he directed them to make the intrepid commander their special target. Soon Fraser's horse was shot under him; but he refused to retire from the field. Mounting a fresh steed he again placed himself at the head of his men, and a few moments later fell, mortally wounded.

This turned the tide of the battle. Though General Burgoyne in person tried to rally his men, his efforts were vain. Driven from their entrenchments by Arnold's troops, they became demoralized and, after firing a single volley, turned and fled.

In this last charge a bullet shattered Colonel Arnold's thigh, and he fell from his horse just as Major Armstrong, who had been sent to recall him from the field, reached his side. He obeyed the order; but four men carried him, and he left behind a shattered foe, and a victorious army.

Night fell, and the patriots remained in possession of the field. The British fled, intending to cross the Hudson and return to Fort Edward. Their loss was about seven hundred, while that of the Americans was but one hundred and fifty.

General Gates, who had remained in the camp **281** all day, then made a move which is to his credit. Discovering, notwithstanding the heavy fog which had set in, the attempt of Burgoyne to recross the river, he sent out a force to prevent his escape. All the next day there was heavy skirmishing, and then the harassed Britisher, leaving his baggage and wounded, set out on a night march for Saratoga. On the ninth he encamped on the heights north of the Fishkill. The patriots pursued, and on the tenth arrived at the heights between Saratoga church and the river.

Then the fleeing general lost hope. His position was exposed to attack on all sides; the roads to the north were impassable, and the woods swarming with patriots. He had bread sufficient only for three days, and no water. Surrender seemed inevitable.

On the thirteenth he called together his officers

for council. While they were deliberating grape-shot from the guns of the pursuers swept across the table around which they were seated. Possibly it hastened their decision. It was agreed to treat with the American commander for honorable surrender.

It required three days for the two commanders to agree upon terms, but on the sixteenth they were finally arranged, and on the seventeenth articles were signed permitting the British to march out with the honors of war, while on their part they surrendered artillery, arms, and ammunition, agreeing not to re-enter the king's service during the war.

General Burgoyne on that afternoon, in the presence of the two armies, handed his sword to General Gates, who promptly returned it. Then the entire British army, numbering nearly six thousand, filed off toward Boston, from which port they were to embark for England.

The four young scouts watched the long line of prisoners as they filed away, and Dan asked:

"What do you s'pose the king will say when he sees them come marchin' home?"

"That the bottom has fallen out of his plans," Philip replied with a laugh.

"'Twon't be so with our men," Late added. "The news will put new fight in 'em, an' they'll lick every red-coat that comes their way."

"An' the rest of the world will think we mean business," Joe added gleefully.

"I am confident it will secure for us the help of France, which means that we shall gain what we are fighting for—our national independence," a voice behind them said.

Turning, the boys saw General Schuyler, who added: "In time to come, I believe, it will generally be acknowledged that this battle of Saratoga was one of the decisive battles of the world, and you, my lads, may be proud because in it you have borne an honorable and important part."

"Hurrah!" they all shouted, filled with enthusiasm at the thought.

Two weeks later General Schuyler and his son stood in the presence of General Washington. During an hour they had been with him discussing the details of the northern campaign, and now had arisen to depart. Taking the father by the hand the brave commander-in-chief of the American forces said:

"Never forget, sir, that at no time have I lost confidence in you, and I shall not rest until I have secured your full vindication at the hands of Congress."

Then turning to the son he added:

"The part you have played in this notable victory has proved, my lad, that you are the worthy son of a worthy sire. In my report to the Congressional committee I shall recommend that you be given a captain's commission."

“And what for my three comrades?” the young scout asked eagerly. “I assure you they never once failed me, and two of them risked their lives to save me from death. The other would have been with them in that undertaking had not his duty called him elsewhere. If need be, give me nothing, but bestow on them some evidence that you appreciate their faithful work.”

“I leave it for their captain to make them warrant officers in his own command,” was the smiling reply.

“They shall have, then, the highest places I can give them,” Phil said stoutly, “and I can safely promise that you will hear good tidings from them.”

A promise which was made good under General Lincoln when he took command of the army in the south.

THE END.

Footnotes

[1] Major General Philip Schuyler, at this time commander of the army of the north, with headquarters at Fort Edwards, N. Y.

[2] Major General Arthur St. Clair, at this time commander of Fort Ticonderoga.

[3] Also called Mount Independence and Mount Defiance.

[4] Afterwards called Fort Schuyler. It was situated near the present city of Rome, N. Y.

[5] Joseph Brant, a Mohawk chief, who had been educated in England. His Indian name was Thayendanegea.

[6] Major-general Horatio Gates, he came from New England to succeed General Schuyler, but his estate was in Virginia.

[7] A little later Captain Brant with three hundred of his warriors swept through Mohawk valley committing some of the greatest atrocities of the war.

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