Ellis Edward Sylvester

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
A YOUNG PIONEER

There was no happier boy in all Kentucky than Jack Gedney on the morning that completed the first twelve years of his life, for on that day his father presented him with a fine rifle.

Now, you must know that some of the best riflemen in the world have been born and reared in Kentucky, where the early settlers had to fight not only the wild beasts, but the fierce red men. The battles between the Indians and pioneers were so many that Kentucky came to be known as the Dark and Bloody Ground.

Some of you may have heard that the most famous pioneer in American history was Daniel Boone, who entered all alone the vast wilderness south of the Ohio, and spent many months there before the Revolution broke out. The emigrants began flocking thither as soon as it became known that the soil of Kentucky was rich, and that the woods abounded with game.

Among those who went thither, towards the close of the last century, were Thomas Gedney and his wife Abigail. With a

dozen other families, they floated down the Ohio in a flat boat, until a short distance below the mouth of the Licking, when they landed, and, taking the boat apart, used the material in building their cabins.

It happened at that period that there was less trouble than usual with the red men. Some of the settlers believed that the Indians, finding themselves unable to stay the tide of immigration that was pouring over the west, would move deeper into the solitudes which stretched beyond the Mississippi. Instead of putting up their cabins close together, a part of the pioneers pushed farther into the woods, and began their houses where they found better sites. Most of them were near natural "clearings," where the fertile soil was easily made ready for the corn and vegetables, without the hard work of cutting down the trees and clearing out the stumps.

Thomas Gedney and his wife were among those who went farther than the spot where they landed from the flat boat. Indeed, they pushed deeper into the woods than any one else who helped to found the little settlement that was planted a hundred years ago on the southern bank of the Ohio. Their nearest neighbours were the members of the Burton family, who lived a mile to the eastward, while a mile farther in that direction were the little group of cabins that marked the beginning of one of the most prosperous towns of to-day in Kentucky.

Mr. Gedney was fortunate enough to find a clearing of an acre in extent, with a small stream running near. Since he had helped

his neighbours to put up their cabins, they in return gave him such aid that in a few days he had a strong, comfortable structure of logs, into which he moved with his wife and only child, Jack, then but six years old.

The sturdy men who built their homes in the depths of the wilderness a century ago were never in such haste that they forgot to make them strong and secure. The red men might be peaceful, and might make promises to molest the white people no more, but the pioneers knew better than to trust to such promises. There are no more treacherous people in the whole world than the American Indians, and no man is wise who places much faith in their pledges.

But I have not started to tell you the history of the pioneers who came down the Ohio in the flat boat, but to give an account of some strange adventures that befell Jack Gedney, shortly after his rifle was given to him by his father. Jack had been trained in sighting and firing a gun as soon as he could learn to close his left eye while he kept the other open. His father's rifle was too heavy for him to aim off-hand, but kneeling behind a fallen tree, or a stump, or rock, his keen vision was able to direct the little bullet with such precision, that Daniel Boone himself, who one day watched the little fellow, gave him much praise.

In those days there was nothing in which a Kentuckian took more pride than in his skill with his rifle. Thomas Gedney had never met his superior, and he meant that if his boy Jack lived the same should be said of him. And so, while the mother gave

the boy instruction in reading and writing, the father took many long tramps with him through the woods, and taught him how to become a great hunter. He showed him the difference between the tracks of the various game, and told him of the peculiar habits of the wild animals and the best method of outwitting them. More than all, he did his best to teach Jack how to guard against his most dangerous of all foes-man himself.

Mr. Gedney was a man who took great precautions when constructing his cabin. He built it just as strongly as it was possible to make it. The windows were so narrow that no grown person could force his body through, the roof was so steep that the most agile red man could not climb it, and the heavy door, when closed and barred inside, was really as stout as the solid walls of logs themselves.

I have not time to tell you about several incidents that proved his wisdom in taking so much pains to guard himself and family against their dusky foes the Indians, but the time came when the woodcraft thus taught to the boy proved of the greatest value to him.

Among the important rules laid down by the father for the son's guidance was that the very first thing to be done after firing his rifle was to re-load it; that in tramping through the woods he should bear in mind that he was always in danger, and that he must look not only in front but beside and behind him; that he must take all pains to hide his trail whenever there was the least cause to fear the red men; that he must use the utmost precaution

when lying down to sleep for the night; that in communicating with his friends he must do so by means of signals that a foe could not understand; that he must always be on the watch for signs of an enemy's presence; and that, when brought face to face with a foe, he must remember that a second's forgetfulness or impatience was almost certain to give the other the decisive advantage over him.

These were but a few of the rules that were impressed upon Jack by his father, who, as I have already told you, spent many hours with him in the woods, the two afterwards coming back to the cabin laden with game that kept the family well provided with food for many days.

Mr. Gedney had sent eastward for the gun which he gave to his son on his birthday. It was of fine make and somewhat lighter than his own, for several years must pass before Jack would be strong enough to handle a man's weapon. The piece would not have been looked upon in these days as of much account, for it was a muzzle-loader with a flint-lock. When Jack wished to load it, he emptied the charge from his powder-horn into the palm of his hand; this was carefully poured into the muzzle of his gun, and then the round bullet, enclosed in a piece of greased cloth or a damp bit of paper, was rammed down upon it. The ramrod was afterwards pushed back in place on the under-side of the barrel, and, raising the clumsy hammer, which clasped the piece of yellow flint, the pan beneath was filled with powder, connecting by means of a touch-hole with the powder in the

barrel behind the bullet.

The hammer was let down so as to hold the powder in place. When the owner wished to fire the gun he drew back the hammer, sighted, and pulled the trigger. The flint nipped against a piece of steel, giving out a spark of fire, which set off the grains in the pan, the latter also touching off the powder in the breech of the barrel, which drove out the bullet.

CHAPTER II.
TRAINING A KENTUCKY RIFLEMAN

I really think that if Jack Gedney had not known of the present his father meant to make him he would have been too delighted to act like a sensible boy. As it was, he could hardly keep from hugging the handsome little gun when his father placed it in his hands, and told him that it was his so long as he proved that he knew how to use it, and that he had enough sense to be trusted alone in the woods.

Unwilling to accept Jack's promises, his father took down his own weapon from the deer's antlers over the broad fireplace, and went a short distance with him to test the new piece. On the edge of the clearing he paused until the lad loaded the weapon with powder and ball (for, of course, the cow's horn and bullet pouch went with the present), and then, looking among the branches overhead, where several grey squirrels were whisking along the limbs, he told Jack he might take his choice. During the few seconds that the boy was darting his quick glances at the lively creatures his father quietly cut a piece of hickory as thick as his thumb, and three or four feet long. Jack looked askance at him; he knew well what it meant.

Since the youth had not yet fired his new gun, he decided to

make his task as light as he could. He raised his piece and sighted at a squirrel less than a hundred feet away, but before he could make his aim sure his father spoke sharply-

"Take the black one on the tree beyond."

It was a long and difficult shot, but Jack's nerves were steady, and a few seconds after he raised his rifle he pressed the trigger. The gun "hung fire" scarcely a moment, when a jet of flame shot from the muzzle, and Mr. Gedney, who had his eyes fixed on the squirrel, saw it vanish over the limb, and then come tumbling and overturning through the branches to the ground.

"Fetch it here," commanded his father.

Without moving a step, Jack deliberately began re-loading his piece, never pausing until the powder was poured in the pan and the hammer let down in place. The father half smiled, for he had expected his boy to forget in his natural excitement the rule about re-charging his gun.

Having finished, Jack walked forward to the foot of the tree, picked up the small furry body where it lay among the leaves, and brought it to his parent. The latter took it from his hand, glanced down, and then flung it aside, tossing the hickory after it.

Shall I tell you why he cut that stick just before his boy fired at the squirrel? When he looked at the little animal he saw that its head had been shot off. Had the bullet missed the head and struck any other part of the body he would have plied that stick about the legs and back of his boy until he yelled for mercy. He had done it more than once, and he, like many another Kentuckian,

considered that that was the right way to train his child how to shoot.

"Bark that one up there," said Mr. Gedney, pointing at another of the creatures that was skurrying along one of the upper limbs, its bushy tail spread out like an angry cat.

Crack!

As the sharp report rang out among the trees the squirrel at which the boy fired flew up nearly a foot above the limb along which it was running, as though thrown aloft by a steel spring, and then it dropped through limbs and leaves to the ground, where it lay stone dead.

An examination showed no wound upon it. The bullet had been sent directly beneath the body so as to chip off some of the bark, which flew against the squirrel with such force as to knock the life out of it. This is called "barking," and is sometimes practised for the fun of the thing by skilful marksmen.

Having viewed the work of his boy, Mr. Gedney could find no fault. Indeed, he did not expect him to do so well, knowing his agitation over his present. He did not seem to think it worth while to praise Jack, but, with a twinkle of his eye, he merely said-

"You'll do; off with you!"

And without another word, Mr. Gedney, with his heavy rifle slung over his shoulder, strode off to his cabin, leaving his boy to spend the day as he chose, well knowing how he would pass it.

As I have told you, the nearest neighbours to Mr. Gedney were the Burton family, who lived about a mile to the eastward.

Mr. Burton was more fortunate than Mr. Gedney in the way of children, for he had two boys, William and George, the one a year younger and the other a year older than Jack, while Ruth, the daughter, was a sweet girl of seven years.

It was natural that the two families should become fond of each other, and that there should be much visiting on the part of the parents as well as by the children. There was hardly a night that Jack was not at the Burton cabin, or his friends were not at his own home. They did a good deal of hunting together, and the Burton boys were skilful with their guns, each one owning a weapon light enough to be handled by its youthful owner. I must add, however, that neither of them was the equal of Jack, as was proven in many contests between them.

Now Will and George Burton had known for several weeks of the present that was to be made to Jack, and they were as pleased as they could be over his coming good fortune. What could be more natural, therefore, than that Jack should set out for the home of his young friends, that they might rejoice with him over the prize that had fallen to his lot?

It was a bright sunshiny day in October when the proud boy set out over the winding but well-worn path that led to the cabin of the Burtons a mile away. The leaves on the trees were beginning to turn yellow and red before, aflame with the beauties of autumn, they fluttered to the ground. It was a royal time for hunting, for the deer, bears, buffaloes, and indeed all kinds of game, were in prime condition. The heart of the boy beat high

with the thought that many of these prizes must fall before that splendid weapon of which he had just become the owner.

I am sure you would have said that Jack Gedney was a fine fellow, could you have seen him as he strode along the path through the Kentucky forest a hundred years ago. In the first place, he was rather large for his years, and erect, sturdy, and strong. His brown eyes sparkled with high health, and his round cheeks glowed like the pulpy fulness of a red apple. The life that the young pioneers led was one that was sure to make them strong, rugged, and vigorous.

If you had met Jack in the streets of London or New York you would have been struck by his dress. His cap was formed by the deft fingers of his mother. It was of brown thick cloth, without any forepiece, soft, warm, and able to stand a great deal of wear. Its make and pattern were such that no matter how it was put on its head, it was in place.

His coat was of the same material, and it was intended to last a good long time. In some respects it resembled the suits often worn by bicyclists of the present day, having a band that enclosed the body just below the waist, while the skirt was only a few inches in length. The coat was buttoned down the front, and contained several pockets within. Underneath the coat was the homespun shirt, made by the spinning-wheel, under the guidance of his mother.

The resemblance of the dress to the bicycle suit of to-day was made more striking by the trousers ending at the knee, below

which were the thick woollen stockings and heavy shoes. During very cold weather the stockings were protected by leggings, reaching from the knee to the shoes. I suppose you know that the fashion of the trousers worn by you was altogether unknown during the days of your great-parents.

Now, I am sure that none of us can blame Jack if, on this beautiful October morning, when he slung his pretty rifle over his shoulder, he threw his head a little farther back than usual, and stepped off with a prouder step than he had ever shown when carrying the heavy gun of his father.

"Ain't she a beauty?" he asked himself, stopping short and bringing the weapon round in front, so that he could admire it. "Father thought when I aimed at that first squirrel that I couldn't knock his head off; and," he added, with a smile, "I had some doubt myself, but I noticed that he cut a bigger stick than usual, and I didn't want it swinging round my legs. I never clipped off a squirrel's head more neatly, though I barked the next one just as well. I wouldn't mind now if I should meet a bear or a deer."

He had resumed his walk, and he looked sharply to the right and left among the trees, but no game worthy of drawing his fire was to be seen, and he kept on along the path, as alert and vigilant as ever.

About half-way between Jack's home and the cabin of his friends the path descended into a slight hollow, through the bottom of which wound a brook or small creek. It was some ten feet in width, and hardly half as deep. For a short time after a

violent rainfall this stream was swollen to three or four times its ordinary volume, but for a number of years it had not risen high enough to carry away the bridge by which people crossed the stream.

This bridge was simply the trunk of a tree which had been felled so as to lie with the stump across the stream. While this could not give as secure a footing as you would like in passing over it, yet it was all that was wanted by those who had to use it. Had the means and all the necessary materials been at their command, they would probably not have taken the trouble to put up a better one.

CHAPTER III.
THE MEETING ON THE BRIDGE

Jack Gedney walked down the slight descent, and stepping upon the fallen tree, moved to the other bank. As he came up again to the general level, he still looked around for some game, but nothing met his eye.

"There's one thing certain," he added: "I'm not going any farther without shooting off this gun."

A hundred yards ahead he saw the whitish trunk of a spreading beech which grew near the path. A patch of the bark about as big as his hand was stained a darker colour than the rest, as though some object had rubbed against and soiled it. The target was a good one, and he took a quick aim and fired.

"That makes three times that I have tried her," he said, with a glow of pleasure, as he examined the tree and saw the bullet embedded in the centre of the spot, "and she hit the eye every time."

He now walked at a more rapid pace than before, and it was not long before he reached the log cabin of the Burton family. The two or three acres of natural and artificial clearing had been well cultivated, and Mr. Burton and his two boys were busy gathering corn and the produce that yet were left out of doors. Mrs. Burton and Ruth were busy within.

As soon as Jack appeared, Mr. Burton and his boys gathered around him to examine and praise the present, which, it may be said, they saw the moment the owner came in sight.

"To-morrow," said Mr. Burton, "you must come over and go with the boys on a hunt: that will be the best test for your gun."

"I had hopes that Will and George could go with me to-day," remarked Jack, reading aright the wistful looks of his friends.

"No," was the kind but decisive reply of the father; "there is enough work to keep them busy until dark."

The boys knew better than to plead with their father after he had once given his decision, so, like the manly fellow that he was, Jack leaned his rifle against a tree, and fell to work with the boys to help in the task.

The work was finished just as the sun was setting, and Jack, declining to stay to supper, once more slung his gun over his shoulder and set out for home, promising his young friends that he would be ready at daylight the next morning to join them in a big hunt.

"It's a pity I didn't get a chance to use her to-day," thought Jack, as he turned his face homeward, little dreaming how soon he would be forced to call upon the weapon to help him out of a peril that threatened his very life.

It was the season of the year when the days were quite short, and Jack knew that the night would be fully come before he could reach his home. He cared nothing, however, for that. He had gone over the trail (or path) many a time when the hour was much

later, and it may be said that he knew it so well that he could have walked the entire length with his eyes shut.

The youth had advanced only a little way when he noticed that the darkness had closed in, and, though the moon was shining above the thick branches, the gloom was so deep in most portions of the forest that he could see only a short distance along the path, even when it took a straight course: which was not often the case.

You must not think that our young friend had any such emotion as fear. Most boys who have spent their lives in the city would shrink from such a journey after nightfall, for it was a fact that Jack Gedney was walking through a stretch of woods in which not only wild animals abounded, but through which the fierce red men hunted, and he was liable to meet both the former and the latter; but he had no more hesitation than he would have felt in climbing from the lower floor of his cabin home to the loft where he slept every night.

You must not forget, too, that he carried his new rifle, and that made him feel secure.

A youngster in the situation of Jack may do a good deal of thinking as he walks briskly along, but, if he has been rightly trained he always keeps his wits about him. So it was that his eyes and ears were always open. He stepped as lightly as an Indian, peering as far ahead as he could in the gloom, glancing from side to side and behind him, and now and then halting for a moment to catch any sound that might fall on his ear.

In this manner he had gone a third of the distance when

he became sure that something was following him. He stopped several times and looked back, but could see nothing. His quick ear, however, had caught the soft footfall in the trail, which left no doubt that either a man or an animal was dogging his footsteps.

It is hard to think of a more trying situation than that of Jack Gedney, for, aware as he was that some danger threatened, he did not know its nature.

His first belief was that it was an Indian who was trying to steal upon him. The stealth which marked its movements led him to think so, for few would have been as quick as the lad to learn its presence.

But, whatever it might be, the young hunter determined that it should not find him unprepared. He brought his gun around in front, where he could grasp it with both hands, softly raised the hammer, and then stood for a full minute as rigid as the trunk of one of the trees beside him. His head was turned sideways, so that he could look in both directions. He neither saw nor heard anything.

Then he ran lightly and rapidly for full a hundred feet, stopping short again, and using his eyes and ears to the utmost. This time he not only heard, but saw something.

The same soft "pit-a-pat" struck his ear, but to his amazement it came from a point in front. While he was looking he caught the shadowy glimpse of some animal as it whisked over a part of the trail where a few rays of moonlight struck its body.

It was as large as a big dog, with a longer body and a sweeping

tail. It was trotting not towards, but away from Jack, who decided at once that it was the wild beast known in the American forests as a panther, but called on the frontier a "painter."

There could be no doubt that he meant to make a supper off the young Kentuckian, for there are not many meals more tempting to such a creature than a plump boy about a dozen years old.

"If you capture me you've got to have a fight," muttered sturdy Jack Gedney, pressing his lips together and shaking his head; "but I wish the sun was shining, so that I could have a fair chance at you."

The panther was circling around the lad, gradually drawing nearer, and on the watch to leap upon him as soon as he dared to approach close enough to make the spring. The boy knew all about the treacherous animals, for he had been with his father when they were killed, and he had shot one within the preceding three months. But on all those occasions they had the daylight to help make their aim certain.

"He may get pretty close to me before I know it," thought Jack, "though he will have hard work to do it; but I don't think he can land on my shoulders at the first jump."

The boy now walked as lightly and as fast as he could. He varied his gait, for if he advanced at a regular pace the panther would have less trouble in securing his intended victim. Jack therefore advanced slowly, then stopped, and then ran with all the speed he could for fifty or sixty steps.

When he paused the third time after such a spurt, he had reached the log lying across the stream in the little hollow of which I have already spoken. Here the trees were so scant that the whole space was lit up by the moonlight, and a small object could be seen quite clearly.

You may be sure that before stepping upon the rude bridge Jack peered long and earnestly in every direction. The tall columns of trees rose to view on each side of the stream, whose soft murmur mingled with the deep moaning of the woods, which comes to us in the night like the hollow roar of the distant ocean.

"Well, I don't mean to wait here all night," concluded Jack, stepping on the smaller end of the trunk, and beginning to pick his way to the other side; "I am ready to meet the painter whenever he wants to see me, but-"

The boy had advanced only three steps when the beast trotted rapidly from the gloom on the other shore, sprang upon the trunk of the tree which supported Jack Gedney, and lashing his tail and growling savagely, came straight towards him.

The panther did not trot after landing on the trunk, but crouched low, and moved slowly like a cat when about to spring on its prey.

Instead of retreating, as Jack was inclined at first to do, in order to get a more secure footing, he brought his gun to his shoulder, and aiming at a point midway between the glaring eye-balls, let fly at the instant the panther gathered his muscles for the leap meant to land him on the shoulders of the lad.

As it was, the beast did leave the log, but instead of bounding forward, he went straight up in the air, to a height as it seemed of six or eight feet, with a resounding screech, falling across the trunk, from which, after scratching, and clawing, and snarling for a few seconds, he rolled with a splash into the water, still struggling furiously, and scattering the spray upon both shores.

"I don't think you'll try to stop any more peaceable Kentucky boys on their way home at night-"

The lad had no more than spoken these words when a warning growl caused him to turn his head. There, no more than a dozen feet distant, and stealthily approaching, was a second panther-no doubt the mate of the first. And poor Jack Gedney's new rifle was empty!

CHAPTER IV.
THE HOME OF JACK

While Jack Gedney stood on the fallen tree which spanned the stream, watching the panther's dying struggles in the water below, he suddenly learned that its mate was creeping upon him from the rear.

Jack did not stand still, but the next instant ran across the log to the solid ground on the other side. There he faced about, and began re-loading his rifle with the utmost haste, for you will admit that he had no time to lose.

The young hunter did not lose sight of the brute for a moment while hurrying the charge into the barrel of his weapon. He expected to be attacked before he could ram the bullet home, and he meant in such an event to club his gun, and using the butt once on the skull of his foe, draw his hunting knife from his inner pocket, and then have it out with him.

You will conclude that this was a big contract for a boy only twelve years old. So it was indeed, but, like a young pioneer, he had learned to depend on Heaven and himself, and he awaited the trial with as much coolness as his father could have done, even though he knew that the chances were ten to one against winning in a fight against such a muscular and ferocious beast.

The panther came forward on its slow, soft walk, until one

paw rested on the log along which the lad had run only a moment before.

The animal formed an interesting figure as, placing the second paw beside the other on the log, he pushed his head forward, so as to peer over at the dark body drifting down stream. The action of the beast lifted his front so that his back sloped down towards his tail, which for the moment was motionless. The shoulder-blades were shoved in two lumps above the line of the neck, which, because of the nose thrust forward, looked unusually long.

Jack Gedney poured the powder from his horn into the palm of his left hand at the moment the panther rested both paws on the log. He noted the pause of the beast, and his heart leaped with the hope that there was a possibility of getting his gun loaded in time. Leaning his rifle far over, so as to make an inclined plane, he rapidly brought it up to the perpendicular as the black, sand-like particles streamed down the barrel.

Next he whipped out a bullet and the little square piece of greased cloth, shoving both into the muzzle of the weapon. Still the panther peered over the log at his lifeless mate.

As the loading of the weapon progressed Jack could hardly control his excitement. He snatched out the ramrod with such violence that it fell from his hand. Like a flash he stooped, caught it up, and began shoving the bullet down the tight-fitting bore of his gun.

He saw the panther move. With a fierce jamb the bullet was stopped by the thimbleful of powder nestling in the bottom of

the barrel. Jack made sure the ball was pressed home when he snatched out the ramrod and let it fall to the ground: no time now to put it back in its place.

Only one more step-to pour the priming into the pan of his weapon. Jack's hands trembled as he drew back the iron jaw which gripped the flint, and dashed some powder into the cavity prepared for it. He was overrunning with hope.

The panther, as if satisfied with the last sight of his mate drifting down stream, turned his head and looked at the sturdy boy at the other end of the log. He slowly lashed his tail, and growled savagely, his looks and manners seeming to say-

"So you're the young gentleman who has just shot my mate! Such being the case, it is my duty to put it out of your power ever to do anything of the kind again. I am now going to eat you!"

All four feet were on the bridge, and the frightful beast took a couple of steps towards his victim. Then a resounding screech broke the stillness of the night, and the animal, leaping straight up in air, rolled back into the water, hardly making another struggle, for the second bullet of Jack Gedney had entered his neck and passed straight through his heart.

Stooping to the ground, the youth picked up his ramrod, and, without moving from the spot, re-charged his weapon. He did so with as much coolness as when firing a match with Mr. Burton and his boys.

"I don't think there are any more painters near," was his thought; "but I am ready for them if they will come one at a time,

and far enough apart to give me a chance to load up."

And resting his gun on his shoulder, he took to the path, and walked steadily homeward.

His father and mother had just sat down to the supper table as he entered. The table was of the simplest make, and was without any cloth covering. Several pine boards rested on four legs-one at each corner-but it was as clean as it could be, and the pewter tea-pot and few dishes shone brightly enough to serve for mirrors. The bread was of dark colour, but sweet and light, and the bacon might not suit delicate palates, but those who ate of it did so with a relish as great as though it were roast turkey.

Mr. Gedney took turns with his wife and boy in asking a blessing upon each meal of which they partook. He nodded to Jack to signify that it was his turn, and the boy, closing his eyes, and reverently bending his head, begged in a few simple words the blessing of God upon the bounty which He had given them.

"Well," said the father in his cheery voice, as the meal began, "have you and the boys left any game in the woods for other folk?"

"Will and George had some work to do to-day, and their father could not spare them. But they promised to go with me on a hunt to-morrow."

"How have you spent the day?" asked the mother.

"I helped the boys until near night, and then started for home."

"Then you haven't had much chance to try your gun?" was the inquiring remark of the father.

"Not as much as I hoped, but we had a shooting match after dinner."

"A shooting match? How did you succeed?"

"Mr. Burton beat me."

"He is one of the finest shots in the West; he has actually beaten *me* once or twice! How about the boys?"

"They have never beaten me," was the smiling answer of Jack.

"Nor must they or any one else beat you," added Mr. Gedney, with a warning shake of his head. "But haven't you brought down any game?"

"Well, I shot a couple of painters on my way home," replied Jack, in the most indifferent manner, as he buried his big sound teeth into a slice of bread and butter.

"Did you kill them both?" asked the mother between her sips of tea.

"Both are so dead that they couldn't be any deader," was the reply of Jack.

"After supper you can tell us about it," said the father, showing no more interest than if they were talking about the "barking" of a couple of squirrels.

Now, brave and cool as was Jack Gedney, he felt some pride in his exploit, for it is not often that one is able to kill two such fierce animals as the American panther without receiving a scratch himself. But he was not the boy to force his story upon his friends, and so he finished his meal, and finally sat down by the broad, cheerful fireplace.

Opposite to him was his father, smoking his pipe, and his mother, having cleared away the supper things, took up her knitting for the evening. The only light came from the blazing logs on the hearth. This was enough to fill the large room, and render a candle or lamp unnecessary. The plain calico curtains were not drawn across the narrow windows, and the latch-string was left hanging outside, so that any one who chose could enter without knocking.

Jack waited until asked by his father to tell how it was he came to kill two "painters." Then he gave the story as it has been given to you.

The mother did not stop her knitting during the narration, nor did the father cease to smoke in his deliberate way, nor ask any question until it was finished. Then he made some natural inquiries, and remarked that he did not see how Jack could have done better than he did.

After this the conversation took a general turn, and lasted perhaps a couple of hours. Finally, the latch-string was drawn in, a chapter read from the Bible, prayer offered up by the father, after which the little family went to bed.

CHAPTER V.
THE YOUNG WYANDOT

The next morning was a perfect day for the young hunters. The sun shone brightly from the unclouded sky, and the air was crisp and keen with the breath of autumn. The experienced eye of the father told him that there was not likely to be any change very soon, and in his mild way he congratulated his son on the prospect of the pleasant hunt that was before him and his young friends.

The agreement with the latter was that they were to wait at their home for Jack, when the three would start into the interior on a hunt that was likely to last two, if not more, days. Mr. Gedney was not one of those who thought his boy was too young to work. There were always a number of small jobs known in the West as "chores," which it was the duty of Jack to attend to, and which he dared not slight.

Thus it came about that, although the boy rose at an unusually early hour, and his mother hurried his morning meal for him, yet when he started eastward along the path leading to his friends, the sun was creeping above the horizon.

The preparations for the journey were few. All the bullets that were likely to be needed had been made by Mr. Gedney himself several days before; the powder-horn was filled, and nothing was

lacking in that line. Then Jack, like his father, always carried a flint and steel with him, so as to be able to start a fire when he wanted it. (The lucifer match was not invented until a good many years after.) Then he had a pinch of mixed pepper and salt, wrapped in a piece of paper, and meant to be used in seasoning the game which they ate. A few other knick-knacks were stowed away in his inner pocket, and, kissing his parents "good-bye," he entered the path at the other end of the clearing, and walked briskly towards the home of his young friends.

When he reached the crossing where he shot the panthers the night before, he naturally looked for the carcases of the animals. They were not in sight, having been carried away by the current.

"They've got mighty sharp claws," Jack said to himself, as he looked down at the scratches in the wood made by the beast before it dropped into the water. "It was well for me that I was able to shoot that other fellow before he could pounce upon me."

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