Ellis Edward Sylvester

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I – "He and I Must Never Meet"

You will recall that one day in a recent August, Jack Crandall, a member of the Stag Patrol of Boy Scouts, who with the Blazing Arrow and Eagle Patrols was spending the summer vacation on the shore of Gosling Lake, in Southern Maine, met with a serious accident. In climbing a tall pine to inspect a bird's nest, he fell to the ground and broke his leg. His companions, Gerald Hume and Arthur Mitchell, belonging to the same Patrol, made a litter upon which he was carried to the clubhouse. Dr. Spellman, staying with his wife and little daughter Ruth, christened "Sunbeam" by Mike Murphy, in answer to a signal, paddled across the lake in his canoe, set the fractured limb and did all that was necessary.

Jack was an athlete, in rugged health and with no bad habits. He, therefore, recovered rapidly. After spending a few days on his couch, he was carried to the front porch, where in the cool shade and reposing upon an invalid chair, especially fashioned

for the occasion, he feasted his eyes upon the delightful scenery and enjoyed the pleasures of his friends although he could not take part. He insisted that they should pay no special attention to him, though there was not a boy who would not have gladly kept him company all the time. A reunion of the troop took place in the evening, when he was carried inside, listened to the reports and took part in the conversation which you may be sure was of a lively nature.

Thus the days passed until the arrival of the silver mounted maple wood crutches, a gift from the other Scouts, and Jack swung carefully out on the porch and walked the length of it several times before sinking down in the waiting chair. This, of course, did not take place until the month was well by and the time for going home near. I thought it best to close my previous story with this glimpse of things, but it now becomes my duty to turn back and relate some incidents that occurred during the first days of the patient's convalescence, since they have to do with what follows.

Dr. Spellman and his wife returned to the bungalow on the day succeeding Jack's mishap.

Scout Master Hall and several of the lads expressed their surprise that no call had been made by Uncle Elk, the Hermit of the Woods, who showed so much fondness for the Boy Scouts that they expected to see him every day, provided the weather was favorable.

"I am sure he would have been here last night or this morning,

had he known of Jack's misfortune," said Mr. Hall.

"If ye have no 'bjection I'll drop in on him and let him know," replied Mike Murphy, whose heart was as sympathetic as that of a young child.

"Please do so."

Mike glanced around for his chums, Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes, but they were not in sight. It did not matter and he decided to make the trip alone, using one of the canoes to take him to the end of the lake, where he would follow the path that led to the cabin through the woods.

"On me way back," remarked Mike to the Scout Master, who walked with him to the water's edge, "I'll drop in to larn how Sunbeam is getting on."

The Scout Master smiled.

"That will take you considerably out of your way."

"It's not worth the mintion, as Ball O'Flaherty said whin he fell off the church steeple and broke his neck. Then ye know it's a long time since I saw Sunbeam."

"Yes, – less than a day."

So the Irish youth seated himself in the stern of the graceful craft, and swung the paddle with creditable skill. No task could have been easier, and he grinned with satisfaction, as keeping close to shore, he watched the trees with their exuberant foliage glide silently backward.

"A canoe is a blissed boon to byes that can't walk; we might set Jack in one of 'em, and he could paddle wherever he wished.

I'm going to suggist to me friends that whin they go back home, each of 'em has a canoe mounted on wheels, so he can roam round the country, the same as if he's skimming over the water as I'm doing this minute. I'd try it mesilf whin I get back, but dad would objict and there's so much water there I don't naad anything of the kind."

Far over to the left, he saw the other canoe handled by several of the Scouts, while somewhat nearer and a little way back from the water, a thin, feathery finger of smoke filtering through the tree tops showed where Dr. Spellman's house stood.

"Sunbeam has been gone so long that I'm worrit less something may have happened to her; I won't tarry at Uncle Elk's, but make haste to relave me mind as regards the Quaan."

Uncle Elk's canoe was drawn up the bank and turned over. Landing near it, Mike followed the winding path to the door from which the latch string hung, pulled it and stepped across the threshold.

"Good afternoon, Uncle Elk," was his greeting as he closed the door behind him.

The hermit was sitting in his rocking chair, reading "The Truth of Religion," by Rudolf Eucken, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Jena and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1908. The old man laid aside the heavy volume, still open, face downward.

"Michael, I'm glad to see you."

He leaned forward, shook hands and motioned the youth to

the chair opposite. Mike obeyed with the remark:

"We have been expecting a call from ye, Uncle Elk."

"You don't wish me to bore you with too much of my presence," said the hermit, with a twinkle of his bright eyes.

"That's something that can't be done, if ye tried it till ye were an old man," replied Mike warmly. And then told of the mishap that had befallen Jack Crandall. Uncle Elk listened sympathetically.

"That's bad, but it might have been much worse."

"Which Jack himself has obsarved, – for instance, 'spose it had been *mesilf*."

"That surely would have been worse for *you*, but better for him. You say that Dr. Spellman set his injured leg?"

"That he did, and I couldn't have done it better mesilf. He called this morning and said the spalpeen was doing splendid."

"When will the doctor call again?"

"I'm not sartin, – but likely tomorrer."

"Forenoon or afternoon?"

"I couldn't say."

Uncle Elk withdrew his gaze from the face of the lad and looked into the fireplace, where only a few dying embers showed. He was silent for a few moments and then addressed his caller.

"Michael," he said in low tones, "I shall call upon Jack at the earliest opportunity, but my call must be timed so there will be no possibility of meeting Dr. Spellman."

Mike was amazed by the words and at a loss what to say.

Therefore he said what after all was perhaps the best thing.

"I'll see that the doctor doesn't try any expirimints on ye."

The old man actually laughed, but only for an instant. With a shake of his head he said:

"It isn't that, Michael, but he and I must never meet."

The youth was astounded, but his sense of propriety forbade any questioning. If Uncle Elk did not choose to make known the cause of his strange enmity, Mike had no right to object.

A strained silence followed for a minute or two, when the hermit again looked meditatively into the smouldering embers.

"It can be easily arranged: let Dr. Spellman make his calls at such times as suit his convenience and I will adjust mine accordingly."

"That should be aisy. I hev it!"

"Let me hear your plan."

"'Spose the doctor makes it a rule to call ivery other day and ye can fit yer visits in betwaan, though we should like it to be oftener."

"That would hardly answer, for he might be needed every day. A better plan will be that he should never call at the bungalow during the evening. If he agrees to that, everything will be right."

"That'll doot! He wouldn't come anyway unless we signalled him, and if ye happen to be at the clubhouse, ye'll have plinty of time to run."

"How am I to know that he consents to it?"

"If he objicts, I'll come back and tell ye; if he agraas, I won't

show up here agin till after ye have visited us."

"That settles the matter. I suppose, Michael, you are wondering why I make such a strange request?"

"I am, but I'm not asking any quistions, as ye'll obsarve."

"Well, you will never learn from me."

Mike was slightly nettled.

"Why thin did ye think it worth while to raise me hopes, whin I hadn't made any inquiries?"

"I beg your pardon, Michael; I shouldn't have done it. Let neither of us refer to it again."

"Do ye wish me to till Docther Spellman what ye said?"

"I do."

"Then consider that I've told him."

"It would be hard for him to understand my request unless he knew my feelings. You may as well stay to supper and over night with me."

"I thank ye, Uncle Elk, but I much fear that if I don't return to the byes they'll think I've tumbled out of a tree the same as Jack, and have broke me neck. I'll bid ye good afternoon and make me way to Docther Spelhnan. Onless ye hear from me to the contrary, ye'll understand that he'll not visit the bungalow on any avening onless he is sent fur, so the way will be open to yersilf."

The hermit rose from his chair and stood in the door as Mike walked down the path to the side of the lake. He looked round just before passing out of sight and waved his hand to the old man, who nodded.

"It's mighty qu'ar," mused the lad, as he shoved off in his canoe; "the docther has niver said a word as far as I've heerd about any throuble between 'em, and I couldn't guess what it is to save me life."

The bright, sunshiny afternoon was well advanced when Mike paddled a little way from shore and turned in the direction of the thin wisp of smoke which revealed the location of the physician's summer home. Almost beyond sight could be made out the second canoe, which some of the Scouts had used in making an excursion over the sheet of water. The craft was close in shore and seemed to be motionless, as if the boys were fishing. The distance was too far for him to tell the number of occupants, but he judged they were three or four.

"And I belave Alvin and Chester are among 'em," he added, after a scrutiny of the boat; "I mind me now that they said something about going off to-day on a cruise. Hello!"

The exclamation was caused by an unexpected discovery. Between him and the home of the physician he saw a second spiral of vapor climbing up among the treetops. Like that of the former, it was so far back from the water that nothing could be seen of the party that had kindled it.

Mike held his paddle motionless while he looked and thought.

"They must be strangers to the rist of us. If this thing kaaps up, bime by we sha'n't have elbow room and will have to camp farther inland. I wonder now if they could be some other Boy Patrols that have strayed in here. They may have heerd of us and

desire to make me acquaintance, as do most people."

Mike had his natural share of curiosity, and decided to learn who the strangers were. He had enough time at command to permit a diversion of this nature, and he headed his craft toward the bank at a point opposite the dim wavering column of vapor which showed that a fire kindled beneath was the cause.

CHAPTER II – A
Slight Miscalculation

The distance was so slight that a score of strokes drove the canoe to shore. Nothing in the nature of a path was to be seen, and there was so much undergrowth that when Mike glided under the vegetation, only the rear of the boat was visible to any one on the lake. He drew the craft up the bank far enough to prevent its floating away during his absence, and began picking his way through the bushes. A few rods and the wood grew more open, though not being much accustomed to that sort of traveling, he made considerable noise in his progress. He was thus engaged with his head bent and his arms thrust out in front feeling his way, when a low horizontal limb slid under his chin and as it almost lifted him off his feet brought him to a sudden stop.

"Worrah! I wonder if me hid is left on me shoulders!" he exclaimed, vigorously rubbing his neck; "yis, – the most of me is here, as Tarn Murry said whin he came down after being blowed up in a powder mill."

A few rods farther and he came upon a sight which caused him to halt as abruptly as before, with a strong inclination to turn about and go back to his canoe.

In a small open space a fire of pine cones, twigs and branches was burning beside the trunk of a fallen tree. Resting on the top

of the blaze was a tomato can, filled with bubbling coffee, whose aroma reached the nostrils of Mike at the moment he caught sight of the fire. On the log sat a ragged, frowsy tramp, with a crooked stick in his hand tending the blaze, while on the ground half lying down and half sitting up, was a second vagrant sucking a corncob pipe.

You remember the two nuisances who called upon Dr. Spellman and because of their insolence were sharply rebuffed by him, though his wife, in the kindness of her heart, gave them food. These were the same hoboes, who it will be noted had not as yet wandered far from the physician's home. You remember, too, their characteristic names, – Buzby Biggs and Saxy Hutt. Lazy, shiftless, dirty, rugged of frame, thieves and unmitigated pests, they were straggling through this part of Maine, in mortal dread of two afflictions, – work and a bath. They were ready to suffer harsh treatment and privation rather than submit to either.

Mike's sensitiveness revolted at sight of them, but before he could turn away, both of the men, who must have heard his approach, raised their heads and looked toward him. Hutt, who was smoking the pipe, slowly rose to his feet, stretched his arms over his head, and beckoned with his grimy forefinger.

"Welcome, my lord!" he called in his husky voice; "wilt thou not come into our baronial castle and partake of a flagon of wine with us?"

The grotesqueness of the invitation appealed to Mike and he walked forward, recalling that he had not his buckthorn cane with

him. Had he gone for a tramp through the woods he would have held it in his hand, but it was in his way when using the canoe. He never carried firearms, for to do so is to disobey one of the strictest rules of the Boy Scouts, besides which, as you know, an Irishman believes in the use only of nature's weapons, with the addition perhaps now and then of a stout shillaleh. Not that Mike Murphy expected any trouble with these men, but the thought which came to him was natural under the circumstances.

He approached in his confident fashion, with a grin on his face, halted a pace or two from the fire, and with the couple examining him, made the Boy Scout salute.

"'Tis so kind of ye that I will halt a brief while and enj'y the hospitality of the Knights of the Ragged Shirt and Dirty Face."

This was a pretty crisp salutation, but it need not be said that Mike felt no more regard for the couple than do all respectable persons. He remained standing and did not go nearer.

"Aren't yer afraid of being arrested fur yer beauty, young man?" asked Biggs with a grimace.

"Not while yersilves are in the counthry."

"Who are you anyway?"

"Mike Murphy of Southport, State of Maine. I would exchange cards wid ye, but I'm afeard ye couldn't return the compliment."

"I left my pasteboards at home on the piany. We gather from your dress that you're one of them Boy Patrols."

"Ye're right, excipt jest now I'm on this side of the lake."

"Gee whizz! but you're keen. How long do you chaps intend to stay there?"

"Probably until we lave. We're not among the folks who hev to be kicked out by their betters."

"Meaning us?"

"As ye plaise; I want to be agreeable to ye."

Mike had not shown tact. He ought to have reflected that it was imprudent to rouse the resentment of two full grown men of so lawless a character as these tramps undoubtedly were. Combative as Mike was by nature, he would have hardly been the equal of one of them in a "shindy" which could be easily started and which it seemed he had set out to provoke.

"I observe," said Biggs, "that you have a brass chain dangling from yer coat pocket in front; does the same signify that there's a watch anchored at t'other end?"

Mike answered the question by flipping out his time piece and displaying it.

"The best Waterbury chronometer made, – price a dollar and a half."

"I should like to borrer the same for my pal and me."

"I'm thinking ye would like to borrer a good many things ye can't; I carry a little loose change in me pocket. Mebbe you'd like to borrer the same?"

"Yer guessed it the fust time; while yer turning over that turnip and chain yer may as well h'ist out the few pennies in yer garments."

The tramp took a step toward the lad, his companion grinningly watching proceedings.

The words and manner of Biggs left no doubt that he meant to rob Mike of his watch and money, – though neither was of much value. Was the Irish youth angry? I cannot do justice to his feelings, so let us try to imagine his state of mind.

Prudence demanded that he should try to conciliate the scamps, or, failing in that, to dash off at the top of his speed, but two reasons checked this course. You know he was not formed for running, and either one of the tramps could have overtaken him by half trying. The other reason was that Mike never ran from any foe. He would die fighting before showing the white feather. Convinced that nothing could avert a fierce struggle, he instantly prepared for it. He would have felt better had his shillaleh been in his grasp, but it has already been shown that his only weapons were those which nature had furnished and no youth of his years could have known better how to use them.

I should be distressed if I had to describe Mike's fight with two full grown men, for it was impossible that he should not get much the worst of it. While it may be a relief to picture one in his situation as baffling, if not defeating two burly despoilers, yet to do so would be contrary to truth.

The youth recoiled a single step, closed his fists and assumed an attitude of defense. Saxy Hutt, still stood grinningly listening and watching. As he viewed the situation it was preposterous to think his pal would need his help. None the less, he would be

quick to give it should the call be made.

"Come on as soon as ye plaise, and I'd as lief take both as one; don't kaap me waiting."

"Hear him talk," said Biggs, still advancing, though more slowly than before; "he makes believe he ain't scared half to death."

"Ye'll be thankful in less nor a minute if ye're allowed to escape wid yer life."

This sounded like the wildest kind of boasting, but it was justified. Since Mike Murphy faced the two tramps, he saw what was behind them, which they did not. In a direct line with Biggs, slightly to the left of Saxy, and no more than a dozen paces to the rear, stood Dr. Spellman with leveled revolver and face red with anger.

"Move a little to one side, Mike, so I shall run no risk of hitting you," called the physician; "just now you're right in line with that ruffian."

Buzby Biggs leaped fully a foot in air, and with a gasp flashed his head about and stared at the point whence the dreadful voice had come. Then his spiky hair seemed to rise on end and lift his dilapidated hat to a height of several inches.

"Shall I wing him, Mike?" asked the doctor, with the weapon still at a level.

"Folly yer own plisure in that regard; I don't begrudge ye the enj'yment, as Mrs. O'Flaherty remarked whin she refoosed to fire at the bear that was chasing her husband."

At that instant, Biggs emitted a howl, and with what was left of his fragmentary hat fluttering to the ground, dashed in a headlong panic through the wood and undergrowth toward the lake.

The sharp crack of the Smith and Wesson rang out, and the fugitive made another bound in air, as if he felt the sting of the bullet, and dived out of sight.

"I missed him on purpose," remarked the doctor; "he isn't worth a cartridge, but I'm undecided about you."

As he spoke he shifted his aim to Saxy Hutt, who was a-tremble with fear.

"I – I – I've got an engagement," he stuttered, beginning to shamble in the direction taken by his companion; "I'll bid you good day."

"Hold on!" sharply commanded his master; "wait till I decide what's best to do with you."

"Why – why, boss, I haven't done anything."

And too weak to stand in his excessive terror, Saxy sagged back and sat down heavily on the log. Mike could not help pitying him.

"It was t'other spalpeen that meant to rob me, docther."

"One is as bad as the other; this one would have helped had it been necessary."

"Oh, doctor," protested the aggrieved Saxy, "how can yer think such a crool thing of a gentleman like me? I was just going to stop Buzby when yer spoke up."

The physician lowered his weapon with a laugh.

"Off with you! I hope never to see the face of yourself or Buzby again. You may drink your coffee if you wish before you leave."

But the tramp had lost his thirst as well as his appetite for the time. He came unsteadily to his feet, and began moving gingerly over the trail of his companion.

"I say, doctor," he said, pausing a few steps away, "if you feel like firing off that little thing in your hand, please p'int t'other way."

"I shall take your request into consideration, but don't advise you to bank on my granting it."

Saxy increased his pace until it equalled that of him who had gone before. Dr. Spellman extended his hand to Mike.

"I hope that is the last of them. I supposed they left the neighborhood, but they will do so now."

"Why do ye think that, docther?"

"Heretofore we had nothing positive to bring against them. Now I can bear witness that they tried to rob you. They know it and have no wish to go to jail while the weather is so pleasant outside. Let's sit down on this log for a wee bit, before going to my house. Tell me how you came to be in this place."

"I was on me way from Uncle Elk's cabin whin the smoke of this camp caused me to turn aside, wid the result that I'd been mixed up in the biggest shindy of me life if ye hadn't took it in yer head to spoil the picnic."

"It was mighty lucky for you that I did so, Mike. Did Uncle

Elk send any message to me?"

"He did that," gravely replied Mike, who thereupon told his friend of the assertion of the hermit that he and the physician must not meet.

"I had begun to suspect some such feeling on his part, though not to the degree he shows. I have called there twice, the last time with my wife, who insists that the old man was in his cabin at the time and purposely kept out of our sight. He can depend upon it that I shall not put myself in his way, though I am wholly at a loss to understand his enmity. But we may as well go to the house, Mike."

As he spoke, the doctor rose to his feet, and the two began threading their way through the wood to the point where Mike had left his canoe.

CHAPTER III – A
Strange Occurrence

It was not far to the edge of the lake, and, as you will remember, there was abundant undergrowth, but the fleeing tramps had left a trail of broken and twisted branches which it would have been easy to follow, even with greater distance and more uncertainty of direction. Mike kept a few paces in the lead, and soon caught the shimmer of water, but when he glanced around saw nothing of his craft. He stood perplexed when Dr. Spellman stepped beside him.

"Where's the canoe?" asked the man.

"That's what meself would like to know."

"Is this the spot where you stepped ashore?"

Mike moved farther until his shoes touched the water. He recognized the projecting limb of a beech which had attracted his notice when he came ashore.

"There's no mistake about the same. Now, docther, that boat can't hev a habit of sneakin' off whin ye're not watching – what's the matter?"

His companion touched his arm and pointed over the water.

"There's the answer to your question."

"It beats me, as the drum said to the drum stick."

Some two hundred yards out on Gosling Lake was the canoe

heading toward the western end of the sheet of water. In it were seated Biggs and Hutt, the two rascally tramps, their appearance suggesting that they were owners of the graceful craft in which they were making a pleasure excursion. Their backs were toward the two on shore, but Hutt who sat near the stern turned his head. Observing the indignant couple, he waved his hand in salutation and grinned so broadly that the gleam of his yellow teeth showed.

Neither Mike nor the doctor spoke for a moment or two. Then the youth solemnly extended his hand.

"Docther, would ye mind shaking?"

"Certainly not, but what is the idea, Mike?"

"'Cause I can't think of anything ilse to do, as the p'liceman said whin he prosaaded to break his club over the head of ivery one in sight."

"Were there ever two such pests? The next time I get a chance I won't kill them, but I'll give each something he'll remember."

"Where's your boat?"

"At the foot of the path leading to the house; the distance is so short that I did not use it, but strolled to this point."

"Let's jump into the same and make fur these spalpeens."

The physician was so angry that he did not hesitate. They hurried through the wood to the spot where the other craft lay as it had been left by its owner. It has been shown that from this spot the house was not visible and therefore the wife and daughter knew nothing of what was afoot, which perhaps was best. The doctor, being the most skilful with the paddle, took

up the implement, and headed after the other craft, which was making good progress toward the farther end of the lake.

Each of our friends had asked himself the question as to what Biggs and Hutt meant by their act and what they were likely to do. It could not be seen that the vagrants had anything to gain, for they must soon abandon the canoe and continue their flight on foot. They knew the medical man carried a deadly weapon, and did not seem backward in using it, because of which they certainly could not desire another meeting with him.

Moreover, a third canoe was involved. It seemed to have disappeared for the time, but must be somewhere near the western end of the lake, which being the case, the tramps were likely to find themselves between two fires, though it was not to be supposed that they had any cause to fear the unarmed Boy Scouts in the invisible boat.

The flight and pursuit had lasted only a few minutes when an unpleasant truth impressed itself upon Mike and the doctor: – Buzby Biggs, who swung the other paddle, did it so deftly that his boat steadily drew away from the pursuer despite the utmost efforts of Dr. Spellman. In a straightaway race the tramps were sure to win, but the course had bounds, and in the end they must be pocketed, a fact so apparent that they themselves saw it from the first. They had the choice of keeping directly on until they reached the western margin so far in advance of their pursuers that they need give them no thought, or they could take the shorter course to the northern shore, opposite the bungalow. It

looked as if they had decided upon the former plan, which would indicate that they knew or suspected nothing of the third canoe, nestling somewhere under the overhanging limbs along shore.

Such undoubtedly would have been the action of the tramps, had not it changed so abruptly and inexplicably that the astounded doctor ceased paddling and stared without speaking a word.

Since our friends sat with their faces toward the backs of Biggs and Hutt, they saw their every movement no matter how slight. Hutt was idle, with a grimy hand resting on either gunwale of the canoe. Now and then he glanced back and when he saw the pursuers steadily falling behind, had the impudence to reach out one hand and beckon them to move faster. The other, knowing he could not be overtaken, showed little interest in those who were striving to come up with him. Something far in advance seemed to hold his attention.

Such was the situation, and the forward boat was within a furlong of the western shore when Biggs suddenly held his paddle suspended as if he had caught sight of some object that startled him. The next moment he flung aside the implement, uttered a cry of terror and dived overboard. Hutt was not five seconds behind him. Both stayed so long under water that our friends suspected they were drowned, but the frowsy heads, one without a hat, bobbed up at some distance from the boat, and they were seen swimming furiously toward the northern bank, which was not far off.

They had not taken a dozen strokes when they dived again and went as far under the surface as before. Thus diving, swimming and working desperately, they quickly reached land, scrambled out, plunged in among the trees and vanished as if Death himself were nipping at their heels. Never was greater panic shown.

Doctor Spellman sat mute and motionless until the tramps had disappeared. Then he turned his head:

"What do you make of that, Mike?"

The occasion was one of the rare ones when the Irish youth had nothing to say. He sighed and shook his head; he couldn't do justice to the theme.

"Something scared both of them out of their wits. It couldn't have been on the shore ahead, for that's too far off, nor on their right, for they tried with might and main to reach land there."

"Could it have been at the rear?" ventured Mike.

"That is toward us. *We* couldn't have caused them such alarm."

"Mr. Hutt may have looked around and catched the frown on me brow; I'm towld I have a tumble exprission when I'm mad."

"It must be true to cause them thus to leap into clear spring water, knowing it meant the coldest kind of a bath. No, Mike," added the doctor gravely, "they saw something *in the water* that threw them into fits. What could it be?"

This was the only theory possible and yet it simply deepened the mystery. What could there be in the clear cool waters of Gosling Lake, besides the different species of ordinary fishes that are taken with hook and line? To Mike and the doctor the puzzle

was more inexplainable than before.

One conclusion, however, was warranted by what had occurred: if the tramps had seen something which terrified them beyond imagination, what was to prevent the man and youth from gaining a sight of the same frightful object whatever it might be?

Now, while it cannot be denied that Dr. Spellman and Mike Murphy were more than ordinarily brave, yet they felt a shrinking in stealing up to the spot where the tramps had dived from the other canoe. It was their ignorance of the character of the peril which affected them more than any tangible danger could have done.

The doctor dipped his paddle in the water and gently swayed it. The boat moved slowly toward the other canoe, drifting like an eggshell over the placid surface. In leaping overboard, Buzby Biggs had flung the paddle from him and it was seen floating a couple of rods distant from the boat. Very slowly the doctor advanced until Mike leaned over and lifted the implement into their craft. Then the man sheered his boat beside the other and Mike, tossing the paddle into it, held it steady, and sat down.

"Now, docther, we can manage it, I'm thinking," remarked the youth, looking up into the face that it seemed to him had gone a little pale.

"Can you find anything to explain the fright of the tramps, Mike?"

Both peered into the clear water, whose depth was too great for them to see the bottom, but nothing rewarded their piercing

scrutiny. And right here a fact must be admitted which was not discreditable to either of them. The breath of air that sighed over the lake had swept the empty canoe fully a hundred feet from whence it was at the moment Buzby Biggs dived overboard. It followed, therefore, that when Mike and the doctor peered into the pellucid depths, it was not at the spot where the tramps had descried something which unnerved them. Moreover, each of the pursuers knew such was the case, but did not try to correct it nor did either drop a hint of his knowledge until some time afterward.

It may be added that had the doctor and his young friend paddled a little farther in the proper direction they would have solved the mystery and been overcome probably by the same panic that had driven the tramps overboard.

"Well," said the physician, "there is nothing to be gained by staying here. Let's go to my home, have supper and spend the evening. I know my wife will be glad to have you, and I suspect that Stubby feels a little that way herself."

"I hope so," replied Mike feelingly; "I may as well confess that my main purpose in going thither is to meet Sunbeam, as the callers used to say regarding mesilf whin they purtended they wanted to see dad and mither."

Paddling at a leisurely rate, they soon drew the two canoes up the bank and stepped out. Mike paused and looked back.

"Can there be any fear of thim spalpeens poking round here while we're not in sight?"

"It seems unlikely; since they tried that sort of thing they have

been scared so fearfully that I think they will avoid us."

"Docther, what could it have been that made them jump out of their boat and swim and dive like two crazy persons?"

"I should give a good deal to be able to answer that question, but I have no more idea than you. Let us try to content ourselves with the belief that like the cause of Uncle Elk's resentment toward me, it will be made clear sooner or later."

Before leaving the landing, as it may be called, they scanned the surface of the lake. The doctor generally carried his binoculars and he traced the margin clear around from their right back again to their left. There stood the bungalow with the flag idly drooping from the staff and several of the Scouts were seen lounging at the front. In no other direction was a sign of life discerned.

"I cannot discover the other canoe," remarked Dr. Spellman, passing the glass to Mike at his side. "If the boys had returned, the boat would be in sight by the bungalow; whoever used it, they are still absent."

"They have landed and gone into the woods to look after birds or to trace out other kinds of trees. They will be back before the set of sun."

"No doubt, unless," added the doctor half in earnest, "they should receive the same shock that struck Biggs and Hutt."

"In that evint, they will be home still earlier."

"Come on; I'm beginning to feel hungry."

"And I'm wid ye there."

CHAPTER IV – Curious Sights And Doings

One of the incidents which made that night memorable in the life of Mike Murphy was that it brought him a compliment, the equal of which he had never received before, nor in the years to come can any similar words so touch his heart.

Ruth Spellman, or "Sunbeam" as she was coming to be called, was so interested in his fairy stories that when the time arrived for her to go to bed she was restless and the mother feared it was something in the nature of a fever that disturbed her. The father, however, assured his wife that it was due to mental excitement and would soon pass away. When Ruth had said her prayers, kissed each good night and lain down on her cot, with the thin blanket spread over her, she still fidgeted. From the next room the three heard her tossing as children will do when sleep fails to soothe them.

Suddenly they heard her pleading voice:

"Cousin Mike, won't you please sing to me?"

"I'll do my bist," he replied with a laugh, as he walked back and sat on a camp stool beside her couch, where only a small portion of the light from the front apartment reached them. He began the baby song with which his mother had often lulled him to slumber in infancy. Its exquisite sweetness was beyond description, the

parents sat motionless and listening as much enthralled as the little one for whose benefit it was sung. They were almost holding their breath when Sunbeam murmured during one of the slight pauses:

"I think one of the angels you told me about, mamma, is singing."

"I don't wonder," whispered the father; "I never heard anything like it."

Five minutes later the child had drifted away into dreamland and Mike came forward and joined the two on the outside. They sat silent for a few minutes. Neither referred to the wonderful treat they had enjoyed, for it would have grated when compared with the simple words of Sunbeam. Nor did Mike speak of it, but, as has been said, his heart had been touched as never before.

It was comparatively early in the evening when he bade his friends good-by, having declined their invitation to stay over night, and walked down to the water, accompanied by the doctor.

"When you next see Uncle Elk, assure him that his wishes shall be respected by me; I shall not call at the bungalow in the evening unless you signal for me, nor do I intend to go near his home."

Mike promised to carry out the doctor's wishes and turned the prow of the boat south, which was the most direct course home. He glanced back, and observing that his friend had gone up the path, made a change of direction, his action showing that he did not wish the doctor to notice it.

The truth was that Mike was obsessed with what he had

witnessed that afternoon. There must be an explanation of the fright of the two tramps, but he could not frame any theory that would stand for a moment.

"And I'll niver be able to do it," he muttered, "till I larn a good deal more than I know now, which isn't anything at all, as Ted Ryan replied whin his taycher asked him what he knowed about his lesson."

Now, as that which terrified Biggs and Hutt seemed to have appeared in the lake near them, it would seem that there was the spot to look for the solution of the mystery, and yet it was impossible to hit upon the precise place. He and the doctor had come pretty near it some hours before, without any result.

"We agraad that what the spalpeens saw was *in the water*, but that couldn't be. It must have been on the land and that's where I'll hunt for the same."

There were just as strong objections to this supposition, the chief of which was that the vagrants when they went overboard swam with frantic energy toward the shore; in other words, they made for the point where the terror was awaiting them. Moreover, their actions in diving repeatedly and glancing back proved that what they dreaded was behind them.

It was useless to theorize, for the more Mike tried it, the more puzzled he became. He decided to paddle slowly and silently to the point where the tramps had landed and make his investigations there. Using his eyes and ears to the utmost, he ought to learn something, provided always there was something

to learn. He certainly displayed "nerve," but no more than he had done on other occasions.

It has been shown that the youth was only an amateur in handing a canoe, but by slowly and carefully moving the paddle, he caused scarcely a ripple and was sure no one could detect him through the sense of hearing. There was no moon, but the sky was clear and studded with stars whose brilliancy enabled him dimly to see objects at a distance of a hundred yards or so. From the first, he kept so close inshore that the undergrowth and wood were in sight and served him as a guide. Even an expert in the circumstances would not have been able to decide precisely where Biggs and Hutt left the water, but Mike was sure he was not far from the spot when he ceased plying his paddle.

He decided not to land, at least not for the present, but to halt where the bow of the canoe rested directly under the dipping branches. Thus, should it become necessary, he could slip out of sight under the leafy screen, or could retreat if it should prove advisable to do so.

An overhanging bough rested on the prow of the craft and held it motionless, a very slight force serving as an anchor in the case of so delicately poised a craft. First, with his heart beating a little faster than usual, he peered round in the gloom that shut him in on every hand. To the southward he saw the lights of the bungalow twinkling like stars, one of the windows throwing the rays well out on the lake, but in no other direction could be noted a sign of life.

"Every one of the byes, not forgitting Scout Master Hall, are there, for the ones that wint out in t'other canoe must have gone back while I was at the docther's. They know where I wint so they won't be worrying about me, which they wouldn't be likely to do annyhow," he added with a touch of his natural whimsicality, "if they didn't know anything about me at all, at all."

No sound reached the intently listening ears, except that deep almost inaudible murmur which is never absent in a stretch of forest or near the ocean.

"I'll try it awhile, but if Mike Murphy knows his own heart, which he thinks he do, he isn't going to sit in this steamboat many more – whisht!"

From a point not fifty feet distant shot out a canoe, like an arrow driven from a bow. In it a single man was seated and vigorously swinging the paddle. He had emerged from under the overhanging limbs and sped southward, absolutely without any noise at all. Mike was so startled by the apparition that he stared breathless for a minute, nor did his wits fully come back until the craft and its occupant were swallowed up in the gloom.

Not only was the unexpected appearance of the canoe startling, but the recognition of the Master of Woodcraft who drove the boat forward like a skimming swallow, added to the amazement of Mike. Beyond a doubt he was Uncle Elk. He was so near when he first darted in view that there was no possibility of mistake.

"I wonder ef I'm Mike Murphy or a big fool or jest both,"

muttered the youth, when able to pull himself together. "I lift Uncle Elk in his cabin studying his primer or spelling book, and now he is in *this* part of the world."

After a moment's reflection the youth added:

"Which the same may be said of mesilf, so that don't count. It looked to me as if he was heading for the bungalow and an interisting question comes before me: being that I obsarved him, did he return the compliment and obsarve *me*?"

After turning the question over in his mind, Mike said to himself:

"If I kaap at this much longer I'll go clean daft, as Jimmy Hagan did whin he tried to whirl his two hands in opposite directions at the same time. Can it be I'm mistook?"

He sniffed the air several times and was convinced that he caught the odor of a burning cigar which could not be far off, else the nose would not have detected it when no wind was blowing.

"Uncle Elk doesn't smoke, leastways I niver obsarved him doing the same, and if he did he ain't here, so the perfume can't be projuiced by him."

He now ventured to draw his canoe nearer shore, by gently pulling the overhanging bough. It was blankly dark all around him, the foliage shutting out the star gleam, so that he had literally to feel his way. Suddenly there was a slight jar, proving that the bow had touched shore. He paused to consider whether anything was likely to be gained by leaving the craft. While it seemed almost certain that Uncle Elk had come to this lonely spot to meet

some one, there was no obvious way by which Mike could assure himself on the point.

He still noted the aroma of the cigar, which he judged to be a pretty fair specimen of the weed, though he was so accustomed to the pipe of his father that he was a poor judge.

"The spalpeen can't be fur off," concluded Mike still gently sniffing, "and begorra! he isn't!"

The exclamation was caused by the sound of a voice, not in speaking, but in chortling, as if pleased over something. The sound was so near that had there been the least illumination Mike must have seen the one from whom it came. Then a second person – as the peculiar sound proved – joined in the ebullition, the two so near together that otherwise the listener would have thought the laugh came from one.

"It's them tramps!" was the thought of the startled Mike; "though one of 'em wouldn't be smoking a cigar unless he stole it or Uncle Elk had give the same to him."

It was unpleasant thus to associate the hermit with the pestiferous vagrants with whom the youth had had much trouble already. He waited for the strangers to speak, but they did not seem to care to do so. Once he thought he saw the glowing end of the cigar, but was probably mistaken, for a second look failed to reveal it, nor did either of the men laugh again.

With a feeling akin to disgust, Mike stealthily worked his canoe from under the overhanging boughs and set out on his return to the clubhouse.

CHAPTER V – Concerning Certain American Trees

As Mike Murphy approached the landing he saw the second canoe drawn up the beach, which was proof that his friends had returned from their excursion to the western end of the lake. The bright light from the main room of the clubhouse showed that the Boy Scouts were gathered there and he decided to go in.

The night was so mild that no fire burned on the broad hearth, but the suspended lamp filled the apartment with a soft illumination which served almost as well as midday. Jack Crandall, the hero of the broken leg, sat in his invalid chair in front of the fireplace and at his side was Uncle Elk. Jack had been listening to the reports of his young friends who had been investigating trees, but were mostly interested in bird lore. The comments which Jack made on the written notes as read to him showed that he was the best informed of any of the Scouts concerning birds. He cleared up many doubts and answered questions so intelligently that the venerable Instructor in Woodcraft complimented him.

Mike came through the open door so silently that none of the boys noticed him. No chair being available, he sat down on the floor, as the majority had already done. He was near the entrance and aimed to avoid observation, but as Uncle Elk from

his position faced him it was probable he noticed the lad, as did Jack Crandall, who also fronted that direction.

The reports and the comments thereon having been finished, the old man was speaking:

"To make satisfactory progress in acquiring knowledge," said he in his low, musical voice to which all listened with alert interest, "you must do so systematically. In our tramp through the woods the other day we picked up a good deal of information, but it was haphazard. We talked of trees as we came across them, but it was fragmentary and ten times as much was left unlearned as was learned. I am glad to know that your Scout Master has followed the right course in directing your study of our native trees, not alone in Maine but as far north as Canada, westward to the Rockies and down to the northern boundaries of the Southern States. The subject is too vast for us to cover in one evening or in a dozen evenings. Let us rather summarize. We shall put our wits together and see how many families we can name, without giving the different species under each. The first is the magnolia family, of which there are four varieties, while under the custard apple there is but one, the papaw. Now let me hear from you."

Nearly an hour was spent during which scarcely a boy in the room kept silent. The pleased old man nodded his head and finally raised his hand for quiet.

"I believe you have mentioned about all. Now, while Isaac jots down the names at the table, let's try to evolve something like order therefrom. Are you ready?"

Isaac Rothstein nodded and held his lead pencil over the paper. Here is the list upon which all finally agreed:

Magnolia, custard-apple, linden, rue, ailantus, holly, staff-tree, buckthorn, rose, pea, sumach, maple, horse chestnut, heath, honeysuckle, dogwood, ginseng, witch hazel, ebony, olive, begonia, laurel, mulberry, elm, plane-tree, walnut, birch, beech, willow, pine, yew and oak.

"None of you has seen all of these," continued the old man, "but I hope you will have the opportunity of studying their peculiarities sometime. To illustrate what a rich treat is before you, we shall give a few minutes' attention to the oak family, concerning which you may think I had considerable to say the other day. Let me show you how much was left unsaid.

"Most persons think of the oak as a slow grower. This is true of two or three species but not of the family. The majority need a hundred years to attain perfection and they rarely bear acorns until twenty years old. The acorn requires no protection in order to mature, and those that are not eaten by wild animals or trodden under foot do their work well. The *quercus* is one of the longest-lived trees."

"What is the greatest age that they attain, Uncle Elk?" asked Scout Master Hall, one of the most interested in the audience.

"It is impossible to say, but there is little doubt that many of them flourish for a thousand years. There are vigorous oaks to-day in England that were old in the time of William the Conqueror. The famous White Oak of Hartford, in which

Captain Wadsworth hid the charter two hundred and twenty-five years ago, was several centuries old at the time, and it was not until the summer of 1856 that a windstorm brought it to the ground. While it is one of the most valuable of the family, the white oak is in danger of extinction, because of its value as timber and on account of the sweetness of its nuts, which makes it a favorite with wild creatures that will not eat the bitter acorns of other oaks. You know the white oak is so called because of the color of its bark, which however is generally an ashen gray. Can any of you tell me the name of the oak that is fifty feet or slightly more in height, grows in Texas, has a fine-checked bark nearly the color of the white oak, with an awkward form and has shoots along the whole length of its branches, with the leaves coarse and rough on both sides? I shall not wait for you to guess the name, which is the post oak.

"The bur oak grows to a height of a hundred and fifty feet and ranges south to Texas and from the foothills of the Rockies to the Atlantic coast, being most abundant in Kansas and Nebraska. One of J. Fenimore Cooper's most pleasing tales is 'The Oak Openings,' a name applied to the scattered forests of Minnesota. Now, you may know that the cork of commerce is the outer bark of an oak growing in southern Europe. The bur oak seems to be striving to produce the same thing and probably will succeed after awhile.

"The chestnut oak sometimes reaches a height of a hundred feet, but the trunk divides into large limbs a few feet above the

ground. It is found in this State, westward through Ohio and as far south as Kentucky. It has many features in common with the yellow oak, whose range is somewhat different.

"The dwarf chinkapin, or scrub chestnut oak, is a shrub rarely more than a dozen feet high and grows on sandy or rocky soil. We do not meet with it north of Massachusetts. In Missouri and Kansas, it acquires dimensions more like a tree.

"The swamp white oak grows to a height of more than a hundred feet, and is fond of the borders of swamps. The top is narrow and round and the branches pendulous. You know about the red oak, which is a rapid grower and ranges from this State to Georgia and westward to Kansas, but attains its finest development north of the Ohio.

"To continue, I should add the names of the scarlet oak, the black and the yellow oak, the pin oak, the swamp Spanish, the bear, the scrub, the black jack, the barren, the shingle, the laurel, and the willow.

"You have noticed that I have done little more than mention the names of the different species. You have learned very little, for it is necessary that you should know the range of each, the height to which it grows, the characteristics of the bark, the wood, the leaves, the flowers and acorns. In conclusion, I shall say that the willow oak is one of the most interesting of trees. Its leaves resemble those of the willow, as do the straight slender shoots. It grows on the wet borders of swamps, but keeps away from the sea coast. Its acorns are very small, with a kernel so

bitter that you would never bite into it a second time.

"My object this evening," said Uncle Elk, "has been rather to awaken a desire on your part to study systematically our common American trees than to give you actual information. Let us dismiss the subject, for in dropping a matter of that kind we should follow the rule in eating, which is to stop before the appetite is cloyed. Suppose to-morrow night we have a little talk about American birds."

There was general nodding of heads and the old man rose to his feet. He was so pleased with his listeners that he said:

"If we get through that subject in time, I'll promise to tell you a story, provided you would like to hear one from me."

He could be seen smiling behind his abundant gray beard.

"Boys will be boys always. Nothing suits them better than a story. So I shall bid you good night for the present, hoping nothing will interfere with our meeting again to-morrow evening."

"The better plan," suggested Scout Master Hall, "is for you to take supper with us, for I foresee that there will be much for you to tell us. We don't want to miss the talk about birds, and I am as eager as the boys to hear your story, which I know will be a good one."

All crowded around the Instructor in Woodcraft, shaking hands, thanking him and urging him so warmly to accept the invitation that he could not refuse. The last one with whom he clasped hands was Jack Crandall, who straightened up in his easy

chair and declared he was receiving more benefit than a dozen doctors could impart.

Mike Murphy had risen to his feet at the close of the old man's talk, but kept his place by the door until Uncle Elk came opposite. A nod of the hermit's head told Mike that he wished to speak with him alone. The signal was observed by several who stayed behind as the two passed out and down the porch to the beach. Uncle Elk did not speak until they were beyond the hearing of the others. Then he halted and looked into the face of the youth.

"Well, Michael, what word do you bring me?"

"I told the docther what ye said and he is agreeable. He will not come to the bungalow in the evening unless we signal for him, which the same doesn't seem to be likely."

"That is what I wanted to know, and I thank you for your service. Well, my son, did you learn anything to-night?"

The youth was not sure of the scope of the question.

"If ye ask whither I larned anything from your words to the byes, I may say I picked up a good deal more than I iver knowed, which wasn't much."

"I refer to what you did after leaving the home of Dr. Spellman and paddling to the upper side of the lake."

"Did ye obsarve me?" asked the astonished Mike.

"How could I help it, when I passed within a few feet of you in my own boat?"

"I didn't notice it whin I came ashore."

"I landed a little way up the beach, where my boat now awaits

me. You haven't told me whether you learned anything through your scouting."

"I saan no one but yersilf, but I heerd them two tramps laughing over something and I smelled the cigar that one of them was smoking."

"No, you didn't."

"I don't catch yer maaning, Uncle Elk," said the mystified Mike; "I sartinly sniffed a cigar and heerd two men chuckling to thimsilves."

"I haven't denied that, but they were not the tramps you have in mind."

"How can ye know the same for sartin?"

"I went to that spot on the shore to meet those men; they are old acquaintances and the name of neither is Biggs nor Hutt."

"Who are they?"

"It would be useless to name them, since they are strangers to you."

"Why didn't ye stay and inthrodooce me?"

"I may do so one of these days, but I gave you a chance to find out things for yourself."

"And mighty little I larned," remarked Mike disgustedly; "if ye don't mind, would ye tell me what the mischief scared thim two tramps to the extint that they jumped out of the canoe they had stole and took a bath in Gosling Lake?"

Uncle Elk was distinctly heard to chuckle.

"I had a talk with my two friends regarding the incident and I

don't wonder that they laughed even after I had left them."

"I faal like laughing mesilf, Uncle Elk, and if ye'll give me the same cause I'll laugh so hard that it will wake the docther's daughter on t'other side of the lake."

"Have patience, Michael, and don't think I am trifling with you, but I am under a promise not to reveal this little secret until I have permission. Good night."

Mike stood gazing after the old man until he passed from sight in the obscurity and he heard him launching his canoe. Then the youth strolled thoughtfully back.

"I'm getting mixed," he muttered with a sigh, "as Jerry Lanagan said whin they run him through a thrashing machine."

CHAPTER VI – A Patriot Martyr

The next day brought a marked coolness in the temperature. In preparation for the evening's instructive entertainment, nearly all the boys spent the time in roaming through the woods, taking notes and brushing up their knowledge of birds, which were met with only in moderate numbers.

Mike Murphy told Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes of his singular experience the night before, and asked their help in solving the puzzle.

"I wish we could aid you," replied Alvin, "but it is as much a mystery to us as it is to you. Gordon Calhoun went with us in the other canoe to the western end of the lake, where we found so romantic a spot that we ate our lunch there and did not return until after dark."

"And ye didn't obsarve anything of thim tramps and their dive overboord?"

"We must have been deep in the woods when that took place and, of course, we noticed nothing strange when we paddled back."

"I've tried to pump Uncle Elk, but the valves won't work. I'm going to kaap at it till I larn the truth or break a trace."

"Count us in to give all the help we can," Alvin assured him.

That evening when the Boy Scouts gathered in the large room of the bungalow and disposed themselves in their free and easy

fashion, a moderate fire was burning on the hearth and all were on the tiptoe of expectancy.

"My friends," said Uncle Elk, "I am going to ask your permission to reverse the order which I laid out last night. Most of us old persons are apt to forget that the knowledge which interests us may not be equally interesting to everyone else. Although I cut short my talk about American trees, it was still dry in some respects. Now if I should start in concerning birds you would by and by become weary. Oh, you needn't shake your heads. I don't forget when I was a boy myself. So I have decided to say nothing about our little brothers of the air until to-morrow night, when we shall consider nothing else. The time now at my disposal is to be given to the story I have in mind. If any one has an objection to make let him do so now or forever after hold his peace."

He looked around in the bright faces as if he really expected a protest instead of a general series of smiles. Then with the prefatory remark that the narrative which he was about to give was true in every respect, he spoke as follows:

"The cause of American independence never looked more gloomy than in the summer and autumn of 1776. Washington with his famishing army was in the city of New York, preparing for the attack that he knew would soon be made by the British fleet and land forces. The American fortifications extended from the ferry station of Brooklyn and Gowanus Bay to Wallabout Bay (now Brooklyn Navy Yard), less than a mile and a half in

length. Generals Sullivan and Stirling were in command, with five thousand miserably equipped troops. Unfortunately that fine officer General Greene was ill with a violent fever, and the boastful Sullivan assumed charge, but Washington soon replaced him with General Putnam. By a fatal oversight, one of the three roads over any of which the enemy could advance if it was unguarded, was left invitingly open. Through this the British soldiers rushed and drove the Americans pell-mell out of their intrenchments.

"Had Howe flung off his natural indolence, he would have captured the whole patriot army, including Washington and his officers, but certain of soon doing so, he wished to save the lives of his men. The Americans had several hundred killed and lost a thousand prisoners, among the latter being Generals Sullivan and Stirling. The leading officers were soon exchanged, but the privates suffered horribly in the hideous Sugar House and rotten hulks at Wallabout.

"A strange providence saved the Continental army. The fleet was checked by adverse winds, and a dense fog settled over Brooklyn, but did not touch the other shore. Thus hidden from sight, the Americans stole back to New York, unseen by the enemy.

"But, as I said, the outlook could not have been more gloomy. The situation was critical to the last degree. The army was so demoralized that little discipline remained; whole companies deserted; the few recruits who came into camp met double their

number going out; those who stayed clamored for their pay, and the money chest was as empty as an egg shell. Winter was coming on, and more than once it looked as if the army would dwindle to nothing. The fourteen thousand troops declared fit for duty were strung the whole length of Manhattan Island.

"The crisis was imminent and Washington called a council of war September 7th, to decide whether New York should be abandoned or defended. The commander, seeing the dread necessity coming, had asked Congress if he should not burn the city rather than allow it to serve as the winter quarters of the invaders. He was ordered to use special care to prevent any damage being done, because that body was sure the place would soon be recovered. The first council of war decided to stay and defend New York.

"A few days later, however, another council agreed that the only course possible was to leave the city and take position on Harlem Heights. The public stores were to be sent to Dobbs Ferry and the sick carried across to New Jersey. The main army would march northward and General Putnam would stay in New York with four thousand troops. If he found his position untenable, he was to follow Washington.

"At this council the commander-in-chief said:

"'I know absolutely nothing of the intentions of the enemy. Two ships-of-war have gone up the East River and others will follow. Their troops are active everywhere, but I cannot even guess what they mean to do. Until I have knowledge on that point,

I am helpless.'

"In his distressful dilemma, Washington wrote to General Heath at Kingsbridge, entreating him and General Clinton to aid in securing the indispensable information. He told them to spare no expense or pains, adding that not since the beginning of the war had he been so uneasy.

"Shortly after, Washington called his officers together again. He told them he was still without the least knowledge of the plans of the enemy. Only one recourse remained to him: – that was to send a spy into the British lines in quest of the information. Such a man must be clear-headed, cool, tactful, a good draughtsman and of undaunted courage. He appealed to Lieutenant-Colonel Knowlton (soon to die the death of a patriot) to find him the person. Knowlton laid the request before a conference of his officers, and asked whether any one was willing to volunteer.

"A spy is very different from a scout and in the eyes of most people is the most contemptible of creatures, for the essence of his duty is treachery. To succeed he must play the hypocrite and betray confidence at every turn. In such scorn is a spy held by civilized nations that he is not permitted to die the death of a soldier, but is hanged like the worst of felons.

"The request of Knowlton was succeeded by an indignant hush. The bronzed faces flushed as if under the sting of an insult, and the officers dared not trust themselves to reply. In the midst of the strained silence, a clear voice spoke:

"'I will go!'

"Every eye was turned in astonishment on the speaker. He was a young man of athletic figure and handsome face, whose paleness was due to a severe illness from which he was hardly yet recovered. He wore the uniform of a captain, and in the whole army there was not a braver or more beloved officer than he. His words caused a painful shock to his comrades, who, believing a disgraceful death was certain to follow his mad attempt, closed around him and protested in the most forceful language at their command. To all their appeals he smiled and shook his head.

"'Gentlemen, it is useless. I am touched by your friendship, but all the arguments you bring forward have already been considered by me. A spy is looked upon with loathing, but the necessity of one's country makes every kind of service honorable. I am not seeking promotion or pecuniary reward. I go to serve our cause, for which I am ready at any time to give my life.'

"It was not the words alone, but their emphasis which silenced his comrades. They saw it was useless to appeal to one whose patriotism throbbed and burned through his entire being, and inspired every thought, word and deed.

"And who was the young officer who thus took his life in his hands that he might serve the cause of liberty?

"He was Captain Nathan Hale, born in Connecticut, in 1755, the sixth child among twelve, of the strictest Puritan parents. His mental and athletic gifts were wonderful. None of his playmates could approach him in running, leaping, swimming, throwing, wrestling and the feats of strength and agility so much admired

by all rugged American youths. Many a time he would place a row of empty barrels beside one another and with little effort spring out of one into the other until he had completed the series. Standing beside a fence whose top rail touched his chin, he would rest one hand lightly on it and vault over as easily as a deer. One day, while a student at Yale, in a contest with his friends, he made so prodigious a leap that the bounds were carefully marked and preserved for years, the admiration and despair of all subsequent students.

"But, extraordinary as was Nathan Hale's athletic skill, his mental powers were more brilliant, while his social qualities made him a favorite with all. His simplicity, unfailing good nature and readiness to help others, no matter whom, justified the remark: 'Every man, woman and child who knew him were his friends and among them not one was ever an enemy.'

"He entered Yale College when fifteen years old and was graduated in due course with the highest honors. This fact attests his scholarship and ability. He was easily the most popular student, not only with his classmates, but with the tutors and the faculty of the college and the best families in New Haven.

"Hale left college in 1773 and engaged in teaching. In 1774, he was made preceptor in the Union Grammar School at New London. The building is carefully preserved and is well worth a visit. The institution was of a high order, and its students were not only grounded thoroughly in an English education, but were prepared for college. Hale was its first preceptor, and his success

was pronounced from the beginning. Boys like you have admired and always will admire physical prowess, and there was never one among them all who could approach their instructor in that respect. What a star football player he would have made in these later days! Added to this ability, his mental and social gifts and his profound religious nature explain his marked success among the youth of New London.

"On the 21st of April, 1775, a rider dashed into the little town upon his foaming horse and shouted the news of Lexington and Concord. Pausing only long enough to rest his panting steed and to snatch a bit of food, he thundered away for New York with his momentous tidings.

"Instantly New London flamed with excitement. The bells were rung and a 'town meeting,' the inalienable recourse of all New Englanders, was called at the court house for early candle light. Seemingly the whole town crowded thither. There were burning speeches and Hale's was the most impassioned of all.

"The talking being over, he wrote down his name as a volunteer. Others caught the contagion and elbowed one another in their eagerness to be among the first to enlist. The next morning, when the boys came together at the call of the school bell, their teacher offered up an earnest prayer for the success of the great struggle that had opened, commended his pupils to the care of their Heavenly Father, shook the hands of each lad in turn, uttered a few words of advice, and set out for Cambridge. Some time later, he came back to New London and resumed his

duties in the school.

"The young patriot, however, could not remain idle so long as his beloved country needed her sons. He enlisted as a lieutenant in Colonel Charles Webb's regiment, which had been raised by order of the General Assembly of Connecticut for home defense and, if needed, for national protection. In September, the regiment marched to Cambridge and took part in the siege of Boston. Upon the departure of the British for Halifax, the American army went to New York. Some months later, when the team of his company's enlistment expired, Hale offered to give the men his month's pay if they would stay a little while longer.

"The Continentals had been in New York but a short time when Hale became the hero of a daring exploit. A British supply vessel lay in the East River under the protection of a frigate of sixty-four guns. He obtained permission to attempt the capture of the sloop. Selecting a few men as brave as himself, they stepped into a whale boat, rowed silently out late at night and drew up beside the vessel undetected by the watch. Like so many phantoms, the boarders climbed over the side, seized the sentinel, fastened the crew below the hatches, lifted anchor and took the prize into Coenties Slip, without raising the slightest alarm. Day was breaking when Hale, holding the helm, was recognized by his friends, who received him with hurrahs. For once at least his comrades enjoyed a 'square meal.'

"In May, 1776, he became captain of a company of Continental Rangers attached to Lieutenant-Colonel Knowlton's

regiment, called 'Congress' Own.' The young officer's company was the best drilled and disciplined of all. Little is known of his actions during those eventful days, but it cannot be doubted that he did his duty well. Illness kept him in New York at the time the British invaded Long Island, and still weak and pale, he joined the troops who retreated toward Harlem Heights early in September.

"This brings me back to the day when Lieutenant-Colonel Knowlton walked into the quarters of General Washington and introduced Captain Hale as the officer who had volunteered to serve him as a spy. The commander looked admiringly into the blue eyes of the handsome young athlete and took his hand. The great man was moved and feelingly thanked him for the inestimable service he hoped he would render his country. He saw without questioning that Hale was the ideal actor for so perilous a rôle. He gave him minute instructions, with a written order to the owners of all American vessels in Long Island Sound to take him to any point on Long Island where he might wish to go.

"Captain Hale left camp the same evening. He took with him Sergeant Stephen Hempstead, a member of his company, who was devoted to the officer, and a servant, Ansel Wright. They had to walk fifty miles to Norwalk before they found a safe place to cross the Sound, because of the British cruisers that were ever moving to and fro. At this place, Hale took off his regimentals and donned a brown cloth suit and a broad-brimmed

hat. He assumed the character of a Quaker school teacher, who had wearied of the society of the rebels in New York and had started out to find a situation among more congenial folk.

"The captain instructed his companions to wait at Norwalk until the 20th, upon which day he expected to come back. They were to send a boat for him on that morning. He left with them his uniform, his commission and all other papers that might betray his identity. He crossed the Sound in a sloop and went ashore on the point of Great Neck in Huntingdon Bay, being rowed thither in a yawl. He landed near a place called 'The Cedars,' not far from a tavern kept by a widow named Chichester. She was a spiteful Tory and the inn was a lounging place for those of her neighbors who were of the same mind. In the gray light of early morning Hale walked past without being noticed. A mile beyond, he stopped at the farm house of William Johnson, and obtained breakfast and a bed for several hours' rest. Thence he went directly into the nearest British lines, where he was received without suspicion. He was gone for about two weeks, but what he did, where he went, what adventures befell him and the various means he used to escape detection can never be known. It is certain that he visited all the enemy's encampments near Brooklyn and twice passed their lines. He made drawings and notes of what he saw and learned; he went from Brooklyn, then only a ferry station, to New York City, which the British captured after his departure, and was equally thorough in every place. The drawings and memoranda, the latter written in Latin, were

hidden under the loose inner soles of his shoes.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.