

**ALTSHELER
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THE KEEPERS OF THE
TRAIL: A STORY OF THE
GREAT WOODS

Joseph Altsheler

**The Keepers of the Trail: A
Story of the Great Woods**

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FOREWORD

"The Keepers of The Trail" deals with an episode, hitherto unrelated, in the lives of Henry Ware, Paul Cotter, Shif'less Sol Hyde, Long Jim Hart, and Silent Tom Ross. In point of time it follows "The Forest Runners," and, so, is the third volume of the "Young Trailer" series.

CHAPTER I

HENRY IN HIS KINGDOM

A light wind blew over the great, primeval wilderness of Kentucky, the dense, green foliage rippling under it like the waves of the sea. In every direction forest and canebrake stretched in countless miles, the trees, infinite in variety, and great in size, showing that Nature had worked here with the hand of a master. Little streams flashing in silver or gold in the sunlight, flowed down to the greater rivers, and on a bush a scarlet tanager fluttered like a flash of flame.

A youth, uncommon in size and bearing, stepped into a little opening, and looked about with the easy, natural caution belonging to the native of the forest who knows that danger is always near. His eyes pierced the foliage, and would have noticed anything unusual there, his ear was so keen that he would have heard at once any sound not a part of the woods.

Eye and ear and the indefinable powers of primitive man told him no enemy was at hand, and he stood on the green hill, breathing the fresh, crisp air, with a delight that only such as he could feel. Mighty was the wilderness, majestic in its sweep, and depth of color, and the lone human figure fitted into it perfectly, adding to it the last and finishing touch.

He blended, too, with the forest. His dress, wholly of fine, tanned deerskin, was dyed green, the hunting shirt fringed, hunting shirt, leggings and moccasins alike adorned with rows of little beads. Fitting thus so completely into his environment, the ordinary eye would not have observed him, and his footsteps were so light that the rabbits in the bush did not stir, and the flaming bird on the bough was not frightened.

Henry Ware let the stock of his rifle rest upon the ground and held it by the barrel, while he gazed over the green billows of the forest, rolling away and away to every horizon. He was a fortunate human being who had come into his own kingdom, one in which he was fitted supremely to reign, and he would not have exchanged his place for that of any titular sovereign on his throne.

His eyes gleamed with pleasure as he looked upon his world. None knew better than he its immense variety and richness. He noted the different shades of the leaves and he knew by contrast the kind of tree that bore them. His eye fell upon the tanager, and the deep, intense scarlet of its plumage gave him pleasure. It seemed fairly to blaze against the background of woodland green, but it still took no alarm from the presence of the tall youth who neither stirred nor made any sound.

Another bird, hidden behind an immense leaf, began to pour forth the full notes of a chattering, mocking song, almost like the voice of a human being. Henry liked it, too, although he knew the bird was flinging him a pretty defiance. It belonged in his world. It was fitting that one singer, many singers, should live in his wilderness and sing for him.

A gray squirrel, its saucy tail curved over its back, ran lightly up an oak, perched on a bough and gazed at him with a challenging, red eye. Henry gave back his look, and laughed in the silent manner of the border. He had no wish to hurt the swaggering little fellow. His heart was bare of ill will against anything.

A deep, clear creek flowed at the base of the hill, and a fish, snapping at a fly, leaped clear of the water, making a silver streak in the air, gone in an instant as he fell back into the stream. The glimpse pleased Henry. It, too, was a part of his kingdom, stocked with fur, fin and feather, beyond that of any other king, and far more vast.

The brilliant sunlight over his head began to dim and darken. He looked up. The van of a host, the wild pigeons flying northward appeared, and then came the great wide column, millions and millions of birds, returning from their winter in the south. He had seen the huge flights before, but the freshness and zest of the sight never wore away. No matter how far they came nor how far they went they would still be flying over his forest empire. And then would come the great flocks of wild

ducks and wild geese, winging swiftly like an arrow toward the north. They, too, were his, and again he took long, deep breaths of a delight so keen that it made his pulses leap.

From the wood at the base of the hill came a crackling sound as of something breaking, and then the long crash of a tree falling. He went a little way down the slope and his moccasins made no sound in the grass. Gently pulling aside the bough of a sheltering bush he saw the beavers at work. Already they were measuring for lengths the tree they had cut through at the base with their long, sharp teeth.

The creek here received a tributary brook of considerable volume, and the dam erected by the beavers had sent the waters far back in a tiny sheet like a little lake. But as Henry saw, they were going to raise the dam higher, and they were working with the intelligence and energy that belong so peculiarly to the beaver. Four powerful fellows were floating a log in the water, ready to put it into place, and others on the bank were launching another.

It was one of the largest beaver colonies he had ever seen, and he watched it with peculiar enjoyment. He killed the beaver now and then—the cap upon his head was made of its skin—but only when it was needful. The industrious animals were safe from his rifle now, and he felt that his wilderness had no more useful people.

He looked at them a long time, merely for the pleasure of looking. They showed so much skill, so much quickness and judgment that he was willing to see and learn from them. He felt, in a sense, that they were comrades. He wished them well in their work, and he knew that they would have snug houses, when the next winter came.

He left them in their peace, returned to the brow of the hill, and then walked slowly down the other side. He heard a woof, a sound of scrambling, and a black bear, big in frame, but yet lean from the winter, ran from its lair in the bushes, stopped a moment at fifty or sixty yards to look hard at him, and then, wheeling again in frightened flight disappeared among the trees. Henry once more laughed silently. He would not have harmed the bear either.

A puffing, panting sound attracted his attention, and, walking farther on, he looked into a glade, in which the grass grew high and thick. He had known from the character of the noise that he would find buffaloes there, and they numbered about a dozen, grazing a while, and then breathing heavily in content. He had seen them in countless herds on the western plains, when he was with Black Cloud and his tribe, but south of the Ohio, owing to the heavy forest, they were found only in small groups, although they were plentiful.

The wind was blowing toward him, and standing partially behind a huge oak he watched them. They were the finest and largest inhabitants of his wilderness, splendid creatures, with their leonine manes and huge shoulders, beasts of which any monarch might be proud. He could easily bring down any one of them that he wanted with his rifle, but they were safe from all bullets of his.

He looked at them a while, as a man would gaze at a favorite horse. There was a calf among them, and whenever it wandered from the middle of the glade toward the edge of the forest the mother would push it back. Henry, studying the woods there, saw just within their shadow the long slinking figures of two gray wolves. He knew their purpose, but he knew also that it would not be fulfilled.

He watched the little forest drama with an interest none the less because it was not new to him. He saw the gray shadows creeping nearer and nearer, while the calf persistently sought the woods, probably for shade. Presently the leader of the herd, an immense bull, almost black, caught an odor, wheeled like lightning and rushed upon the wolves. There was a single yelp, as one was trampled to death, and the other fled through the forest to seek easier prey.

The buffaloes returned to their grazing and the foolish calf, warned by the danger from which he had been saved, stayed in the middle of the glade, with his elders as a wall around him. Henry smiled. He had foreseen the result, and it was wholly to his liking. He passed around the opening, not wishing to disturb the animals, and went northward, always on soundless feet.

A stag, catching the human odor on the wind, sprang from a thicket, and crashed away in wild alarm. Henry laughed again and waved his hand at the fleeting figure. The stag did not know that he had no cause to dread him, but Henry admired his speed. A flock of wild turkeys rose from a bough above his head, and uttering preliminary gobbles, sailed away in a low flight among the trees. He waved his hand at them also, and noticed before they disappeared how the sunlight glowed on their bronze feathers.

It was a fine morning in his kingdom, and he was seeing many forms of its life. He remarked a bee tree, and thought it probable that the runaway bear would make a try there some day for honey. Then he stopped and looked at a tiny blue flower, just blooming in the shelter of a bush. He examined it with appreciation and touched the delicate leaf very gently, lest he break it away. Little and fragile, it had its place nevertheless in his realm.

His course led him back to the creek, here very deep and clear and running over a gravelly bottom. After looking and listening for a little while, he undressed, laid his rifle and other weapons on the very edge of the bank, where he could reach them in an instant, and dropped silently into the water. It was cool and he shivered at first, but as he swam the warmth returned to his veins.

He was a splendid swimmer, and he was careful not to splash or make any other sound that could be heard far. It was glorious there in the water, and he was loath to leave it. He lay on his back, floated a little with the current, and then with strokes strong, swift and silent, swam back again.

His eyes looked up into a blue sky, sprinkled with many little white clouds golden at the edge. The huge flight of pigeons had passed and no longer dimmed the sun. He could just see the last of the myriads on the edge of the northern horizon. But there was a sudden flash of black across the blue, and a hawk shot down into the forest. A bald eagle sailed in slow majesty above the trees, and, well within the shelter of the foliage near him, many small birds were twittering. The air over his realm as well as the forests and waters was full of life.

He came out, allowed himself to dry in the sun, while he flexed and tensed his powerful muscles. Then he dressed. The swim had been good, and he was glad that he had taken the risk. He was aware that the forest contained inhabitants much more dangerous than those he had looked upon that morning, but he had not yet seen any sign of them, and he was one who had learned to use his opportunities.

After luxuriating for a little while on the grass, Henry, rifle on shoulder, walked swiftly forward. He had a definite purpose and it was to rejoin his four comrades, Paul Cotter, Shif'less Sol Hyde, Long Jim Hart and Tom Ross, who were not far away in the greenwood, the five, since the repulse of the great attack upon the wagon train, continuing their chosen duties as keepers of the trail, that is, they were continually on guard in the vast forest and canebrake against the Northwestern Indians who were making such a bitter war upon the young Kentucky settlements.

Henry had known that they would come again. Kentucky had been a huge hunting ground, without any Indian villages, but for that reason it had been prized most highly by the savage. The same reason made the ground all the more dangerous for the white people, because the Indians, unhampered by their women and children, came only with chosen bands of warriors, selected for supreme skill in battle and forest lore. No seekers of new homes ever faced greater dangers than the little white vanguard that crossed the Alleghanies into the splendid new land beyond. Hidden death always lurked in the bush, and no man went beyond the palisade even on the commonest errand without his rifle.

It was a noble task that Henry and his comrades had undertaken, to act as watchers, and it appealed to them all, to him most because he was continually in the wilderness that he loved so well, and he felt that he was doing a much greater work than when he was felling trees, and helping to clear a place for crops. As for himself he would never have cut down a single tree, although there were millions and millions of them. Nature held nothing that he admired more. He knew no greater delight

than to stand on a high hill and look on the forest, deep green, waving in the wind, and stretching to the complete circle of the horizon and beyond.

He was now in one of the loneliest stretches of the wilderness, far north of Wareville, and no great distance from the Ohio. A day's march would take him to a favorite crossing of the savages, and that was why he and his comrades were in this region. He increased his speed, settling into the long swinging gait which the scouts of the border always used, when they would hasten, but, in a half-hour, he stopped suddenly and his figure seemed to vanish utterly in a dense mass of green bushes.

Henry, now hidden himself, had seen. It was only a trace that scarcely any eye save his would have noticed, but in a place where the earth was soft he had observed the faint imprint of a moccasin, the toes turning inward and hence made by an Indian. Other imprints must be near, but, for a little while, he would not look, remaining crouched in the thicket. He wished to be sure before he moved that no wearer of a moccasin was in the bush. It might be that Yellow Panther, redoubtable chief of the Miamis, and Red Eagle, equally redoubtable chief of the Shawnees, were at hand with great war bands, burning to avenge their defeats.

He did not move for fully ten minutes. He had acquired all the qualities of those who live in constant danger in vast forests, and, like the animal that hides, his figure and dress blended completely with the green thicket. The air brought no menace to either eye or ear, and then he stepped forth.

He found the imprints of five or six pairs of moccasins farther on, and then they became so faint that the best trailer in the West could not follow them, although he believed that they had been made by a hunting party. It was customary for the Indians on their great raids to detach a number of men who would roam the forests for food, but he decided that he would not try to follow them any longer. He would not be deflected from his purpose to join his comrades.

Leaving the broken trail he sped north by west, the forests and thickets growing thicker as he advanced. At one point he came to a vast canebrake that seemed impassable, yet he made his way through it almost without slackening speed, and came to a grove of oaks, so large and so dense that the sunlight never entered there. He stopped at its edge and imitated the long, haunting cry of the owl. In a moment or two a note like it, but distant and faint, came. He uttered the cry a second time, and heard the reply.

Hesitating no longer he entered the oak grove. These trees with their great mossy trunks were the finest that he had ever seen. Some peculiar quality of the soil, some fertilizing agency beneath had given them an unparalleled growth. The leafy roof was complete, and he advanced as one who walks down a limitless hall, studded with a myriad of columns.

Two miles and turning around a hill he came to a cup in its far side, hidden so well that the unknowing would have passed it unseen. But he called and his four comrades answered from the cup. Parting the bushes Henry entered and they gave him a low but joyous welcome.

The cup, almost circular, was not more than ten feet across, but the sun shone in it and the ground was warm and dry. Just beyond the far edge a little spring gushed from under a stone and trickled away, whispering gently through the bushes.

Paul was the only one of the four who had risen. He stood now erect, the stock of his rifle resting on the ground, the customary attitude of the waiting borderer, his fine, intellectual face bright with interest.

"Did you see anything, Henry?" he asked.

"O' course he saw somethin'," drawled Shif'less Sol. "Did you ever know the time when Henry went anywhar without seein' anythin'?"

"Paul meant did he see anythin' wuth tellin'," said Long Jim. "You're always talkin' too much, Sol. Why did you want to bust in on a boy that was askin' a decent question?"

"I never talk too much, Long Jim Hart," said the shiftless one indignantly. "Now an' then I hev to talk a long time, 'cause I know so much that I can't git it all out between sunrise an' sunset,

an' the hours then are mighty crowded, too. I reckon that you'd never need more'n five minutes to empty your head."

"Mine's a good head an' it never has any swellin' either."

"Give Henry a chance," said Paul smiling. "How can he ever tell us anything, when you two are filling all the woods with the roar of argument?"

The debaters subsided. Silent Tom Ross said nothing. His chariness of speech often saved him much breath. Besides, Tom was contented. He knew that if Henry had found anything worth telling and thought fit to tell it he would do so at the right time.

"Give me some venison," said Henry. "I've walked a long way, and I'm hungry."

Paul produced a piece from a deerskin knapsack that he carried and Henry, sitting down in the circular opening, ate. Paul lay down again and all of them waited.

"Indians," said Henry at length, waving his hands toward the east.

"How many?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"I could not tell, but I think it's a large band, either Miamis or Shawnees. Perhaps Yellow Panther and Red Eagle have come back."

"Like as not," said the shiftless one. "They're the kind to come."

"Huntin' scalps," said Tom Ross, speaking for the first time.

"And it's our business," said Paul, "to see that they don't get 'em."

"So it is," said Long Jim. "A man hates to lose his hair, 'specially when he's got such thick, beautiful hair as mine. I've heard that a big prize fur my scalp has been offered to all the Injun nations across the Ohio. Still, danger heats up my courage, an' I'm right proud uv bein' a marked man."

"We must find out all about that band," said Tom Ross. "Which way wuz they goin'?"

"The trail so far as it showed led to the east," replied Henry, "but you couldn't tell anything by that. I'm quite sure it was made by hunters sent out for buffalo or deer to feed the main band. There's lots of game around here, which shows that the Indians haven't been roving over this region much."

"I've seen all kinds," said Long Jim. "It jest walks or flies right up to our rifle barrels, an' ef it wuzn't fur the danger I'd like to show you fellers the grand way in which I could cook a lot uv it."

"Right thar, old hoss, I stand up fur you ag'in' the world," said Shif'less Sol, "but I reckon we ain't lightin' any fires jest now."

"No," said Henry. "I think we'd better stay here the rest of the day, and keep ourselves in hiding. The main band, whatever its size or wherever it is, seems to have plenty of flankers and hunters, and if we ran into them, as we surely would, we wouldn't have any chance to watch 'em later on."

"Right, o' course," said Shif'less Sol, and the others agreed in silence.

The five lay back upon the dry leaves, depending upon hearing chiefly, to warn them of the possible coming of an enemy. The undergrowth was so dense about the cup that no one fifteen yards away could see them, and they were able to hear even a creeping warrior, before he could come that near. Hence they reposed without alarm, and, bold forest runners that they were, eternally on guard, they took their ease with a certain sense of luxury.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and the sun was at its brightest, the rays being vertical. From their woodland cup they looked up at a circle of shining blue sky, continually crossed by tiny white clouds, following one another in a regular procession from south to north. The majesty of the wilderness and the illimitable covering of forest green appealed to Paul but little less than to Henry. He, too, felt the great lift of the spirit, danger or no danger.

The five enjoyed the wilderness, every one in his own way, Henry and Paul because their souls were stirred by it, Shif'less Sol because it was always unfolding to him some new wonder, Tom Ross because it was a hunting ground without limit, and Long Jim because nearly every kind of game found in it could be eaten, after it had been cooked by his master hand.

But they did not speak now. The people of the border, save in their homes, never talked much. The caution bred by the necessity of the woods became a habit. They acquired an extraordinary power

over voice and nerves. Like a Hindu, a man could lie silent and motionless for hours. In this respect they had the quality of the Indian and the five at least could match his native cunning and training, and, in addition, bring to their own aid a superior intellectual power. That was why they were kings of the woods.

The sun passed the zenith and the rays were no longer vertical, but it was almost as bright in the cup as ever, while the sky itself had lost nothing of its shining blue tint. Paul presently said:

"I notice a shred of brown or gray against that brilliant blue. Now all the little clouds are white, and this sadder color has no business there. Besides, it's a blur. Would you say it's smoke, Henry?"

Henry, who had been listening rather than watching, opened his eyes and stared intently at the faint smudge on the sky.

"Yes, it's smoke," he said, "and as the wind now comes from the south it, too, is traveling that way. Don't you think so, Sol?"

"O' course, Henry. Now you see thar's a little bigger patch o' gray followin' the first, an' it ain't so mighty high above us, either."

"Yes, I see it. Read the book for us, Sol."

"Lookin' at them thar two bits o' gray which Natur' didn't put up in the sky, but which somehow came from the hand o' man, I kin spin the tale jest ez it is. That's smoke up thar. It can't come from any kind o' a forest fire, 'cause it's early spring an' the woods are too green to burn. Thar ain't no white people in these parts 'cept ourselves an' ef thar wuz they wouldn't be so foolish ez to build a fire that sends up smoke. So it's bound to be Injuns. They're a big band, so big that they ain't afeard o' bein' attacked. That's the reason why they're so keerless 'bout thar smoke. An' 'cause the band is so big it ain't jest hunters. It's a war band bound south ag'in the settlements to git scalps in revenge for all the braves they've lost. Do I tell the truth, Henry?"

"To the last detail."

"Thoroughly good logic," said Paul.

"What's logic?" asked Long Jim.

"I'll illustrate," replied Paul. "When you see a deer, take aim at him with your rifle and shoot him through the heart, you feel quite sure when he drops dead that it was you who killed him. Logic tells you that, and so that is logic."

"I reckon I know now," said Long Jim, rubbing his chin.

"Tom," said Henry, "about how far from us is the fire that makes that smoke?"

"Smoke, 'less there's a terrible lot uv it, don't hang together long," replied Ross, looking up thoughtfully at the little gray clouds. "But I reckon them two thar wuz broke off from a much bigger piece at the start, an' are gittin' smaller ez they come. But thar main camp ain't more'n two miles from here, Henry."

"Just about that, I should say. We'd better look 'em over tonight, hadn't we?"

"Jest ez you say. You're the leader, Henry."

"We'll do it, if we can, but I'm thinking we'll have to be mighty careful. I've an idea that the woods are full of warriors. I don't want to be burned at the stake."

"But Jim Hart here would make a most bee-yu-ti-ful torch," said Shif'less Sol. "Slim an' nigh on to six feet and a half tall he'd light up the whole woods, ef he wuz set on fire on top fust."

"Ef you wuz set on fire on top," said Long Jim, "thar wouldn't be much burnin', 'cause a blaze can't feed on emptiness."

"Thar goes another o' them little gray patches," said Silent Tom. "That means they're still feedin' the fire—fur cookin' too, 'cause they don't need it to warm by. The hunters must hev brought in a power o' game, 'cause when the warriors do eat, an' they hev plenty o' it to last, they eat in a way no white man can match."

"I suppose that was the way of the primitive man," said Paul, who was wont to think about origins and causes. "He was never sure of his food, and when he had it he ate all he could."

Henry uttered a slight warning hiss, a sibilant breath, scarcely more, and the five shifting a little, grasped their rifles in such a manner that they could be pushed forward at once, and listened with all their ears. Henry had heard a light footfall, and then the faint sound of voices. He drew himself to the edge of the covert and he did it with so much skill that not a leaf or a blade of grass rustled.

Lying flat on the ground, and, looking underneath the boughs of the trees and bushes, where only the trunks and stems were in the way, he saw the legs of four men, the upper parts of their bodies being completely hidden by the foliage. Henry knew, nevertheless, that they were three Indians and one white man. The white man was disclosed by his thicker legs and his toes which turned out. All were clothed much alike in deerskin leggings, but Henry could make no mistake.

It was equally evident to him that the white man was not a prisoner, because he walked quite freely. Once he passed ahead of the three Indians, and then he dropped behind. If a captive, he would have walked just behind one warrior and the other two, in Indian file, would have walked close behind him.

Henry saw also that they were carrying heavy weights, because they stepped slowly and with a certain stiffness. There was a rigidity and tension that strong men walking easily would not have shown. Unquestionably they were successful hunters, carrying game to a great gluttonous band feasting with energy two miles away.

"Three Shawnees and Braxton Wyatt," whispered Shif'less Sol, who had crept to his side. "Don't you remember that he had jest the faintest bit o' bow in his legs? An' thar's that bow. Why, I'd know them legs anywhar in the world."

"That's so," said Henry. "Now I wonder what his wicked mind is devising. There's no hater like a renegade."

"You may be shore he's thinkin' o' harm to our people down below," said the shiftless one. "I'm glad we're here to see 'em."

Henry nodded in agreement, and they whispered to the others that Wyatt and three Shawnees were passing. Henry and Sol knew that they were Shawnees, because they had red beads in a row on their leggings, where the Miamis wore blue ones.

"Ef I wuz to steal down a bit through the bushes an' shoot that traitor right squar' through his black heart, ez I could do easy, I'd be savin' the lives o' innocent men, women an' children," said Shif'less Sol.

"It is likely," said Henry, "but you mustn't do it. Somehow I can't see a man shot from ambush. Besides, it would give the alarm, an' we mightn't be able to carry on our work."

"I didn't say I wanted to do it, but it's pow'ful temptin'."

"Yes, I know, but it's silence and waiting for us."

The four pairs of legs, three Indian and one white, passed on. Ten minutes later they heard a long whoop from one point, and a long whoop from another point answered. They were not war cries, merely signals, and the five appreciated more than ever the invisibility of their little retreat. There was not more than one chance in a hundred that a wandering warrior would stumble upon it.

Other calls were heard through the forest, and then the faint sound of a chant dying swiftly.

"They're merry," said Paul, with swift intuition. "Maybe they have some scalps already to rejoice over."

It was a bitter reminder to Henry, and yet it might be true. A small band, traveling fast, might have struck an unguarded settlement, and, returning, might be here now with the great band, bearing their sanguinary trophies. Five only, no matter how brave and skillful, could not watch the whole border.

"There's nothing to do," he said, "but wait for darkness."

Not one of them had risen to his feet, and they merely sank back on their elbows, again relying more upon ear than eye. They relaxed, but they were ready for instant action, should the need come.

They would not have very long to wait now. The sun was so far over in the west that it cast slanting rays and shadows were gathering at the base of the cup. It was growing colder and the rising wind sang among the green young leaves. A vast red sun hanging low over the western wilderness tinged the forest, as if with fire. To an ordinary human being it would have been an awful sun in its flaming majesty, frightening him, lost in the forest, by its mysterious immensity, but the five, either separately or alone were too familiar with the great spectacle to feel fear.

"It's an uncommonly red sun," said Tom Ross.

"And they say that means battle," said Paul, who had read much for a lad of the frontier.

"I s'pose so," said the shiftless one, "an' it may mean a storm, but I reckon in this case it's more likely to p'int to rifles an' tomahawks."

The splendor of the west in its crimson and gold deepened. Higher up in the heavens were glorious terraces of blue and pink. The boughs of the distant trees stood out as if they were wrapped in living fire.

"Magnificent!" said Paul, for whom its magic never palled.

"And now it's fading," said Henry.

"The shoulder of the world is coming up between," said Paul.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Long Jim, "when with your own eyes you kin see the sun movin' 'roun' behind the earth."

"The sun doesn't move, Jim, that is, so far as we're concerned, but we do. We roll around ourselves every day and night. At the end of the day the earth is between us and the sun, and in the night when we roll back around we face the sun again."

"You've read a lot of books, Paul, forty or fifty, I s'pose, an' I believe most that you say, but you can't make me believe a thing like that. Don't I see the sun set, an' don't I see it rise? What's print to a fellow's eyes? Print can lie, but your eyes don't."

Paul did not deem it worth while to argue. In a few more minutes the sun was hidden behind the turning earth, leaving great bands of gold and blue and pink, which, in their turn, faded fast, giving place to the gray of coming twilight.

The five ate venison, and drank from the tiny brook at the edge of the cup. Meanwhile, full night came, and they prepared to go forth and see what they might see.

CHAPTER II

THE BIG GUNS

Despite the brilliant sunset, the night was dark, drifting clouds veiling the moon at times, while the stars lay hidden behind mists and vapors, making the conditions suitable for those who wished to scout and spy upon an enemy, as fierce and implacable as the Indian.

"All that color when the sun went down means rain," said Tom Ross, who was weatherwise.

"But not tonight," said Henry.

"No, not tonight, but tomorrow, sometime, it'll come, shore. Them warriors hev built up their fires mighty big. Can't you smell the smoke?"

The wind was blowing toward them and upon it came the faint odor of burning wood.

"They're indulging in what we would call a festival," said Paul. "They must have an immense bonfire, and it must be a huge camp."

"Beyond a doubt," said Henry.

Examining their weapons carefully they left the cup, dropping into their usual order, as they made their silent way through the forest, Henry leading, the shiftless one next, then Paul, followed by Long Jim while Silent Tom covered the rear. There was no noise as they passed. They slipped by the boughs and every moccasined foot instinctively avoided the rotten stick that would break beneath its weight.

As they advanced the odor of burning wood grew stronger. It might not have been noticed by the dwellers in peaceful lands, but it was obvious at once to senses trained like theirs in the hardest of all schools, that of continuous danger. Henry twice heard the swish of a heavy night bird over their heads, but he knew the sound and paid no attention to it. Faint sliding noises in the thickets were made by the little animals, scuttling away in fright at the odor of man.

They crossed a shallow valley, in which the forest was extremely dense, and emerged upon a low hill, covered with oak, maple and elm, without much undergrowth. Here Henry was the first to see a low, barely discernible light upon the eastern horizon, and he called the attention of the others to it. All of them knew that it was the glow of the Indian campfire, and apparently nothing but heavy forest lay between them and the flames.

They held a consultation, and agreed that Henry and Shif'less Sol, the best two trailers, should go forward, while the other three should remain in reserve to cover their retreat, if it were forced, or to go forward to possible rescue, if they did not return before morning. The decision was reached quickly. The superiority was accorded at once and without jealousy to Henry and the shiftless one.

But they moved forward in a group, until the glow rose higher and grew brighter. Then the three who were to stay lay close in a clump of bushes growing near the base of a great elm that Henry and Shif'less Sol marked well. Faint whoops or their echo came to them, and they knew that the warriors were rejoicing.

"A mighty big camp, bigger even than we thought," said Silent Tom.

"We'll soon see," said Henry, as he and his comrade in the daring venture slid away among the bushes. Then the two went forward with unbelievable skill. Not even the ear of a warrior could have heard them fifteen feet away, and they never relaxed their caution, although they did not believe that the Indians were keeping very close watch.

They had seen at first a glow more pink than red. Now it was a deep scarlet, showing many leaping tongues against the forest. The odor of burning wood became strong, and they saw sparks and wisps of smoke flying among the leaves. Long fierce whoops like the cry of animals came at times, but beneath them was an incessant muttering chant and the low, steady beat of some instrument like a drum.

"The war dance," whispered Henry.

The shiftless one nodded.

They redoubled their caution, creeping very slowly, lying almost flat upon the ground and dragging their bodies forward, like crawling animals. They were coming to one of the openings, like a tiny prairie, frequent in early Kentucky, sheltered on the side they were approaching by a dense canebrake, through which they were making their way.

The open space was several acres in extent, and at the far end were tepees, which the two knew were intended for chiefs of high degree. In the center burned an immense bonfire, or rather a group of bonfires, merged into one, fed incessantly by warriors who dragged wood from the adjoining forest, and threw it into the flames.

But it was not the sight of the fire or the tepees that stirred Henry. It was that of hundreds of Indian warriors gathered and indulging in one of those savage festivals upon which nobody could look at night without a thrill of wonder and awe. Here primeval man was in his glory.

The Indians of North America were a strange compound of cruelty and cunning, leavened at times by nobility and self-sacrifice. Most of the tribes were perfect little political organizations, and the league of the Iroquois was worthy of a highly civilized race. They were creatures of circumstances, and, while loyal to friends, they were merciless to enemies, devising incredible methods of torture.

It was this knowledge that made Henry shudder as he looked upon the great camp. He knew the Indian and liked him in many respects—his captivity in the northwest had been no pain—but he was white and he must fight for the white man, and hence against the red.

The warriors were intoxicated not with liquor, but with the red fury of the brain. Vast quantities of game, freshly dressed, were heaped upon the earth. Every man would seize a piece to suit himself, broil it hastily on coals and then eat. He ate like the savage he was, and the amounts they devoured were astonishing, just as they could fast an amazing number of days, if need be.

Whenever one had eaten enough for the time he would rush into a mass of dancers near the eastern edge of the opening. Then he would begin to leap back and forth and chant with unnatural energy. They could keep up this manner of dancing and singing for many hours, and they quit it only to obtain more food or to fall down exhausted.

"It's the war dance," whispered Henry.

Shif'less Sol nodded. It was, in truth, just approaching its height as the two crept near. Four powerful warriors, naked except for the breech clout, were beating incessantly and monotonously upon the Indian drums. These drums (Ga-no-jo) were about a foot in height and the drummer used a single stick. The dance itself was called by the Shawnees, Sa-ma-no-o-no, which was the name bestowed upon this nation by the Senecas, although the Iroquois themselves called the dance Wa-ta-seh.

Few white men have looked upon such a spectacle at such a time, in the very deeps of the wilderness, under a night sky, heavy with drifting clouds. The whole civilized world had vanished, gone utterly like a wisp of vapor before a wind, and it was peopled only by these savage figures that danced in the dusk.

Near the trees stood a group of chiefs, among whom Henry recognized Yellow Panther, the Miami, and Red Eagle, the Shawnee, imposing men both, but not the equals of an extremely tall and powerful young chief, who was destined later to be an important figure in the life of Henry Ware. They stood silent, dignified, the presiding figures of the dance.

The war drums beat on, insistent and steady, like the rolling of water down a fall. The very monotony of the sound, the eternal harping upon one theme, contained power. Henry, susceptible to the impressions of the wilderness, began to feel that his own brain was being heated by it, and he saw as through a dim red mist. The silent and impassive figures of the chiefs seemed to grow in height and size. The bonfires blazed higher, and the monotonous wailing chant of the warriors was penetrated

by a ferocious under note like the whine of some great beast. He glanced at the shiftless one and saw in his eyes the same intense awed look which he knew was in his own.

The mass of men who had been dancing stopped suddenly, and the chant stopped with them. The warriors gathered into two great masses, a lane between them. Save the chiefs, all were naked to the breech clout, and from perspiring bodies the odor of the wild arose.

The fires were blazing tremendously, sending off smoke, ashes and sparks that floated over the trees and were borne far by the wind. At intervals, prolonged war whoops were uttered, and, heavy with menace, they rang far through the woods, startling and distinct.

Then from the edge of the forest emerged about forty warriors painted and decorated in a wildly fantastic manner and wearing headdresses of feathers. The drums beat again, furiously now, and the men began to dance, swinging to and fro and writhing. At the same time they sang a war song of fierce, choppy words, and those who were not dancing sang with them.

The lane wound around and around, and, as the singers and dancers went forward they increased in vehemence. They were transported, like men who have taken some powerful drug, and their emotions were quickly communicated to all the rest of the band. Fierce howls rose above the chant of the war songs. Warriors leaping high in the air made the imaginary motions of killing and scalping an enemy. Then their long yells of triumph would swell above the universal chant.

All the while it was growing darker in the forest. The heavy drifting clouds completely hid the moon and stars. The sky was black and menacing, and the circular ring of woods looked solid like a wall. But within this ring the heat and fury grew. The violence and endurance of the dancers were incredible, and the shouting chant of the multitude urged them on.

Henry caught sight of a white figure near the chiefs, and he recognized the young renegade, Braxton Wyatt. Just behind him was another and older renegade named Blackstaffe, famed along the whole border for his cunning and cruelty. Then he saw men, a half-dozen of them, in the red uniforms of British officers, and behind them two monstrous dark shapes on wheels.

"Can those be cannon?" he whispered to Shif'less Sol.

"They kin be an' they are. I reckon the British allies o' the Injuns hev brought 'em from Detroit to batter down the palisades o' our little settlements."

Henry felt a thrill of horror. He knew that they were cannon, but he had hoped that the shiftless one would persuade him they were not. They were probably the first cannon ever seen in that wilderness, the sisters of those used later with success by the Indians under English leadership and with English cannoneers from Detroit against two little settlements in Kentucky.

But startled as Henry was, his attention turned back to the dancers. Old customs, the habits of far-off ancestors, slumbered in him, and despite himself something wild and fierce in his blood again responded to the primeval appeal the warriors were making. A red haze floated before his eyes. The tide of battle surged through his blood, and, then, with a fierce warning to himself, he stilled his quivering body and crouched low again.

A long time they watched. When a dancer fell exhausted another leaped gladly into his place. The unconscious man was dragged to one side, and left until he might recover.

"I think we've seen enough, don't you?" whispered Henry. "I'd feel better if I were further away."

"Stirs me like that too," said Shif'less Sol. "It ain't healthy fur us to stay here any longer. 'Sides, we know all we want to know. This is a big war party, mostly Miamis and Shawnees, with some Wyandots an' a few Iroquois and Delawares."

"And the English and the cannon."

"Yes, Henry, an' I don't like the looks o' them cannon, the first, I reckon, that ever come across the Ohio. Our palisades can turn the bullets easy 'nuff, but they'd fly like splinters before twelve pound round shot."

"Then," said Henry with sudden emphasis, "it's the business of us five to see that those two big guns never appear before Wareville or Marlowe, where I imagine they intend to take them!"

"Henry, you hit the nail squar' on the head the fust time. Ef we kin stop them two cannon it'll be ez much ez winnin' a campaign. I think we'd better go back now, an' j'in the others, don't you?"

"Yes, I don't see that we can do anything at present. But Sol, we must stop those cannon some way or other. We beat off a great attack at Wareville once, but we couldn't stand half a day before the big guns. How are we to do it? Tell me, Sol, how are we to do it?"

"I don't know, Henry, but we kin hang on. You know we've always hung on, an' by hangin' on we gen'rally win. It's a long way to Wareville, an' while red warriors kin travel fast cannon can't get through a country covered ez thick with woods an' bushes ez this is. They'll hev to cut a road fur 'em nigh all the way."

"That's so," said Henry more hopefully. "They'll have to go mighty slow with those big guns through the forests and thickets and canebrake, and across so many rivers and creeks. We'll hang on, as you say, and it may give us a chance to act. I feel better already."

"They ain't likely to move fur a day or two, Henry. After the dances an' the big eatin' they'll lay 'roun' 'till they've slep' it all off, an' nobody kin move 'em 'till they git ready, even if them British officers talk 'till their heads ache. They're goin' on with the dancin' too. Hear them whoops."

The long shrill cries uttered by the warriors still reached them, as they stole away. Henry passed his hand across his forehead. All that strange influence was gone now. He no longer saw the red mist, and his heart ceased to beat like a hammer. The healthy normal forest was around him, full of dangers, it was true, but of dangers that he could meet with decision and judgment.

They returned rapidly, but occasionally they looked back at the red glare showing above the trees, and for most of the way the faint echoes of the whoops came to them. When they approached the bushes in which they had left the others Henry uttered a low whistle which was promptly answered in like fashion by Silent Tom.

"What did you see?" asked Paul, as they emerged from their hiding place.

"Nigh on to a thousand warriors," replied Shif'less Sol, "an' it was a mighty fine comp'ny too. We saw two chiefs, Yellow Panther, the Miami, an' Red Eagle, the Shawnee, that we've had dealin's with before, an' our old friend Braxton Wyatt, an' the big renegade Blackstaffe, an' British officers."

"British officers!" exclaimed Paul. "What are they doing there?"

"You know that our people in the East are at war with Britain," said Henry, "and I suppose these officers and some men too have come from Detroit to help the warriors wipe us out in Kentucky. They've brought with them also two very formidable allies, the like of which were never seen in these woods before."

"Two new and strange allies, Henry?" said Paul. "What do you mean?"

"Something that rolls along on wheels, and that speaks with a voice like thunder."

"I don't understand yet."

"And when it speaks it hurls forth a missile that can smash through a palisade like a stone through glass."

"It must be cannon. You surely don't mean cannon, Henry?"

"I do. The big guns have crossed the Ohio. The Indians or rather the English with 'em, mean to use 'em against us. It's our business to destroy 'em. Sol and I have agreed on that, and you are with us, are you not?"

"O' course!" said Tom Ross.

"Uv course!" said Long Jim.

"Through everything," said Paul.

"What do you think we'd better do right now?" asked Ross.

"Go back to the cup and sleep," replied Henry. "It'll be safe. The Indians will be so gorged from their orgie, and will feel so secure from attack that they'll hardly have a scout in the forest tomorrow."

"Good plan," said the shiftless one. "I expect to be in that shady little place in a half-hour. Long Jim here, havin' nothin' else to do, will watch over me all through the rest of the night, an' tomorrow when the sun comes out bright, he'll be settin' by my side keepin' the flies off me, an' me still sleepin' ez innercent ez a baby."

"That won't happen in the next thousand years," said Long Jim. "Ef thar's anything fannin' you tomorrow, when you wake up, a Shawnee or a Miami warrior will be doin' it with a tomahawk."

They quickly retraced their course to the cup, being extremely careful to leave no trail, and were about to make ready for the night. Every one of them carried a light blanket, but very closely woven and warm, upon which he usually slept, drawing a fold over him. The dry leaves and the blankets would make a bed good enough for any forest rover at that time of the year, but Henry noticed a stone outcrop in a hill above them and concluded to look farther.

"Wait till I come back," he said, and he pushed his way through the bushes.

The outcrop was of the crumbling limestone that imparts inexhaustible fertility to the soil of a great region in Kentucky. It is this decaying stone or a stone closely akin which makes it the most wonderful cave region in the world.

Higher up the slope Henry found deep alcoves in the stone, most of them containing leaves, and also a strong animal odor, which showed that in the winter they had been occupied as lairs by wild animals, probably bears.

Looking a little farther he found one that penetrated deeper than the rest. It might almost have been called a cave. It was so placed that at that time of night the opening faced a bit of the moon that had made a way through the clouds, and, Henry peering into the dusky interior, judged that it ran back about twenty feet. There was no odor to suggest that it had been used as a lair, perhaps because the animals liked the alcoves better.

He threw in some twigs, but, no growl coming forth, he entered boldly through an aperture about three feet across and perhaps five feet high. He stepped on smooth stone, but as soon as he was inside he stopped and listened intently. He heard a faint trickling sound, evidently from the far side of the cave, which appeared to be both deeper and wider than he had thought.

Henry surmised that the sound was made by running water, and standing a long time, until his eyes could grow used, in some degree, to the dusky interior, he, at length, made out the opposite wall which was of white stone. Stepping carefully he found that a tiny stream flowed in a groove made by itself, coming out of one side of the wall and disappearing in the other.

It was such a thin little stream that it created no dampness in the cave and Henry, drinking some of the water from the palm of his hand, found it fresh and cold. He experienced a singular pleasure in discovering the water, one that he did not understand. Perhaps it was a prevision.

He explored fully this room in stone, and found it dry and clean throughout. His ancestors, hundreds of thousands of years ago, would have rejoiced to find such a place, and Henry rejoiced now for reasons which were akin to theirs. He returned quickly to the cup.

"We won't sleep here," he said.

"Why not?" asked Paul.

"Because I've found a better place."

"But this is fine."

"I know, but I have a finer."

"What is it?"

"A beautiful stone mansion, built generations ago. It has no furniture in it now, but we don't need any. It's built very solidly and it's been waiting for us a long time."

"A hole in the limestone," hazarded Shif'less Sol.

"Partly right. It's more than a hole. It's a room, and we've had great luck to find it, I tell you, this stone room specially made a million years ago for our use."

"Well, it's been waitin' a good while, but we're here."

"Come along, I'll lead you," said Henry, "and be sure not to leave any trace of a trail. This house is intended for us only, and we don't want any wandering warriors, no matter what their nation, knocking at our doors."

"Hurry," said Shif'less Sol. "I'm gittin' pow'ful sleepy."

Henry led the way, and, as he did so, taking a comprehensive look at the heavens, he was glad for other reasons as well as safety that they had found their stone house in the hill. The bit of a moon was gone and the clouds hung lower and darker. He felt the damp in the air.

The mouth of the cave was almost hidden by a heavy growth of bushes, but Henry, pulling them aside a little, pointed to the opening.

"In there with you," he said to Long Jim, who was nearest.

"Who? Me?" said Long Jim, "an' run squar' into a b'ar's mouth? Let Sol go. He's the fattest, an' the b'ar would like him best."

"No bear is inside," said Henry. "I've seen to that. A herd of about fifty was in there, the first bear herd I ever saw, but I killed them all with my knife and threw them down the cliff before I saw you."

"Then ez you've cleared out the place, Henry," said Long Jim, "I guess it's all safe, an' here goes."

He bent down from his mighty height and entered, the others following silently in single file, swallowed up by the dusk. Then they stood in a group, until they could see one another, the faint light from the door helping.

"Well," said Henry, proudly, "haven't I done well by you? Isn't our new house equal to my announcement of it?"

"Equal, and more than equal!" exclaimed Paul with enthusiasm. "Why, we haven't had such a place since that time we lived on the island in the lake, and this is a greater protection from danger."

"An' we hev plenty o' water, too, I see," said Shif'less Sol. "Look at the river over thar, runnin' along ag'in the wall. 'Tain't more'n three inches wide, an' an inch deep, but it runs fast."

"I've no doubt that a cave family lived here two or three hundred thousand years ago," said Paul, his vivid fancy blossoming forth at once.

"What are you talkin' about, Paul?" said Long Jim. "People livin' here two or three hundred thousand years ago! Why, the world is only six thousand years old! The Bible says so!"

"In the Biblical sense a year did not mean what a year does now, Jim. It may have been a thousand times as long. Men did live in caves several hundred thousand years ago. A book that Mr. Pennypacker has says so."

"If the book says it, I reckon it's so," said Long Jim, with the borderer's sublime faith in the printed word.

"The man of that time was a big, hairy fellow. He didn't have even bows and arrows. He fought with a stone club or ax of stone."

"An' do you mean to tell me, Paul, that a man with jest a club could go out an' meet the arrers of the Injuns? Why, all uv them warriors kin shoot arrers pow'ful hard an' straight. What chance would the man with the club hev had?"

"There were no Indians then, Jim."

"No Injuns then!" exclaimed Long Jim indignantly. "Why the fust white man that ever come through these parts found the woods full uv 'em. I take a heap from you, Paul, 'cause you're an eddicated boy, but I can't swaller this."

"I'll prove it to you some day," said Paul laughing, "but whether you believe me or not this place suits us."

"How much venison have we got, Tom?" asked Henry.

"'Nough in a pinch to last three days."

"Now you fellers kin keep on talkin' ef you want to," said the shiftless one, "but ez fur me I'm a man o' sense, a lazy man who don't work when he don't hev to, an' I'm goin' to sleep."

He spread his blanket on the stone floor, lay down and kept his word.

"We might as well follow," said Henry. "Sol's a man of intelligence, and, as he says, when there's nothing to do, rest."

"I ain't sleepy," said Tom Ross. "Guess there's no need uv a watch, but I'll keep it awhile, anyhow."

He sat down on his blanket and leaned against the wall, near the mouth of the room. The others stretched out, even as Shif'less Sol had done, and breathing a sigh or two of satisfaction followed him into a land without dreams.

Although Henry's sleep was dreamless, it did not last very long. He awoke in three or four hours. It was quite dark, but, as he lay on his back and gazed steadily, he was able to make out the figure of Silent Tom, crouched on his blanket beside the door, his rifle across his knees. Although saying nothing Henry had paid attention to what Paul had said about the ancient cave man, and now it was easy for his fancy to transform Ross into such a being. The rifle on his knees was his stone club, and he watched by the opening all through the night lest an enemy should come. For the present, at least, it was as much reality as fancy, because here was the cave, and here they were, guarding against a possible foe.

"Tom," he called softly.

Ross looked around.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I'm restless. I can't sleep any more, and, as I'm going to stay by the opening, you'd better persuade yourself to go to sleep."

"Are you bent on watchin', Henry?"

"Yes, I intend to sit up."

"Then I'll go to sleep."

He lay down on his blanket, and Henry took his place by the wall.

CHAPTER III

THE INDIAN CAMP

The position of the great youth was comfortable, as he sat upon his blanket, the curve of the wall fitting into the curve of his back, his rifle resting across his knee, and his figure motionless. He carried in his belt a pistol, the keen hatchet of the border and also a long hunting knife, but it was the rifle upon which he depended mainly, a beautiful piece, with its carved stock and long blue barrel, and in the hands of its owner the deadliest weapon on the border.

Henry, like Tom, did not stir. He was a match for any Indian in impassivity, and every nerve rested while he thus retained complete command over his body. He could see from his position the bushes beyond the opening, and, above them, a broad belt of black sky. He rejoiced again that they had found this cave or rather stone room as they called it.

The dark heavens were full of threat, the air heavy with damp, and low thunder was just beginning to mutter. Tom Ross had read the gorgeous sunset aright. It betokened a storm, and the most hardened hunters and scouts were glad of shelter when the great winds and rains came. The dryness and safety of the room made Henry feel all the more snug and content, in contrast with what was about to happen outside. It seemed to him that Providence had watched over them. Truly they had never known a finer or better place.

His mind traveled again to those old, bygone people of whom Paul had talked, how they lived in caves, and had fought the great animals with stone clubs. But he had a better room in the stone than most of theirs, and the rifle on his knees was far superior to any club that was ever made. His nerves quivered beneath a thrill of pleasure that was both mental and physical. His eyes had learned to cope with the dusk in the room, and he could see his four comrades stretched upon their blankets. All were sleeping soundly and he would let them sleep on of their own accord, because there was no need now to move.

The mutter of the thunder grew a little louder, as if the electricity were coming up on the horizon. And he saw lightning, dim at first and very distant, then growing brighter until it came, keen, hard and brilliant, in flashing strokes. Henry was not awed at all. Within his safe shelter his spirit leaped up to meet it.

The thunder now broke near in a series of fierce crashes, and the lightning was so burning bright that it dazzled his eyes. One bolt struck near with a tremendous shock and the air was driven in violent waves into the very mouth of the cave. Shif'less Sol awoke and sat up.

"A storm!" he said.

"Yes," replied Henry, "but it can't reach us here. You might as well go back to sleep, Sol."

"Bein' a lazy man who knows how an' when to be lazy," said the shiftless one, "I'll do it."

In a few minutes he was as sound asleep as ever, while Henry continued to watch the storm. The sky was perfectly black, save when the lightning blazed across it, and the thunder rolled and crashed with extraordinary violence. But he now heard an under note, one that he knew, the swish of the wind. It, too, grew fast and he dimly saw leaves and the branches of trees flying past. It was certainly good to be in the snug stone covert that he had found for himself and his friends!

The lightning became less bright and the thunder began to die. Then the wind came with a mighty sweep and roar and Henry heard the drops of rain, striking on leaf and bough like bullets. He also heard the crash of falling trees, and one was blown down directly in front of the opening, hiding it almost completely. He was not sorry. Some instinct warned him that this too was a lucky chance. The rain came in driven torrents, but it passed the mouth of the cave and they were as dry and comfortable as ever.

The thunder and lightning ceased entirely, by and by, and Henry sat in the dark listening to the rush of the rain, which came now in a strong and steady sweep like the waves of the sea. He listened to it a long time, never moving, and at last he saw a thin shade of gray appear in the eastern sky. Day was near, although it would be dark with the storm. But that need not trouble them. On the other hand it would be to their advantage. The great camp of the Indians would be broken up for a while, and they must long since have sought what shelter they could find. They could not advance for two or three days at least, while the five lay in a splendid covert only two miles from them.

Laggard day came, with a dusky sky, obscured by heavy clouds and the rain still pouring. It was several hours after sunrise before it ceased and the sky began to clear. Then the others awoke and looked out.

"A big storm and I never heard a thing," said Paul.

"No, Paul," said the shiftless one, "you didn't hear it but it came off anyway. You're a mighty good sleeper, you are, Paul. Put you atween fine white sheets, with a feather bed under your body an' a silk piller under your head, an' I reckon you'd sleep a week an' be happy all the time."

"I suppose I would. It's a sound conscience, Sol."

"I heard somethin' once," said Long Jim, "but knowin' I wuz in the best place in the world I didn't open my eyes. I jest went to sleep ag'in an' now, ef thar wuz anythin' to cook an' any place to cook it I'd git the finest breakfast any uv you fellers ever et."

"We know that, Jim," said Henry, "but we'll have to stick to the dried venison for the present. You'll find plenty of drinking water over there by the wall. Do you notice that our river has risen a full inch?"

"So it has," said Paul. "The rain, of course. Since we've had this noble inn I'm not sorry about the storm. It will stop the march of that Indian army."

"And also hide any trail that we may have left yesterday or last night," said Henry with satisfaction.

"What do you think we ought to do now, Henry?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"Eat our breakfasts, that is, chew our venison. I don't believe we can do anything today, and there is no need, since the Indians can't move. We'll stay here in hiding, and at night we'll go out again to explore."

"A whole day's rest," said the shiftless one, with deep approval. "Nothin' to do but eat an' sleep, an' lay back here an' think. I'm not eddicated like you an' Henry, Paul, but I kin do a power o' hard thinkin'. Now, ef Jim tries to think it makes his head ache so bad that he has to quit, but I guess he's lucky anyway, 'cause we're always doin' his thinkin' fur him, while he's takin' his ease an' bein' happy."

"Ef I had been dependin' on your thinkin', Shif'less Sol," said Long Jim, "my scalp would hev been hangin' from an' Injun lodge pole long ago."

"Well, it would look well hangin' thar. You hev got good thick hair, Long Jim."

They finished their breakfast, and all of them sat down near the opening. The fallen tree, while it hid the aperture, did not cut off their own view. They were so close to it that they could see well between the boughs and leaves. The rising sun, brilliant and powerful, had now driven away all the clouds. The sky was once more a shining blue, all the brighter because it had been washed and scoured anew by wind and rain. The green of the forest, dripping everywhere with water, looked deeper and more vigorous. Down in the valley they heard the foaming of a brook that had suddenly become a torrent, and which with equal suddenness would return to its usual size.

They remained all day in their retreat, seeing thin threads of smoke three or four times against the blue sky, an indication that the warriors had built their campfires anew, and were trying to dry themselves out. Indians as well as white men suffer from rain and cold and Henry knew that they would be sluggish and careless that night. There was a bare chance that the five might get at the cannon and ruin them in some manner, although they had not yet thought of a way.

It was decided that Henry and Shif'less Sol should make the second expedition, Paul, Tom Ross and Long Jim remaining as a reserve within their stone walls. The two did not disturb the fallen tree at the entrance, but slipped out between the boughs, and walking on dead leaves and fallen brushwood, in order to leave as little trace as possible, reached the valley below. This low area of land was studded for a long distance with new pools of water, which would disappear the next day, and the ground was so soft that they took to the bordering forest in order to escape the mud.

"Pears likely to me," said the shiftless one, "that them Britishers had tents. They wouldn't go on so long an expedition as this without 'em. It's probable then that we'll find the renegades in or about 'em."

"Sounds as if it might be that way," said Henry. "The site of their camp is not more than a mile distant now, and the tents may be pitched somewhere in the woods."

"Reckon we're near, Henry, I smell smoke, and it's the smoke that comes out of a pipe."

"I smell it too. It's straight ahead. It must be one of the officers. We'll have to be slow and mighty particular. There's a big moon and all the stars are out."

The night, as if to atone for the one that had gone before, was particularly brilliant. The dripping woods were luminous with silvery moonlight and the three used every tree and bush as they approached the point from which the tobacco smoke came. The woods were so dense there that they heard the men before they saw them. It was first a hum of voices and then articulated words.

"It seems that these forest expeditions are not to be taken lightly, Wyatt," said a heavy growling voice.

"No, Colonel Alloway," Braxton Wyatt replied in smooth tones. "There are no roads in the wilderness. If we want one we'll have to make it. It's the cannon that hold us back."

"The Indians could move fast without them."

"Yes, sir, but we must have 'em. We can't break through the palisades without 'em."

"Why, young sir, these red warriors can annihilate anything to be found in Kentucky!"

"They did not do it, sir, when we attacked Wareville last year."

"Lack of leadership! Lack of leadership!"

"If you'll pardon me, sir, I don't think it was. The Indians have to fight in their own way, and the Kentucky riflemen are the best in the world. Why, sir, the things they can do with their rifles are amazing. A musket is like an old-fashioned arquebus compared with their long-barreled weapons. I know one of them—and I must say it, though I hate him—who could kill running deer at two hundred yards, as fast as you could hand him the rifles, never missing a shot."

"A William Tell of the woods, so to speak!" said the heavy, gruff voice, sounding an incredulous note.

"You'll believe me, sir, if you meet 'em," said Wyatt earnestly. "I don't love 'em any more'n you do, much less perhaps, but I've learned enough to dread their rifles. I was telling you about the one who is such a terrible marksman, though the others are nearly as good. Last night before the rain one of the Wyandots found the trace of a footstep in the forest. It was a trace, nothing more, and not even an Indian could follow it, but I've an idea that it's the very sharpshooter I was telling you about."

"And what of it? Why should we care anything for a stray backwoodsman?"

"He's very dangerous, very dangerous, sir, I repeat, and he's sure to have four others with him."

"And who are the dreadful five?" There was a note of irony in the voice.

"The one of whom I spoke is named Henry Ware. There is another, a youth of about his own age, named Paul Cotter. The third is Solomon Hyde, a man of amazing skill and judgment. The other two are Tom Ross, a wonderful scout and hunter, and Long Jim Hart, the fastest runner in the West. It was he who brought relief, when we had the emigrant train trapped. I think that all the five are somewhere near and that we should beware."

The heavy, gruff voice was lifted again in an ironic laugh, and Henry, creeping a yard or two more, saw through the leaves the whole group. The English officer whom Wyatt had called Alloway,

was a man of middle years, heavily built. His confident face and aggressive manner indicated that he was some such man as Braddock, who in spite of every warning by the colonials, walked with blinded eyes into the Indian trap at Fort Duquesne, to have his army and himself slaughtered. But now the English were allied with the scalp-takers.

A half-dozen English officers, younger men, surrounded Colonel Alloway, silent and attentive, while their chief talked with Wyatt. The older renegade, Blackstaffe, was leaning against a tree, his arms folded across his chest, a sneering look upon his face. Henry knew that he thought little of European officers there in the woods, and out of their element.

But the most striking figures in the scene were Yellow Panther, head chief of the Miamis, and Red Eagle, head chief of the Shawnees. They stood erect with arms folded, and they had not spoken either while Alloway and Wyatt talked. They were imposing men, not as tall as the young chief whom Henry had seen distantly, and who was destined to have a great part in his life later on, but they were uncommonly broad of shoulders and chest, and, though elderly they were at the very height of their mental and physical powers.

They were in full war paint, their scalp locks were braided and each had flung about him somewhat in the manner of a Roman toga a magnificent blanket of the finest weave, blue for Yellow Panther, red for Red Eagle.

Wyatt translated to them Alloway's words, and Red Eagle at length raising his hand said to Wyatt in Shawnee, which all three of the hidden scouts understood perfectly:

"Tell our white ally that his words are not those of wisdom. The Indian when he goes upon the war path does not laugh at his enemy. He knows that he is not fighting with children and he heeds the warnings of those who understand."

His tones were full of dignity, but Wyatt, when he translated, softened the rebuke. Nevertheless enough of it was left to make the arrogant Colonel start a little, and gaze with some apprehension at the two massive and silent figures, regarding him so steadily. It was likely too that the grim forest, the overwhelming character of the wilderness in which he stood, affected him. Without the Indians he and his men would be lost in that mighty sweep of country.

"Tell the officers of the King, across the great salt water," continued Red Eagle to Wyatt, "that the word has come to us that if we go and destroy the settlements of the Yengees, lest they grow powerful and help their brethren in the East who are fighting against the King called George, we are to receive great rewards. We use the tomahawk for him as well as for ourselves, and while we listen to Alloway here, Alloway must listen also to us."

Wyatt veiled his look of satisfaction. He had not fancied the haughty and patronizing manner of Alloway, and he was sure that the Colonel was making too little of the five and their possible proximity. Despite himself, and the young renegade was bold, he felt a shiver of apprehension lest the formidable group were somewhere near in the woods. But he added, speaking in a more persuasive tone to Alloway:

"You'll pardon me, sir, but the Indian chiefs are in their own country. They're proud and resolute men, trusting in their own methods, and they must be humored. If you don't defer somewhat to them it's quite possible that they'll take all their warriors and go back to their villages."

Alloway's face grew red with anger, but he had enough wisdom and resolution to suppress it. He looked around at the vast and somber forest, in which one could be lost so easily, and knew that he must do so.

"Very well," he said, "the chiefs and I lead jointly. Ask them what they want."

Wyatt talked with the two chiefs and then translated:

"They wish to stop here a day or two, until they can obtain new supplies of food. They wish to send out all of their best trailers in search of the scout called Ware and his comrades. They are dangerous, and also Yellow Panther and Red Eagle have bitter cause to hate them, as have I."

"Very well, then," said Alloway, making the best of it. "We'll halt while the warriors brush away these wasps, whom you seem to fear so much."

He walked away, followed by his men, and Henry and Shif'less Sol drew back in the thicket. They were flattered by Braxton Wyatt's frank admission of their power, but they were annoyed that the footprint had been seen. Henry had felt that they could work much better, if the warriors were unaware of their presence.

"Those two chiefs will act quickly," he whispered to his comrade. "Maybe they had already sent out the trailers, before they had the talk with the officer. It's possible that they're now between us and our new home in the cliff. It's always best to have a plan, and if they pick up our trail I'll run toward the east, and draw them off, while you make your way back to Paul and Jim and our room in the cliff."

"You let me make the chase," said Shif'less Sol, protestingly. "They can't ketch me."

"No! We've pretty well agreed upon our different tasks, and this, you know, is mine."

The shiftless one was well aware that Henry was the most fitting, yet he was more than anxious to take the chief danger upon himself. But he said nothing more, as they withdrew slowly, and with the utmost caution, through the woods. Twice, the red trailers passed near them, and they flattened themselves against the ground to escape observation. Henry did not believe now that they could regain the stone room without a flight or a fight, as he was confirmed in his belief that Red Eagle and Yellow Panther had sent out numerous trailers, before their talk with the English colonel.

A quarter of a mile away, and they were forced to lie down in a gully among sodden leaves and hold their breath while two Shawnees passed. Henry saw them through the screening bushes on the bank of the gully, their questing eyes eager and fierce. At the first trace of a trail, they would utter the war whoop and call the horde upon the fugitives. But they saw nothing and flitted away among the bushes.

"Comin' purty close," whispered Shif'less Sol, as they rose and resumed their progress. "Warm, purty warm, mighty warm, hot! The next time they'll jest burn their hands on us."

"Maybe there'll be no next time," said Henry as they approached the edge of a brook. But the bank, softened by the rain, crumbled beneath them, and the "next time" had come almost at once.

Although they did not fall, their feet went into the stream with a splash that could be heard many yards away. From three points came fierce triumphant shouts, and then they heard the low swish of moccasined feet running fast.

"Remember," said Henry, rapidly, "hide your trail and curve about until you reach the hidden home. Wait there for me!"

He was gone in an instant, turning off at a sharp angle into the bushes, leading directly away from the cliff. Now the young superman of the forest summoned all his faculties. He called to his service his immense strength and agility, his extreme acuteness of sight and hearing, and his almost supernatural power of divination, the outgrowth of a body and mind so perfectly attuned for forest work.

No fear that he would be caught entered his mind. Alone in the forest he could double and turn as he chose, and there was no Indian so fleet of foot that he could overtake him. A wild and exultant spirit flowed up in him. He was the hunted. Nevertheless it was sport to him to be followed thus. He laughed low and under his breath, and then, swelling the cords in his throat, he gave utterance to a cry so tremendous in volume that it rang like the echo of a cannon shot through the wilderness. But, after the Indian fashion, he permitted it to die in a long, fierce note like the whine of a wolf.

It was an extraordinary cry, full of challenge and mockery. It said to those who should hear, that they might come on, if they would, but they would come on a vain errand. It taunted them, and aroused every kind of anger in their breasts. No Indian could remain calm under that cry and every one of them knew what it meant. Their ferocious shouts replied, and then Henry swung forward in the long easy gait of the woodsman.

Mind and muscle were under perfect control. While he ran he saw everything in the bright moonlight and heard everything. He made no effort to conceal his trail, because he wanted it to be seen and he knew that the entire pursuit was strung out behind him. Probably Shif'less Sol was already safe within the stone walls.

Lest the trail itself should not be enough he again uttered the defiant cry that thrilled through the forest, returning in many echoes. He listened for the answering shouts of the warriors, and felt relieved when they came. The spirit that was shooting through his veins became wilder and wilder. His blood danced and he laughed once more under his breath, as wild as any of the wild men of the forest.

He was racing along a low ridge from which the rain had run rapidly, leaving fairly firm ground. Once more he disturbed the thickets. Startled wild animals sprang up as the giant young figure sped past. A rabbit leaped from under his raised foot. A huge owl looked down with red, distended eyes at the flying youth, and, in the face of the unknown, using the wisdom that is the owl's own, flew heavily away from the forest. Some pigeons, probably a part of the same flock that he had seen, rose with a whirr from a bough and streamed off in a black line among the trees. The undergrowth was filled with whimperings, and little rustlings, and Henry, who felt so closely akin to wild life, would have told them now if he could that they were in no danger. It was he, not they, who was being pursued.

He caught a glimpse of a dusky figure aiming a rifle. Quickly he bent low and the bullet whistled over his head. Catching his own rifle by the barrel he swung the stock heavily and the red trailer lay still in the undergrowth. A little farther on a second fired at him, and now he sent his own bullet in reply. The warrior fell back with a cry of pain to which his pursuing comrades answered, and Henry for a third time sent forth his fierce, defiant shout. Those whom he had met must have been hunters coming in.

He reloaded his rifle, running, and kept a wary eye as he passed into the canebrake. But he believed now that he had left behind the outermost fringe of the scouts and trailers. He would encounter nobody lying in ambush, and, after making his way for a long time through the dense thickets, he sat down on a little mound to rest and observe.

He knew that the nearest of the warriors was at least four or five hundred yards away, and that none could come within rifle shot without his knowledge. So, he sat quite still, taking deep breaths, and was without apprehension. He was not really weary, the long swinging run had not been much more than exercise, but he wanted to look about and see the nature of the land.

The canebrake extended a great distance, but he saw far beyond it the black shadow of forest, in the interminable depths of which he might easily lose himself if the pursuit continued. Whether it continued or not was a matter of sheer indifference to him. He had drawn them far enough, but if they wished to go farther he would be the hunted again, although it might be dangerous for the hunters.

He saw the crests of the cane waving a little, and, rising, he resumed the race on easy foot, passing through the canebrake, and entering the forest, in which there was much rough, rocky ground. Here he leaped lightly from stone to stone, until he knew the trail was broken beyond the possibility of finding, when he sat down between two great upthrust roots of an oak and leaned back against turf and trunk together. He knew that the green of his deerskins blended perfectly with the grass, and he felt so thoroughly convinced that the pursuit had stopped that he decided to remain there for the night.

He unrolled the blanket from his back, put it about his shoulders, and then he laughed again at the successful trick that he had played upon these fierce red warriors. It had been an easy task, too. Save the two hasty shots from the trailers he had never been in serious danger, and now, as he rested comfortably, he ate a little more of the dried venison from his knapsack. Then he fell asleep.

The hours of the night passed peacefully. The soft turf supported his back, and only his head was against the trunk of the tree. It was a comfortable position for a seasoned forest runner. Toward morning the wind rose and began to sing through the spring foliage. Its song grew louder, and before it was yet dawn Henry awoke and listened to it. Like the Indian he heard the voice of the Great Spirit in the wind, and now it came to him with a warning note.

He stretched his limbs a little and stood up, his hand on the hammer of his rifle. The darkness that precedes the dawn covered the woods, but he could see some distance into it, and he saw nothing. He listened a long time, and as the dusk began to thin away before the sun he heard a low chant. He knew that it was an Indian song, a song of triumph, coming from the south, and for a while he was puzzled.

Clearly, this was no part of the great war band, which lay to the north of him, and he concluded that it must be a small expedition which had already gone into the South and which was now returning. But he did not like the character of the song. It indicated victory and he thrilled with horror and repulsion. The triumph must be over people of his own race.

The blood in every vein grew hot with anger, and the pulses in his temples beat so hard that for a while it made a little singing in his head. The great figure stiffened and a menacing look came into his eyes.

The chant was fast growing louder and the singers would pass within a few feet of his tree. He slipped aside, turning away a hundred yards or so, and crouched behind dense bushes. The singers came on, about twenty warriors in single file, Shawnees by their paint, and the first three brandished aloft three hideous trophies. Henry had more than suspected, but the reality made him shudder.

The three scalps were obviously those of white people, and the first, long, thick, blonde and fine, was that of a woman. The warrior who waved it aloft, as he chanted, wore only the breech cloth, his naked body painted in many colors, and he exulted as he displayed his trophy, so fine to his savage heart.

A mighty rage seized Henry. For a moment his eyes were clouded by the red mist that danced before them. The song of the wind before the dawn had aroused him to his coming danger, but there was nothing to tell the triumphant savage that his hour was at hand.

The red mist cleared away from the great youth's eyes. The blood lately so hot in his veins became as cold as ice, and the pulses in his temples sank to their normal beat. Mind and nerves were completely attuned and he was a perfect instrument of vengeance. The rifle rose to his shoulder and he looked down the sights at a tiny bear painted in blue directly over the warrior's heart. Then he pulled the trigger and so deadly was his aim that the savage sank down without a cry, and the scalp fell and lay upon his own body, the long hair reddening fast with the blood that flowed from the warrior's heart.

Henry turned instantly and darted into the depths of the forest, reloading as usual as he ran. A single backward glance had shown him that the warriors, confused and puzzled at first, were standing in an excited group, looking down at their dead comrade. He knew they would recover quickly and to hasten the moment he uttered that long, thrilling cry of defiance.

He was willing for them to pursue, in truth he was anxious that they should. He had marked the other two warriors who waved the scalps, and he now had a cold and settled purpose. He intentionally made noise as he ran, letting the boughs of bushes fly back with a swish and soon he heard the Indians, two or three hundred yards away.

He knew that their muskets or smooth bores could not reach him at the range and that his rifle had over them, an advantage of at least fifty yards. He let them come a little nearer, and, as the country was now more open they saw him and uttered cries of mingled rage and triumph. They were gaining perceptibly and they felt certain of capture.

The fugitive permitted them to come a little nearer, and he watched them out of the corner of one eye. The second man in the pursuing group, a tall thin warrior, had been waving a scalp. Even now it was swinging at his belt, and as they gained, yard by yard, Henry wheeled for a second or two and shot the scalp-bearer through the head.

Then he increased his speed, reloaded his rifle once more, and sent back that taunting cry which he knew inflamed the savage heart with ferocity and the desire for vengeance. The Indians had hesitated, but now they uttered the war whoop all together, and came on at their utmost speed. Henry

noted the third scalp-bearer. He was a short, powerful fellow, but he did not have speed enough to keep himself in front. But Henry was resolved that he too should suffer.

They were running now through forest comparatively free from undergrowth. The fugitive stumbled suddenly and then limped for a step or two. The simultaneous yell of the Indians was fierce and exultant, but the rifle of the great youth flashed, and the short, broad warrior was gone to join his two comrades.

Then the speed of the fugitive increased at a great rate, and, as the warriors were no longer anxious to pursue, he soon disappeared in the forest.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEED IN THE WATER

Henry's pace sank into a long walk, but he did not stop for two hours. Then he drank at one of the innumerable brooks and lay down in the forest. His adventure with the returning war party made him think much. It was likely that other small bands had gone on the great adventure in the south. The young warriors, in particular, were likely to take to the scalp trail. It furnished them with excitement and at the same time destroyed the intruders upon their great hunting grounds.

He was tempted to rejoin his comrades and go south at once with a warning, but second thought told him that the chief danger lay in the great war band under Yellow Panther and Red Eagle. He would adhere to his original plan and seek to destroy the cannon.

He resolved to return at night, and since he had plenty of time he shot a small deer, taking all chances, and cooked tender steaks over a fire that he lit with his flint and steel. It refreshed him greatly, and putting other choice portions in his knapsack he started back on a wide curve, leaving the smoldering coals to arouse the curiosity of any one who might see them.

It was now the second day after the great storm, and earth and the forest had dried completely. Henry, stepping lightly on the firm earth, and always using every stone or log or brook to hide any possible trace, had little fear of leaving a trail that even the keenest Indian could follow. But he picked up several trails himself. One was that of a small party coming from the east, and he thought they might be Wyandots bound for the great camp. Another had the imprints of two pairs of boots, mingled with the light traces of moccasins, and he knew that they were made by English soldiers, doubtless gunners, coming also with their Indian comrades to join the great camp.

Nothing escaped his notice. He knew that not far to the eastward ran one of the great rivers that emptied into the Ohio, flowing northward, and he began to wonder why the band did not use it for the transport of the cannon, at least part of the way. Indians were usually well provided with canoes, and by lashing some of the stoutest together they could make a support strong enough for the twelve pounders. It was an idea worth considering, and he and his comrades would watch the stream. Then it occurred to him that he might go there now, and see if any movement in that direction had been begun by the warriors. The other four undoubtedly would remain in their little stone fortress, until he returned, or even if they should venture forth they knew all the ways of the forest, and could take care of themselves.

To think of it was to act at once, and he began a great curve toward the east, slackening speed and awaiting the night, under cover of which he could work to far better effect and with much greater safety.

Toward sunset he came upon a trail made by moccasins and two pairs of boots, and he surmised that it was Alloway and one of his young officers who had passed that way with the Indians. As they were going toward the river it confirmed him in his conjecture that they intended to use it, at least in part, for their advance into Kentucky.

There had been no effort to hide the trail. What need had they to do so? Even with the belief that the five were in the vicinity they were in too large numbers to fear attack, and Henry, following in their footsteps, read all their actions plainly.

They were not walking very fast. The shortness between one footprint and the next proved it, and their slowness was almost a sure indication that the party included Yellow Panther and Red Eagle, or at least one of them. They did not go faster, because they were talking, and Alloway would have discussed measures only with the chiefs.

At one point four pairs of footsteps turned aside a little, and stopped in front of a large fallen log. Two of the traces were made by moccasins and two by boots. So, the two pairs of moccasins

indicated that both chiefs were present. The four had sat on the log and talked some time. In the crevices of the bank he found traces of thin ash. The British officer therefore had lighted his pipe and smoked there, further proof that it had been a conference of length.

The warriors had remained in a group on the right, thirty or forty yards away, and several of them had lain down, the crushed grass showing faint traces of their figures. Two small bones of the deer, recently covered with cooked flesh, indicated that several of them had used the opportunity to eat their supper.

Unquestionably the movement intended by the white leader and the red chiefs was important, or they would not stop to talk about it so long. Hence it must mean the transportation of the cannon by water. He could not think of anything else that would divert them from the main route.

About two miles farther on another trail joined the one that he was following. It was made wholly by moccasins, but it was easy enough for him to discern among them two pairs, the toes of which turned outward. These moccasins, of course, were worn by Blackstaffe and Wyatt, who, whatever the British colonel may have thought of them, were nevertheless of the greatest importance, as intermediaries between him and the Indian chiefs.

A few yards beyond the junction they had stopped and talked a little, but they had not sat down. Nevertheless they had consulted earnestly as the footsteps were in an irregular group, showing that they had moved about nervously as they talked. Then they walked on, but the moccasins moved forward in a much straighter and more precise manner than the boots, which were now veering a little from side to side. The two British officers, not trained to it like the others, were growing weary from the long walk through the woods. But they persevered. Although they sagged more the trail led on, and, after a while, Henry saw a light, which he knew to be a campfire, and which he surmised was on the bank of the river.

The night was fairly dark and under cover of bushes he approached until he could see. Then all his surmises were confirmed. The campfire was large and around it sat Alloway, the younger officer, Red Eagle and Yellow Panther, and at a little distance about twenty warriors. The two Englishmen seemed utterly exhausted, while the others showed no signs of weariness.

"I admit, Wyatt, that walking seven or eight miles through the primeval wilderness is no light task," said Alloway, wiping his red, perspiring face.

His tone was not haughty and patronizing. He felt just then, in this particular work, that he was not the equal of the renegades and the warriors. Henry saw a faint ironic smile upon the face of each of the renegades, and he understood and appreciated their little triumph.

"You would do better, Colonel," said Blackstaffe suavely, "to wear moccasins in place of those heavy boots. They carry you over the ground much more lightly, and we have to follow the ways of the wilderness."

The irritable red of Alloway's face turned to a deeper tint, but he controlled himself.

"Doubtless you are right, Blackstaffe," he said, "but we are here at last."

Wyatt had been speaking in a low tone to the chiefs, and it inflamed a choleric man like Alloway to hear anyone saying words that he could not understand. He was not able to restrain himself wholly a second time.

"What is it, man? What is it that you're saying to the chiefs?" he exclaimed.

"I was merely telling them," replied Wyatt, "that you and your aide, Lieutenant Cartwright, had been made weary by the long walk through the woods, and that we'd better let you rest a little before going down to inspect the canoes."

A blaze of anger appeared in Alloway's eyes, but the younger officer who had been watching his chief with some apprehension, said deferentially:

"Suppose, sir, that we do as they suggest. Campaigning in this wilderness is not like fighting on the open fields of Europe."

They all sat down about the fire, and venison, jerked buffalo meat and roasted grain were served to them. The two chiefs were silent, and, holding themselves with dignity, were impressive. Presently one of them took from under his deerskin tunic a pipe, with a long stem, and a bowl, carved beautifully. He crowded some tobacco into it, put a live coal on top and took two or three long puffs. Then he passed it to the other chief who after doing the same handed it to Colonel Alloway.

The officer hesitated, not seeming to understand the meaning of the pipe at that particular time, and Wyatt said, maliciously:

"The pipe of peace, sir!"

"Why should we smoke a pipe of peace when we're already allies?"

"A little feeling has been shown on our march through the woods to the river. Indians, sir, are very sensitive. These two chiefs, Yellow Panther and Red Eagle, are the heads of powerful tribes, and if their feelings are hurt in any manner they will resent it, even to the point of withdrawing all their warriors and returning north of the Ohio. I suggest, sir, that you smoke the pipe at once, and return it to them."

Colonel Alloway did so, Cartwright took it readily, after them the two renegades smoked, and thus it was passed around the circle. It came back to Red Eagle, who knocked the coals out of the pipe and then gravely returned it to its resting place.

Henry had watched it all with eager attention, and when the little ceremony was finished he made another short circle through the bushes that brought him close to the river, where he saw about twenty canoes and two boats much larger, built stoutly and apparently able to sustain a great weight. He knew at once that they were intended for the cannon and that they had been brought down the Ohio and then up the tributary stream. Both had oars and he surmised that the white gun crews would use them, since the Indians were familiar only with the paddle. These boats, scows he would have called them, were tied to the bank and were empty. Some of the canoes were empty also, but in seven or eight, Indian warriors were lying asleep.

He was quite certain that the cannon would be brought up the next day, and be loaded on the scows, and he wished now for the presence of his comrades. The five together might accomplish something real before the dawn, and then he resolved that since he was alone he would attempt it alone. He withdrew to a considerable distance, and lay down in the bushes, very close.

It was hard to think of a plan that seemed feasible, and he concentrated his mind upon it until his brain began to feel inflamed, as if with a fever. But the idea came at last. It was full of danger, and it called for almost supernatural skill, but he believed that he could do it. Then the fever went out of his brain and the tension of his nerves relaxed. He felt himself imbued with new strength and courage, and his soul rose to its task.

He saw the two officers, the renegades and the chiefs come down to the edge of the river, and talk with the warriors there. No very strict watch was kept, because none seemed to be needed. Then blankets were spread for them under the trees, and they went to sleep. Most of the warriors followed their example, and not more than three or four sentinels were left on watch. These three or four, however, would have eyes to see in the darkness and ears to hear when a leaf fell.

But Henry did not sleep. He was never more wide-awake. He made his way carefully through the bushes farther up the stream to a point where he noticed the last canoe lying empty near the shore, almost hidden in the shadows cast on the water by the overhanging boughs.

He came to a point parallel with it and not more than ten feet away, and critically examining the river saw that the water was quite deep there, which suited his purpose. The light craft was held merely by a slender piece of bark rope. Then he began the most perilous part of his task. He returned toward the sleeping officers and chiefs, and, lying flat upon the ground in the deep grass and heavy shadows, began slowly to worm himself forward. It was a thing that no one could have accomplished without great natural aptitude, long training and infinite patience. He knew that risk of detection

existed, but he calculated that, if seen, he might be up and away before any one of his enemies could find time for a good shot.

The Englishmen in particular were the mark at which he aimed. He had noticed that the younger one carried a large horn of powder and he was likely to be careless about it, a belief that was verified as he drew near. The Englishman had taken off his belt, bullet pouch and powder horn, all of which now lay on the ground near him.

A long arm was suddenly thrust from the grass and a hand closing on the powder horn took it away. Henry felt that it was well filled and heavy and he glowed with triumph. The first link in his chain had been forged. He crept back into the bushes, and stopped there twice, lying very still. He saw the Indian sentinels moving about a little, but evidently they suspected nothing. They were merely changing positions and quickly relapsed into silence and stillness.

It was fully half an hour before Henry was back at his place opposite the swinging little canoe. Then he shook the powder horn triumphantly, put it down at the foot of a tree and covered it up with some leaves. As he did so he noticed that many of last year's leaves were quite dry and he remembered it.

Then he went back to forge the second link, which was not so difficult. The fire around which the white men and the chiefs had eaten their supper was a little distance back of the present camp, where he was quite sure that it was still smoldering, although deserted. He found a stick the end of which was yet a live coal, and circling a little wider on his return he came back to the powder horn.

Henry held the live point of the stick close to the ground where it could not cast a glow that the sentinels might see, and then waited a minute or so before taking any further action. Two links of the chain had been forged and he felt now that he would carry it to its full length and success. He had never been more skillful, never more in command of all his faculties, and they had never worked in more perfect coördination. There had never been a more perfect type of the human physical machine. Nature, in one of her happy moods, had lavished upon him all her gifts and now he was using them to the utmost, turning his ten talents into twenty.

The third link would be one of great difficulty, much harder than the bringing of the fire, and that was the reason why he was considering so well. He could discern the figures of three of the sentinels on land. Two of them were brawny warriors naked to the waist, and painted heavily. The third was quite young, younger than himself, a mere boy, perhaps on his first war path. Henry understood the feelings of hope and ambition that probably animated the Indian boy and he trusted that they would not come into conflict.

The sentinels were walking about, and when the one nearest him turned and moved away he gathered up quickly fallen brushwood which lay kiln-dry at the river's brink. Then he hid his rifle, other weapons and ammunition in the grass. For a brief space he must go unarmed, because he could not be cumbered in an effort to keep them dry.

Carrying the powder horn, the dry sticks and the one lighted at the end, he dropped silently into the water and managed with one arm to swim the few feet that separated him from the canoe. Then he passed around it, putting it between him and the land, and carefully lifted everything inside. He knew that the dry wood would burn fast when he placed the torch against it, and he put the horn full of powder very near.

Then he sank low in the water behind the canoe, and listened until he heard the faint sputter of the fire in the dry wood. Now new difficulties arose. He must time everything exactly, and for the sake of his enterprise and his own life he must keep the Indian alarm from coming too soon.

The sputtering was not yet loud enough for the warriors on the bank to hear it, and he ventured to rise high enough for another look over the edge of the canoe. In two minutes, he calculated, the fire would reach the powder horn. Then he drew from his belt his hunting knife, the only weapon that he had not discarded, and cut the withe that held the canoe.

Burying himself in the water to the nose he sent his fire ship down the stream toward the two scows intending for it to enter just between them. Now he needed all his skill and complete command over his will. The sputtering of the fire increased, and he knew that it was rapidly approaching the horn of powder. The flesh had an almost irresistible desire to draw away at once and swim for life, but an immense resolution held his body to its yet uncompleted task.

The canoe was moving with such a slight ripple that not an Indian sentinel had yet heard, but when it was within ten yards of its destination one happened to look over the river and see it moving. There would have been nothing curious in a canoe breaking its slender thong and floating with the current, but this one was floating against it. The Indian uttered a surprised exclamation and instantly called the attention of his comrades.

Henry knew that the supreme moment was at hand. The Indian warning had come, and the sputtering told him that the fire was almost at the powder horn. Giving his fire ship a mighty shove he sent it directly between the scows and then he made a great dive down and away. He swam under water as long as he could, and just as he was coming to the surface he heard and saw the explosion.

The two scows and the canoe seemed to leap into the air in the center of a volcano of light, and then all three came down in a rain of hissing and steaming fragments. The crash was stunning, and the light for a moment or two was intense. Then it sank almost as suddenly and again came the darkness, in which Henry heard the steaming of burning wood, the turmoil of riven waters and the shouts of warriors filled with surprise and alarm.

It was easy in all the confusion for him to reach the bank, recover his arms and speed into the forest. He had forged with complete success every link in his chain of destruction. The scows intended for the transportation of the cannon were blown to splinters, and while they might lash enough canoes together to sustain their weight, they must move slowly and at much risk.

Although he was dripping with water, Henry was supremely happy. When he undertook this feat he had believed that he would succeed, but looking back at it now it seemed almost incredible. But here he was, and the deed was done. He laughed to himself in silent pleasure. Wyatt, Blackstaffe and the others would undoubtedly trace it to him and his comrades, and he hoped they would. He was willing for them to know that the five were not only on watch but could act with terrific effect.

A half-mile away from the river and he heard a long fierce yell, uttered by many voices in unison. He knew they had picked up at the edge of the stream the tale that he had not sought to hide, and were hoping now for revenge upon the one who had cost them so much. But he laughed once more back of his teeth. In the darkness they might as well try to follow a bird of the air. He curved away, reached one of the numerous brooks intersecting the stream, and ran for a long time in its bed. Then he emerged, passed into a dense canebrake and stopped, where he took off his wet clothing and spread it out in the dark to dry. The blanket which he had left on the bank with his arms was warm and dry and he wrapped it around his body. Then he lay down with his weapons by his side.

The satisfied blood ran swiftly and proudly in the veins of the great forest runner. He had done other deeds as bold, but perhaps none as delicate as this. It had demanded a complete combination of courage and dexterity and perfect timing. A second more or less might have ruined everything. He could imagine the chagrin of the choleric colonel. Unless Wyatt and Blackstaffe restrained him he might break forth into complaints and abuse and charge the Indians with negligence, a charge that the haughty chiefs would repudiate at once and with anger. Then a break might follow.

Whether the break came or not he had insured a delay, and since the cannon could not yet be put upon the river he might find a way to get at them. He rolled on one side, made himself comfortable on the dead leaves and then heard the wind blowing a song of triumph through the cane. He fell asleep to the musical note, but awoke at dawn.

His clothing was dry, and, unwrapping himself from the tight folds of the blanket, he dressed. Then, stretching his muscles a little, to remove all stiffness or soreness he emerged from the

canebrake. After examining a circle of the forest with both eye and ear to see that no warrior was near, he climbed a tree and looked over a sea of forest.

To the north where the great camp lay he saw spires of smoke rising, and to the east, where a detachment guarded the boats in the river, another column of smoke floated off into the blue dawn. So he inferred that they were yet uncertain about their campaign and that their forces would remain stationary for a little while. But he was sure that warriors were ranging the forest in search of him. Red Eagle and Yellow Panther would not let such an insult and loss pass without many attempts at revenge.

He descended and ate the last of his venison. He would have returned at once to his comrades, but he believed that many warriors were in between and he did not wish to draw danger either upon them or himself. He began another of his great curves and it took him away from the refuge in the cliff, coming back in two or three hours to the stream that bore the little Indian fleet. His triumph of the night before increased his boldness, and he resolved to return the following night and annoy further the detachment by the river. It would serve his cause, and it would be a pleasure to vex the dogmatic European colonel.

Weather was a great factor in the operation he was carrying on, and the coming night, fortunately for his purpose, promised to be dark. Spring is fickle in the valley of the Ohio, and toward evening clouds gathered, although there was not a sufficient closeness of the air to indicate rain. But the moon was feeble and by and by went away altogether. Then the stars followed, leaving only a black sky which hid Henry well, but which did not hide the smaller camp by the river from him.

Watchers had been spread out in a wider circle, but he had no difficulty in approaching the fire, built on the bank of the river, around which sat the two chiefs, the renegades and the British officers. Henry saw that the faces of all of them expressed deep discontent, and he enjoyed the joke, because joke it was to him. He understood the depths of their chagrin.

"We'll have to carry the cannon on the canoes, and maybe they'll fall into the river," said Alloway querulously. "How in thunder the blowing up of those scows was managed I don't understand!"

"Several of the warriors saw a canoe floating down, sir, just before the explosion," said Cartwright, "and it must have been no illusion, as a canoe is gone."

Cartwright had missed his horn of powder after the excitement from the explosion was over, but he supposed some Indian had used the opportunity to steal it, and he said nothing about his loss from fear of creating a breach.

"In my opinion, sir," said Braxton Wyatt, smoothly but with just a trace of irony, "it was done by Ware and his comrades."

"Impossible! Impossible!" said Alloway, testily. "The careless Indians left powder in the scows and in some manner equally careless it's been exploded. The tale of the canoe that floated upstream of its own accord was an invention to cover up their neglect."

"Do you wish us to translate for you and to state that opinion to the chiefs?" asked Blackstaffe.

Alloway gave him an angry glance, but he had prudence enough to say:

"No, of course not. After all, there may have been a canoe. But whatever it was it was most unfortunate. It delays us greatly, and it preys upon the superstitions of the warriors."

"They are very susceptible, sir, to such things," said Wyatt. "They dread the unknown, and this event has affected them unpleasantly. But I'm quite sure it was done by Ware, although I don't know how."

"Ware! Ware!" exclaimed Alloway, impatiently. "Why should a force like ours dread a single person?"

"Because, sir, he does things that are to be dreaded."

Yellow Panther, who had been sitting in silence, his arms folded across his great bare chest, arose and raised his hand. Braxton Wyatt turned toward him respectfully and then said to Colonel Alloway:

"The head chief of the Miamis wishes to speak, sir, and if you will pardon me for saying so, it will be wise for us to listen."

"Very well," said Alloway. "Tell us what he says."

Thus spoke Yellow Panther, head chief of the Miamis, veteran of many wars, through the medium of Braxton Wyatt:

"We and our brethren, the Shawnees, have come with many warriors upon a long war path. Our friends, the white men whom the mighty King George has sent across the seas to help us, have brought with them the great cannon which will batter down the forts of the Long Knives in Kaintuckee. But the signs are bad. The boats which were to carry the cannon on the river have been blown up. An enemy stands across our path and before we go farther we must hunt him down. If we cannot do it then Manitou has turned his face away from us."

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