

Castlemon Harry

Frank on the Prairie



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CHAPTER I

Ho for the West!

FOR two months after their return from their hunting expedition in “the woods,” Frank and Archie talked of nothing but the incidents that had transpired during their visit at the trapper’s cabin. The particulars of Frank’s desperate fight with the moose had become known throughout the village, and the “Young Naturalist” enjoyed an enviable reputation as a hunter. He was obliged to relate his adventures over and over again, until one day his thoughts and conversation were turned into a new channel by the arrival of an uncle, who had just returned from California.

Uncle James had been absent from home nearly ten years, and during most of that time had lived in the mines. Although the boys had not seen him since they were six years old, and of course could not remember him, they were soon on the best of terms with each other. Uncle James had an inexhaustible fund of stories; he had crossed the plains, fought the Indians, was accustomed to scenes of danger and excitement, and had such an easy way of telling his adventures, that the boys never grew tired of listening to them. The day after his arrival he visited the museum, gazed in genuine wonder at the numerous specimens of his nephews’ handiwork, and listened to the descriptions of their hunting expeditions with as much interest as though he had been a boy himself. Then he engaged in hunting with them, and entered into the sport with all the reckless eagerness of youth.

The winter was passed in this way, and when spring returned, Uncle James began to talk of returning to California to settle up his business. He had become attached to life in the mines, but could not bear the thought of leaving his relatives again. The quiet comforts he had enjoyed at the cottage he thought were better than the rough life and hard fare to which he had been accustomed for the last ten years. He had left his business, however, in an unsettled state, and, as soon as he could “close it up,” would return and take up his abode in Lawrence. The cousins regretted that the parting time was so near, for they looked upon their relative as the very pattern of an uncle, but consoled themselves by looking forward to the coming winter, when he would be settled as a permanent inmate of the cottage.

“I say, Frank,” exclaimed Archie one day, as he burst into the study, where his cousin was engaged in cleaning his gun preparatory to a muskrat hunt, “there’s something in the wind. Just now, as I came through the sitting-room, I surprised our folks and Uncle James talking very earnestly about something. But they stopped as soon as I came in, and, as that was a gentle hint that they didn’t want me to know any thing about it, I came out. There’s something up, I tell you.”

“It’s about uncle’s business, I suppose,” replied Frank. But if that *was* the subject of the conversation, Archie came to the conclusion that his affairs must be in a very unsettled state, for when they returned from their hunt that night the same mysterious conversation was going on again. It ceased, however, as the boys entered the room, which made Archie more firm in his belief than ever that there was “something up.”

The next morning, at the breakfast-table, Archie’s father announced his intention of returning to Portland at once, as his business needed his attention; and, turning to the boys, inquired:

“Well, have you had hunting enough this winter to satisfy you?”

“Yes, sir,” was the answer.

“Then I suppose you don’t want to go across the plains with your Uncle James?”

“Hurrah!” shouted Archie, springing to his feet, and upsetting his coffee-cup. “Did you say we might go?”

“Be a little more careful, Archie,” said his father. “No, I did not say so.”

“Well, it amounts to the same thing,” thought Archie, “for father never would have said a word about it if he wasn’t intending to let us go. I knew there was something up.”

We need not stop to repeat the conversation that followed. Suffice it to say, that Uncle James, having fully made up his mind to return to the village as soon as he could settle up his business, had asked permission for his nephews to accompany him across the plains. Their parents, thinking of the fight with the moose, and knowing the reckless spirit of the boys, had at first objected. But Uncle James, promising to keep a watchful eye on them, had, after considerable argument, carried the day, and it was finally decided that the boys could go.

“But remember,” said Mr. Winters, “you are to be governed entirely by Uncle James; for, if you have no one to take care of you, you will be in more fights with bears and panthers.”

The boys readily promised obedience, and, hardly waiting to finish their breakfast, went into the study to talk over their plans.

“Didn’t I tell you there was something up?” said Archie, as soon as they had closed the door. “We’ll have a hunt now that will throw all our former hunting expeditions in the shade.”

As soon as their excitement had somewhat abated, they remembered that Dick Lewis, the trapper, had told them that it was his intention to start for the prairie in the spring. If he had not already gone, would it not be a good plan to secure his company? He knew all about the prairie, and might be of service to them. They laid the matter before Uncle James, who, without hesitation, pronounced it an excellent idea. “For,” said he, “we are in no hurry. Instead of going by stage, we will buy a wagon and a span of mules and take our time. If we don’t happen to fall in with a train, we shall, no doubt, want a guide.” As soon, therefore, as the ice had left the creek so that it could be traveled with a boat, Uncle James accompanied the boys to the trapper’s cabin.

Dick met them at the door, and greeted them with a grasp so hearty, that they all felt its effects for a quarter of an hour afterward.

“I ain’t gone yet,” said he; “but it won’t be long afore I see the prairy onct more.”

“Well, Dick,” said Frank, “we’re going, too, and want you to go with us.”

The trapper and his brother opened their eyes wide with astonishment, but Uncle James explained, and ended by offering to pay the trapper’s expenses if he would accompany them. After a few moments’ consideration, he accepted the proposition, saying:

“I have tuk to the youngsters mightily. They’re gritty fellers, an’ I should like to show ’em a bit of prairy life.”

Uncle James and the boys remained at the cabin nearly a week, during which their plans were all determined upon, and, when they arrived at home, they at once commenced preparations for their journey. Their double-barreled shotguns were oiled, and put carefully away. They were very efficient weapons among small game, but Uncle James said they were not in the habit of using “pop-guns” on the prairie; they would purchase their fire-arms and other necessary weapons at St. Louis.

The first of June – the time set for the start – at length arrived, and with it came the trapper, accompanied by his dog. Dick carried his long rifle on his shoulder, his powder-horn and bullet-pouch at his side, and a knapsack, containing a change of clothes and other necessary articles, at his back. He had evidently bestowed more than usual care upon his toilet; his suit of buckskin was entirely new, and even his rifle seemed to have received a thorough rubbing and cleaning preparatory to its introduction into civilized life. Frank and Archie meeting him at the door, relieved him of his rifle and pack, and conducted him into the house. But here the trapper was sadly out of place. He sat on the edge of his chair, and was constantly changing the position of his feet, and looking down at the rich carpet, as if he could hardly believe that it was made to walk upon. The inmates of the cottage used every exertion in their power to make him feel at his ease, and, to some extent, succeeded; but he breathed much more freely when the farewells had been said, and the party was on its way to the wharf. In due time they arrived at Portland, where they remained nearly a week. Here the trapper again found

himself in hot water. He was installed in a large, airy room in Mr. Winter's elegant residence; but he would much rather have been assigned quarters among the trees in the yard. The sights and sounds of the city were new to him, and at every corner he found something to wonder at. When on the street, he was continually getting in somebody's way, or being separated from his companions, who found it necessary to keep a vigilant watch over him. But it was on the train that his astonishment reached its height. He had never before traveled in the cars, and, as they thundered away, going faster and faster as they left the city behind, the trapper began to clutch his seat, and to look wistfully out the window at the woods, which appeared to be dancing by, as if he never expected to be permitted to enter his natural element again. He would have preferred to "foot it," as he remarked, and, when at last they reached St. Joseph, he drew a long breath of relief, mentally resolving that he would never again tempt destruction by traveling either on a steamboat or railroad car.

It was midnight when they reached the hotel. Being very much fatigued with their long journey, they at once secured rooms and retired, and were soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER II

The Wagon Train

ON awaking the next morning, the boys found themselves surrounded by new scenes. While they were dressing, they looked out at the window, and obtained their first view of a wagon train, which was just starting out for the prairie. The wagons were protected by canvas covers, some drawn by oxen, others by mules, and the entire train being accompanied by men both on foot and on horseback. Fat, sleek cows followed meekly after the wagons, from behind whose covering peeped the faces of women and children – the families of the hardy pioneers now on their way to find new homes amid the solitude of that western region.

The boys watched the train until it disappeared, and then went down stairs to get their breakfast. Uncle James was not to be found. In fact, ever since leaving Portland, he seemed to have forgotten his promise to his brother, for he never bothered his head about his nephews. It is true, he had watched them rather closely at the beginning of the journey, but soon discovered that they were fully capable of taking care of themselves and the trapper besides. He did not make his appearance until nearly two hours after the boys had finished their breakfast, and then he rode up to the hotel mounted on a large, raw-boned, ugly-looking horse. He was followed by the trapper, who was seated in a covered wagon, drawn by a span of mules, while behind the wagon were two more horses, saddled and bridled.

“Now, then, boys,” said Uncle James, as he dismounted and tied his horse to a post, “where’s your baggage? We’re going with that train that went out this morning.”

“An’ here, youngsters,” exclaimed Dick, as he climbed down out of his wagon, “come an’ take your pick of these two hosses. This one,” he continued, pointing to a small, gray horse, which stood impatiently pawing the ground and tossing his head – “this feller is young and foolish yet. He don’t know nothin’ ’bout the prairie or buffaler huntin’; an’ if whoever gets him should undertake to shoot a rifle while on his back, he would land him on the ground quicker nor lightnin’. I ’spect I shall have to larn him a few lessons. But this one” – laying his hand on the other horse, which stood with his head down and his eyes closed, as if almost asleep – “he’s an ole buffaler hunter. The feller that your uncle bought him of has jest come in from the mountains. He can travel wusser nor a steamboat if you want him to, an’ you can leave him on the prairie any whar an’ find him when you come back. Now, youngster,” he added, turning to Frank, “which’ll you have?”

“I have no choice,” replied Frank. “Which one do you want, Archie?”

“Well,” replied the latter, “I’d rather have the buffalo hunter. He looks as though he hadn’t spirit enough to throw a fellow off, but that gray looks rather vicious.”

“Wal, then, that’s settled,” said the trapper; “so fetch on your plunder, an’ let’s be movin’ to onct.”

Their baggage, which consisted of three trunks – small, handy affairs, capable of holding a considerable quantity of clothing, but not requiring much space – was stowed away in the wagon. When Uncle James had paid their bill at the hotel, they mounted their horses, and the trapper, who now began to feel more at home, took his seat in the wagon, and drove after the train. Archie soon began to think that he had shown considerable judgment in the selection of his horse, for they had not gone far before the gray began to show his temper. After making several attempts to turn his head toward home – a proceeding which Frank successfully resisted – he began to dance from one side of the street to the other, and ended by endeavoring to throw his rider over his head; but the huge Spanish saddle, with its high front and back, afforded him a secure seat; and after receiving a few sharp thrusts from Frank’s spurs, the gray quietly took his place by the side of Archie’s horse, and walked along as orderly and gentle as could be wished.

The trapper, who was now the chief man of the party, had superintended the buying of their outfit, and, although it was a simple one, they were still well provided with every necessary article. The boys were dressed in complete suits of blue jeans, an article that will resist wear and dirt to the last extremity, broad-brimmed hats, and heavy horseman's boots, the heels of which were armed with spurs.

Their weapons, which were stowed away in the wagon, consisted of a brace of revolvers and a hunting-knife each, and Archie owned a short breech-loading rifle, while Frank had purchased a common "patch" rifle. The wagon also contained provisions in abundance – coffee, corn meal, bacon, and the like – and ammunition for their weapons. Their appearance would have created quite a commotion in the quiet little village of Lawrence, but in St. Joseph such sights were by no means uncommon. Buckskin was much more plenty than broadcloth, and the people who passed them on the streets scarcely noticed them.

At length, just before dark, they overtook the train, which had stopped for the night. The wagons were drawn up on each side of the road, and altogether the camp presented a scene that was a pleasant one to men wearied with their day's journey. Cattle were feeding quietly near the wagons, chickens cackled joyously from their coops, men and women were busily engaged with their preparations for supper, while groups of noisy children rolled about on the grass, filling the camp with the sounds of their merry laughter.

The trapper drove on until he found a spot suitable for their camp, and then turned off the road and stopped. He at once began to unharness the mules, while the boys, after removing their saddles, fastened their horses to the wagon with a long rope, and allowed them to graze. When the trapper had taken care of his mules, he started a fire, and soon a coffee-pot was simmering and sputtering over the flames, and several slices of bacon were broiling on the coals. After supper, the boys spread their blankets out under the wagon, and, being weary with their day's ride (for it was something new to them), soon fell asleep.

The next morning, when they awoke it was just daylight. After drawing on their boots, they crawled out from under the wagon, and found the trapper, standing with his hat off, and his long arms extended as if about to embrace some invisible object.

"I tell you what, youngsters," said he, as the boys approached; "if this aint nat'ral; jest take a sniff of that ar fresh air! Here," he continued, looking about him with a smile of satisfaction – "here, I know all 'bout things. I'm to hum now. Thar's nothin' on the prairy that Dick Lewis can't 'count fur. But, youngsters, I wouldn't travel on them ar steamboats an' railroads ag'in fur all the beaver in the Missouri River. Every thing in them big cities seemed to say to me, 'Dick, you haint got no business here.' Them black walls an' stone roads; them rumblin' carts an' big stores, war sights I never seed afore, an' I never want to see 'em ag'in. I know I was treated mighty kind, an' all that; but it couldn't make me feel right. I didn't like them streets, windin' an' twistin' about, an' allers loosin' a feller; an' I wasn't to hum. But *now*, youngsters, I know what I'm doin'. Nobody can't lose Dick Lewis on the prairy. I know the names of all the streets here; an', 'sides, I know whar they all lead to. An' as fur varmints, thar's none of 'em that I haint trapped an' fit. An' Injuns! I know a leetle 'bout them, I reckon. It's funny that them ar city chaps don't know nothin' 'bout what's goin' on out here; an' it shows that all the larnin' in the world aint got out o' books. Send one of 'em here, an' I could show him a thing or two he never heern tell on. But I must be gettin' breakfast, 'cause we'll be off ag'in soon; an' on the prairy every feller has to look out fur himself. You can't pull a ring in the wall here, an' have a chap with white huntin' shirt an' morocker moccasins on come up an' say: 'Did you ring, sir?' An' how them ar fellers knowed which room to come to in them big hotels, is something I can't get through my head. Thar's no big bell to call a feller to grub here. Take one of them city chaps an' give him a rifle, an' pint out over the prairy an' tell him to go an' hunt up his breakfast, an' how would he come out? Could he travel by the sun, or tell the pints of the compass by the stars? Could he lasso an' ride a wild mustang, or shoot a Injun plumb atween the eyes at two hundred an' fifty yards? No!

I reckon not! Wal, thar's a heap o' things I couldn't do; an' it shows that every man had oughter stick to his own business. It's all owin' to a man's bringin' up."

While the trapper spoke he had been raking together the fire that had nearly gone out; and having got it fairly started, he began the work of getting breakfast. The boys, after rolling up their blankets and packing them away in the wagon, amused themselves in watching the movements of the emigrants, who now began their preparations for their day's journey. By the time Uncle James awoke, the trapper pronounced their breakfast ready. After they had done ample justice to the homely meal (and it was astonishing what an appetite the fresh invigorating air of the prairie gave them), the boys packed the cooking utensils away in the wagon while the trapper began to harness the mules. This was an undertaking that a less experienced man would have found to be extremely hazardous, for the animals persisted in keeping their heels toward him, and it was only by skillful maneuvering that Dick succeeded in getting them hitched to the wagon. By the time this was accomplished, Uncle James and the boys had saddled their horses and followed the trapper, who drove off as though he perfectly understood what he was about, leaving the train to follow at its leisure.

Dick acted as if he had again found himself among friends from whom he had long been separated; but it was evident that sorrow was mingled with his joy, for on every side his eye rested on the improvements of civilization. The road was lined with fine, well-stocked farms, and the prairie over which his father had hunted the buffalo and fought the Indian, had been turned up by the plow, and would soon be covered with waving crops. No doubt the trapper's thoughts wandered into the future, for, as the boys rode up beside the wagon, he said, with something like a sigh:

"Things aint as they used to be, youngsters. I can 'member the time when thar was'nt a fence within miles of here, an' a feller could go out an' knock over a buffaler fur breakfast jest as easy as that farmer over thar could find one of his sheep. But the ax an' plow have made bad work with a fine country, the buffaler an' Injun have been pushed back t'wards the mountains, an' it won't be long afore thar'll be no room fur sich as me; an' we won't be missed neither, 'cause when the buffaler an' beaver are gone thar'll be nothin' fur us to do. These farms will keep pushin' out all the while; an' when folks, sittin' in their snug houses beside their warm fires, hear tell of the Injuns that onst owned this country, nobody will ever think that sich fellers as me an' Bill Lawson an' ole Bob Kelly ever lived. If ole Bill was here now, he would say: 'Let's go back to the mountains, Dick, an' stay thar.' He wouldn't like to see his ole huntin' grounds wasted in this way, an' I don't want to see it neither. But I know that the Rocky Mountains an' grizzly bars will last as long as I shall, an' thar'll be no need of trappers an' hunters an' guides arter that."

Dick became silent after this, and it was not until the train halted for the noon's rest, that he recovered his usual spirits

CHAPTER III

Antelope Hunting

GRADUALLY the train left the improvements of civilization behind, and, at the end of three weeks, it was miles outside of a fence. Here the trapper was in his natural element. He felt, as he expressed, “like a young one jest out o’ school,” adding, that all he needed was “one glimpse of a Comanche or Cheyenne to make him feel perfectly nat’ral.”

In accordance with the promise he had made Frank before leaving St. Joseph, he now took Pete (that was the name the latter had given his horse) under his especial charge; and every morning, at the first peep of day, the boys saw him galloping over the prairie, firing his rifle as fast as he could reload, as if in pursuit of an imaginary herd of buffaloes. At first the spirited animal objected to this mode of treatment, and made the most desperate efforts to unseat his rider; but the trapper, who had broken more than one wild mustang, was perfectly at home on horseback, and, after a few exercises of this kind, Pete was turned over to his young master, with the assurance that he was ready to begin buffalo hunting. According to Frank’s idea, the animal had improved considerably under the trapper’s system of training, for he would hardly wait for his rider to be fairly in the saddle before he would start off at the top of his speed. The boys, who considered themselves fully able to do any thing that had ever been accomplished by any one else, having seen Dick load and fire his rifle while riding at full speed, began to imitate his example, and in a short time learned the art to perfection. In addition to this, each boy looked upon his horse as the better animal, and the emigrants were witnesses to many a race between them, in which Sleepy Sam, as Archie called his horse, always came off winner. But Frank kept up the contest, and at every possible opportunity the horses were “matched,” until they had learned their parts so well, that every time they found themselves together, they would start off on a race without waiting for the word from their riders.

One morning, just after the train had left the camp, as the boys were riding beside the wagon, listening to a story the trapper was relating, the latter suddenly stopped, and, pointing toward a distant swell, said: “Do you see that ar’, youngsters?”

The boys, after straining their eyes in vain, brought their field-glass into requisition, and finally discovered an object moving slowly along through the high grass; but the distance was so great, they could not determine what it was.

“That’s a prong-horn,” said the trapper at length. “An’ now, Frank,” he continued, “if you’ll lend me that ar’ hoss, I’ll show you that all the huntin’ in the world aint larnt in that leetle patch of timber around Lawrence.”

Frank at once dismounted, and Dick, after securing his rifle, sprang into the saddle, saying:

“Come along easy-like, youngsters, an’ when I tell you, you get off an’ hide behind your hoss.”

Frank mounted Sleepy Sam behind Archie, and they followed the trapper, who led the way at an easy gallop. Useless, at his master’s command, remained with the wagon. They rode for a mile at a steady pace, and then, seeing that the game had discovered them, the boys, at a signal from the trapper, stopped and dismounted, while Dick kept on alone, his every movement closely watched by Frank and Archie, who, having often read of the skill required in hunting antelopes, were anxious to see how it was done. The trapper rode on for about half a mile further, and then the boys saw him dismount, unbuckle the bridle, and hobble his horse so that he would not stray away. He then threw himself on his hands and knees, and disappeared. A quarter of an hour afterward the boys saw his ’coon-skin cap waving above the grass. If this was intended to attract the attention of the game, it did not meet with immediate success, for the antelopes continued to feed leisurely up the swell, and finally some of their number disappeared behind it. The boys regarded this as conclusive evidence that the trapper’s plan had failed; but at length one of the antelopes, which stood a little apart from the others,

and appeared to be acting as sentinel, uttered a loud snort, which instantly brought every member of the herd to his side. They remained huddled together for several moments, as if in consultation, and then began to move slowly down the swell toward the place where the trapper was concealed. There were about twenty animals in the herd, and they came on in single file, stopping now and then to snuff the air and examine the object that had excited their curiosity. But nothing suspicious was to be seen, for the trapper was concealed in the grass, the only thing visible being his cap, which he gently waved to and fro as he watched the movements of the game. The antelopes advanced slowly – much *too* slowly for the impatient boys, who, concealed behind their horse, closely watched all their movements, fearful that they might detect the presence of the trapper, and seek safety in flight. But the latter well understood the matter in hand, and presently the boys saw a puff of smoke rise from the grass, and the nearest of the antelopes, springing into the air, fell dead in his tracks. The others turned and fled with the speed of the wind.

In an instant Frank and Archie had mounted, and when they reached the place where the trapper was standing, he had secured his prize, which was one of the most graceful animals the boys had ever seen. It was about three and a half feet high at the shoulders, and, although Dick pronounced it very fat, its body was slender and its limbs small and muscular. After having examined the animal to their satisfaction, they all mounted their horses, Dick carrying the game before him on his saddle; and as they rode toward the wagon, Archie exclaimed:

“Now, Frank, we know how to hunt antelopes. It isn’t so very hard, after all.”

“Isn’t it?” inquired the trapper, with a laugh. “You don’t understand the nature of the critters, when you say that. I know I killed this one easy, but a feller can’t allers do it. Howsomever, you can try your hand the next time we meet any, an’ if you do shoot one, I’ll allers call you my ‘antelope killers.’ Them red handkerchiefs of your’n would be jest the things to use, ’cause the critters can see it a long way. If you can bring one of ’em into camp, it will be something wuth braggin’ on.”

It was evident that the trapper did not entertain a very exalted opinion of the boys’ “hunting qualities;” but that did not convince them that they could not shoot an antelope. On the contrary, it made them all the more anxious for an opportunity to try their skill on the game, if for no other reason than to show the trapper that he was mistaken.

Half an hour’s riding brought them to the wagon, which was standing where they had left it, and, after the buck had been skinned and cleaned, the trapper mounted to his seat and drove after the train, followed by the boys, who strained their eyes in every direction in the hope of discovering another herd of antelopes. But nothing in the shape of a prong-horn was to be seen; and when the train resumed its journey after its noon halt, they gradually fell back until the wagons were out of sight behind the hills. Then, leaving the road, they galloped over the prairie until they reached the top of a high swell, when they stopped to look about them. About two miles to the left was the train slowly winding among the hills; but the most faithful use of their glass failed to reveal the wished-for game. All that afternoon they scoured the prairie on both sides of the wagons, and when it began to grow dark, they reluctantly turned their faces toward the camp.

“What did I tell you?” asked the trapper, as the boys rode up to the wagon, where the latter was unharnessing the mules. “I said you couldn’t shoot a prong-horn.”

“Of course we couldn’t,” answered Archie, “for we didn’t see any to shoot.”

“I know that,” replied the trapper with a grin; “but *I* seed plenty. The next time you go a huntin’ prong-horns, be sartin that the wind blows from them t’wards you, an’ not from you t’wards them. They’ve got sharp noses, them critters have.”

The boys were astonished. They had not thought of that; and Archie was compelled to acknowledge that “there was something in knowing how, after all.”

CHAPTER IV

The Best Trapper on the Prairie

THAT night the train encamped a short distance from one of the stations of the Overland Stage Company. The trapper, as usual, after taking care of his mules, superintended the preparations for supper, while the boys, wearied with their day's ride, threw themselves on the grass near the wagon, and watched his movements with a hungry eye. Uncle James, as he had done almost every night since leaving St. Joseph, walked about the camp playing with the children, who began to regard him as an old acquaintance. Presently the attention of the boys was attracted by the approach of a stranger, whose long beard and thin hair – both as white as snow – bore evidence to the fact that he carried the burden of many years on his shoulders.

He was dressed in a complete suit of buckskin, which, although well worn, was nevertheless very neat, and, in spite of his years, his step was firm, and he walked as erect as an Indian. He carried a long heavy rifle on his shoulder, and from his belt peeped the head of a small hatchet of peculiar shape, and the buck-horn handle of a hunting-knife. He walked slowly through the camp, and when he came opposite the boys, Dick suddenly sprang from the ground where he had been seated, watching some steaks that were broiling on the coals, and, striding up to the stranger, laid his hand on his shoulder. The latter turned, and, after regarding him sharply for a moment, thrust out his hand, which the trapper seized and wrung in silence. For an instant they stood looking at each other without speaking, and then Dick took the old man by the arm and led him up to the fire, exclaiming:

“Bob Kelly, the oldest an' best trapper on the prairie!”

The boys arose as he approached, and regarded him with curiosity. They had heard their guide speak in the highest terms of “ole Bob Kelly,” and had often wished to see the trapper whom Dick was willing to acknowledge as his superior. There he was – a mild, good-natured-looking old man, the exact opposite of what they had imagined him to be.

“Them are city chaps, Bob” – continued the trapper, as the old man, after gazing at the boys for a moment, seated himself on the ground beside the fire – “an' I'm takin' 'em out to Californy. In course they are green consarnin' prairie life, but they are made of good stuff, an' are 'bout the keerlessest youngsters you ever see. What a doin' here, Bob?”

“Jest lookin' round,” was the answer. “I'm mighty glad to meet you ag'in, 'cause it looks nat'ral to see you 'bout. Things aint as they used to be. Me an' you are 'bout the oldest trappers agoin' now. The boys have gone one arter the other, an' thar's only me an' you left that I knows on.”

“What's come on Jack Thomas?” asked Dick.

“We're both without our chums now,” answered the old man, sorrowfully. “Jack an' ole Bill Lawson are both gone, an' their scalps are in a Comanche wigwam.”

The trapper made no reply, but went on with his preparations for supper in silence, and the boys could see that he was considerably affected by the news he had just heard. His every movement was closely watched by his companion, who seemed delighted to meet his old acquaintance once more, and acted as though he did not wish to allow him out of his sight. There was evidently a good deal of honest affection between these two men. It did not take the form of words, but would have showed itself had one or the other of them been in danger. They did not speak again until Mr. Winters came up, when Dick again introduced his friend as the “oldest an' best trapper agoin'.” Uncle James, who understood the customs of the trappers, simply bowed – a greeting which the old man returned with one short, searching glance, as if he meant to read his very thoughts.

“Now, then!” exclaimed Dick, “Grub's ready. Pitch in, Bob.”

The old trapper was not in the habit of standing upon ceremony, and, drawing his huge knife from his belt, he helped himself to a generous piece of the meat, and, declining the corn-bread and

the cup of coffee which the boys passed over to him, made his meal entirely of venison. After supper – there were but few dishes to wash now, for the boys had learned to go on the principle that “fingers were made before forks” – the trapper hung what remained of the venison in the wagon, lighted his pipe, and stretched himself on the ground beside his companion.

The boys, knowing that the trappers would be certain to talk over the events that had transpired since their last meeting, spread their blankets where they could hear all that passed, and waited impatiently for them to begin; while Mr. Winters, who had by this time become acquainted with every man, woman, and child, in the train, started to pay a visit to the occupants of a neighboring wagon.

For some moments the two men smoked in silence, old Bob evidently occupied with his own thoughts, and Dick patiently waiting for him to speak. At length the old man asked:

“Goin’ to Californy, Dick?”

The trapper replied in the affirmative.

“What a goin’ to do arterward?”

“I’m a goin’ to take to the mountains, an’ stay thar,” replied Dick. “I’ve seed the inside of a city, Bob; have rid on steam railroads an’ boats as big as one of the Black Hills; an’ now I’m satisfied to stay here. I’d a heap sooner face a grizzly or a Injun than go back thar ag’in, ’cause I didn’t feel to hum.”

“Wal, I’m all alone now, Dick,” said the old man, “an’ so are you. Our chums are gone, an’ we both want to settle with them Comanche varmints; so, let’s stick together.”

Dick seemed delighted with this proposition, for he quickly arose from his blanket and extended his hand to his companion, who shook it heartily; and the boys read in their faces a determination to stand by each other to the last.

“I’ve got a chum now, youngsters,” said Dick, turning to the boys; “an’ one that I aint afraid to trust anywhar. Thar’s nothin’ like havin’ a friend, even on the prairy. I come with the boys,” he added, addressing his companion, who, seeing the interest Dick took in his “youngsters,” slowly surveyed them from head to foot – “I come with ’em jest to show ’em how we do things on the prairy. They can shoot consid’ble sharp, an’ aint afraid. All it wants is the hard knocks – fightin’ Injuns an’ grizzlies, an’ starvin’ on the prairy, an’ freezin’ in the mountains, to make trappers of ’em.” And here Dick settled back on his elbow, and proceeded to give the old man a short account of what had transpired at Uncle Joe’s cabin; described Frank’s fight with the moose and panther in glowing language; told how the capture of the cubs had been effected, until old Bob began to be interested; and when Dick finished his story, he said:

“The youngsters would make good trappers.”

This, as the trapper afterward told the boys, was a compliment old Bob seldom paid to any one, “for,” said he, “I’ve knowed him a long time, an’ have been in many a fight with him, an’ he never told me I was good or bad.”

“Wal,” said Dick, again turning to his companion, “You said as how Jack Thomas was rubbed out. How did it happen?”

Old Bob refilled his pipe, smoked a few moments as if to bring the story fresh to his memory, and then answered:

“When I heered that Bill Lawson war gone, an’ that you war left alone, I done my best to find you, an’ get you to jine a small party we war makin’ up to visit our ole huntin’ grounds on the Saskatchewan; but you had tuk to the mountains, and nobody didn’t know whar to go to find you. Thar war eight of us in the party, an’ here, you see, are all that are left. As nigh as I can ’member, it war ’bout four year ago come spring that we sot out from the fort, whar we had sold our furs. We had three pack mules, plenty of powder, ball, an’ sich like, an’ we started in high sperits, tellin’ the trader that bought our spelter that we’d have a fine lot fur him ag’in next meetin’ time. We knowed thar war plenty of Injuns an’ sich varmints to be fit an’ killed afore we come back, but that didn’t trouble us none, ’cause we all knowed our own bisness, and didn’t think but that we would come through all right, jest as we had done a hundred times afore. We didn’t intend to stop afore we got to the Saskatchewan;

so we traveled purty fast, an' in 'bout three weeks found ourselves in the Blackfoot country, nigh the Missouri River. One night we camped on a leetle stream at the foot of the mountains, an' the next mornin', jest as we war gettin' ready to start out ag'in, Jack Thomas – who, like a youngster turned loose from school, war allers runnin' round, pokin' his nose into whatever war goin' on – came gallopin' into camp, shouting:

“Buffaler! buffaler!”

“In course, we all knowed what that meant, an' as we hadn't tasted buffaler hump since leavin' the fort, we saddled up in a hurry an' put arter the game. We went along kinder easy-like – Jack leadin' the way – until we come to the top of a swell, an' thar they war – nothin' but buffaler as fur as a feller could see. It war a purty sight, an' more'n one of us made up our minds that we would have a good supper that night. We couldn't get no nigher to 'em without bein' diskivered, so we scattered and galloped arter 'em. In course, the minit we showed ourselves they put off like the wind; but we war in easy shootin' distance, an' afore we got through with 'em, I had knocked over four big fellers an' wounded another. He war hurt so bad he couldn't run; but I didn't like to go up too clost to him, so I rid off a leetle way, an' war loadin' up my rifle to give him a settler, when I heered a noise that made me prick up my ears an' look sharp. I heered a trampin, an' I knowed it war made by something 'sides a buffaler. Now, youngsters, a greenhorn wouldn't a seed any thing strange in that; but when I heered it, I didn't stop to kill the wounded buffaler, but turned my hoss an' made tracks. I hadn't gone more'n twenty rod afore I seed four Blackfoot Injuns comin' over a swell 'bout half a mile back. I had kept my eyes open – as I allers do – but I hadn't seen a bit of Injun sign on the prairy, an' I made up my mind to onct that them Blackfoot varmints had been shyin' round arter the same buffaler we had jest been chasin', an' that they didn't know we war 'bout till they heered us shoot. Then, in course, they put arter us, 'cause they think a heap more of scalps than they do of buffaler meat.

“Wal, as I war sayin', I made tracks sudden; but they warn't long in diskiverin' me, an' they sot up a yell. I've heered that same yell often, an' I have kinder got used to it; but I would have give my hoss, an' this rifle, too, that I have carried for goin' nigh onto twenty year, if I had been safe in Fort Laramie, 'cause I didn't think them four Injuns war alone. I war sartin they had friends not a great way off, an' somehow I a'most knowed how the hul thing was comin' out. I didn't hardly know which way to go to find our fellers, 'cause while we were arter the buffaler we had got scattered a good deal; but jest as I come to the top of a swell I seed 'em a comin'. Jack Thomas war ahead, an' he war swingin' his rifle an yellin' wusser nor any Injun. I'll allow, Dick, that it made me feel a heap easier when I seed them trappers. Jack, who allers knowed what war goin' on in the country fur five miles round, had first diskivered the Injuns, an' had got all the party together 'cept me, an' in course they couldn't think of savin' their own venison by runnin' off and leavin' me.

“Wal, jest as soon as we got together we sot up a yell and faced 'bout. The Injuns, up to this time, had rid clost together; but when they seed that we warn't goin' to run no further jest then, they scattered as if they war goin' to surround us; an' then we all knowed that them four Injuns warn't alone. So, without stoppin' to fight 'em, we turned an' run ag'in, makin' tracks for the woods at the foot of the mountains. An' we warn't a minit too soon, fur all of a sudden we heered a yell, an' lookin' back we seed 'bout fifty more red-skins comin' arter us like mad. They had a'most got us surrounded; but the way to the mountains war open, an' we run fur our lives. The varlets that had followed me war in good pluggin' distance, an' when we turned in our saddles an' drawed a bead on 'em, we had four less to deal with. It warn't more 'n ten mile to the foot of them mountains, but it seemed a hundred to us, an' we all drawed a long breath when we found ourselves under kiver of the woods. The minit we reached the timber we jumped off our hosses, hitched them to the trees, an' made up our minds to fight it out thar an' then. We knowed, as well as we wanted to know, what the Injuns would do next – they would leave a party on the prairy to watch us, an' the rest would go sneakin' round through the woods an' pick us off one at a time. The only thing we could do – leastwise till it come dark – war to watch the varlets, an' drop every one of 'em that showed his painted face in pluggin' distance. We

war in a tight place. Our pack mules, an' a'most all our kit, had been left in the camp, an' we knowed it wouldn't be long afore the Injuns would have 'em, an' even if we got off with our bar, we wouldn't be much better off – no traps, no grub, an' skeercely half a dozen bullets in our pouches.

“Wal, the Injuns, when they seed that we had tuk to the timber, stopped, takin' mighty good keer, as they thought, to keep out of range of our rifles, an' began to hold a palaver, now an' then lookin' t'wards us an' settin' up a yell, which told us plain enough that they thought they had us ketched. But we, knowin' to an inch how fur our shootin' irons would carry, drew up an' blazed away; an' we knowed, by the way them red-skins got back over that swell, that we hadn't throwed our lead away. They left one feller thar to watch us, howsomever, but he tuk mighty good keer to keep purty well out of sight, showin' only 'bout two inches of his head 'bove the top of the hill. While the Injuns war holdin' their council, we had a talk 'bout what we had better do. The truth war, thar war only one thing we could do, an' that war to stay thar until dark an' then take our chances. We had all fit savage Injuns enough to know that they wouldn't bother us much so long as daylight lasted; but arter that, if we didn't get away from thar, our lives war not worth a charge of powder. We soon made up our minds what we would do. We divided ourselves into two parties – four of us watchin' the prairy, an' the others keepin' an eye on the woods, to see that the varlets didn't slip up behind us.

“Wal, we didn't see nothin' out of the way all that day. Thar war that feller peepin' over the hill, an' that war the only thing in the shape of a red-skin we could see; an' we didn't hear nothin' neither, fur whatever they done, they didn't make noise enough to skeer a painter. At last it come night, an' it war 'bout the darkest night I ever see – no moon, no stars – an' then we began to prick up our ears. We all knowed that the time had come. You can easy tell what we war passin' through our minds. Thar warn't no sich thing as a coward among us eight fellers, but men in sich a scrape as that can't help thinkin', an' I knowed that every one thar drew a long breath when he thought of what he had got to do. I tell you, Dick, it war something none of us liked to do – leave one another in that way – men that you have hunted, an' trapped, an' fought Injuns with, an' mebbe slept under the same blanket with, an' who have stuck to you through thick an' thin – sich fellers, I say, you don't like to desart when they're in danger. But what else could we do? We war a'most out of powder an' lead, an' the Injuns war more'n six to our one. You have been in sich scrapes, an' in course know that thar warn't but one way open to us.

“Wal, as I was sayin', as soon as it come fairly dark, the boys gathered 'round me, an' waited to hear what I war goin' to do. In course, I couldn't advise 'em, 'cause it war every feller look out fur himself, an' the best men war them as was lucky enough to get away. So I said:

“I'm goin' to start now, boys. It's high time we war movin', cause if we stay here half an hour longer, we'll have them red-skins down on us in a lump. Thar's somethin' goin' on, sartin. They don't keep so still fur nothin'.”

“Wal, we whispered the matter over, an' finally settled it. The oldest man war to go fust; the next oldest, second; an' so on; an' that them as got away should draw a bee-line fur Fort Laramie, an' get thar to onct, so that we might know who got off an' who didn't. We didn't think we should all get away. Some war sartin to go under; an', Dick, we didn't forget to promise each other that those of us that lived would never let a red Injun cross our trail. When every thing was settled, I, bein' the oldest man in the comp'ny, began to get ready fur the start. I put fresh primin' in my rifle; seed that my knife and tomahawk war all right; then, arter shakin' hands with all the boys, an' wishin' 'em good luck, I crawled away on my hands an' knees. I didn't go back into the woods, but tuk to the edge of the prairy, an' found the way cl'ar. Not an Injun did I hear. As fur seein', you couldn't a told your mother, if she warn't two foot from you; an' in 'bout half an hour I found myself on the banks of a leetle creek. How long I lay thar, an' how much of that water I drunk, I don't know; but I thought water never tasted so good afore. Then I walked into the creek, an' had waded in it fur 'bout half a mile, when all to onct I heered a yellin' an' whoopin', followed by the crack of rifles, an' then I knowed that I hadn't been fooled consarnin' what the red-skins meant to do. They had got what war

left of our fellers surrounded, an' made the rush. Fur a minit I stood thar in the water an' listened. I heered a few shots made by our poor fellers, 'cause I can tell the crack of a Missouri rifle as fur as I can hear it; an' then one long, loud yell, told me that it war all over.

“Wal, I laid round in them mountains fur more'n six weeks, starvin' fur grub an' water, an' listenin' to the yellin' varlets that war huntin' arter me; but I got back safe at last, arter walkin' all the way from the Rocky Mountains to the fort, an' thar I found Jack Thomas. Me an' him war the only ones that got out. When the Injuns got them six fellers, they rubbed out nearly the last one of our comp'ny. Me an' Jack war mighty down-hearted 'bout it, an' it war a long time afore we could b'lieve that we war left alone. We didn't feel then like ever goin' back to the mountains ag'in, 'cause we knowed it would be lonesome thar. In course, we could easy have made up another expedition, fur thar war plenty of hunters an' trappers – good ones, too – hangin' round the fort; but somehow we didn't feel like goin' off with any one outside of our own comp'ny.

“Wal, me an' Jack laid round as long as we could stand it, an' then we got a couple of hosses, another new kit, an' sot off ag'in. We didn't think it safe fur only two of us to try the Blackfoot country ag'in, so we struck for the huntin' grounds on the Colorado. At that time thar war plenty of beaver in that river; so it didn't take us long to find a place that suited us; an' we settled down, comfortable-like, to spend the winter. Fur three months we had plenty of sport, an' the sight of our pile of furs, growin' bigger an' bigger every day, made us happy an' contented. One mornin' we sot out bright an' 'arly, as usual, to 'tend to our bisness, takin' different directions – fur my traps war sot on the side of the mountain, an' Jack had sot his'ne on the banks of the creek that run through the valley. I had been gone frum him but a short time, when I heered the crack of his rifle. Somehow, I knowed it war somethin' 'sides a varmint he had shot at; an' I warn't fooled neither, for a minit arterward I heered another gun, an' then afore I could think twice a Comanche yell come echoin' from the valley, tellin' me plainer nor words that my chum war gone. An Injun had watched one of his traps, an' shot him as he come to it. I knowed it as sartin as if I had seed the hul thing done.

“Wal, I warn't in a fix kalkerlated to make a feller feel very pleasant. I war three hundred miles from the nighest fort, in the very heart of the Comanche country, an' in the dead of winter, with the snow two foot deep on a level. But I didn't stop to think of them things then. My bisness war to get away from thar to onct. In course, I couldn't go back arter my hoss or spelter, fur I didn't know how many Injuns thar war in the valley, nor whar they had hid themselves; so I shouldered my rifle an' sot off on foot t'wards the prairy. A storm that come up that night – an' it snowed an' blowed in a way that warn't a funny thing to look at – kivered up my trail; an' if I war ever follered, I don't know it.

“I finally reached the fort, an' I've been thar ever since. I'm an ole chap now, Dick; but when I hunted an' trapped with your ole man, when me an' him warn't bigger nor them two youngsters, an' hadn't hardly strength enough to shoulder a rifle, I never thought that I should live to be the last of our comp'ny. In them days the prairy war different from what it is now. It war afore the hoss-thieves an' rascals began to come in here to get away from the laws of the States; an' them that called themselves trappers then war honest men, that never did harm to a lone person on the prairy. But they've gone, one arter the other, an' only me an' you are left.”

As the old trapper ceased speaking, he arose suddenly to his feet and disappeared in the darkness, leaving Dick gazing thoughtfully into the fire. It was an hour before he returned, mounted on his horse, which he picketed with the others. He then silently rolled himself up in his blanket and went to sleep.

CHAPTER V

A Fight with the Indians

WHEN setting out the next morning, Frank noticed that the wagons, instead of starting off singly, and straggling, as they had formerly done, kept close together, and traveled more rapidly. The trapper, too, instead of taking the lead, and getting in advance of the train, seemed satisfied to remain with the others. Upon inquiring the reason for this, Dick replied:

“You may find out afore night, youngster, that we are in a bad bit of Injun country. The train that went out afore us had a scrimmage here with nigh five hundred of the red-skins, who stampeded some of their stock. So keep your eyes open, an’ if you see a Injun, let me know to onct.” The trapper said this with a broad grin, that was meant to imply that if they were attacked, the Indians would make their appearance before a person so inexperienced as Frank could be aware of it.

“The red-skins don’t gener’lly keer ’bout an out-an-out fight,” continued the trapper, “cause they don’t like these long rifles, an’ they know that these yere pioneers shoot mighty sharp. All the Injuns want – or all they can get – is the stock; an’ they sometimes jump on to a train afore a feller knows it, an’ yell an’ kick up a big fuss, which frightens the cattle. That’s what we call stampedin’ ’em. An’, youngster, do you see that ’ar?”

As the trapper spoke, he pointed out over the prairie towards a little hill about two miles distant. After gazing for a few moments in the direction indicated, Archie replied:

“I see something that looks like a weed or a tuft of grass.”

“Wal, that’s no weed,” said the trapper, with a laugh, “nor grass, neither. If it is, it’s on hossback, an’ carries a shootin’-iron or a bow an’ arrer. That’s a Injun, or I never seed one afore. What do you say, Bob?” he asked, turning to the old trapper, who at this moment came up.

“I seed that five minutes ago,” was the reply, “an’ in course it can’t be nothin’ but a red-skin.”

The boys gazed long and earnestly at the object, but their eyes were not as sharp as those of the trappers, for they could not discover that it bore any resemblance to an Indian, until Mr. Winters handed them his field-glass through which he had been regarding the object ever since its discovery. Then they found that the trappers had not been deceived. It was a solitary Indian, who sat on his horse as motionless as a statue, no doubt watching the train, and endeavoring to satisfy himself of the number of men there might be to defend it. In his hand he carried something that looked like a spear adorned with a tuft of feathers.

“I wish the varlet was in good pluggin’ distance,” said Dick, patting his rifle which lay across his knees. “If I could only get a bead on him, he would never carry back to his fellers the news of what he has seed.”

“Do you suppose there are more of them?” asked Archie, in a voice that would tremble in spite of himself.

“Sartin,” replied old Bob Kelly, who still rode beside the wagon; “thar’s more of ’em not fur off. This feller is a kind o’ spy like, an’ when he has seen exactly how things stand, he’ll go back an’ tell the rest of ’em, an’ the fust thing we know, they’ll be down on us like a hawk on a June-bug. But they’ll ketch a weasel, *they* will, when they pitch into us. Dick, when they do come, don’t forget Bill Lawson.”

The trapper turned his head, for a moment, as if to hide the emotion he felt, at the mention of the name of his departed companion, but presently replied:

“This aint the fust time that you an’ me have been in jest sich scrapes, Bob, an’ it aint likely that we’ll soon forget that we owe the varlets a long settlement. Thar aint as many of us now as thar used to be; more’n one good trapper has had his har raised by them same red-skins – fur I know a Cheyenne as fur as I kin see him, youngsters – an’ mebbe one o’ these days, when some one asks, ‘What’s come on ole Bob Kelly an’ Dick Lewis?’ the answer will be, ‘Killed by the Injuns!’”

It may be readily supposed that such conversation as this was not calculated to quiet the feelings of Frank and Archie – who had been considerably agitated by the information that there was a body of hostile Indians at no great distance – and to their excited imaginations the danger appeared tenfold worse than it really was. At that day, as the trapper had remarked, it was a very uncommon occurrence for a large train to be engaged in a regular fight with the Indians, for the latter had learned to their cost that the pioneers were always well armed, and that there were some among them who understood Indian fighting. They generally contented themselves with sudden and rapid raids upon the stock of the emigrants, and they seldom departed empty-handed. But it is not to be wondered that the trappers, who had participated in numberless engagements with the savages, and witnessed deeds of cruelty that had awakened in them a desire for vengeance, should delight to talk over their experience. The boys, although considerably frightened, were still greatly encouraged by their example. Dick twisted uneasily on his seat, as though impatient for the fight to begin, now and then looking toward the spy, as if he had half a mind to venture a shot at him; while old Bob Kelly rode along, smoking his pipe, apparently as unconcerned as though there was not a hostile Indian within a hundred miles of them. Mr. Winters evidently partook of the old man's indifference, for, after satisfying himself that his weapons were in readiness, he drew back beside his nephews, and said, with a smile:

“Well, boys, you may have an opportunity to try your skill on big game now. This will be a little different from the fight you had in the woods with those Indians who stole your traps. Then you had the force on your side; now the savages are the stronger party. But there's no danger,” he added, quickly seeing that the boys looked rather anxious; “every man in the train is a good shot, and the most of them have been in Indian fights before. I don't believe all the red-skins on the prairie could whip us while we have Dick and Bob with us.”

The boys themselves had great confidence in the trappers – especially Dick, who, they knew, would never desert them. But even *he* had several times been worsted by the Indians. Frank thought of the story of the lost wagon train. But then he remembered that the reason that train was captured, was because the emigrants had not “stood up to the mark like men.”

All this while the train had been moving ahead at a rapid pace, and many an anxious eye was directed toward the solitary Indian, who remained standing where he was first discovered until the wagons had passed, when he suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. All that day the emigrants rode with their weapons in their hands, in readiness to repel an attack; and when they halted at noon, guards were posted about the camp, and the cattle were kept close to the wagons. But, although now and then a single Indian would be seen upon one of the distant swells, the main body kept out of sight; and the boys began to hope that the train was considered too large to be successfully attacked. At night old Bob Kelly selected the place for the encampment, which was made according to his directions. The wagons were drawn up in a circle to form a breastwork, and the cattle were picketed close by under the protection of a strong guard. Fires were built, and preparations for supper carried on as usual, for, of course, all attempts at concealment would have been time and labor thrown away. As soon as it began to grow dark, the cattle were secured to the wagons by long stout ropes, which, while they allowed the animals to graze, effectually prevented escape. Then guards were selected, and the emigrants made every preparation to give the savages a warm reception, in case they should make a dash upon the camp. No one thought of his blanket. The idea of going to sleep while a band of Indians was hovering about, watching their opportunity to pounce down upon them, was out of the question. The two trappers, after satisfying themselves that every thing was in readiness for an attack, began to station the guards. Frank again thought of the story Dick had related of the lost wagon train, and, desiring to witness an exhibition of the skill that had enabled him to detect the presence of the Indians on that occasion, proposed to Archie that they should stand guard with him. The latter, who always felt safe when in the company of their guide, agreed; and when the trapper started off with the guards, he was surprised to find the boys at his side.

“Whar are you goin'?” he asked.

“We want to stand guard with you!” replied Frank.

“Wal, I never *did* see sich keerless fellers as you be,” said the trapper. “You get wusser an’ wusser. Much you don’t know about this bisness. I guess you had better stay here whar you’re safe.”

“Wal, wal!” said old Bob Kelly, who was not a little astonished at the request the boys had made, “they’ve got the real grit in ’em, that’s a fact, if they are green as punkins in Injun fightin’. A few year on the prairy would make ’em as good as me or you, Dick Lewis. But you’ll get enough of Injuns afore you see daylight ag’in, youngsters. So you had better stay here.”

So saying he shouldered his rifle, and, followed by the guards, disappeared in the darkness. The boys reluctantly returned to their wagon, where they found Uncle James, seated on the ground, whistling softly to himself, and apparently indifferent as to the course the Indians might see fit to adopt. But still he had not neglected to make preparations to receive them, for his rifle stood leaning against one of the wheels of the wagon, and he carried his revolvers in his belt. The boys silently seated themselves on the ground beside him, and awaited the issue of events with their feelings worked up to the highest pitch of excitement. The fires had burned low, but still there was light sufficient to enable them to discover the emigrants stretched on the ground about the wagons, talking to one another in whispers, as if almost afraid to break the stillness that brooded over the camp, and which was interrupted only by the barking of the prairie wolves, and the neighing and tramping of the horses. Two hours were passed in this way, when suddenly the sharp report of a rifle, accompanied by a terrific yell, rang out on the air, causing the emigrants to grasp their weapons and spring to their feet in alarm. For an instant all was silent again. The stillness was so deep that Frank thought the camp was suddenly deserted. Then a long drawn out whoop arose from the prairie, followed by a chorus of yells that struck terror to more than one heart in that wagon train. Then came a clatter of horses’ hoofs; the yells grew louder and louder; and the boys knew that the Indians were coming toward them. The emigrants rushed to the wagons, and the next moment the savages swept by. The boys saw a confused mass of rapidly-moving horsemen; heard the most terrific yells, the report of fire-arms, and the struggles of the frightened cattle as they attempted to escape, and then all was over. The Indians departed as rapidly as they had come, and the boys, bewildered by the noise, had not fired a shot. On the contrary, they stood holding their rifles in their hands, as if they had suddenly forgotten how to use them. Uncle James, however, was not confused. He had heard the war-whoop before, and as he came out from behind the wagon, he began to reload one of his revolvers, remarking as he did so:

“There are some less in that band, I know.”

“Did you shoot?” asked Archie, drawing a long breath of relief to know that the danger was past. “Why, I didn’t have time to fire a shot.”

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