

FICTION

Edward Sylvester Ellis

Blazing Arrow

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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WAR CHIEF SERIES, No. 2.

BLAZING ARROW,

A TALE OF THE FRONTIER

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

AUTHOR OF "BOY PIONEER SERIES," "DEERFOOT SERIES,"
"LOG CABIN SERIES," ETC., ETC.

PHILADELPHIA

HENRY T. COATES & CO.

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OVER THE FALLS.

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BLAZING ARROW

A TALE OF THE FRONTIER.

CHAPTER I.

LARRY AND WHARTON.

"I'll follow him to the right, and you, Larry, go to the left; we'll have him then, sure."

"All right; it's mesilf that will bate ye, fur all ye're the swiftest runner in Kintucky."

"There isn't a minute to lose; move faster, Larry!"

"Do you attind to your own business, and lave Larry Murphy to himsilf."

The words were uttered quickly, for the two youths were eager and excited. They had caught sight of an enormous bear a few minutes before, as he lumbered into the canebrake in the direction of the torrent which swept furiously toward the Ohio. The young Irishman happened to be a few paces in advance of his companion, Wharton Edwards, and took a flying shot at the brute. Whether he struck him or not was uncertain. The probabilities were that, despite his skill with the rifle, he only scratched his bulky body, or missed him altogether. Before Wharton could bring his weapon to bear, bruin was beyond reach for the time.

It was at this juncture that the fleet-footed youth bounded to the side of his Irish friend and urged him to hurry to the left, while he circled in the other direction. One of them must head off the game, and it mattered little which did it provided it was done.

Larry Murphy was as ardent in his pursuit as his comrade, and was hopeful of getting the prize away from him. Pausing, therefore, only long enough to exchange the words quoted, he was off like a deer.

"That young man houlds a high opinion of himsilf," he muttered, as he crashed forward, "and I've saan worse fellys than Whart Edwards. He can bate all creation running, but I'm hoping that he may thrip his feet so as to give mesilf a show----"

It was poetical justice, perhaps, that the fate which the young Irishman wished might overtake his friend claimed him for his own, for, while the words were in his mouth, a wire-like vine on the ground did the mischief. It wound round his ankle like an angry black snake, and he sprawled forward on his hands and knees, his gun flying several feet from his hands.

"Bad luck to it!" he growled, climbing to his feet; "that's just the sthyle I used to thrip up the spalpeens. I'm onsartin whether me neck is broke off or not, but I'll have to lave it to find out till this little job is over."

The fall was so violent that he limped for a few paces, and his speed was lessened; but the stream was not far off, and the rugged lad was quick to rally from his discomfiture.

"Begorra, but I've got the laugh on Whart," he exclaimed, a minute later, as he caught sight of a dark object among the trees; "that shot of mine landed the beast, and knowing that it's mesilf that's entitled to him, he has left Wharton and turned off there to wait for me to finish him."

If this quaint faith were genuine, Larry did not trust it farther than he was compelled to. Instead of waiting till he could draw nearer and secure a truer shot, he stopped abruptly, brought his heavy rifle to a level, sighted quickly but carefully, and let fly.

There was no doubt about his having hit the mark this time. He was a good shot, and the distance was too slight for him to miss. Forgetting the law of the hunter, which requires him to reload his discharged gun before moving from his tracks, Larry lowered his weapon, and driving his broad honest face through the wreath of smoke before it could lift from the muzzle of his rifle, he dashed forward toward the game to which he was sure he had just given the finishing touch.

In his excitement, and with his partly obscured view, he did not observe that the bear remained immovable. If he had noticed it, he would have concluded that the beast had been mortally wounded by the first shot and had collapsed while on the way to the stream of water.

"Now Whart will be filled wid jilousy whin he finds that the bear surrindereed to me. Had it been him that come in sight of the beast he wouldn't have stopped, but obsarving that it was mesilf, he threw up his hands and----"

Larry paused in dismay. Crashing through the brush, he stopped close to his supposed prize, and found that, instead of its being the game he had in mind, it was the lower portion of an immense tree that had probably lain for years on the

ground. It bore some resemblance to a prostrate animal, but the youthful hunter never could have made the mistake except for his flurried condition.

"Wurrah, wurrah, now, but that was a bad miss," he muttered, grinning at his own blunder. "I don't see any necessity for acquainting Whart wid all the sarcumstances, but if the stump doesn't say anything about it, I'll hold me pace."

The slip took away from the youth about all the hope he had felt until then of bagging the bear. He knew at the time that young Edwards gave him the better chance, for it was just like the magnanimous fellow to do that thing, and Larry had lost it through his own stupidity.

He listened for a few moments, uncertain which way to move or turn. There seemed little use in trying to regain his lost opportunities, but the doughty fellow mortally hated to give up the peculiar contest without another effort.

He could hear the dull roar of the torrent as it poured over the falls only a short way off, and he fancied once that he detected the rush of some swiftly-moving body through the wood. Of this, however, he could not be certain, because of the interfering noise of the stream.

"Whist, now, but I forgot the same!" he suddenly added, as he recalled that it was an empty weapon which he held in his hand.

"S'pose now that that cratur should turn 'round to make my acquaintance; I would have to ask him to have the kindness to wait awhile until I could get the gun in shape, and he would be mane 'nough to objict."

Despite Larry's fondness for talking, either with a companion or himself, and despite the apparent absurdity of many things he said, he wasted no time when it was of value, and he committed few errors of judgment.

The proper amount of powder was poured from the unstopped horn into the palm of his hand and sent rattling down the inclined barrel of his heavy gun. Then a bullet, clasped in a small square of oiled cloth, was rammed tightly upon the charge; the yellow flint was drawn back and the pan filled with the black grains; then the hammer was carefully lowered, and the old-fashioned weapon was ready for use.

At that moment the report of a rifle broke the stillness, and the startled Larry, glancing around, exclaimed in a guarded undertone:

"I b'leave Whart is in trouble."

CHAPTER II.

ON THE BRINK.

Meanwhile young Edwards found himself a stirring actor in a stirring series of events.

He set out with all the ardor of a young hunter to bring down the bear, which was the most enormous one he had ever seen in the Kentucky wilds. His fondness for his jovial companion led him to give him what seemed to be the best chance to secure him; and it may be said that, had the situations of the youths been reversed, bruin would have quickly fallen a victim to the prowess of the young Kentuckian. But fate made a turn of the wheel of fortune of which neither dreamed.

Wharton Edwards possessed wonderful fleetness of foot, and counted on no trouble in running down the lumbering beast; but when he struck the point where he ought to have been visible, he was not in sight.

The acute hearing of the youth, however, told him where the bear was plunging through the undergrowth. It was in the direction of the stream, and fearful that he would escape him altogether, Wharton took up the pursuit with all the energy at his command.

The momentary pause had given the bear an advantage which he used with a sagacity worthy of a more intelligent creature than he. Without turning to the right or left, he swung ponderously along until he reached the edge of the torrent, into which he tumbled like a rock falling down the side of a mountain.

"I've got you now!" was the exultant exclamation of the youth, who reached the point where bruin had disappeared within ten seconds afterwards.

An exasperating state of affairs confronted him. The high, rocky bluff on each side of the swift current shut out all view of the water within two or three yards of the side on which the spectator happened to stand. Whether instinct led the bear to adopt the course he did is uncertain, but it is hardly credible, since his species are well known to be stupid; but, be that as it may, this specimen, instead of making for the other bank, kept so near to the one from which he had leaped that young Edwards could not see him. The only way in which he could gain a view of him was by lying down on his face and peering over.

He had no time to do this, besides which, under the circumstances, it was almost impossible to gain a shot at the swimming bear.

The presumption was that he would make for the other bank in quest of some opening by which to leave the water, but Wharton, in his eagerness, was unwilling to count upon that.

"If I were upon the other side," was his thought, as he hurried nervously along the bluff, seeking to keep pace with the rushing current, "I would have him just where I wanted him. But I shall lose him, for there is no way to get across--yes there is, and I'll do it, sure as a gun."

A hundred yards below, and quite near the falls, the bluffs approached each other so closely that he was sure he could leap from one to the other. Thus in a bound he could place himself in the best position to shoot the game against which he began to feel a resentment because of the manner in which it baffled him.

Had young Edwards been more familiar with his immediate surroundings, or less enthusiastic in his pursuit of the prize, he would have hesitated, and, adopting the good old adage, looked before he leaped; but he was carried away by the excitement of the moment, and did that which no one would have been quicker than he, under other circumstances, to condemn.

Running rapidly along the bluff, and parallel with the course of the stream, he reached the narrow portion upon which he had fixed his eye, gave it a glance, and decided that by no great effort he could leap to the corresponding bluff on the opposite side.

And beyond a doubt he would have succeeded had he used only ordinary precaution, but he was in dread lest the bear should escape him. The falls were but a short way below, and though the raging waters were likely to finish him, that of itself would spoil everything. No hunter likes to see another take his game out of his hands, and he viewed such a loss through the falls in the same light. His blood was up, and he meant to secure the animal if it was "in the wood."

Stepping hastily back for a couple of paces, he gathered himself, ran the distance, and, concentrating his strength in the effort, leaped toward the opposite bluff.

The instant he left the ledge he saw to his horror that he was going to fall. A leaper or runner always feels what is coming before the crisis is upon him, and Wharton Edwards knew he had made an awful miscalculation.

With the desperation of despair he flung his rifle from him at the instant of leaping, and when it was too late to withdraw. It landed on the rocks, and the impact of the hammer caused its discharge, the ball, by a singular concurrence of circumstances, passing within a few inches of the owner's face.

It was only for a passing breath that the youth was in the air, but it seemed to him he was held suspended for several minutes over the raging waters. He struck only a few inches short, but those few inches were fatal. His chest and lower part of the body collided violently with the solid wall, and his hands were thrown over the surface on which he had hoped and expected to place his feet.

He clutched fiercely to save himself, and had there been anything to grasp must have succeeded; but there was nothing, and, rebounding fully a foot, he went down into the torrent twenty feet below. As if fate meant to dally with and mock him, he splashed within a few feet of the bear, who, with a snuff of fear, turned away and began a wild effort to swim against the current. The brute had become aware of the roaring falls close at hand, and saw the trap in which he was caught, and from which it was impossible to extricate himself until, as may be said, he was almost on the brink of the falls.

A short distance from the plunge was a gap in the bluff, where the ground was only a few inches above the surface of the water. If the brute should hold himself close to the bank on that side until this favoring point was reached, he could save himself.

And he did, though little credit belonged to him for the feat. Like the stupid creature that he was, he continued furiously striving to swim against the current, and without stemming it in the least; but the same blind instinct kept him clawing at the rocks on the side from which he had leaped, and thus held him in the only position which gave the slightest hope.

All at once the beam-like claws struck the rocky bottom. The water quickly shallowed. By a prodigious effort he checked his swift downward progress--then he secured a foothold--his massive, shaggy body heaved up from the water--he plunged heavily to one side, and, with another mighty putting forth of his strength, walked out upon the solid earth and was safe.

Beyond peradventure, Wharton Edwards would have done equally well had the opportunity been given him to study for a few seconds his perilous surroundings. He would have been quick to see the opening through which his intended prize escaped, and the gorge was so narrow that he could readily have swam across to it in the few moments at his command; but the youth was in a hapless situation.

He landed against the bluff with such violence that the breath was driven from his body, and when he struck the water he was senseless. The rush of the chilling current, as he shot below the surface, partly revived him, and he made an instinctive effort at self-preservation. The blow, however, had been severe, and his brain was in a whirl the next moment, the torrent carrying him with great swiftness toward the falls.

Larry Murphy was closer to the stream than he had supposed, while reloading his rifle. The report of his friend's rifle gave him the necessary guidance, and he dashed over the intervening distance at the top of his speed.

A minute later he peered over the bluff, and, without seeing the bear, which was almost beneath him, saw the head and shoulders of his friend, who had come to the surface a few seconds before.

"Ye blundering spalpeen, that's no place to go in swimming!" called the frightened youth, with no suspicion of the mishap that had occurred.

Undecided what to do, and yet unable to stand idle, Larry ran along the edge of the bluff, and a minute later saw to his amazement the bear emerge and shake his dripping coat. It would have been easy to shoot him down, for there could not have been a fairer target; but the youth had no thought of bagging game in those terrible moments, and he bestowed hardly a glance at the brute.

A second look at young Edwards told him that something was wrong.

"Swim toward me!" shouted Larry, loud enough for his clear voice to be heard above the thunder of the waters.

He had bounded headlong down the sloping bluff, and then off into the open low space, which offered the only hope. It was a high leap, but in his excitement he did not notice it.

"Swim hard, ould felly, or it'll be too late--hivin save me, but he's drowning!"

Wharton's head was dipping below the surface, and his arms had ceased the feeble struggles they made a short time before. The youth was really drowning.

He was now so nearly opposite the opening in the bluff, and so near the plunge of waters, that had he been in the full possession of his senses and strength he could have swam the space, brief as it was, only by the most desperate efforts. In his senseless condition he could not accomplish it, of course, had he been in water as still as a mill pond.

Larry Murphy saw and comprehended all this in the twinkling of an eye. He knew that if he stood where he was it would be to see his loved friend die, and if he plunged in after him both would go over the falls, with possibly one chance in a thousand of their escape.

And did he, while quickly weighing the chances, hesitate?

CHAPTER III.

OVER THE FALLS.

Not for an instant. He had decided on his course while leaping down into the opening which had admitted the imperilled bruin into safety. The moment he landed he flung his gun away, snatched off his hat, doffed his coat, seemingly with the same movement, and leaped with might and main into the terrible current.

The narrow width at this portion caused him to strike within arm's length of his friend. The left arm of the powerful young Irishman griped the collar of the sinking youth, and he gave him a shake fierce enough almost to dislocate his neck.

"Wake up, Whart, ye spalpeen! What's the matter wid ye?"

They were now so close to the falls that the voice of Larry was indistinct, but the violent shaking did just what was needed. The half-drowned youth was roused, and stared about him in a bewildered way. He gasped and began struggling.

"Take it aisy, me boy," added Larry, who could not avoid talking even in that appalling moment; "ye nadn't try to swim over the falls, for the water is kind enough to save ye the trouble."

The knowledge that his friend was alive, when he feared he was not, was enough to send a thrill of pleasure through him, even though the awakening, as may be said, was on the brink of death itself.

Young Edwards was still too bewildered to comprehend matters. His struggling continued, but it was instinctive and naturally without the least result. His companion retained his grasp on his collar until he saw that nothing could be gained by it. Then he let go and gave more attention to himself.

By this time they were on the brink of the falls. The torrent moved with a calm, swift, hurrying impressiveness that was the more appalling because of its contrast with the churning hades of waters below. It was as if the volume, gathering itself for the plunge, ran forward with eager speed and dived off the rocks into the boiling cauldron.

Larry Murphy was too wise to make any resistance. He drew in his breath, cast one look at the white face of his friend, uttered a prayer for both, and then over they went.

Neither of the youths were ever able to tell clearly what followed during the few moments, though their experiences must have been quite similar. Larry Murphy probably kept better track of events than his companion, because he had not suffered the temporary daze undergone by him a brief while before.

It seemed to him that on the very brink of the falls he was thrown bodily outward and downward by some fearful power independent of the resistless current. The descent, of necessity, was short, but it appeared to be tenfold its actual length. Then he went down, down, down, as though he would never stop, until he fancied that he was driven to the bottom of a watery cavern of immeasurable depths.

He instinctively held his breath until he felt that the distended blood-vessels must burst. He was whirled about and tossed hither and thither amid spray and foam and more solid water, like an egg-shell in a maelstrom. Then, when he could hold his breath no longer, he made one spasmodic inhalation. He was almost strangled, but a part of that which he drew in was air. The next breath was all air, and then he was swimming in the comparatively smooth water below the falls.

As soon as he could clear his eyes and look about him, he saw that he was borne along by the swift current, which was double the width of the stream above. Instead of the rocky bluffs which rendered it almost unapproachable in that portion, the banks were comparatively low and lined with large trees, some of which leaned out over the water, with their limbs almost touching it.

The most pleasing sight that greeted Larry was that of his friend in the act of lifting himself upon dry land, with the help of one of the overhanging limbs. He had escaped and was himself again.

"Are you all right?" he called, in a cheery voice, looking around at Larry, who was swimming hard toward the same point, but would be unable to strike it until he passed a few rods below.

"I'm not sure, but I think I be; I'll report whin I sets fut on dry land."

"If you are bruised or hurt, I'll swim out to your help."

"Stay where ye be till I asks ye to do the same."

Wharton moved along the bank, so as to keep pace with his friend. When the shore was reached he extended his hand and helped him out, and, as may be supposed, the two greeted each other with warmth and gratitude.

Wharton explained what a woful mistake he made in his eagerness to get a shot at the bear, but Larry did not refer to the blunder he committed when he shot at a fallen tree instead of the brute.

"I wonder where that cratur is?" said he, looking around as if he expected to see the animal at his elbow.

"Safe beyond any harm from us," replied Wharton; "he had enough sense to get out of the water before going over the falls."

"And it's yersilf that would have done the same, but for the whack ye got from trying to bust the rocks apart by jumping against them."

"That was the stupidest thing I ever did in my life. If I had taken ten seconds more I could have made the leap as easy as you can jump over your hat."

"Ye are mighty good at leaping and running, but I wouldn't want to see ye try that again."

"Which reminds me, Larry, that it's best to go back and get our guns before some one else finds them for us."

The clothing of the youths was drenched, but they cared nothing for that, for it was the summer time, and the weather was seasonable. So far as Larry Murphy could tell, he had received no injury whatever. His companion suffered somewhat from his collision with the rocks, but that was of a nature that it must soon pass away, and was only felt at intervals.

While the couple are making their way to the point above the falls, where the elder had left his gun and part of his clothing, we will give a few sentences of explanation.

Brigham Edwards and his family dwelt in one of the small frontier settlements of Kentucky. His family consisted of his wife, his only son Wharton, aged seventeen, and the Irish youth, a year older. They had lived originally in Western Pennsylvania, where Larry was left to the care and kindness of the well-to-do settler, who had been one of the best friends his Irish laboring man ever knew. The mother of Larry died in his infancy, so that he was an orphan, without any near relatives.

Mr. Edwards was among the prominent members of the frontier town, where he had lived for nearly three years, when the incident just described occurred. The parents took it into their heads a short time before to make a visit to some old friends that had settled in a larger town about a hundred miles farther east. In order to do so, they mounted their ponies and followed a well-marked trail, crossing several streams and mountainous sections, and incurring considerable danger from the Indians, who, in those days, were nearly always hostile.

About half way between the two settlements stood a block-house, which was a favorite meeting-place for Boone, Kenton, McClelland, Wells, and the frontier rangers whose names are linked with the early history of the great West. It was agreed between the parents and the boys that they should meet on the return of the former at this post, and make the rest of the journey together.

Mr. Edwards fixed on the 10th of August as the day he would be at the block-house. The boys were to arrive no later than that date, and no sooner than a day before. The parents agreed to wait twenty-four hours for them if necessary, and then, in case they did not show up, they were to continue their journey homeward.

The trail was so plain and the route so well known that it was easy to make accurate calculations, and to figure the time within a very few hours when the respective parties would reach the block-house. This figuring, as in these later days, was based on the supposition that no accident befell any one concerned.

Wharton and Larry had walked about two-thirds of the distance between their home and the block-house, when they had their flurry with the huge bear, which certainly did not suffer as much as they. It was early in the afternoon of the mild summer day, and they were in the depths of the vast Kentucky wilderness through which prowled the wild beasts and equally wild red men.

The lads soon reached the spot where Larry had flung his coat and coonskin cap. The former was picked up, and a short distance off he found his rifle unharmed. The cap, however, was still missing, after the two had spent some little time hunting for it.

"Whart," said Larry, stopping short and staring hard at him, "I know what's become of that fine hat of me own."

"Well?"

"The bear sneaked back here and stole it; he's got the laugh on us so far, but I'll niver be satisfied till we mate again and adjoost accounts."

"More likely you flung it into the water in your excitement, and it went over the falls with us."

"Why didn't I think of the same?" asked Larry, with a relieved expression on his freckled face. "I don't mind its absince, for I'd rather be widout a hat than to wear one, but the sun harms me complexion."

"Come on," laughed Wharton, laboriously climbing his way to the higher bluffs, whither his companion followed him; "I feel a little uneasy about leaving my rifle so long."

"How are ye going to get to the same?"

"I'll show you."

It will be understood that they had left the water below the falls on the side from which they had entered it, so that the weapon lay on the bluffs just across where the owner had flung it. The athletic youth intended to repeat the leap he made a short time before, despite the protests of Larry, who had no wish to make a second descent of the falls in his effort to help his friend.

"Go ahead, go ahead," he said, "if ye find any fun in the same; we've got a half day to spare, and I s'pose we may as well spend it in turning flip-flaps off the rocks and over the falls as in any other way."

"No fear of that," calmly answered his friend, who, having reached the place, now prepared to make the leap.

The preparations were simple. There was a run of a couple of rods, all that he needed. Taking a number of short, quick steps, young Edwards bounded from the edge of the bluff for the opposite one, whose elevation was about the same.

He formed a striking picture, with his fine athletic form crouching in mid-air, or sustained for an instant over the rushing torrent into which he was precipitated on his first effort. His feet were partly gathered under him, and his bent elbows were close at his sides in the approved attitude. Larry, who knew the marvellous powers of his young friend in running or leaping, never felt any misgiving as to the result, though he pretended to be alarmed.

He saw him alight more than a foot beyond the edge with the grace of an antelope, taking only a couple of steps forward from the momentum of his new leap.

"That's aisy," he muttered, "that is, for him as finds it aisy to do; I'm sure I could make the leap if they'd move the bluffs about half the distance nearer to this side than the same is at this moment."

Larry was indulging in these characteristic expressions, when he thought his friend was acting as though not fully satisfied with things. He walked a few steps, as if about to lift his gun from the ground, but abruptly halted, straightened up, and looked about him in a puzzled way.

At this point the two were so far above the falls that they could easily understand each other's words without elevating their voices to an unusual extent. The Irishman's waggery was irrepressible.

"I say, Whart, the bear tuk it the same as me cap; he's going off with both his arms full."

Young Edwards must have heard the badinage, but he gave no evidence of it. He stood looking at the ground, but not across the stream, where his friend was watching him.

"I say, what's the matter?" called Larry, beginning to feel uneasy at the peculiar action of his friend.

In answer, the younger lad turned about and looked hard at him. His face was pale, as if he were laboring under great excitement; beyond question he had made some alarming discovery. Glancing to the right and left, young Edwards now came to the edge of the bluff, and making a funnel of one of his hands called out:

"Run, Larry, as quick as you can! don't wait a minute."

"What is it, owld felly?"

"Indians!" was the startling reply; "the woods are full of them."

"Why, then, don't ye run yersilf?" demanded the astounded Larry; "leap back here, and we'll keep each ither company."

"Run, run!" called his companion, frantically gesticulating and motioning him away. "They've got my gun, and if they

see you, Larry, you're lost!"

The impetuosity of the youth literally forced the Irish lad away from the stream and among the trees. He retreated a few yards, puzzled beyond expression.

"What the mischief can I do?" he asked himself; "I can't jump more'n half way across the stream, and that won't do me any good. What does Whart maan by sinding me away while he stays and won't jump? By the powers! I have it!" he exclaimed, striking his thigh and stopping short. "It's a maan thrick of his to git me out of the way, where I won't be harmed, while he rolls up his slaaves and fights a whole tribe of Injins. That thrick won't work! Larry Murphy must be counted in."



CHAPTER IV.

BLAZING ARROW.

At the moment of flinging his rifle from him, when he made his first leap, Wharton Edwards noticed where it landed, and of course knew just where to look for it. When he searched that place for it, and saw nothing of the weapon, he knew, therefore, that something was wrong.

A thrill of alarm went through him on realizing the oversight he had committed, but he met it with the coolness of a veteran.

He pretended to be still searching for the weapon, and moved back and forth, and hither and yon, with his head bent, as though his eyes were fixed on the ground, but the eyebrows were elevated and his vision was roaming along the edge of the trees only a few rods distant, in quest of Shawanoes.

None of them were in sight, but he knew that they were there, and more than one pair of serpent-like eyes were fixed upon him and watching his every act.

Wharton's impulse was to turn back and leap to the other side of the gorge. The temptation was strong, but he dared not attempt it. He could not make the jump without a short run, and that would give the Indians all the chance they could ask to wing him on the fly, as they most assuredly would do.

During the few minutes that he pretended to be groping for the missing gun he did a lot of thinking. He knew he was caught inextricably in a trap, and for a time saw no possible way out.

Had there been anything to gain by a sudden leap into the torrent he would have made it; but that insured another plunge over the falls, with the chances in favor of drowning. That, however, was as nothing compared to the fact that he would be at the mercy of the Shawanoes from the moment he entered the water.

Hopeless himself, his concern was for the chivalrous Larry, who had imperilled his life for him. There was hope that his presence on the other bluff was unknown to the red men, and Wharton felt that if he could frighten him into getting out of the way he would be comparatively safe, and would be at liberty to hasten on to the block-house and secure help for him.

But Larry seemed to be taken with a spell of obtuseness just then. He called to Wharton several times in a dangerously loud voice, and appeared not to see, or at least not to understand, the signals which were assiduously made to him. The young man became so solicitous for his companion, who was without comprehension of his danger, that he forgot everything else, and, advancing to the edge of the ravine, indulged in the vigorous gestures and words which accomplished what he intended.

"Now, if he will use sense, he can save himself," was the conclusion of Wharton, from whose heart a crushing weight was lifted; "he has not been seen, and only needs to keep out of sight until he can take the trail again."

But he was in a dreadful situation himself. Between the ravine and the woods, from which he knew the Shawanoes were watching him, was an open space, something more than fifty yards in extent. This narrowed to a fourth of that width up stream, and disappeared altogether at the brink of the falls.

It was useless to pretend longer to hunt for the missing rifle on the face of the rocks when a minute's scrutiny was sufficient to prove that it was not there. His actions had already shown that he knew something was amiss, and the Indians were not likely to allow the farce to continue much longer.

To go directly away from the stream and toward the wood was to walk into the hands of the fierce red men, and the youth was ready to take any risk before doing that. The frightful contingency he feared was that the moment he made a break for freedom they would fire, and the distance was so short that he could not escape their aim. That brief, open space over which he must run was the gauntlet of certain death. If he were only a little nearer the trees, he would attempt it. He saw but one possible thing to do, and he now attempted it.

Pausing in his groping for the weapon, he raised his head and looked inquiringly about him. He did not dare let his eyes dwell on the trees immediately in front, through fear of exciting suspicion, and the quick glance which he swept along the trees failed to show him so much as a glimpse of his enemies. But he knew they were there, all the same.

Fixing his eyes again on the ground, he pretended suddenly to discover shadowy traces of something in the nature of footprints, but, instead of leading straight toward the wood, they led up stream, where the open space rapidly

narrowed.

He walked slowly forward, with his gaze seemingly on the earth, but he was slyly watching the wood, with the alertness of a weasel, on the lookout for the first evidence that his action was mistrusted.

It was a fearful test to the nerves. With every foot's advance his heart throbbed faster with hope, and his desperate resolve became more fixed. His greatest task was to restrain himself from bounding forward at the topmost bent of his speed as he saw the friendly trees drawing near with each passing moment; and yet he not only forced himself to do that, but he came to a dead halt, slowly turned around, bent his head down and scanned the ground behind him. His action was as if he had suddenly come upon some evidence, but in that sweep of the head he again glanced along the edge of the wood that confronted him when he leaped the chasm. This time he saw a movement so faint that he could not identify it, but it told him the crisis had come.

He had now gone so far that nothing less than a disabling bullet could restrain him. He longed more than ever to leap away, but every inch gained was of incalculable worth, and, repressing his impatience with an iron will, he continued edging along, his heart throbbing like a trip-hammer.

To fail to keep close watch of the wood any longer must defeat his purpose. With little attempt, therefore, to hide his action, he quickly turned his head, and, without checking his advance, scanned the margin of the forest. As he did so, he observed a stir among the trees. The Shawanoes evidently concluded that the farce had gone too far. Without another second's hesitation young Edwards made a tremendous bound in the direction of the trees, and was off like an arrow shot from the bow.

He expected a rattling volley from the Shawanoes, and few who have not been through the ordeal can understand the sensation which comes over one when absolutely certain of a demonstration of that kind. To his amazement, however, not a shot was fired, and he dodged among the trees unscathed. Puzzled beyond measure to know what it meant, the fugitive glanced over his shoulder. That which he saw perplexed him for the moment as much as his immunity from the part of a target. One solitary Shawanoe warrior had leaped to his feet and started in pursuit. Like a flash the whole meaning of this act came to Wharton Edwards.

When the Indians were not so hostile toward the whites as they were at the time of which we are writing, they occasionally visited the block-houses and settlements for purposes of barter, and to engage in friendly contests of skill in shooting, leaping and running. The red men were so trained from infancy to this kind of amusement that they were experts, and held their own well against the pioneers, though it is well known that the Caucasian race, under similar surroundings and environments, surpasses all others in physical as well as mental attainments.

The champion of the settlement was Wharton Edwards, who, despite his seventeen years, vanquished all contestants. He received the praise of Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton, who agreed that there was but one Shawanoe, outside of the unrivalled Deerfoot, who could hold his own with him. That was the famous warrior Blazing Arrow, who was about double the age of Wharton, and who claimed to have beaten every one with whom he struggled for supremacy.

Following this declaration from such high authority came the natural desire to see young Edwards and the Shawanoe runner pitted against each other, and efforts were made to bring about a contest between these representatives of their respective races. The great difficulty in the way was that the Shawanoe was one of the most vicious and treacherous of his tribe. He had committed so many crimes against the whites that he feared to trust himself in their power, and stubbornly refused to come to the settlement, despite the assurances of the leading pioneers.

He was persuaded, however, to venture out of the woods one day, and the arrangements were quickly made for a race between him and young Edwards. Before the trial came off some one gave the Shawanoe a draught of "fire-water," which roused the sleeping devil in him. Whipping out his knife, he emitted his war-whoop, and charged upon the astonished youth, with the intention of slaying him.

Wharton, who naturally had no weapon with him, succeeded in dodging the miscreant, and before the wrathful settlers could punish him he darted into the woods with a defiant shout and disappeared.

The glance which Wharton Edwards now cast to the rear, as he started to flee, showed him that his single pursuer was Blazing Arrow.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE WOODS.

The race between Wharton Edwards and the famous Shawanoe runner, Blazing Arrow, was to come off at last, but under far different circumstances than either had ever anticipated.

The wretch, while under the influence of liquor, had attempted the life of the youth, and now, when his own natural self, he was determined to run him down, and to his death. He hated the whole race with a consuming hatred, and his wrath against this lad was more intense than against any human being. It was he that had the audacity to think himself worthy of running a race with him, who had defeated the most renowned runners of the Wyandots, Pottawatomies, and the adjoining tribes, to say nothing of his own people.

The action of the Shawanoes, when young Edwards made his leap of the chasm, can be understood. The youth's life was spared, where no other person would have been permitted to live after placing himself in their power. Blazing Arrow, as well as several of his associates, recognized the youth the instant they saw his face, and a hurried consultation took place as to what should be done.

But for the presence of their champion they would not have permitted him his slight advantage; but their faith in Blazing Arrow was as complete as his own, besides which he was one of their leaders. He ordered them to remain quiet, or rather to devote themselves to bringing down what whites were near, while he made a little dash and brought back the fugitive.

This was how it came about that Wharton Edwards, instead of being pursued by a score of Shawanoes, started off with but a single warrior trailing after him.

But it is noticeable, further, that the same pursuer carried his rifle, or rather that of the youth; for, with the characteristic refinement of cruelty, he meant to add this little triumph to his capture of the lad when he should run him down and smite him to the earth.

Wharton had no weapon other than his hunting-knife, while his foe took good care to see that a weapon was at his own command. He was the one who, if any accident befell himself, would feel pleasure in shooting down the lad that had never harmed him.

The sight of Blazing Arrow gave Wharton a knowledge of the situation, and during the few minutes that he was dodging through the trees he tried to decide upon the right course to follow.

They were but a short way from the main trail. This was clearly marked, although it was travelled so little that in many places the overhanging limbs interfered with one's passage. He believed he could dash along this faster than his pursuer, and but for his anxiety about Larry Murphy he probably would have attempted to do so, but the report of a rifle which reached his ears a few minutes later deepened his fears and increased his anxiety.

If he should put forth all the speed of which he was capable, it was not likely to surpass that of the Shawanoe, who was accustomed to dodging among tree trunks. There was little to be gained by speculating at this stage of the contest, but he concluded to go ahead until the opportunity was more favorable for turning his own amazing fleetness to account.

Besides, it should be stated that Wharton was not yet certain that he could beat Blazing Arrow in a contest of speed. The Indian was a wonderful runner, and the youth was not certain by any means that the red man would not overhaul him when the test should take place.

"At any rate he has got to do the hardest work of his life before he captures my scalp," muttered the lad, compressing his lips and ducking under a limb which would have caught under his chin if he had neglected the precaution.

He headed for the trail, darting a look behind him now and then to note their relative speed. As nearly as he could judge, it was about the same, but as he could not know whether Blazing Arrow was putting forth his best efforts or not, the knowledge was of little benefit. At the moment of striking the path, Wharton recalled a fact that had slipped his mind until then. Less than an eighth of a mile in advance the trail crossed a natural clearing where, for fully a fourth of a mile, not a tree or shrub obtruded. Then the two could do their best, and the question of supremacy would be decided, providing the red man indulged in no treachery. Blazing Arrow dropped into the path at a point about a hundred yards behind the fugitive, which was a little more than the space separating them at the moment of starting.

It was necessary to keep the advantage he possessed, and to gain all he could before the plain was reached. If Wharton should prove himself superior to the Shawanoe, the latter would resort to his rifle, and either kill him or wound

him so that he could not run. If the fugitive was the inferior, he must fall into the hands of his enemy; so that, no matter how it eventuated, the situation of the youth was full of peril.

"I guess I may as well let myself out while I have the chance," the latter muttered, a moment after striking the trail.

And Wharton proceeded to "let himself out," while Blazing Arrow, the Shawanoe, lost no time in doing likewise.

Wharton's aim was to increase the distance between himself and Blazing Arrow as much as he possibly could before reaching the clearing, half a mile wide, where the way was open and the test of speed would be decisive.

Within the same moment that he recalled the existence of the clearing he was dashing along the trail like a terrified deer. This work proved harder than he anticipated. The obtruding branches swished his face with smarting violence, and more than one twig cut his forehead and nose like the lash of a whip. He thrust out his hands to ward these aside, and they hurt his hands.

He kept it up, however, for he was now running for life, and what is to be compared to such a stake? But these obstructions, despite all he could do, retarded his progress. The alarming truth quickly became manifest that instead of gaining ground, as he had hoped, he was losing it.

"Suppose he can beat me?" was the terrifying thought that almost paralyzed him for the moment; "but," he added, "he hasn't done it yet!"

The Shawanoe did not utter any cry, and he was so far to the rear that Wharton did not hear him as he came along the trail with the grim certainty of fate. He was a marvellous runner, and he did not mean to allow the detested youth, whose beard was not yet grown, to get away from him.

More than once, while speeding in this fashion, young Edwards asked himself whether he could elude his enemy by leaping aside or hiding among the trees. Possibly he might have done it could he have drawn beyond sight of him for a few minutes only, so that his divergence would not be seen. But just there lay the difficulty, and he dared not make the attempt.

It was a sight that would have tried the nerves of the bravest man when he looked back and caught a glimpse of the Indian warrior, partly hidden by the brushing limbs and vegetation, as he sped forward like a furious animal, and knew it was a mortal enemy that was after him, impelled by a hatred which nothing but death could quench.

The fugitive determined that for the time he would not look behind him. Almost unconsciously to himself, when he did so, he lost a little ground.

The straining vision which was now cast forward saw the light made by the clearing or opening in front. A few more bounds and he struck the margin of the space, which for half a mile was as free from trees as a stretch of Western prairie. Here was the place for the supreme test, and the youth, with a muttered prayer, bent all his energies to the task, fully alive to the stake at issue.

Not a breath of air was stirring on this mild summer afternoon, but the wind created by his arrowy-speed was like a gale as it rushed by his face and lifted the short auburn hair about his neck until it floated straight out. The arms were bent at the elbows, the chest thrown forward, while the shapely limbs worked with the swiftness and grace of a piece of perfect machinery. The feet doubled in and over each other with bewildering quickness, there seeming at times to be half a dozen of them on the ground, in the air, and to the rear at the same time.

The stride was tremendous. The handsome face of the youth was pale with an unshakable resolve, and the thin lips were compressed, his breath coming thick and fast through the nostrils. The hazel eyes gleamed and the brows were knitted as with a person who means to do or die.

Ah, that was a race worth travelling many a mile to see! Had Simon Kenton, or Daniel Boone, or Anthony McClelland, or the Wetzels, been in that open clearing, they would have stood like statues, wrapt in admiration and wonder, for never could they have beheld before such a magnificent exhibition of prowess in the way of speed.

Every thrilling element was present, for not far to the rear rushed a six-foot Shawanoe, who, like the youth in advance, strained every muscle to the highest tension. And he was a frightful object as he ran, for his face was that of a race-horse. The long coarse locks streamed behind him like a whipping pennant in a hurricane; and one of the stained eagle-feathers in the crown was snatched loose and fluttered backward. The naturally hideous face was made more so by the red and black patches daubed in fantastic splashes over it. The sinewy chest was bare, but the fringes of the parti-colored leggings and moccasins flickered and twinkled in the sunlight as the Shawanoe thundered across the clearing, his black eyes fixed on the flying figure in front, and his countenance distorted by a passion his terrible race is so capable of feeling.

As Blazing Arrow ran, he carried the youth's rifle in his right hand. It was grasped just in front of the lock, the muzzle pointing ahead, as though he had but to press the trigger to bring down the fugitive without a change of aim. The left hand rested on the knife thrust in his girdle, the position of the two hands suggesting that he was thirsting to use both weapons upon the lad whom he sought so desperately to run down.



CHAPTER VI.

A MISCALCULATION.

The Indian was doing his best. Had the whole tribe been assembled on that clearing, with eyes fixed on him and urging him on, he could have done no better. He had run many a race, and, since his manhood, had won them all. Most were gained by no more than half trying, just as he expected to gain this one when he ordered his companions to remain behind in the wood, and leave to him the task of bringing back the white youth who had the effrontery to appear as a contestant in a trial against him.

The expectation of Blazing Arrow was that of running down Wharton Edwards just before or at the time he entered the wood on the opposite side of the clearing. Stretching forward his massive hand, he meant to hurl him from his feet, and then drive him back to where the other warriors were waiting to subject him to their whimsical torture.

Yes, Wharton Edwards was destined, in Blazing Arrow's mind, for the torture. This had been the fierce savage's purpose from the outset, and it remained as such for a few moments after the two had burst into the opening. Then a doubt arose, and by the time half the clearing was thrown behind him the despised youth in front was running faster than he was.

The soul of Blazing Arrow must have been humiliated beyond expression when, despite the most strenuous exertions he could put forth, and the knowledge that never in all his life had he run with greater speed, that lithe, graceful youth in front began steadily drawing away from him.

It was an astounding truth. Wharton Edwards could outrun the champion of the Shawanoes, and he was doing it with such certainty that neither he nor his pursuer could fail to see the fact.

The youth waited till a fourth of the distance was passed, so there could be no mistake as to the actual test. He had gone that far with all the strength of which he was capable. He knew that his pursuer had done the same, so that when he glanced around, the truth as to their relative speed must be established.

The result was more striking than he had dared to hope. He had widened perceptibly the space between them, and was still doing so, even though his venomous enemy was putting forth the utmost exertions of which he was capable.

It can be understood how the discovery thrilled the fugitive, and he can be pardoned if, even in that trying moment, he felt a touch of regret that the race between him and the Indian did not take place, as it was arranged, at the settlement. What a triumph he would have won!

Nor can he be blamed because in the flush of victory, and with the belief that the real danger was past, he deliberately snatched off his cap, swung it above his head, and uttered a shout of exultation. It was only human nature, and you or I would have done the same had we been in his place.

The cry was wormwood and gall to Blazing Arrow, and deep must have been his regret that at the time when, seized with drunken frenzy, he made for the lad, he did not finish him. Had he done so, the Shawanoe would have been saved this humiliation.

Why did not the pursuer stop short and bring his rifle into play? He was a good marksman, and the distance was not enough to require any special skill on his part. Doubtless the dusky miscreant was influenced by several reasons, one of which was the loss of ground he would sustain. Then, too, a man who has been using his muscles so fiercely is not in the best condition to aim a rifle accurately. Furthermore, it is not impossible that the Shawanoe believed that the youth was unable to maintain his astounding speed. He must soon slacken it, and then the Indian champion would take revenge for this temporary defeat. Wharton feared an attempt to shoot him, and he continued his prodigious exertion, since there was every inducement to increase the gain he had made, and the sheltering wood was now but a short way in advance. He glanced back a couple of times, and then threw his thoughts forward, for he recalled that he was confronted by a peculiar condition of things.

Immediately after entering the forest again, the trail made what may be described as a horseshoe curve. A deep, wooded ravine interposing in front necessitated a looping of the path. The circuit was a furlong in length, the trail coming back to within a few rods of the first turn. Standing at this point, one could see the slightly ascending course on the side of the narrow ravine, and a man or animal walking up the gentle incline was in view of any one at the beginning of the curve.

It will be understood, therefore, that if Blazing Arrow should halt at this point the instant he reached it, and the youth

should keep to the trail, the latter would come directly under the muzzle of his own rifle, in the hands of his implacable enemy.

But Wharton Edwards was not the one to throw away an advantage gained by a display of speed such as it is safe to say no other living person could have made. It would have been idiotic to do so when no necessity existed.

Several ways of escape presented themselves. He could leave the trail at the lower point of the loop, not returning to it until well beyond sight of his enemy, or possibly he could leap across the gorge, as he had done in the case of the torrent, and thus not sacrifice any ground.

It was this step which he revolved in his mind while dashing across the last fourth of the narrow plain, but a single fact restrained him; he doubted his ability to make a successful leap. Although he had been over the path several times, and might be considered familiar with it, he had never studied it closely enough to settle the question without another inspection, and there was not a minute to spare for making that.

If he could make the leap it would be a great gain; if he should fail, the disaster would be irreparable, for among the wood, brush and undergrowth he could neither conceal himself nor travel as fast as the Shawanoe, who would quickly have him at his mercy. The risk was too great to incur, and he decided not to take it. He did a thing, on the contrary, which was like an inspiration. Making the short turn, he ran a few rods, when he glanced toward the plain. Blazing Arrow was invisible, and would remain so for several minutes, despite the speed with which he was approaching.

The youth made a powerful leap aside from the path, and dodged behind the trunk of an oak large enough to shelter his body. Then he stood panting, alert and watchful, awaiting the coming of his enemy. He saw him a minute later, through the trees, running with undiminished speed, and like an engine that was absolutely tireless. The Shawanoe was more familiar with the course of the trail than the youth, and therefore knew of its looping, which had puzzled the latter for a few brief moments. The course adopted by the Shawanoe was peculiar, and for a time assumed an almost ludicrous phase.

The quick glance which he cast down the path failed to show him the fugitive, who he must have supposed was still running over it and would speedily reappear as he rushed up the incline. By leaping the ravine he would head him off and have him at his mercy.

The pursuer decided to adopt this course, and with only a slight slackening of pace he dashed toward the gorge; but when almost on the brink he must have concluded the chances of success were against him, and he changed his mind. But he did not succeed in changing the course of his body, as he meant to do. He would not have failed had the bank of the ravine been as firm as he supposed it was. He checked himself with the skill of an experienced runner; but the ground gave way, and despite everything he could do he went floundering, scrambling and struggling to the bottom of the ravine, which was almost perpendicular and fully thirty feet deep.

Had he given less attention to the effort to save himself and looked where he was going it would have been better; for, as it was, although the fall was considerable, it was so broken that it would have amounted to little had not his head come in collision with the base of one of the trees growing in the bottom of the gorge. The impact was violent, and must have jarred the tree. It jarred Blazing Arrow to that extent that he tumbled over on his back senseless.

Wharton Edwards was watching matters like a cat waiting for a mouse. When he saw the Shawanoe disappearing he ran cautiously forward from his hiding-place, and, not forgetting to screen himself, peeped over the edge of the ravine.

"I'm afraid he hasn't broken his neck," he muttered, as he noted the shock the other had received, "though that crack against the trunk of the tree was enough to kill anyone."

This unlooked-for incident insured the safety of the fugitive, who, if he chose, could have continued his flight to the block-house; but two considerations led him to take a different course. He could not desert Larry Murphy, who, beyond all question, was in imminent peril, and he disliked beyond expression to lose his rifle, which was a birthday gift from his father, and a superior piece of workmanship. It was this act that led him to attempt a feat worthy of Simon Kenton himself.

Leaping lightly from the edge of the ravine, he grasped the branches of a tree near at hand. It bent low with his weight and broke; but he seized another, and that also, after dipping downward, gave way and let him fall. By that time he was so near the ground that he dropped lightly to his feet. He paused and glanced at Blazing Arrow lying outstretched on his back, with his face upturned, as if he were dead. But he was not; he was only senseless.

"If he will only stay that way for a few minutes I shall be all right; but if he awakes----"

Aye, if he awoke, what vengeance he would take on the youth who dared not only to beat him at running, but to steal

like a beast of prey upon him!

But young Edwards had determined upon his line of action, and it was now too late to turn back.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHECK.

It was characteristic of Larry Murphy and Wharton Edwards that each should hasten to risk his own life for the other.

When the latter made his leap across the chasm, through which the water rushed, with his rifle that had been left there, he had no thought of the peril in which he placed himself. Had he turned on the instant, or sprang back to the bluff he had just left, he would have had a companion, with a good weapon between them, even though he possessed no gun himself.

But that would have placed the Irish lad in the extremity of peril, as Wharton well knew, and he determined to face the danger alone, reasoning that it was useless to involve both as long as it could be prevented.

The earnestness of Wharton caused Larry to withdraw from the gorge until he was among the trees beyond, when he halted for a moment, and, reflecting on the situation, read the purpose of his friend.

"I see through the trick," he muttered, angry with himself that he had been duped even for a few moments, "and it won't work on me. Larry Murphy isn't to be left out of this business."

It was all well enough to form this resolution, but the youth was confronted by the query as to how his friend was to receive any practical benefit from his efforts. Peering from the trees in the direction of the gorge, he saw nothing of him, nor of the Indians who he was sure were there.

Nothing would have pleased Larry more than to repeat the performance of Wharton, and thereby place himself on the other side of the gorge; but he saw no way of doing it without a fatal delay. It was utterly beyond his power to make the leap which was so easy for the other. He knew that if he attempted it he would plump down into the torrent and go over the falls again, unless he swam out, as did the bear, on the same side from which he entered.

There was no break in the bluffs across stream by which one could climb out above the falls, so that the only feasible way open to him to reach Wharton was by swimming the torrent below the falls. That, as we have said, involved a delay which, under the circumstances, was fatal to all chance of giving his friend any practical help. But Larry could not stand idle. In the blind hope of doing something, he hurried down stream and approached it again at the point where he had entered it before, and whence the bear had emerged.

It was as he feared. He might as well have tried to climb the smooth face of a perpendicular wall as to leave the torrent at any point above the falls, to say nothing of the danger of being swept over the latter.

A slight bend in the stream enabled him to discern the spot where Wharton had landed when he made his leap. He was looking fixedly in that direction, hoping he would reappear, when a Shawanoe Indian came into view and paused on the brink of the gorge.

He held his rifle in one hand and was in war paint. He seemed to be looking at the water and the other bluff, as though measuring the distance preparatory to leaping the chasm. This indicated that the red man knew, or suspected, that another was near at hand, and on the other side of the stream.

The leap was a good one, even for a trained warrior, and when this one made up his mind to attempt it, he stepped back several paces in order to gain the necessary momentum. When he paused, only the top of his head was visible to the watchful Larry, who knew very well what he intended to do.

The Shawanoe suddenly ran the short distance, and made the leap with the ease shown by Wharton Edwards a short time before.

At the moment the crouching form was in mid-air, with limbs drawn together and muscles set, the rifle dropped from his grasp, his arms went upward with a wild cry that rose above the waters, and his body, landing on the edge of the bluff, rolled back in the torrent and instantly sank out of sight.

"I can jump the stream myself. I don't mean that such spalpeens as ye shall have the chance of doing the same," muttered Larry, stepping back several paces and reloading his gun with the utmost haste.

None knew better than he that the occurrence would stir up matters among the Indians on the other side, and he would have been a zany to invite a return shot by remaining a fair view to those who would investigate the matter offhand.

Had he possessed one of the modern breech-loaders and repeating rifles, he might have secured a good position and

held half a hundred Indians at bay; but with his clumsy though excellent weapon he could not hope to maintain his ground for any length of time.

The moment his gun was ready he cautiously advanced to the edge of the stream and peered around the rocks. There was no warrior in sight, but he was shrewd enough to allow his vision to roam along the bluff on the other side down to the falls themselves.

So far as he could judge, no one was near. A dark body, however, caught his eye in the water itself. It was going over the falls, a limp and inert mass, which he was quick to recognize, and at which he cast but a single glance.

But the youth was not left long in suspense. His keen eyes were roving along the edge of the other bluff, which was sharply outlined against the blue sky, when a small protuberance suddenly appeared at the very point on which his eyes happened to rest.

"It's another of 'em," was his thought, as he screened himself so far as he could behind the ledge of rocks and brought his rifle to a level; "when his head rises high enough I'll plug him in the eye. Whisht now!"

The Indian was cunning. Instead of bringing his crown into sight, it sank out of sight again.

Larry was standing with his gaze centred on the point where he had just seen the object, his gun loaded and ready to fire the instant a fair target was presented, when it shot up like a jack-in-the-box a dozen feet to one side, immediately dropping out of view again.

The movement was so quick that the painted face had appeared and vanished before Larry could shift his aim.

The Shawanoe must have known that some one was awaiting a favorable chance to serve him as the warrior was served who attempted to leap the gorge.

"It saams to me," growled the disappointed Larry, "that every one I'm getting acquainted wid is up to some of his tricks. Why couldn't that spalpeen have showed himself where he made me expect him? It would be just like some of 'em to sneak across above or below, where I can't head 'em off. I wonder what's become of Whart?"



CHAPTER VIII.

A CHAT.

It was like approaching a sleeping tiger, likely at any moment to bound to his feet and rend the helpless victim, and Wharton Edwards, despite his well-proved courage, felt a misgiving as he drew near the terrible Shawanoe.

Blazing Arrow in falling held the rifle fast so long as his senses remained with him; but when he came near splitting the tree trunk with his head, the weapon flew several feet away. This happened to be the side farthest from Wharton, who, therefore, was forced to walk around him in order to secure the gun.

Everything depended on promptness; and when Wharton found himself within a few paces--too close to retreat--he took several quick leaps, and bending over, snatched up the weapon from where it lay on the ground.

Words cannot picture the relief that came to him when his hands closed about his beloved rifle, and he knew that, from fleeing in terror before the fierce Shawanoe, he was now his master. He could not only defy his wrath, but Blazing Arrow was at his mercy.

Quickly as all this took place, Wharton was not a second too soon. At the moment of stepping back and looking at the Shawanoe, the latter began rallying from the shock that had held him senseless for a briefer period than seemed to be the case. Doubtless he suffered a good deal of pain from the accident, but he was too stoical to show it. He moved uneasily, muttered something in his own tongue, and then came to a sitting posture with such suddenness that the startled youth recoiled several paces and grasped the weapon more firmly than before.

The painted face was like that of a demon, as the Indian, fully understanding what had taken place, sat for a few seconds glaring at the youth, ten feet away, unable to speak, perhaps because of his overflowing wrath, but emitting a serpent-like hissing between his teeth, as if in warning of the blow he was about to strike.

The law of the frontier would have justified young Edwards in sending a bullet through the one that had sought his life. Perhaps few would have condemned him if he had fired when Blazing Arrow's face assumed the expression of hatred which is beyond description; but the lad, despite his training, could never have condoned such an act, now that his life was in no danger.

Recalling that the Shawanoe spoke English tolerably well, Wharton, holding his rifle ready for instant use, addressed him:

"Are you much hurt, Blazing Arrow?"

"Yes--much hurt--can't walk--can't stand."

Had the wily red man been less prompt with his reply he might have deceived the youth. The latter could feel no pity for him, even though he knew he was suffering, but there was an eagerness in his manner which convinced Wharton that he was shamming, and was not injured to such an extent as to be unable to help himself.

Blazing Arrow spoilt everything by adding, before the other could make response:

"Help Shawanoe up--maybe he den walk," and he reached out his hand toward the boy.

"I rather guess not," replied Wharton, with a faint smile and a meaning shake of his head; "if you can't rise to your feet you can stay there, for all I care."

"Help little bit," persisted the Shawanoe, making what seemed to be a futile effort, and sinking back with one hand still extended, as though he were a child.

"No, sir," replied the youth more emphatically, "I wouldn't trust you, Shawanoe."

"No speak lie--Blazing Arrow no double tongue."

"You have always had a double tongue; you have always spoken lies. Was it not you who tried to kill me when we were about to run a race?"

"Shawanoe drink fire-water--didn't know nuffin'."

"You knew enough to run off in the woods before my friends could punish you. Why have you chased me so far to-day?"

"Want to catch you," replied the warrior frankly, evidently perceiving that this was an occasion in which truth would serve better than falsehood.

"What hindered you from catching me?"

"Brudder run faster dan Shawanoe."

"Did you run as fast as you could?"

"Yes--run hard--run like thunder--brudder much run--beat deer--beat antelope."

"Then I can beat you?" asked Wharton with a meaning look at the subtle miscreant, who nodded his head with great vigor as he made reply:

"Yes--beat Shawanoe--run faster--much more run."

If Blazing Arrow hoped by "acknowledging the corn" in this fashion to win the confidence of the youth he was mistaken. He could afford to own up when the only one that heard him was his conqueror. Little fear of his ever making the confession to his own people.

"That's the first truth you have told in a long time. What would you have done to me if you had outrun and captured me?"

"Take back to Shawanoes."

"And what then?"

"Run race wid me."

"Suppose I had beaten you?"

"Den get away--like do now. No hurt brudder."

Wharton little doubted that such a chase would have been arranged, with the difference that no possible escape would have been left for him.

"If I had outrun you would I have been allowed to go free?"

"Yes--dat so--ugh!--yes."

"Well, being that I have just outrun you, I will keep a good distance between you and me."

And thereupon Wharton turned about and began walking along the ravine toward the point whence he came. As he did so he partly turned his head, so as to keep the wretch in his field of vision; he knew better than to trust him, even to the smallest degree. He half expected to see him leap to his feet and dash after him, but the wily warrior remained seated until the intervening trees shut him from sight. Wharton hurried along the ravine, and curved again and came back before he struck a place which permitted him to climb out. He did so, however, with little difficulty, and, reaching the path once more, began retracing his steps to the clearing, across which he had run with such great speed.

This brought him to the spot where Blazing Arrow had met with his mishap. Stealing carefully forward, Wharton peered over. To his astonishment the Shawanoe was not in sight; he had disappeared as utterly as though he had never been. At the same moment the youth made another and more astounding discovery.

CHAPTER IX.

TURNING BACK.

It is singular how, in the most critical moments, certain thoughts will obtrude themselves. While Wharton Edwards was peering over the ravine and wondering whither Blazing Arrow had vanished, a sudden suspicion caused him to raise his rifle and examine its lock.

There was not a grain of powder in the pan and no charge in the barrel. All the time that it had been in the hands of the Shawanoe and himself it was as useless as a stick. It seemed incredible that such should have been the fact, and yet here was the evidence before his own eyes.

What was equally apparent and more astonishing was that Blazing Arrow must have been unsuspecting of the truth. The youth had not reloaded the weapon after firing the last time, and it was, therefore, empty when he flung it across the ravine preparatory to making his leap. It had been picked up by the runner, who failed, in the excitement, to notice the oversight, taking it for granted that it was ready for use. In the rush of the pursuit he had no chance of examining it, and when he recovered his senses the gun was in the hands of its owner.

But had the Shawanoe known the truth, when the lad stood within a few paces defying him, his pretended weakness would have gone in a flash, and, bounding to his feet, he would have leaped upon his conqueror like a panther.

"That's the strangest thing I ever knew," exclaimed Wharton, with a shudder at his inexplicable escape; "I can't understand how he and I missed seeing it."

When it is remembered that the fact of an old-fashioned flintlock being unloaded is perceptible at a glance, the feature of the mistake is the more remarkable.

The discovery threw the youth into something of a panic. He felt as if the venomous old man was about to assail him from among the trees, and, with a quick glance around, made desperate haste to reload the gun. Not until the ball was rammed down the barrel and the powder was in the pan did he breathe freely.

"There!" he exclaimed, drawing a sigh of relief, "when I make that blunder again I deserve to be shot, but the laugh is on Blazing Arrow more than on me."

Now that he had a trusty weapon in his possession, and the Shawanoe had none, the situation of the latter was like that of a wild beast and a marksman. Could the beast leap unawares upon the marksman he could overcome him, but the latter had only to maintain his watchfulness.

Had Blazing Arrow rushed toward the lad after he had found his gun was empty, and before he reloaded it, Wharton's only resource would have been to take again to his heels; for, active and athletic as he was, he could not possibly be a match for the powerful, full-grown warrior, and it would have been foolhardy on his part to take any such risk.

The disappearance of the Shawanoe during the brief absence of Wharton was proof that the wily wretch was shamming. His fall had given him a severe shock, but no bones were broken; and had the youth heeded the request to help him to rise he would have snatched him off his feet in a twinkling and had him at his mercy.

Whither had he gone? The dread that he might be stealing among the trees in the effort to surprise him caused young Edwards to make a hasty withdrawal from the wood to the open plain which had been the scene of the severest race of his life.

When he stood clear of the trees, and beyond reach of any sudden surprise, he breathed freely for the first time.

"Now let him come, if he wants to. I can outrun him anyway, but I don't run any more races," added Wharton, glancing down at his gun.

The Shawanoe, who was doubtless glaring at him from some point of concealment, must have relied upon cunning to outwit his victim.

"I wonder what sort of yarn he will tell his people when he goes back?" mused Wharton. "How will he account for his failure to capture me, and what explanation will he give for the loss of my gun? I suppose he will say he concluded to shoot me, and broke it over my head and flung it away. But if I come out of this trouble they will learn the truth some day."

Not forgetting to be on his guard against his foe, the lad walked slowly across the clearing, taking the back trail. He

was considering the best thing to do. But for Larry Murphy, he would have made all haste in the opposite direction. The block-house was almost twenty miles away, and this flurry had delayed the couple so long that there was no time to spare. Wharton's parents would become anxious and set out to meet the boys. If they should become involved with these Indians, direful consequences were likely to follow.

But Wharton could not desert his comrade. He was a mile or two away, near the main party of warriors, and Providence alone could prevent his falling into their hands. Larry would naturally suppose that his friend was not far from him, and it would be just like the fellow to run into the worst sort of peril in the hope of doing him service.

"I must get back to him as soon as I can. If he could only know how fortunate I have been it would be easy for him to steal around the whole party and join me here. Then we could do some fast travelling, and be at the block-house before sunrise to-morrow."

Since, however, such a state of affairs was out of the question, Wharton had only to face matters as they were.

One ground for hope cheered him. The sultry summer afternoon was drawing to a close, and night was at hand. He could manoeuvre in the darkness much better than when the sun was shining. He and the Irish lad had a system of calls and signals by which they communicated when within hearing distance of each other. He could fall back on this when darkness fell.

With his controlling wish there was but one thing for him to do; that was to make his way with the utmost care to the region of the falls, where he had parted from Larry. If his comrade had been wise enough to keep out of the hands of the Shawanoes he was hopeful of opening communication with him. A few more hours must decide the question.

He increased his pace. When he reached the wood on the opposite side of the plain it was twilight. He walked rapidly, as though in a hurry, but after going far enough to be beyond sight he came stealthily back and looked toward the point where he had reloaded his gun. As he did so he caught the outlines of a figure in the dim light steadily approaching, and he knew it was Blazing Arrow, the Shawanoe.



CHAPTER X.

GROPING IN THE DARK.

Larry Murphy, after his daring check of the Shawanoes in their attempt to leap the torrent, was sufficiently wise to see that it would not do for him to remain where he was. The red men had located the dangerous marksman, and would soon gain access to him.

If they chose, they could swim the stream below, as he had done, and there must be other points above where the walls approached near enough to allow them to jump across. If two or three succeeded in getting to the rear of his position (and what was to prevent it?) he would be caught inextricably in a trap.

"I wonder what's become of Whart? What could he do without me? He's always getting into trouble, and it's the bother of me life getting him out again. I ought to be with him now."

Nothing was clearer than that before he could do any more service for his friend, or even learn his situation, he must place himself on the other side of the torrent. He could do this by swimming, as before, but he shrank from repeating the performance. The Shawanoes were likely to watch for such an attempt, and he would be in a bad situation if discovered in the water.

He believed, too, that at no distant point up stream there was some place where the passage could be made quickly and without danger; he decided to find out if such was the case.

"I hope Whart won't do anything rash," he mused, picking his way with no little skill and with the utmost care, "but he needs me with him all the time. With all the speed he owns, if he only made a break for the block-house, he'd be there in an hour or two; but it's just like him not to think of that, and if he did, mor'n likely the Indians would object."

A hundred yards above the point where young Edwards had leaped the torrent, Larry began working his way back to it. It would have been a most fortunate thing had he arrived somewhat sooner, for then he would have seen his friend starting on his memorable race with Blazing Arrow. The chance of bringing down the vicious Shawanoe by a shot from the rear would have been so inviting that it is more than probable that the youth would have nipped the contest in the bud. But, had he not done so, he would have gained the information that would have changed his own line of action, and the whole course of succeeding events.

But the torrent was wider than below, and not even Wharton Edwards would have been able to leap it. Larry was careful to keep out of sight, and withdrawing again from the bank, he cautiously made his way up stream, on the watch for some place to cross.

"I wonder whether any of them have got over yet?" he muttered, feeling each step of the way; "they're sharp enough to follow me tracks where I haven't stepped on the stones--whisht!"

He stopped short, for he had heard something moving slowly among the undergrowth ahead.

"Some of them have come back----"

Instead of a Shawanoe warrior, the bulky form of an immense bear came into sight.

"And so ye want to mix in this business?" was the thought of the lad on identifying the animal. "I'm sure neither Whart nor me would have any objections if you would only turn your attention to them that is making us so much bother."

He surveyed the lumbering creature a minute or two, strongly tempted to give him a shot. He would have fired, but the report of the gun would be heard by the Shawanoes, some of whom could not be far off. The falls were so distant that the sound was but a faint roar in his ears.

The bear did not seem to be looking for large boys just then, and, after lumbering into sight, disappeared among the vegetation, which was rank in that section. He showed no sign of suspecting that one of his natural enemies was so near. Had he known it, doubtless he would have given him attention.

In the effort to find a place where the stream could be crossed, Larry pushed on, never forgetting that he was in continual danger from the Shawanoes. The day was waning, and night was not far off.

"If I don't strike the right sort of spot," he concluded, "by the time night is here, I'll find a place where I can swim from one bank to the other. Halloo!" A dark object on the ground a short distance in advance caught his eye. Stooping down, he found to his delight it was his lost cap, doubtless carried thither by this same bear.

It will be remembered that the torrent to which we have made reference so often was not crossed by the trail leading from the settlement to the block-house, although the two approached quite closely at several points. The winding course of the path was mainly with the object of avoiding a passage over the stream. The boys, therefore, knew little about it, and the slight journey Larry Murphy was making was in the nature of an exploration.

When he was about ready to give up hope of finding a method of crossing other than by swimming, a surprise greeted him. The high banks not only drew near together, but they were bridged by a fallen tree, whose base was several feet away from the edge of the other shore. The branches rested on the ground near the feet of the astonished youth, who felt like throwing off his hat with delight.

"If I ever meet the gentleman that felled that tree for me, I'll give him me heartfil thanks."

Larry would have been pleased had the trunk been larger; not that it lacked strength, but it would have been much easier to walk it, for it is no light task to pick one's way along a comparative sapling, especially when a deep, rapid stream is sweeping beneath.

By this time the sun had set and the light was growing dim in the woods. He stood back just beyond the dead branches and meditatively scratched his head. He knew that in all probability the tree had fallen in this position of its own accord, and perhaps never had served as a bridge; but, if so, it was because the occasion did not arise, since nothing could be more opportune.

"I'm wondering whether I'm equal to the job," he added, still scratching his scrubby hair. "If I step off I'll have to go over the falls, unless I crawl out at the one spot, and I'm likely to miss that. If the sun was shining it would be easy enough, and I guess maybe I can do it as it is."

This was a case where it was idle to delay. He therefore fastened his rifle in the usual way behind his back, so as to leave his arms free, for more than likely he would need them before reaching the opposite side.

"There won't be much use of saving mesilf without the gun, so we'll hang together or go down, if we must, with our colors flying."

He placed his foot on the upper part of the trunk, just beyond where the first branch appeared, and tested it. So far as he could tell, it was sufficiently strong to bear ten times his weight.

He now advanced inch by inch, but had gone less than a fourth of the distance when he found that his rifle was balanced in such a way behind his shoulder that it was unsteady, and liable to throw him at any moment.

It was delicate and dangerous to retreat, but he did it, slowly struggling until he was so near the shore from which he started that he was able to turn quickly and leap to the solid ground.

He took several minutes to adjust his weapon, for the slight trial he had made taught him it would be exceedingly perilous for him to run any sort of risk. It would be all he could do to get across under the most favorable circumstances.

In the gathering gloom, when everything was in readiness, he placed his foot on the narrow portion of the trunk and prepared to repeat the attempt, but at the very moment of doing so he made the discovery that some one else had started to cross from the other side.

Larry Murphy learned the truth in the nick of time. Ten seconds later and he would have been on the trunk at the same moment as the other, and an advance by both must have caused them to meet over the middle of the stream.

As it was, Larry was uncertain whether he had been seen, or whether it was a man or animal that was approaching. The doubt, however, lasted but a second, when out from the gloom advanced a Shawanoe warrior, who came along the narrow bridge with the deliberate certainty of a Blondin. No fear of *his* making a misstep.

This of itself told the youth that the Indian had not seen him, for, if he had, nothing would have been more foolhardy than thus to place himself at the mercy of the one who a short time before had shown his nerve and marksmanship under more difficult circumstances.

But for the displacement of his rifle, Larry Murphy would have walked into the arms of the red man. As it was, he had missed doing so, or at least had missed discovery, by the narrowest margin conceivable.

With the coolness and cleverness of a veteran the lad moved back among the denser gloom of the trees, where he was confident no one could see him unless close enough to touch his person. Then he paused and watched proceedings. Hardly had the sun sunk below the horizon when the round full moon gave out its light, flooding wood and stream with

radiance. It was the moonlight that revealed the sinewy figure to the watcher in the darkness.

Larry could not but admire the surefootedness of the red man, who never stepped off the trunk until standing over solid earth. Then he turned about and faced the side from which he had come. He was so close to the edge of the gorge that he was still revealed in the moonlight.

The temptation was strong to give him a quick shove into the water, leaving him to get out the best way he could; but before the youth could act upon his mischievous suggestion a second Indian emerged from the gloom and carefully crossed the primitive bridge used by his predecessor.

"What does all this mean?" Larry asked himself. "Is the whole party coming over one by one? It may be that they will bring Whart with them. Halloo!"

A third Shawanoe crossed, but no more. The three stood for several minutes so close to the youth that but for the noise of the torrent he would have been sure of betrayal through the throbbing of his heart.

There was a moment when he believed they had seen him from the first, and intended to turn like lightning upon him. In case they did so he meant to make a rush, with the hope of forcing them into the river.

The red men remained but a few minutes, however, when they disappeared as silently as phantoms. Whither they had gone, or what their business was and why three of them had come from the other side, were questions beyond the solution of the puzzled lad, who was certain that he had never stumbled into such a mixed condition of affairs.

He waited a long time, fearful of venturing to walk over the trunk, lest he might meet others. When that did not take place, the likelihood of there being more of the Shawanoes in the vicinity, who would be quick to detect his approach, was not lessened.

It looked to Larry as though the three had come over to look for him, though why they should expect to find him in the darkness was hard to understand. If the sun were in the sky there would be ground for their hope of outwitting him. The fact remained that, so far as he knew, young Edwards was still on the other side of the torrent, and his friend could not hope to do him any service so long as they were thus separated.

"I must git across and put mesilf in such a position that he can lean on me, but I'm thinking it won't be the best thing to try it at this place, where so many may observe me."

It was only ordinary prudence that led Larry Murphy to make this decision. Brave as he was, and often so to the verge of recklessness, he was not the sort of person to run into danger unnecessarily. While it was not to be expected that he would find any more bridges to use in crossing the stream, there was reason to look for such a narrowing of the banks that he could make the leap, and he set out once more to find the spot.

To his disappointment the ground over which he was obliged to make his way changed for the worse. It became so broken that it was impossible in some places to progress without making detours that led him a considerable distance from the stream. As there was no saying whether or not these diversions were not at the very places where the water could be leaped, he was in anything but an agreeable frame of mind. This was not decreased when he suddenly tumbled down a cavity deep enough to bruise him severely.

His efforts to save himself where his eyes gave no help probably made the mistake worse.

"I'm thankful that I'm alive," was his honest thought when able to pull himself together. "I've had the best luck--whisht!"

At that moment he became aware that he was not alone.

CHAPTER XI.

IN A CORNER.

Larry Murphy's first thought, when he found he had stumbled into something in the nature of a cave, was that it might serve him as a refuge or a fort in the impending fight with the Shawanoes, who were certainly beginning to crowd him hard.

The night being fully come, his eyes were of little use, but the sense of feeling told him that he had stumbled down an abrupt incline, perhaps a rod in length, and into a cavern in the rocks, of whose extent he could form no idea. It might be only a few feet, or it might extend backward or to the right or left until its ramifications equalled those of the Mammoth Cave, afterwards discovered at no great distance from that very spot.

He was debating the question with himself when a figure appeared at the head of the short incline down which he had stumbled. There was just enough arrowy moonlight reaching that portion of the rocks for him to identify the huge, lumbering mass as that of an immense bear.

He had his rifle at his shoulder, with the intention of letting fly at him as he came head on, when the thought that the Shawanoes were so near that they would hear the report caused him to hesitate. If they were near enough to appear before he could get away he would be in a bad fix, knowing nothing of the cave, and with no chance to get food or water.

Still, he could not stand still and allow the brute to make a supper upon him, and, plucky as he was, he had no wish to fight him alone with his hunting-knife.

He thought and acted quickly. He resolutely walked backward several paces in the cave at the risk of breaking his neck. His extended hands told him that the space was wide, and he moved silently to the right, so as to be out of the path of the animal, provided he followed anything like a direct course.

The enormous beast swung along in his heavy fashion, and was in the act of entering the cavern, when he stopped, emitting a grunting snort, and abruptly withdrew. He had scented something wrong, and did not intend to rush headlong into danger.

The act of the bear disconcerted Larry for a moment. Standing within the cavern, he could have fired his gun with little risk of the report being heard outside. That was one of his motives in retreating, willing to let the animal alone if he would be equally considerate, but not afraid to fire the moment it was necessary.

But bruin not only withdrew from the entrance to the cavern, but clambered up the incline to a point where he could not be seen by the youth. The discovery on his part that some intruder was in his home had doubtless decided him to have it out in the open air rather than in the dark.

This was a wise proceeding on the part of the animal, which is rarely capable of anything of that nature, and it outwitted the Irish lad--an exploit not often achieved by others.

He could not leave the cavern without following the bear up the incline and bringing about a collision, for he was certain the beast was lurking near, with the intention of attacking him.

After some delay he moved softly toward the opening of the cavern to gain a view of the exterior, which was faintly lit up in places by the moonlight. He could see nothing, and he hesitated to venture out through fear that, despite its size, the bear would pounce upon him before he could defend himself.

The brave youth, however, fully understood his grave situation. So long as he remained within the cavern he might as well be a thousand miles away for all the help he could give his friend. Instead of assisting Wharton Edwards, he was in need of assistance himself.

Knowing the patience with which most wild animals will await the descent of treed game, he believed this bear would remain on the outside through the night, and perhaps a portion of the next day, with the probability that even then the prisoner would have to make a fight of it before he could get away. This was more than Larry could stand, and he did not mean to wait.

If the bear was really lying on the outside, he was not so near the top of the incline that the youth did not have some chance of eluding him without firing a gun.

Furthermore, if he was obliged to discharge his rifle, it was by no means likely that any of the Shawanoes were so close

that they could rush to the spot before he would have the opportunity of getting away. He had already stood within an arm's reach of them, as may be said, without discovery; and, although that was because they had no suspicion of the fact, yet the favoring night, it would seem, ought to give him all the hope he could ask.

"At any rate," he concluded, "I've stayed here as long as I intend to, and now I'll take my departure."

Larry Murphy, having decided on his course of action, followed it out with his usual promptness. With his rifle grasped in his right hand, and his body slightly crouching, he began climbing the incline which led to the level ground above. This was so steep that when he stumbled at the top in the first place, he rolled all the way to the bottom, but with care he could go up or down without falling.

The stillness was profound--the sound of the falls being dull and faint, as though they were miles distant in the depth of the wilderness. Though the fierce Shawanoes were prowling in the darkness among the trees, not a rustling leaf betrayed their presence.

Near the top of the slope he sank on his hands and knees and advanced inch by inch. The bear, as we have stated, is not famous for his sagacity, but at times he shows a remarkable cunning, and this specimen was not likely to let his supper walk away without causing some trouble.

As the lad's head came to a level with the surface he crouched still lower and advanced a little farther. This gave him the "purchase" he wanted. Then, sitting on his heels, he brought his gun around to the front, the hammer up, and the weapon held with both hands. In this position it could be fired the instant needed.

He now slowly raised his head and peered intently in all directions. His height was sufficient to allow him to see all about him, but the intense gloom rendered his eyes almost useless. It was impossible for him to identify any object.

Fancying that he might be able to detect bruin's breathing in the stillness, he listened for a few seconds, but was unable to hear anything. He was now on the threshold, as may be said, and it was useless to wait longer.

He assumed the upright position, stepped away from the incline for several paces, and then stopped. He meant to do this with a certain dignity, and fully expected that it would compel the bear to uncover himself so that he would know where to fire.

He began his effort well, but in the darkness he could not observe the obstructions in his way; so, when at his most dignified point, an obtruding boulder sent him sprawling over it.

He was not hurt, and when he pulled himself together, and, with his weapon ready, stared about in the gloom, he not only saw but heard nothing.

And then the odd truth dawned upon him. There was no bear near, and had not been for some time past.

The animal, after his hurried retreat up the incline, on discovering the intruder in his home, had not lain down to pounce upon him as he came forth, as that intruder suspected, but had lumbered off into the woods, apparently as anxious to get away from the young hunter as the latter was too keep out of his reach.

Larry had waited a long time in the cavern before making this venture, and naturally he was chagrined on learning the truth.

"It's a big lot of valuable time wasted," he muttered.

He was now once more free to do as he chose, but without any clear idea of what course to take. His whole anxiety was to find his friend, Wharton Edwards, and give him what help he could, if he stood in need of it, but where to look for him he knew no more than the earth's satellite.

Ah! through the cool hush of the summer night a soft, almost inaudible sound reached him. It was the faint, tremulous cooing of the wild dove, but so low, timid, and flute-like, that the bird seemed to mean it should be heard only in its immediate vicinity.

The heart of Larry Murphy gave a quick throb. That was the call he and Wharton Edwards had practiced until they could give it perfectly. Could it be that his friend was not only free from the Shawanoes, but was so near?

It seemed impossible, and yet, when the signal was repeated a minute later, all doubt was gone, and, hardly unable to repress a shout, the lad replied with a precisely similar call.

These signals were of that pure musical quality that, when first made, neither could tell the point whence the other came. The note was simply "in the air." Larry, however, suspected that his friend had crossed the torrent a few minutes

before by means of the prostrate tree, and he began treading his way thither with the utmost caution.

For several minutes utter stillness reigned. Some cause led the first one to hold his peace for that time.

Larry was so near the narrow, moonlit space bordering the torrent that he halted, deeming it unwise to venture farther. It was evident, despite the care he used, he had gone away from instead of toward his friend. To advance any farther was likely to take him beyond reach, and possibly complicate matters with the Shawanoes, who could not be far off.

"I wonder where they can be?" he mused, sufficiently prudent to remain in the shadow among the trees. "He's very careful, which is wise, and I'll be the same."

He waited minute after minute, without hearing the expected signal, and a vague misgiving began to trouble him.

"It can't be I'm too far off for me to hear him. I'll give him the call mesilf, and a little louder."

He was shaping his lips to form the singular cry, when it sounded so near that he started. With the signal came a thrill of affright, for the listening ear detected a shade of difference; it was not precisely what he expected, nor exactly similar to his own.

At the same moment a crouching figure appeared on the edge of the moonlit space, and advancing with the slow, noiseless motion of a shadow across the face of a dial.

Larry Murphy saw that it was a Shawanoe Indian. As if the red man meant to reveal himself beyond mistake, he took a single step forward, held his head bent for a moment in the attitude of intense attention, and then slowly looked toward every point of the compass in turn.

At one angle the full moonlight fell upon the painted face, which the youth recognized as that of the ferocious Blazing Arrow.

"I'll settle you!" whispered the youth, stealthily raising the hammer of his gun. "Ye have no business with that signal."

He tried to present his weapon without any noise, but with all his care the hammer, as it was drawn back, made two dull clicks, which sounded startlingly loud in the situation.

Knowing that the ear of the Indian had caught the noise, Larry brought his weapon to his shoulder like a flash and pointed the muzzle toward the spot, less than twenty-five feet away.

But no Blazing Arrow was there. He had disappeared like the coon at the flash of the huntsman's rifle.

Whether his acute sense of hearing had enabled him to locate the point whence came the double click, Larry did not wait to see. He had no intention that the miscreant, knife in hand, should come down on him with the resistless force of an avalanche.

Lowering his head to help conceal his movements, he drew back several paces, with a silence and stealth that the Shawanoe himself could not have surpassed. Then, crouching low on the ground, he waited, watched and listened.

His rifle was ready to be fired, and he resolved to let Blazing Arrow have the charge the instant he caught sight of him. The warrior was cunning, but he was liable to uncover himself in moving about the youth, whose precise location he could not know.

The danger of the latter was that other Shawanoes besides this one were near, and might close around him in the gloom. He was ready, and would fight any number of them if they beset him, but there could be but one result of such a desperate struggle.

Hearing and seeing nothing of his enemies, he decided to improve his situation by a further change of base. Inasmuch as the slightest slip was certain to prove fatal, the work was slow and surpassingly delicate.

The foot was lifted quickly from the ground and suspended in the air and lowered slowly, while the body leaned gently forward, waiting a long while before its weight was allowed to rest on the limb.

The tedious work was continued until Larry moved fully a dozen yards from his starting-point. Then, for the first time, he breathed freely and felt that it was safe to pause.

Still nothing was seen or heard of Blazing Arrow or his companions, and the youth, with a shudder, asked himself the startling question: "How came the Shawanoe to have the signal of Wharton Edwards?"

CHAPTER XII.

REVERSING POSITIONS.

Pausing on the edge of the natural clearing which had been the scene of the terrific race between himself and Blazing Arrow, Wharton looked back, and in the gathering darkness saw a flickering figure on the farther side, where the trail re-entered the wood, and he knew it was that of the champion runner of his tribe, whom he had not only defeated in the contest of fleetness, but in the singular battle of wits which followed.

"I'd wager a good deal, if I had a chance," muttered the lad, "that he feels just a little impatient with himself. I am quite sure that matters haven't gone to suit him."

It was in the power of the youth to turn the tables still more completely on the dusky miscreant. He had but to wait where he was until he was within easy range, and then shoot him down. It need not be said, however, after what had taken place a short time before, that this was a crime which nothing could have induced young Edwards to commit, even though he knew the Shawanoe was as eager as a tiger to secure his life.

"We're likely to come together again before this business is over," he reflected, "where I won't feel so much like letting you alone as I do now."

There was one uncomfortable proceeding which he did not mean to undergo; that was to have Blazing Arrow dogging at his heels like a sneaking wolf awaiting the chance to pounce upon him unawares. It is hard to imagine a more trying situation than that of knowing an enemy is stealing behind you in the darkness, on the alert to dart forward when your vigilance is relaxed, and make his attack with the deadly quickness of the rattlesnake.

Walking but a short way, Wharton stepped aside from the trail and stood motionless among the trees, where an owl would not have noticed him in flying along the path. He was not kept waiting many minutes. A soft tap-tap sounded on the ground as Blazing Arrow, in a loping trot, left the clearing and plunged into the wood, and then a faint, shadowy figure was dimly seen moving between the trees.

Directly opposite Wharton it came to a halt. Because of the obscurity he could not be seen except in motion, but the watcher knew what that meant. He was listening. He could not be assured what the youth in front was doing, and since his experience with him, the redskin understood that he had a young man above the ordinary as his antagonist.

A minute later Wharton saw something flicker in the gloom. The Shawanoe had started on again. This time he did not trot, for the protruding limbs interfered and would have made too much rustling. He walked rapidly enough, however, to overtake any one going at the usual rate.

Waiting until he believed he was at a safe distance in advance, the lad stepped back upon the trail and continued his journey toward the war party, where he hoped to be of service to his friend.

Since the white and red men had exchanged situations, Wharton had now to guard against running into the one in advance. If the Shawanoe should learn what had been done he would be sure to try some trick on the youth. By crouching along the path he could leap upon him as he passed and bear him helplessly to the ground.

It need not be said that young Edwards was on the alert. He could not have been more so, frequently pausing to listen, or to use his eyes, so far as possible, in the darkness.

Unable to hear anything through the air, he knelt down and pressed his ear to the ground. That served him no better, and he slowed his progress, and stopped more frequently.

"I wonder whether he has any suspicion that I am behind him?" was his thought. "It may be," he added grimly, "that he is thinking what sort of yarn to get up to explain why he hasn't brought me with him. If I am not careful he may nab me after all. I'd like to know whether he still has the headache, or whether he hasn't set me down as a fool for letting him off when I had the chance to finish him."

If it should so prove that Blazing Arrow was not aware that, instead of following the white youth, the reverse was the case, the space between them was certainly increasing, for one was going slow and the other fast.

When the distance passed became considerable, Wharton began to feel hope. They were close to where he had already undergone several stirring adventures, and he was almost certain the savage runner knew nothing of his whereabouts. Finally he turned off from the trail almost at the point where he had started to run away from Blazing Arrow and his companions.

Attentively listening and watching, he heard nothing, and then began a guarded examination of the immediate neighborhood. It was there the Shawanoes had crouched when he bounded across the gorge in quest of his rifle, but it was not to be expected that they had remained there ever since. The examination convinced him that all had moved somewhere else.

Wharton's concern being now for Larry Murphy, he did some close reasoning.

"I know he will, risk his life to help me, whom he naturally thinks is in a bad way, but how is he going to do it, or how has he got across to this side of the torrent? He can't make the leap that I did, and I am quite sure he wouldn't try to swim, because that would compel him to go below the falls. The chances are that he is on the other side."

This conclusion, it will be perceived, was correct; but had the reasoner known of that fallen tree spanning the gorge, it is likely his decision would have been different.

Before repeating the leap he had already made, Wharton spent more time in what may be called reconnoitering.

It was altogether beyond reason that the Shawanoes should be looking for any such performance, and with little hesitation, therefore, he walked out from the shadow, ran across the moonlit space of rocks, and, with the same ease and grace as before, placed himself on the other bank. He quickly scurried to cover, and then awaited the result.

It was nothing, so far as he could tell. Still at a loss which way to turn or what to do, but hoping that Larry might be somewhere within reach, he made the signal which has been described elsewhere.

"If he hears that he will know what it means. By gracious, he has heard it!"

From a point close at hand, and directly behind him, came the response, although, as the reader well knows, it was not the lips of Larry Murphy that made it.



CHAPTER XIII.

A BLUNDER.

Blazing Arrow possessed the subtlety of a serpent and the cunning of a fox. Underneath his actions lay his unextinguishable hatred of the white race. His anger against it seemed always to be flaming at white heat.

But the slyest and wisest of animals and men are liable at times to overreach themselves. Had the imp been content with what was unquestionably a remarkable exploit he would have held Wharton Edwards at his mercy, but he must needs spoil all by his attempt to make assurance doubly sure.

He had not seen the youth after he watched him disappear across the clearing where the back trail entered the woods. He never suspected that he was not on his front on the return, and failed to see his last leap across the torrent. Confident, however, that he was not far off, he began a search for him, with the hope of getting matters in better shape before rejoining his comrades with an account of his experience.

It happened, therefore, that when young Edwards made his dove-call to Larry Murphy, Blazing Arrow was so near that he heard it. He knew that it came from none of his people, and consequently must be from one of the whites.

With extraordinary cleverness he replied by several notes, whose resemblance to those causing them was so wonderfully close as to be perfect. Fearful, however, that he might not have hit the exact note, he repeated the call.

And in doing so he made the fatal blunder. One of the unchangeable laws governing Wharton Edwards and Larry Murphy at such times was that under no circumstances was either to repeat a signal without a minute or two interval. It was the violation of this rule that apprised the youth of his peril and gave him time to save himself.

Suspecting that it was Blazing Arrow who was near, Wharton retreated farther into the wood. In making the movement he used all the caution he could, and believed that no one had overheard him. What followed looked as though he was right in the conclusion, for the Indian, without moving from his tracks, signalled again, making the same mistake as before by repeating it, in his effort to repress his impatience at the delay in the response.

"I don't think I'll be in a hurry to open a conversation with you," thought Wharton; "I'm looking for somebody else."

He was still in a dangerous situation, however, and continued edging away from the locality where he had come so near falling a victim to the resentment of the warrior, who was among the most cunning of his tribe. Wharton's heart sank when, despite the extreme care he used, he caught his foot in a running vine and narrowly escaped falling. He instantly straightened up and waited for the attack that he was sure was coming; but, as the minutes passed, he concluded the Indian was already so far off that the slight rustling did not reach him. It was probable that the Shawanoe, in trying to outwit the youth, had moved away from him, and the two were now separated by a considerable space.

How was it that this Indian was in possession of the signal which the two youths used when in danger?

In the case of Wharton, however, there was little of the anxiety of his friend. The latter heard the call before emitting it himself, so that it was impossible that Blazing Arrow should have got it from him; and, since Wharton Edwards was the only other person that possessed it, the misgiving of the Irish lad was warranted.

But with Wharton the case was different. Blazing Arrow's signal succeeded his, and, therefore, was but a clever imitation.

"It may be that he got it from Larry," reflected our young friend, "but the chances are against it. Where can the fellow be?"

It was an exasperating reflection that for hours the work had been of a blind nature, as may be said. The youths had been separated, there had been a fierce race, fighting, and running back and forth, and all manner of incidents, and yet matters stood as at the beginning.

While this was a cause for gratification in one respect, inasmuch as the two were still safe from the most dreaded tribe of Indians in the West, the disheartening fact was that the boys were just where they were when the danger broke upon them. They had not advanced a rod along the trail to the block-house, where Wharton's parents would probably arrive that evening. The prospect was poor for the boys appearing until long after the hour they were expected.

"We ought to have had an understanding before we separated; but then," added Wharton disgustedly, "I don't see how we could, or what good it would have done. Larry wouldn't leave as long as he thought I was in trouble, and I'm sure I wouldn't desert him. I wonder now----"

A new thought had come into his mind--that of withdrawing from the neighborhood, making all haste to the block-house, and bringing back aid. There was always a number of the most skilled rangers of the frontier at this post, and they were ever ready to respond to any call for help. Probably Daniel Boone or the great Simon Kenton was at hand, with unerring rifle and marvellous woodcraft.

Wharton could reach the block-house before daylight, and be back while the day was yet young, with his new friends. Learned in the ways of the woods and the red men, they would quickly become the hunters instead of the hunted, and teach the marauders a lesson to be remembered forever.

Had the question presented itself as it did after his vanquishment of Blazing Arrow, the youth would have continued his flight along the trail, and been back with his friends before or by the time the sun was on the horizon. As it was, he debated the question a long time, and then decided not to continue the journey until he gained some definite knowledge of Larry; his own movements depended upon that. If the other had fallen, then Wharton should not lose a moment hurrying away from the accursed neighborhood. If his comrade was a prisoner of the Shawanoes, he must be equally prompt in securing assistance, since he unaided could do no good; but if the other was still his own master, then both would give an exhibition of rapid travelling toward the block-house.

"No," said young Edwards, resolutely, "I don't go till I learn something about Larry. I'll do just as he would do if in my place."

And he might have added, truthfully, "and just what he is doing at this moment."

Manifestly there was but one way to learn the truth, and that was by investigating, and the only way to investigate was to keep moving, which he did.

The night was so far along that the Shawanoes were quite certain to have kindled a camp-fire somewhere in the woods. This was their custom, and it was this beacon light, as it may be called, for which young Edwards now began hunting.



CHAPTER XIV.

LOOKING ON.

Wharton Edwards was not long finding that for which he was seeking. While feeling his way among the trees, with all his senses on the alert, a point of light suddenly flashed out in the gloom. It was directly ahead, and he had but to penetrate a short distance farther, when he came in sight of the camp-fire of the Shawanoes.

He approached with great care, and halted at what he deemed a safe distance to study the characteristic scene before him.

Careful counting, repeated several times, showed eleven Indian warriors gathered together about a mass of burning wood, which was kindled in a small open space. Upon a fallen tree were seated four of them, while the rest were lolling on the ground in lazy attitudes. Two seemed to be examining the locks of their guns, and nearly all were smoking.

There were no signs of any food, but the lusty youth felt so hungry that he was sure they must have had something to eat before he came upon them. Game was so abundant in the country that it was unreasonable to suppose any one would go hungry unless he happened to be in a situation similar to that of the youth himself.

One fact gave Wharton a thrill of gratitude and hope; Larry was not with the group of Indians, and, therefore, could not be a prisoner.

Young Edwards had been under the impression that there were about a score of Shawanoes with which he and Larry Murphy had collided, but counting those that had fallen by the way, there were less.

The absence of the youth from the camp could not be a guarantee of his weal, for he might have been stricken down in the woods, but the sign had been so favorable that Wharton felt more hopeful than at any time since their separation.

He was quick, however, to notice a significant fact: Blazing Arrow was also absent.

"I would give anything to know where he is and what he is doing," thought the youth. "It may be that he is leaning against the tree and still studying over the yarn that is to prevent the rest knowing I outran him, but it is more likely he is prowling through the woods after Larry and me."

The answer to this conjecture came suddenly and startlingly. Wharton, not forgetting his caution, kept well back in the gloom, with his body screened behind the trunk of a tree. He was attentively watching the group around the camp-fire, when something moved between him and the light, partly eclipsing it.

A second look showed the form of the twelfth Shawanoe, walking silently toward the blaze; and, as he joined the others, and stood so the firelight revealed his features, Wharton Edwards recognized him as Blazing Arrow.

"He has struck it," muttered the youth. "He has got the yarn in shape at last. I wish I could hear it, and find what sort of a fancy he has."

The great runner was without any gun, and it was evident that he must have wrenched his inventive powers to straighten out matters so as to retain his prestige among these warlike people. His position as a great warrior and the real leader of the party could not fail to help in the test to which he was subjected.

The arrival of the dusky desperado caused a sensation. Every face was turned, and those who were seated on the tree rose to greet him. The silence in the wood allowed Wharton to hear their gruff, jerky sentences, but since he did not understand a word of Shawanoe, his ears were of no service.

One of the warriors extended a rifle to Blazing Arrow, who waved it back until he, standing in the middle of the group, gave his account of matters.

Some years later the settlers learned the particulars of this amazing narrative. The great runner said he allowed the youth to draw away from him for a time in order to put forth his best efforts. When this had taken them to the natural clearing, with which all were familiar, he started to run him down, and would have done so before the open space was half crossed but for the sudden appearance of five or six white men coming from the other direction.

Of course the new comers were fully armed, but, nothing daunted, the valiant Shawanoe assailed them. He brought down two, and would have had the others at his mercy had not a shot broken the lock of his gun. He then threw away the useless weapon, uttered a defiant whoop, and strode back toward his own party, whither the whites did not dare follow him.

It was one of the listeners to this stupendous statement who told it to the pioneers. When asked whether he and the others believed it, a shadowy smile lit up the dusky face, and he quaintly replied that they tried to do so.

Having rendered his account, Blazing Arrow and several of his comrades seated themselves on the fallen tree and engaged in an animated talk, which lasted for a quarter of an hour or more. The burden of it was that one of the whites was still near them, and must not be permitted to steal along the trail in the direction of the block-house, for if he succeeded in reaching that point he would be safe against anything the Shawanoes could do.

The dusky prevaricator was cunning enough not to claim that he had slain Wharton Edwards, for the youth, being alive, was liable to turn up in a way that would throw discredit on his veracity.

The lad, who was looking on, could only conjecture the meaning of what passed before his eyes. When he saw a couple of warriors rise to their feet and come toward him, he supposed it was to make hunt for him and his friends. He was made to realize, too, the delicately dangerous position in which he stood.

When the figures plainly outlined against the illumination of the camp-fire started, he fervently wished himself elsewhere. He dared not stir, for, as if fate were dallying with him, a lot of wood, thrown on the blaze within a few minutes before, threw a circle of light to the base of the tree from behind which he was cautiously peering. Had he started to withdraw, the two Shawanoes would have been upon him in a twinkling. He could only wait where he was, and hope they might pass by without detecting his presence.

He hardly breathed as he heard the rustling of their moccasins on the leaves, and pressed his upright figure against the bark as though he would force himself into the very structure of the tree itself.

Fortunately the suspense quickly passed. If the couple were hunting for him and his companion, they did not expect to find either so near headquarters, and speedily vanished in the gloom beyond, stepping so softly that their footfalls became inaudible.

This incident gave young Edwards a good scare. He felt that he had run an unnecessary risk, and wasted time in staying so long after learning that Larry was not with the main party of Indians. More of these were likely to leave the camp, and the danger of his position must increase.

Without delay, therefore, he began his retrograde movement. This was easy, and he soon placed himself where he could feel comparatively safe.

His curiosity led him to pick his way back to the torrent that had been the scene of so many moving incidents of the afternoon. He was somewhat confused as to the points of the compass, but the faint roar was his guide, and with little trouble he placed himself quite near the stream, which coursed between the rocks with such impetuosity.

The youth was too prudent to advance into the moonlight, where the prowlers were liable to see him, and so it happened that he approached the rocks at a point that was new to him. To this fact was due a surprise. He was just in time to see one Indian following the other across the foot-bridge made by the prostrate tree.

"I never suspected that was there," he said to himself when he comprehended its meaning; "I thought there was no means by which Larry could make his way back to the trail without swimming below the falls or fording some place farther up. I wonder whether he knows about that?"

The action of the Indians gave Wharton a suspicion of the truth. They had crossed the torrent with the intention of hiding somewhere along the path leading to the block-house, so as to cut off the flight of one or both of the boys in that direction. This, seemingly, was an easy thing to do, provided the fugitives were unsuspecting of what was going on.

Young Edwards saw no way of breaking through the maze of perplexity that had closed around him. He had done his utmost without learning where his friend was. More than that, although he was hopeful, he could feel no certainty that he was really alive.

The occasion justified another appeal to the peculiar dove signal, and he now made it.

CHAPTER XV.

A HAIL AND AN ANSWER.

Meanwhile Larry Murphy was not idle. He had never received a more terrifying shock than that caused by the discovery that the signal which he was confident was made by Wharton Edwards came from the lips of Blazing Arrow.

On the first thought there was but one explanation of this: his friend had called to him and had been overheard by the Shawanoe, who instantly caught it up, well knowing its significance, and had deceived Wharton by his clever imitation.

This supposition, as the reader knows, was correct; but when Larry went further, and decided that his comrade had fallen a victim to the treacherous red man, the reader also knows he made a mistake.

Firm in the terrible belief for the time, he was so overcome that he sat down on a boulder, too faint and weak to stand, until several minutes had passed.

"This is a bad go, is this same," he mused with a deep sigh. "If the Indians had to take one, why didn't they take mesilf? They're likely to do the same--it's little I care if they do."

So extreme was his dejection, that had he known that a half dozen Shawanoes were stealing upon him at that moment he would not have stirred from his position or attempted to defend himself.

This intense depression, however, could not last. All strong, rugged natures are quick to rebound from such pressure and soon reassert themselves. By and by he felt a grain of hope. The rifle lying across his knees was clasped more firmly; he raised his head and listened; had he discovered the approach of a foe he would now have defended himself.

"I wish that Blazing Arrow would walk out in front of me and dare me to tackle him," he muttered, gnashing his teeth. "I wonder where he is?"

He rose to his feet and peeped around in the gloom. A while before he had shunned the chief, and counted himself fortunate because he was able to escape a meeting. Now he would have felt doubly fortunate could he have gained a chance to attack him.

When the Shawanoe was wanted he was somewhere else.

"I wonder," continued Larry, as hope grew stronger within him, "whether Whart wasn't sharp enough to play the trick on Blazing Arrow that he did on mesilf? He must have heard the call, to learn how to make the same; but Whart may have give him the slip."

It was a faint hope, but it did the lad good. He had hunted so much in the company of his friend that they had not only acquired a good deal of woodcraft, but were familiar with each other's ways.

Larry recalled that he had heard no gun fired since the discharge of his weapon. It was fair to believe, therefore, that whatever the fate of young Edwards might be, he had not been shot. There were other methods of putting him out of the way, but the belief to which his friend was rapidly bringing himself was that the one for whom he was concerned was a prisoner of the Shawanoes.

The way to find out was to discover the camp of the red men, which must be pitched somewhere in the neighborhood. It will thus be seen that the lads were reasoning along the same lines, to the same conclusion.

Larry had risen from the boulder on which he had seated himself, and decided to move farther back in the woods in search of the camp-fire that he knew was burning there. In making the search he would have to go it blind, since there was no means of finding guidance.

But, as in more than one previous instance, he fortunately discovered that others were near him before he was observed. He stood motionless, peering and listening under the trees, where the gloom was so intense that he might have brushed by a man without either seeing the other.

They were there, however, and a moment later were seen more plainly in the moonlight, across which they passed to reach the torrent whither they were making their way.

Larry was surprised when he saw two Indians walking with their light, noiseless tread over the rocks. He had supposed there was but a solitary warrior.

"I'm hoping that one of them is Blazing Arrow," was his thought.

He was resentful to that degree toward this particular Shawanoe that, despite the danger from his companion, he would have shot him down; and there can be little question that in doing so he would have rendered a service to humanity.

But he could not identify either of the red men in the moonlight, with their faces turned away from him. He saw them walk to the edge of the torrent, where the tree lay, and then one followed the other across.

"I'd like to know the meaning of that; they must be hunting for Whart or mesilf. I'm pretty sure they won't find mesilf there, and I don't know about Whart. If they haven't got him already, it may take more than them to find him."

As yet he could not know whether the war party were on this or the other side of the stream. It looked as if the couple were returning to camp. If this was so, the youth must follow them to obtain the information he wanted.

He had reached this conclusion and was about to venture out in the moonlight, when he was thrilled by the sound of the signal which he feared he was never to hear again.

He paused and listened, afraid to reply and yet on the point of doing so.

At the proper interval the call was repeated, and then, so certain that everything was right was he that, instead of making the proper answer, he called in a guarded undertone:

"Is that yersilf, Whart?"

"It is," was the reply of the delighted friend, and the next minute they were together.

It was a joyous reunion, even though the shadow of great danger rested upon the two youths. Wharton Edwards and Larry Murphy had been separated, seemingly, with slight prospect of ever seeing each other again; they had gone through many perils during the preceding few hours, and at the moment when despair had almost taken possession of both, they clasped hands and stood side by side.

"Are ye sure it's yersilf, Whart?" asked the elder, squeezing the fingers of his friend, who fully reciprocated the warmth of feeling.

"I'm as sure, Larry, as you are that it's you."

"Then we'll consider it settled; and how are ye?" he asked, shaking again the hand which he had not yet released.

"I was never better, and thankful and happy to find you alive when I feared it was all over with you."

"The same to yersilf; and have ye suffered no harrum?"

"None at all, though matters kept moving; I dodged up the trail, and the only Shawanoe who followed me was Blazing Arrow."

"And did he catch ye?"

"Not that I am aware of. You remember the natural clearing, a little way out toward the block-house?"

"That I do."

"Well, when I struck that, Blazing Arrow was not far behind me. He had my gun and I hadn't any, so that all I could do was to run, and there he and I had the race that we missed at the settlement."

"Tell me about it," eagerly asked Larry.

"There isn't much to tell, except that I did my best, and I suppose he did the same, Larry; I beat him badly; I must have gained fifty yards on him."

"And is that the honest truth now, Whart?"

"It is."

"Heaven bless ye!"

And the enthusiastic fellow struck his friend a resounding whack on the shoulder.

"Sh!" warned Wharton, "we must talk low, for some of them may be near us."

"Why didn't ye sind word to me, so that I could have stood by ye and cheered ye on and watched the sight? Wouldn't it have been a treat!"

"I would have been proud if you and the rest of our friends could have been there, for I did better than I thought I could."

The friends told the particulars of what had happened to each other since their separation. Happy, indeed, were they in their reunion.

"Whart," said Larry a few minutes later, "I knowed there was something I'd forgot."

"What's that?"

"I'm as hungry as I can be."

"So am I, and have been for hours; I wish there was some way of getting supper, but I know of none. There is something else, however, that is more important than supper."

"And what is that?"

"We must get away from here at once. We ought to have left long ago."

"I'm thinking ye're right, and I'm ready to do your bidding whenever you are ready. I came near crossing over that tree a good while ago, and I'm prepared to do it now if you say so."

"I'm not satisfied that that is the best course."

"Why not?"

"From what you have told me and what I have seen, the Shawanoes seem to be using that to-night as a bridge. I don't know how many have come and gone over it to-day. Suppose that a party of them made up their minds to cross at the same time we do?"

"And that's what some of 'em did when I was about to try it; if me gun hadn't wobbled behind me shoulder we'd have met on the log."

"The trees grow to the bank at each end of the log, so that if these two hadn't slanted across that little, narrow space off there to the left, we wouldn't have seen them until they stepped upon the foot-bridge. What I mean to say, Larry, is this: we have had such good fortune that we must not tempt Providence further by trying to cross here."

"How shall we manage it?"

"Go farther up the stream till we're well away from this place, where the Indians seem to be so plentiful."

"And maybe there isn't such a spot."

"There must be; there are not enough of the Shawanoes to be everywhere."

"Not that, but a place where we can cross; ye must bear in mind that it's not me that can jump like yersilf."

"There must be some spot where the banks come close together. A stream generally grows narrower the nearer you approach the source."

"True, if it runs between the rocks all the way, as it does above the falls."

There was logic in these words, and his friend could not deny it.

"I agree with you, Larry; but if the rocks disappear and the torrent widens, then it must be so slow that we can either swim or wade it. There isn't any chance of our reaching the block-house except by the trail, and that is on the other side."

"But what about the two that wint across a little while ago?"

"We must look out for them, and for the others, too; we are not through with them yet."

"I agree with ye now."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DETOUR.

There could be no denying that extraordinary fortune had attended the boys, but they were too prudent to count on a continuance of what might be called the run of good luck, except by the utmost circumspection on their part.

They were together once more, with their guns, ammunition and accoutrements intact, and without either having suffered any harm. Nothing would have been easier for them than to cross the ravine by the fallen tree, which had answered for a foot-bridge more than once that evening, and in doing so it was not probable that they would have run greater risk than they had repeatedly incurred during the preceding few hours; but the necessity for such risk did not exist, and consequently they did not take it. Wharton suspected the truth. The Shawanoes, knowing that the lads, or at least one of them, was in the vicinity, were in ambush along the trail, with the expectation that they would walk into the trap, which is exactly what they would have done had they taken the path opposite to where they were standing while holding their conversation.

The evident and simple course for them to follow was to make a detour, by which they would return to the trail at a point beyond where the red men were awaiting them.

This was more difficult than would be supposed, for the route to the block-house was a winding one, and they were unacquainted with that portion of the country through which they would have to make their way. They might lose themselves altogether, though both were too good woodsmen not to eventually reach their destination.

But having decided on what to do, they wasted no time. Their purpose was to cross the stream above where they had met, and Wharton picked his way steadily through the wood, with Larry at his heels. Conversation was dangerous, and none for a time was had, since there was no call for it.

The roughness of the ground gave them trouble from the first. They were forced to turn aside repeatedly and flank boulders, rocks, and wild, broken ravines, into which they would have fallen but for the alertness of Wharton, who maintained his place a few paces in advance.

This course compelled them frequently to edge away from the stream, which still swept between such a high wall of rocks that it was impassable, but they never lost it altogether. By listening carefully they could locate it, and at intervals they made their way to the margin, to learn whether the spot for which they were looking was within sight.

"Well, I declare!"

It was Wharton Edwards who uttered the exclamation, and his companion pushed his way to his side to learn the cause of his excitement. As he did so, he saw they were standing on the edge of a ravine which obtruded itself at right angles to the course they were pursuing.

But for the fact that it contained no water, they would have believed that it was the gorge through which ran the stream. But it was empty, and in the shadows neither could see to the bottom of its gloomy depths. The trees grew so near the margin that the opposite side was indistinct.

"I didn't expect to meet anything like this," added Wharton, with a sigh of disappointment; "it means trouble."

"You can't tell till ye find out," was the somewhat superfluous remark of Larry. "It may not run very far to the right or left, and we've had so much experience in walking around things that this won't make much difference one way or t'other."

"I'm afraid we'll get so mixed up that we won't be able to find our way from it now."

"It may be a lucky thing--maybe the same."

"What do you mean?"

"Who can say where they are waiting for us? It may be five or ten miles away, or it may be within sight of the block-house. We can get there without setting foot in the trail agin."

"You may be partly right, Larry, though if we can strike the path five miles away from the falls, I won't be afraid to keep it until we reach the block-house. The risk beyond that isn't any greater than what we have always had to run from the time we leave the settlement till we get back again."

"It strikes me we are not gaining much time by standing here discussing the question."

As Larry spoke he turned to the left and moved off.

"Hold on!" interrupted his companion; "that will take us farther away than ever, and may lead us so far that we'll lose the stream altogether."

By going to the right they approached the current that had to be passed before they could recover the trail. Perhaps a passable spot was at hand, and the means of crossing the smaller ravine was as likely to be on one hand as the other.

With the same pains and labor as before they reached the stream, where they found themselves confronted by a peculiar condition of affairs. The banks were somewhat farther apart, but they remained perpendicular rocks fully twenty feet in height, between which the torrent flowed so impetuously that they would have been as helpless as a balloon in a gale of wind. The crossing-place was still to be sought farther up the stream.

But to reach it they must place themselves on the farther side of the smaller ravine, which crossed their course at right angles. This opened directly into the current, with whose surface it was nearly even. In times of freshet or flood the dry ravine was probably a tributary torrent of the other. At present it looked impassable, but after studying it a few moments Wharton said:

"I believe, Larry, we can both jump that. What do you think?"

"I won't know for sartin till I try it; then I'll know, sure."

"So will we both; but the distance is less than where I made the leap."

"So it will have to be if it's mesilf that's to sail across."

The conformation of the dry ravine near the stream allowed them to see the other side. Wharton measured the width with his eye, and then, without a word, drew back a single step, and with little effort landed lightly on the opposite side.

"What do you think of that, Larry?"

"It isn't much for yersilf, but I would be proud of the same."

"I'm sure there will be no trouble. There is room for you to get a couple of yards start, and I wouldn't advise you to try it if I wasn't sure you would succeed."

Young Murphy was plucky, but he surveyed the task before him with some misgiving. With a depth of about twenty feet, and nothing but rock at the bottom, a failure to land on the other side meant death or serious injury.

He stood on the edge, and spent a minute or two peering down into the gloomy depths. Then he looked across at his friend, who cheered him on.

"I'll thry it," he said, resolutely, and with a shake of his head.

"Fling over your gun to me; it will be easier for you to make the jump without that than with it."

Larry tossed the rifle to his friend, who deftly caught the weapon. Then, with the grim comicality of his nature, he threw his cap after it.

"If I do make a tumble of it, I should like ye to preserve that as a token of remembrance."

He now braced himself for the effort. With all his strength, he could not compare with his friend in speed and rapidity. The leap, however, was only a moderate one, and Wharton was confident he would make it if no mishap intervened.

And, beyond question, he would have done so had no interference taken place. He carefully backed a rod or so from the edge of the dry ravine.

Everything was going on well, but almost on the edge he stepped on a small pebble, unnoticed by the eye. The effect was slight, and a spectator would hardly have seen it, but, all the same, it was just enough to disarrange his stride, so that when the leap, which he was forced to make, took place, it was faulty. He lost the impetus that otherwise would have landed him on his feet on the other side with hardly a jar to his body.

"I can't do it! I can't do it, Whart!" called the leaper at the moment of bounding into the air, for he could not fail to know that he was about to fall short.

The waiting friend said nothing, but braced himself for the shock, for he, too, knew what was coming.

Larry barely missed landing, but his hands were thrown forward where his feet should have struck, and had he received no help he would have gone backward and down the ravine.

But it was for this that Wharton Edwards had prepared himself. Each hand of Larry was grasped by his own, and he almost lay on his back as he tugged to draw him out of the gorge and up on the solid support above.

Had not Wharton dug his heels into a projection, he would have had to let go or be drawn downward with his friend, who could not help drawing tremendously on him. Larry, however, gave great aid by throwing one foot on top of the rock, and using that limb as a lever with which to lift his body the rest of the short distance. This so lessened the task that the next minute the danger was over, and the two stood beside each other.



CHAPTER XVII.

BY THE LAKE.

The place for which the two were searching was found within a furlong of where Larry Murphy, with the assistance of his companion, leaped the day before. But how different from that which they had in mind! Instead of a simple widening and shallowing of the stream, it expanded into a small lake several miles long, with a width one-third or one-half as great. The sheet of water discharged itself through the narrow, canyon-like passage, eventually finding its way into the Ohio. The placid surface gleamed in the moonlight, and was without a ripple. The shores were shaded by overhanging limbs, and the scene was as lonely, as beautiful and impressive as at creation's morn. The only sign of life was themselves.

"Now," said young Edwards, after he and his friend had gazed upon the water for some minutes in silence, "it looks as if the only way to get back to the trail is to go round the lake."

"But that may reach a dozen miles or farther yet, and by the time we have come round the same we'll be forty miles from the block-house, and not knowing which way to turn to find it. Ye're aware, Whart, how hard it is to keep our bearings whin we're in the woods without knowing the course to take to git anywhere. We'll be sure to go astray, and may pass within fifty yards of the block-house without knowing the same."

"You mustn't forget that the trail which we have been following is not the only one that leads to the place. They extend out in all directions, and we'll strike some of them."

"How can we know which course to take? The bother of it is, one may go farther away from it all the time."

"It isn't as bad as that, but," added Wharton, gravely, "the night is getting far along, and we must be several miles from the path, unless it happens to bend around toward the lake. We can't get back to it before daylight, if we do then. What I am afraid of is that father and mother won't wait at the block-house for us, but run right into the very danger we have just escaped."

"Do ye mind now that they won't start before morning, and they can't reach the falls till about noon?"

"That all sounds reasonable enough," replied Wharton, who was considerably agitated, "but how do we know we're going back to the trail inside of the next two or three days?"

Larry looked at his companion in surprise. The two were standing where the moonlight fell upon them, and their countenances were plainly visible to each other. It had been the Irish youth that, previous to this time, had expressed the most misgiving as to the result, but the other seemed to become, all at once, the most despondent.

The fact was that Wharton was quite buoyant in spirits until they came to the lake. He had been hoping that long before this they would be able to turn back toward the trail, and the prospect of several miles' farther detour naturally caused his discouragement.

Those were not the days when young men carried watches, but they knew it was beyond midnight. They were ravenously hungry and were fagged out. They had been undergoing severe exertion for many hours, and Wharton especially had been forced to tax his endurance to the utmost extremity during that fearful race with Blazing Arrow.

"Larry," said he, taking a seat on a bowlder just without the fringe of shadow cast by the trees, "I don't know whether the best thing we can do isn't to sleep for the rest of the night. I was never so tired in all my life."

"There is only one thing I want more than sleep."

"What's that?"

"Something to eat."

"And with the woods full of it we haven't a chance to get a mouthful."

"And with the lake there running over with--hould!" exclaimed Larry, pausing in the act of seating himself by his companion; "help me to start a fire, Whart."

"I don't know about that," replied the other; "the Shawanoes are likely to be in these parts, and we must build it back among the trees, where there is less danger."

"That's just what we mustn't do, me boy; it must be near the water; it's mesilf that will gather the stuff, and do ye be

ready with the flint and steel."

Wharton, understanding the plan of his friend, lent his aid. It was an easy matter to collect some dry twigs and leaves, which were carefully placed in a heap on one of the flat rocks close to the water's edge. Then, while Larry busied himself in gathering more substantial fuel, young Edwards brought his old-fashioned flint and steel into play. He used no tinder, but there was a shower of streaming sparks soon flying from the swiftly moving metals, and before long one of them caught a crisp leaf, which was easily nursed into a flame that ate its way fast into the twigs and larger sticks. In less time than would be supposed, a vigorous fire was burning on the rock and sending its reflection far across the gleaming water.

Then Larry had not long to wait. Stooping by the edge of the lake, he bared his arm and leaned forward, as alert as a cat watching for a mouse. Suddenly his hand shot below the surface, there was a splash, and a plump fish flew out beyond the expectant Wharton. He had his hand in a twinkling on the flapping prize that gleamed in the firelight.

"Cook him quick, Whart!" cried the delighted Larry; "there's no need to wait till I git more; that's only a starter."

Each did his duty, the elder stopping work when he had landed a couple more, one of which weighed fully two pounds. By that time the younger of the two was broiling the first in the hot flames, the appetizing odor of which made the couple almost irrestrainable. Larry wanted to attack it before it was finished, but Wharton insisted that the meal should be in the best style of the art. They carried no condiment with them except that which excels others--hunger.

It was a most nourishing and toothsome repast that they made. Nothing, indeed, could have been more enjoyable. The lake was overflowing with edible fish, for probably no white men had ever drawn one from the waters, and if the Indians took any they were few in number. The light of the fire attracted many to the spot.

"Now that we've had such a good supper," said Wharton, "I think it's best to let the fire go out."

"I'll hurry the same."

Larry scattered the embers with his shoes, so that in a few minutes little was left of them. Then he seated himself beside his friend, and was on the point of making some characteristic remark when Wharton excitedly grasped his arm and whispered:

"Hark! do you hear that? What does it mean?"

"It's a ghost!" replied the awed Larry; "let's be getting out of this as fast as we can!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STRANGE SIGHT.

From somewhere in the gloomy solitude came a low quavering monotone that had a most uncanny sound in the weird midnight. The youths never before had heard anything of the kind, and the bravest men would have been impressed by it.

Larry, in his fright, sprang to his feet, and would have fled deeper into the woods, but his companion caught his arm and whispered:

"Wait; let's find out what it is."

"Havn't I told ye!" demanded the other with husky impatience; "it's a ghost--it's a hobgoblin."

"But hold on, I say; keep still."

They made sure that they were well protected by shadow, while they waited for a solution of the extraordinary occurrence.

The monotone chant resembled the lower notes of an organ played softly, and with a rise and fall of no more than two or three notes. It was a wild song, which came from some point not far away, though neither could say precisely where. At times it seemed to be overhead, and Wharton caught himself looking into the sky and among the tree-tops for a solution of the mystery. It had a way of ceasing at the end of a minute or two for several seconds, and then was resumed with the same unvarying monotone.

"It's coming this way!" whispered Larry, gripping the shoulder of his companion and attempting to rise again; but Wharton forced him back, though he felt very much like plunging in among the trees himself.

"If it's a ghost he can't hurt us."

"How do you know he can't? I tell ye he's coming this way!"

"What makes you say that?"

"Because I see him; look beyant, right across the lake--don't ye obsarve him?"

Until that moment Wharton had no thought that his friend saw anything--but he did. Directly across from where they were seated, and under the shadow of the opposite bank, where the waters narrowed preparatory to entering the gorge, so that the distance was barely a hundred yards, appeared a point of light. It looked like a star gliding along the shore and keeping in the shadow, so that the fiery glow was all that was visible to the eye.

This of itself was not the form which ghosts are supposed to take, but it was in keeping with the dismal monotone, which sent a cold shiver down their backs. Wharton was more than ever inclined to run, but with a courage that was rather unusual he resolutely held his ground, and forced his companion to do the same.

"I'm going to find out what it is," he said in a guarded undertone, "before I leave this spot."

"All right; when the spook jumps on us and we are dead ye'll learn how much more I know than yersilf."

"Sh!"

Something was seen to be issuing from the wall of shadow. The point of light was a part of the object which was moving slowly, while the strange sound continued. The boys were straining their eyes to learn what it was, when, at the same moment, they recognized it as the prow of a canoe, which was leaving the bank of shade and coming out upon the moonlit surface of the lake.

Neither spoke, and the next moment the whole boat became visible. In the bow burned a torch, and well back toward the stern sat an Indian. He faced the boys, and as he swung his paddle, first on one side and then on the other, he emitted the strange chanting sounds that had so startled the lads when first heard by them.

The proceeding was so unusual that Wharton knew that it was produced by some extraordinary cause. It suggested that the red man was mourning for some of his friends who had perished and been buried in the lake. The youths had never heard an Indian "death song," and they knew, when a warrior chanted it, it was generally when his own death was at hand; but it would have been nothing remarkable had this Shawanoe sung it for another.

But amid their affright one startling truth impressed itself upon the awed spectators: the strange Indian, in heading across the narrow space of water, was placing himself in the control of the torrent which rushed between the rocks with prodigious impetuosity. In fact, it looked as if it was his intention to shoot the rapids despite the peril involved.

"That ghost is going straight for the falls," said Larry, "and when he reaches them he'll glide over the same without wetting a hair of his head."

But now took place a thing worth travelling many a mile to see. Never did the youths witness such marvellous skill in managing a canoe as this strange Indian displayed. Combined with that was a strength and quickness no less wonderful.

The frail boat was already moving with the sweep of waters which only a few rods away shot between the rocks, when the slowly swaying paddle was dipped deep into the water, and changed from side to side in bewildering rapidity. The sensitive craft responded so promptly that the prow turned outward again, and headed toward a point considerably above the spectators.

It was amazing work, but neither of the spectators believed he could succeed until he did so. It was like a man paddling from the centre of a vast whirlpool. That which seemed impossible was accomplished before the struggle seemed fairly begun.

From the mouth of the canyon itself the warrior forced his canoe, until the youths saw that the danger was passed and he was gaining on the tremendous torrent. Having crossed the middle portion, he now headed toward the other extremity of the lake, and thus fought his way directly against the swift current.

Had this task been given to either Wharton or Larry, they could not have succeeded, even with the most desperate exertion; but to the warrior it seemed only a pastime. With hardly half the exertion he had put forth a few minutes before, he moved against the rush with an even certainty that ended all thought of danger.

"It beats all!" whispered Larry, amazed and delighted by the exhibition. "I never observed the like. Do you think he would take it kindly if I threw my cap in the air and gave him a hurrah?"

"I don't think he would be offended, but it is better to go down and shake him by the hand."

No earthly inducement could have led Larry to do this, and Wharton knew that if he indulged in a hurrah he would instantly take to the woods. He hadn't the remotest idea of doing either.

"Whist! do ye note what the spook is at?"

The other did observe that the prow of the canoe was turned sharply to the left, and the question was hardly uttered when it touched the shore almost at their feet.



CHAPTER XIX.

ZANY OR LUNATIC.

In no respect did the Indian display his matchless coolness more strikingly than when, amid the terrific exertion he was compelled to put forth, he never ceased his doleful singing, if such it may be called. It continued, indeed, while he was paddling directly against the current, until, when one of his strains was half complete, it ceased abruptly, as if cut in two.

At the same moment the prow of the craft was turned to the left, and, shooting across the brief space, slid a few inches up the sloping beach. It was evident that his keen eye had detected the recent presence of persons there, and with far less fear of them than they had of him he proceeded straightway to investigate matters.

By this time the boys were less inclined to run. The spiritual edge, so to speak, had worn off, and they saw that it was a material creature before them--a genuine red man, with some of whom they had had experience, especially during the preceding hours. They had become accustomed to that business, and could view it with comparative calmness, inasmuch as each held a loaded rifle in his hand.

Wharton gently touched the shoulder of his companion as an appeal to him not to speak or make any sound. The two rose noiselessly to their feet and watched the strange being's actions.

The prow of the canoe having been forced far enough up the stony slope to hold it motionless, the Indian laid down his paddle, leaned forward, took the torch in hand, and then stepped from the boat. The torch was a piece of resinous pine, whose top leaned so far over the gunwale that there was no danger from the smoking flame. With this in his left hand he looked down at the embers of the late fire, some of them still giving forth a faint blue smoke, and he saw the few remaining fragments of the meal.

With much deliberation he gazed out over the moonlit lake, gradually coming back to such a position that when he peered into the gloomy depth of the woods his eyes seemed to be centred on the spot where the two boys looked silently and wonderingly at him in turn.

The strange being had no gun, but a knife and tomahawk protruded from the belt around his waist. He was dressed similarly to the Shawanoes whom they had encountered so recently, and there could be little doubt that he belonged to their tribe.

No figure could be more picturesque than that formed by this creature when he raised the flaming torch aloft, bent his head down and craned it forward, while his black eyes seemed to pierce the impenetrable gloom from whence the boys silently watched him.

His face was smeared in the truly frightful manner of his people, and his countenance and features were so irregular that he was forbidding to the last degree. He stood with one foot advanced, his attitude suggesting that of a man pausing on the edge of a ravine and peering across before venturing to leap.

He maintained this attitude for several minutes, as motionless as those toward whom he was staring. It seemed to Wharton that his flaming black eyes could look through solid wall or rock, and the youth held his gun ready to meet any sudden rush from him.

But he did not advance. Suddenly he resumed his weird chanting, and then began a fantastic dancing back and forth over the rock, keeping rude time by swaying the torch and the free arm. The exhibition was so grotesque that the spectators surmised the truth.

The explanation of it was that the Shawanoe was a zany or lunatic. The latter is as rare with the American race as it was with the African in the South before the war, but on no other theory could the course of the Indian be explained.

Neither Wharton nor Larry held a thought of harming him. Had he been Blazing Arrow himself they would not have done so, except in self-defence. Believing him harmless, they would have been glad to act the part of a friend toward him.

Instead of seeking out those who had started the fire, the warrior returned to his canoe, carefully adjusted the torch in its place, shoved the boat clear, leaped into it, caught up his paddle, and sent his craft spinning along the left bank, seemingly with the speed of a swallow on the wing.

"He's not a ghost," exclaimed Larry, "but he's crazy clear through. Where has he gone?"

The two stepped to the edge of the water and looked in the direction where the boat had disappeared. A short distance away the shore made a curve, and it was this, evidently, which shut the Indian and canoe from sight. It would have taken rapid motions, but the paddler had proved his expertness in that.

The occurrence caused the boys to forget their drowsy, tired feeling. They became as alert and wide awake as during the day.

"Larry, let's push on and around the lake. I'm worried now about father and mother, and it won't do to lose more time."

"I'm as willing as yersilf."

The rocky shore made travelling easy, and they walked with greater freedom than at any time since leaving the vicinity of the falls. The younger kept his place a few paces in advance, and had not gone far when he stopped again with the exclamation:

"Here's the crazy man again!"

He was not exactly right, for instead of the Indian he saw the canoe drawn up against the rocky shore, as in the previous instance. The paddle was there, but the Indian and torch were missing.

"I wonder what that means?"

"Maybe he has grown tired and gone ashore to rest awhile."

It did not seem likely that the fellow was far away, and they looked curiously in every direction. He had not resumed his chanting after leaving the scene of the boys' camp, and he was nowhere in sight.

There is no telling what fancy may enter the head of a lunatic, and, much as the couple would have disliked to harm him, they were always ready to defend themselves.

Doubtless it was the sight of the fire by which Wharton cooked the fish that led the Shawanoe to paddle his craft across the lake. It is not likely that the whole performance was meant to frighten away the intruders.

"I don't think we have anything to fear from him," remarked Wharton, after they had waited several minutes; "we may as well use our time in pushing on."

"It's a long thramp we have before us."

The two looked up the lake toward the end where the wild waters rushed through the gorge. The outlook was discouraging, for, light as was the moonlight, they could see nothing of the dark line of forest which must have marked the uttermost boundary.

Wharton drew a deep sigh.

"I'm tempted to turn back; we can follow the stream and find the trail again, while now there's no telling where we may bring up."

"I've a better idea," said Larry, with a chuckle.

"What's that?"

By way of answer he pointed to the canoe, whispering:

"The paddle is there."

"We'll do it; it will save us a good deal of hard work, and perhaps prevent our going astray. But the owner will be likely to object."

"How can he help himself?"

"All right; in with you; there's no saying when he'll be back again."

Larry Murphy was as deft in handling the paddle as his companion, and at the same moment shoved the prow clear and leaped in. He made a couple of sweeps with the implement, which sent the boat far out over the gleaming surface.

It was well that they were so prompt in their movements, for the next minute the red man burst from the woods, and came rushing and chattering toward them as if he intended to overhaul them by swimming. His words were unintelligible, being in his native tongue, but there was no mistaking his wrath.

"I believe the gentleman is excited," remarked Larry, swinging the paddle more leisurely.

"It looks that way----"

"Sh! mind your eye!"

Something whizzed by the head of Wharton and splashed in the water beyond. It almost grazed his cheek, and seemed to be like a cannon ball. For all purposes it might have been considered such, for had it struck the youth, the result would have been fatal.

The crazy Indian had hurled a large stone with prodigious force and accuracy. Little need, it would seem, of such a thrower carrying a firearm.

As Wharton turned his affrighted gaze around he saw the fellow about to hurl another.

"Gracious! he will kill us," exclaimed the youth, bending his head forward to dodge the terrible missile.

"No, he won't, ayther."

As Larry spoke he dropped his paddle, caught up his rifle, and, pointing toward the red man, fired.



CHAPTER XX.

ACROSS THE GORGE.

"Heavens, Larry, you have killed him!" was the horrified exclamation of Wharton Edwards.

"Be easy now," coolly replied his companion, putting down the weapon and resuming the paddle; "he isn't hurt."

"Didn't you aim at him?" asked his friend, who, looking back, saw no signs of injury on the part of the Shawanoe.

"Not so loud," whispered Larry; "he might hear you."

The youth drove the canoe farther out into the lake, but all the time he kept his head turned so as to see every movement of the Indian.

Larry had not aimed at him; nothing in the world would have induced him to shoot the poor, demented creature; but he meant to give him a good scare, and he succeeded.

Instead of throwing the stone in his hand he dropped it at his feet, whirled about, and ran for the trees. As he did so he dodged from side to side like a Digger Indian when trying to distract the aim of his enemy.

"That's better than killing him," commented Wharton, with a sigh; "he thinks you intended that shot for him, and he doesn't mean to give us a second chance."

"But he is taking a second one himself. Look out!"

Wharton saw a shadowy something sailing through the air overhead. It struck in the water several yards beyond the canoe with a "chung," but had gone wide of the mark. From the fringe of shadow the Shawanoe had hurled another missile, but he had thrown it with such vicious fierceness that it missed the target altogether.

Before he could repeat the attempt with more care, Larry impelled the boat beyond his reach, and that particular danger for the time was past.

"I wonder if he can throw across the lake?" muttered Larry; "keep a sharp eye on him, for he may begin a bombardment bimeby that will lay us out."

"We are surely too far off," replied Wharton, surveying the long space over which they had passed.

Nevertheless, they kept a close watch for some demonstration, which, however, did not take place.

The lake where the canoe now crossed was no more than a furlong in width, and Larry veered as near to the beginning of the gorge as was safe, for by so doing he effected considerable gain.

In his eagerness to accomplish this he narrowly missed a fatal blunder. Ere he was aware, he found himself sweeping toward the gorge which had caused them so much trouble.

He did not approach nearly so close as the Indian, but only by the most strenuous exertions was he able to save himself. When they reached the shore at last he was exhausted.

They were secure, however, and inexpressibly relieved to find themselves, after all their work and danger, on the other side of the current which had been so long an impassable barrier in their path. They had come a long way to do this, and more than once they asked themselves whether it was not a mistake. But for their conviction that an ambush had been laid along the trail, thus compelling a detour, the attempt never would have been made.

It now remained for them to follow the gorge down in the direction of the falls until they were as near the path as prudent, and then strike out for the block-house, returning to the trail at a point beyond where they believed the Shawanoes were awaiting them.

But they were fatigued at the time they halted for supper, and they had not gone far when they found themselves so weary and sleepy that it was hard to drag one foot after another. The ground was rougher than they supposed, and would have taxed the strength of stronger persons than they. They were in need of rest and must have it.

"It can't lack much of daylight," said Wharton, halting where the rocks were bare and they were near the rushing torrent, "and we may as well wait until then."

"We haven't gone far," remarked Larry, removing his cap and running his fingers through his hair, "and we know that

we're on the right course. Do ye mind, too, that we can travel a good many miles atween this time and sunrise?"

"All right; do you say keep on?"

"Of course."

"Come on, then."

Wharton wheeled about to continue their journey when his friend interposed:

"Hold on; I forgot that I am so tired. I can't walk half a dozen steps more to save me."

Wharton laughed, though he had resolved to keep it up until he dropped from exhaustion.

They were satisfied with any resting-place. The sultry night rendered unnecessary any protection, and the rocks themselves were as comfortable, almost, as a downy couch. The protuberances, when their caps were laid upon them, afforded excellent pillows, and five minutes after stretching themselves out both were sound asleep.

The spot, which had been selected with little thought, was on the fringe of the wood, which approached to within twenty feet of the river. The rocks were rough and uneven, but it was easy to find places that suited their forms. They lay down just within the shadow thrown out by the trees, where they could not be seen by any one unless he stumbled over them.

But for their extreme fatigue they would have adopted the ordinary precaution of kindling a fire, or taking turns in mounting guard while the other slept. Each, however, knew that he was incapable of remaining awake, and the attempt was not made.

True, there was danger abroad, but, except in the case of wild animals, it was as great with as without the fire. It was likely, indeed, to be greater.

This complete wearing out also of the bodies prevented either noticing that the course of the moon would soon cause its light to fall upon their faces, thus bringing them into plain view of any who might be lurking in the neighborhood.

And it came about that less than an hour had gone by when the two were discovered. The figure of an Indian appeared moving noiselessly along the banks of the ravine, almost in their very footsteps. At every few paces he paused and looked keenly about him, as if in quest of something.

Suddenly the owner of the canoe, for it was he, halted. Could any one have seen his face, he would have noticed the frightful expression of exultation which passed over it, for he was searching for these two youths and had found them.



CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE PURSUIT.

When Larry Murphy paddled the canoe beyond reach of the missile hurled by the enraged owner of the craft, the boys were warranted in believing that they were done with him. He was eliminated from the problem, so to speak.

But the singular creature was not done with them. The discharge of the gun startled him almost into spasms, and, as we have shown, he made haste to bound in among the shadows of the trees; but the belief that the youths were in the act of stealing his boat filled him with consuming rage. He threw another stone with might and main, and, though the feat was an astonishing one, he saw that it accomplished nothing.

He watched the canoe until it vanished under the shadow of the opposite shore. He could not know the intentions of the thieves, but it did not take him long to decide on his own.

Emerging from among the trees, where the rocks were bare, he started on a run toward the opposite end of the lake. He was familiar with every foot of the way, and the bank offered no obstruction. He bounded as lightly as the chamois across chasms, and when they were too broad to be leaped he skirted them without hesitation or fault, never losing a rod of distance or a minute of time. He never walked for more than ten paces, maintaining his gait with a uniformity that no one else could have equalled.

He had a goodly number of miles to travel, for he was obliged to round almost the entire circumference of the lake. He might have cut off a large part of the distance by swimming across the water, and undoubtedly he would have done so had not an important errand drawn him to the extreme end.

The lake was fed by a narrow, deep stream, across which he sprang with the ease of Wharton Edwards when leaping the gorge. A brief way farther and he paused in front of a small structure among the rocks. It was composed of limbs, boulders, sticks, and the skins of animals, barely large enough to give him room to lie down and move around.

This was the home of the strange creature, and was never entered by any other person. Stooping down, he passed within. No light burned, nor did he need any. A few minutes later he emerged, carrying a long bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows behind one shoulder suspended by a thong which passed under one armpit. These implements constituted his only weapons, besides the knife and tomahawk, he never making use of any firearms.

In the moonlight and shadows it was impossible for him to follow the trail of the youths, which would have been almost invisible under the glare of the sun; but the Indian seemed to be guided by intuition, which, in the mentally affected, often approaches inspiration. In what way he was able to convince himself that the young white men meant to pass down the other side of the canyon cannot be conjectured, but that such was his conviction was proven by his whole course of action.

The distance which the Shawanoe was obliged to journey consumed several hours despite the speed he used, and nearly all of this time was spent by Wharton Edwards and Larry Murphy in deep, refreshing sleep.

When the Indian approached the spot where the canoe had been abandoned by the youths his gait became a walk, and he peered cautiously about him. He uttered a low cry of exultation on observing the graceful birchen structure, and began a hasty examination. The paddle lay in the bottom of the boat, which showed no signs of injury. It might be supposed that this gratifying discovery would have taken the edge off the Indian's enmity, but he showed no signs of such feeling; if possible, his anger became fiercer. He leaped away with a speed which prevented any attempt to follow the trail, but he was proceeding on general principles, it may be said.

It will be remembered that travelling was more difficult on the side of the lake. Even such an expert as the Indian was forced to change his gait from a trot to a walk. Sometimes he was in shadow and sometimes in the moonlight. At intervals he paused, and bent over as if examining the flinty surface for signs of footsteps of the youths. It is incredible that he could have discovered any under the circumstances, and yet he acted as if he did.

By and by he approached the spot where those for whom he was searching lay asleep. He passed a short distance beyond, but something displeased him. He stopped abruptly, looked down at the grass, and then came back over his own trail.

While he stood peering into the surrounding gloom he saw the inanimate forms.

In his delight the man repeated the dance he had given on the shore of the lake. He leaped up and down, keeping time to the swaying of the long, ashen bow grasped in his left hand, and passed back and forth over a space of a dozen

square feet.

He continually glanced at the youths, who were unconscious of their danger, and held himself ready to open hostilities at the moment they showed signs of awaking. Strange that neither Wharton nor Larry thought of such a peril as that which now impended.

The grotesque dance lasted but a few minutes. That manner of expressing his exultation was soon satisfied, and he made ready for action.

Reaching over his left shoulder with his right hand, he drew a feathered arrow from the quiver. A careful examination by moonlight satisfied him that it was perfect and every way fitted for his purpose. He fitted the notch in the deer-string of the bow, and then advanced stealthily until within a few dozen yards of the sleepers, the implement so held all the time that he could have launched the missile at a moment's warning.

The elder of the youths lay nearest, and he aimed at him. Little fear that he could not drive the arrow deep into the chest of the sleeper, after which he probably intended to serve Wharton in the same manner.

But with the whimsicality of an insane man he changed his mind, evidently concluding that the tomahawk was the most fitting weapon to be used in dispatching them. With the same deliberation shown from the first, he relaxed the tension of the string and replaced the arrow in the quiver. Then he turned about and silently deposited the bow on the ground, so that it should not handicap him.

This was all that was necessary, and he drew his tomahawk and faced about just in time to make an unexpected and startling discovery.



CHAPTER XXII.

ARQU-WAO.

An inexplicable instinct sometimes warns a person of the approach of peril. The experience of most of us confirms this statement, and we are tempted to suspect that it is another manifestation of that occult "sixth sense" of which we have only a shadowy conception.

Wharton Edwards and Larry Murphy had been sleeping several hours, for it will be remembered that they were exceedingly tired. Day was at hand, and yet, in the usual order of things, they would have slumbered several hours longer; but, at the same moment, the two became as wide awake as they were when hurrying along the trail to the block-house.

This moment of awakening came when the Indian was in the act of laying down his bow behind him. Larry, being nearer to the savage than Wharton, took upon himself to act promptly.

In an instant he rose upon one knee and levelled his gun at the astonished Shawanoe. In the act of doing so the youth recalled that he had not reloaded it since firing the weapon while in the canoe. Nothing in his manner, however, told the red man this interesting fact.

"Do the same as mesilf," whispered Larry to his companion, "for I forgot to load my gun."

Wharton was quick to obey, and the Indian stood petrified, absolutely unable to move hand or foot.

"I've got ye now, ye spalpeen!" said Larry, in a loud voice; "if ye stir I'll shoot!"

To the amazement of the youth, the Indian replied in their own tongue:

"No shoot--no hurt Arqu-wao--me good Indian."

"Begorra, but ye're not acting like one," was the comment of Larry, who now rose to his feet. "What were ye trying to do, anyway?"

Wharton imitated the action of his companion, and said, in an undertone:

"Don't hurt the poor fellow."

"That depinds on himsilf," was the resolute response. "I spared him once, and he mustn't go to heaving any more rocks at us, for he's too handy at the business."

The Indian, at the moment of turning around, had placed his hand on his tomahawk, but snatched it away as though it had suddenly become red hot. He was a picture of abject fear, and trembled in every limb. Had he known enough to wheel about and run, he would have been safe, for neither of the boys had the least desire to harm him. But, to use a modern expression, they had the drop on him.

"Keep an eye on him," said Larry, "while I load my gun."

The Indian must have experienced peculiar emotions when he received the proof that it was an empty weapon that had brought him to terms. Larry proceeded to reload his rifle in a deliberate fashion, while Wharton covered their prisoner with his own gun.

It was while this proceeding was under way that the couple noticed that the sun was almost in the horizon. The long eventful night was ended, and they were close upon more stirring events.

"He calls himself Arqu-wao," said Wharton. "I wonder what the name means?"

"I'm thinking it means an Indian half-scared to death; but, Whart, what'll we do wid him, now that we've got him?"

"That's what puzzles me. If we hadn't waked up just as we did we never would have awaked at all, and if we let him go he'll probably sneak up behind us and drive an arrow through each before we know our danger."

"Let's keep him a prisoner."

"How will we manage it?"

"I'll fix it."

Arqu-wao was still motionless, looking as if he expected to be punished with death for his attempt upon the lives of the youths. As Larry spoke, he strode toward him with a stern face and manner. The Indian instantly began pleading in the most pitiful manner for his life. The youth was tender-hearted, and said, kindly:

"Be good Indian and we won't hurt, but let me have the tomahawk."

The implement was meekly handed over.

"Now the knife."

That followed the other; and with all the gravity that Larry could assume he shoved the handle of the first weapon between the waistband of his trousers and shirt.

"Whart, you can take charge of that," he added, passing the knife to his companion, who readily disposed of it about his person.

The most dangerous implement of all still remained in the hands of the Shawanoe, and the captors were perplexed for the moment as to how it was to be disposed of. It would have been easy to render it useless, and the arrows might have been cast down the ravine, but they hesitated to take that step.

The same thought was in the minds of the lads. Arqu-wao might be used as a friend and an ally in the danger which still threatened, and, if so, he would need some weapon to be of avail in emergencies.

Wharton now advanced and spoke:

"Arqu-wao, do you know where the block-house is?"

The expression of the Indian's face showed that he did not comprehend the question.

"Big house--fort--place where white men are?"

"Yes--me know--me been dere," he replied, nodding his head vigorously.

"It's off yonder, isn't it?" inquired Wharton, pointing with his hand in the supposed direction.

Arqu-wao shook his head.

"Not dere--off dere," he said, indicating a point of the compass fully forty-five degrees removed from the first.

"I wonder if he's right?" said Wharton, doubtfully, turning toward his companion.

"Yes, for he's so scared he's sure to play square for a time."

"Very well," said Wharton, looking toward the Indian. "Lead the way; if you go wrong, we shoot, we kill."

"Arqu-wao go right--he go right--he good Shawanoe--broder of Blazing Arrow."

The latter remark was startling to the boys, and they looked inquiringly at each other, wondering what he could mean.

"Begorra, if he's a brother to him, it's a bad ricommindation to himsilf," remarked Larry.

"He may be the flower of the flock, but we will keep sharp watch on him."

The Indian, now that he understood that he had chance for his life, lost most of the fear that had filled him from the moment he was arrested in the very act of committing a crime.

He showed his knowledge of what was said to him by walking, not parallel to the course of the torrent, which the boys had intended to take for their guidance, but diverging at quite a sharp angle from it. Neither of the youths could be satisfied whether this was favorable or not, but there was logic in Larry's theory that their guide was so frightened that he would act honestly, at least for a time.

If he was doing so, he was doing them a great favor, for, instead of walking a number of miles down the gorge, and then returning over the same route, this distance would be saved by "cutting across lots," with the probability of eluding the hostile Shawanoes waiting in ambush. Whether such was the fact or not must be left to future developments.

The sun was now fairly above the horizon, and the day promised to be as clear and sunshiny as the preceding one. The hearty meal, eaten the night before, and the rest, enabled the boys to continue their brisk walk for hours without fatigue. They would have been glad to keep straight on, if it were possible, until they reached the block-house.

When they leaped across a small brook of cold, sparkling water, Wharton called the guide to wait for a minute. He was walking about a rod in advance, glancing sharply to the right and left, and even among the branches of the trees, as though he suspected danger lurking there. He never once looked back while thus engaged until he heard the sharp summons of Wharton. Then he stopped short and turned half way round, and stood like a statue.

There was something suggestive in his attitude, for his right hand was hidden from the sight of the boys. If he chose he could slide it up over his breast, stealthily withdraw an arrow from the quiver, and fit it to his bow-string without detection. The launching of the missile would be done so quickly that no shot from either rifle could anticipate it. But there were two boys, and this would frustrate any such purpose, unless one should place himself at such disadvantage that he could not rise and recover his gun before the firing of the second arrow.

"Keep an eye on him," whispered Wharton; "I don't like his actions."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SERIOUS QUESTION.

Larry Murphy was in no mood for trifling. He had spared Arqu-wao twice, and he did not mean to do it again.

He noticed his suspicious action, and raising the hammer of his rifle, he held the weapon half lifted to his shoulder, while he kept his threatening gaze fixed upon the guide, who was equally intent in watching him.

The Irish youth understood what he must do in order to discharge the arrow, and all he was waiting for was to detect the first preliminary movement on the part of the singular being.

"Drink away, Whart," he replied; "he won't fool me."

With no fear, the younger lad knelt down and drank deep from the cool, refreshing brook. Then he rose to his feet, replaced his cap, and picked up his gun.

"I don't think he'll fool me either," he quietly remarked, imitating the attitude of his companion.

"I believe he's up to some mischief," remarked Larry, who, nevertheless, fully slaked his thirst before rising to his feet.

The few moments thus occupied were trying to Wharton Edwards, who was suspicious of the Indian. He could not explain his peculiar position on any theory other than that he was seeking a chance to use his bow against them. He believed that if he once removed his gaze from the Indian, that instant he would drive an arrow through his body, and then launch another at Larry before he could rise or bring his gun to bear.

Needless to say, therefore, he closely watched the Shawanoe until Larry stood at his side.

"Lead on," said Wharton, with a wave of his hand, "and don't walk quite so fast."

"Me walk just so," replied Arqu-wao, accommodating his gait to that of his captors.

"I don't know what to make of him," remarked Wharton, when the advance was resumed. "I have half a mind to take his bow away from him."

"Ye haven't observed him doing anything wrong yet," was the response of Larry.

"What of his manner just now?"

"It looked bad, but we ain't sartin that it meant anything at all."

"We would be more certain if he had no weapon."

"Hold on a bit; if we stop for dinner or anything else, we won't give him a chance. I think, between ourselves, we can watch him so sharp that he won't do any harrum."

Wharton consented to this arrangement, though he could not free himself of a strong misgiving in doing so.

Arqu-wao continued his guidance as though no thought of anything but the strictest loyalty to his captors had ever entered his brain, all awry with its unimaginable fancies.

Perhaps there had not. The truth must become known before the set of sun.

At intervals the guide turned his head far enough to glance back, but this was so evidently for the purpose of learning whether his pace was satisfactory that no suspicion was excited. His conduct could not have been more satisfactory, so far as appearances went.

The party were abroad in the woods, and the youths had only a very general idea of where they were. They had made many windings and turnings, and at last had forsaken the only reliable guide--the gorge--by which to find their way back to the trail.

This, as we have shown, was a matter of no moment, provided the Shawanoe was not meditating treachery against them; but how easy for him, if he chose, to lead them into a trap.

"Halloo, what's up now?" asked Wharton.

"Hold your gun ready!"

The Indian had come to a sudden stop, and, looking back, raised one hand, which the lads accepted as a request for them also to halt. They obeyed him.

Standing thus, with his body as rigid as iron, Arqu-wao slowly turned his head so as to look at each point of the compass in turn. Those behind him did the same, not forgetting to use their hearing as best they could, but with no result.

The Shawanoe next knelt down and applied his ear to the ground, as his people do when suspecting the nearness of an enemy whom their eyes fail to detect. It was possible, of course, that this pantomime was part of a carefully laid plan to put them off their guard. If so, though cleverly done, it failed to succeed.

The result of the guide's test seemed to be satisfactory, for he quietly assumed the perpendicular again and resumed his walk. He did not look back, evidently concluding that they knew enough to follow without any direction from him.

"Larry," whispered his friend, "let's fall a little more to the rear, so that, if he tries any of his tricks, we'll have a better chance for ourselves."

"I was thinking of the same thing," said the other, acting at once upon the suggestion.

They doubled the space heretofore separating them from the guide, who took no notice, apparently, of the change in their relative situations.

The thought in the minds of the boys was that, if Arqu-wao should attempt to take them into a camp of their enemies, or to reveal them to a war party, or, in fact, to attempt any form of betrayal, they would have a much better chance of saving themselves by a rapid retreat. They might well doubt whether the prospect of their guide benefiting them was worth all their mental disquiet. It is probable that, had they taken more time to consider the matter at the beginning, they would have disarmed the Shawanoe and allowed him to go in peace.

All at once he made a sharp turn to the left. As he did so, he looked around, so that his face was in full view, and to the amazement of the lads they saw a distinct grin upon it.

"That's the first time he has tried to smile," remarked Larry, "and I'm afeared of it."

"Don't you understand what it means?" asked his friend a minute later.

"No, do you?"

"There it is."

As Wharton spoke he pointed to the ground in front. Larry at once saw the significance of the words. They were following a distinctly marked trail.

"But is it the right one?" whispered Wharton.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRACKS OF HORSES.

At the moment when neither of the youths had a thought of such a thing, they found themselves walking along a distinctly marked trail in the woods, while Arqu-wao, the Shawanoe guide, turned his head with an odd expression, as if to ask their opinion of the manner in which he had kept his agreement.

This issue would have been highly pleasing but for the question which instantly presented itself to Wharton Edwards and Larry Murphy--were they upon the right trail?

Fully aware of the treacherous subtlety of the American race, they might well doubt the answer. The Indian must have seen that he was regarded with suspicion, and knew, therefore, that extraordinary care was necessary on his part to bring about the ruin of his captors and save himself.

What more likely to deceive them than the act of taking them to a plainly marked path through the woods?

But such trails were not common at that day in the forest, and since the boys had passed over the one connecting the block-house with the settlement, it surely seemed that they ought to be able to identify it. They set out to do so, and quickly succeeded.

Wharton was slightly in advance of his companion, and, turning his head, he said in a low tone, over his shoulder:

"Larry, we're on the right track as sure as we're born."

"I know it. Do ye mind that tree over there to the right, beyant, that has been knocked all to splinters by lightning? Do ye mind that, I say?"

"Yes; I remember it well. We saw it last fall when we passed here."

It would seem that the splintered trunk should have been an infallible guide to the youths; but, as if fate wished to toy with them, Wharton was positive that it was on the right side of the trail as they faced the block-house, while Larry was equally certain it was on the left. Neither could dissuade the other, and the question remained as exasperating as before. One believed that instead of going right they were walking directly contrary to the proper course, and that sooner or later they would reach the dangerous section where they had already met with so many narrow escapes.

Had either been able to convince the other of his mistake they would have decided what was the best thing to do, for such a decision of necessity would have determined whether Arqu-wao was playing them false or not.

It was the younger lad who believed they were going astray, and it was this fact which caused him to examine the ground, as they walked along, with closer scrutiny than his companion. In doing so he made an alarming discovery; the path showed the distinct hoofprints of two horses that had travelled in the opposite direction.

The woodcraft of the young man told him that the animals had passed that way quite recently, probably within a few hours. While there could be no certainty as to who the couple were, he decided at once that they were his father and mother on their way from the block-house to the settlement.

"Larry," said he, touching the shoulder of his friend, "the Shawanoe is acting honestly with us."

"How can ye know that?" asked the other in surprise.

"These are the footprints of father and mother's horses."

Larry bent his head forward and closely studied the ground for some time, walking slowly, and allowing nothing to escape him.

"Ye are right," straightening up, "which means that two people have passed this way--pretty lately, too; but how can we know who they were?"

"This trail is little travelled. If the folks left the block-house very early this morning they would have been near here by this time. We can't know it is they, but it is certain as anything can be."

"Then ye were wrong and I was right about the course we were following."

"Yes; I believe the Indian is doing his best to keep his promise."

"I hope so, but I don't feel as certain as myself of that."

The brief delay of the couple had allowed Arqu-wao to gain so much on them that he was almost invisible. Discovering the fact, he again halted and looked back, as if waiting for them to come up.

"Observe him," said Larry. "He stands just as he did when we took a drink from the brook."

Such was the fact. If he chose to launch an arrow, he could do so with an instantaneousness that was sure to be fatal to one; but now they were in a better situation than before, and the result was so certain to be fatal to him that neither felt much fear of any attempt.

Wharton beckoned to him to wait, and they hurried forward. Pointing to the hoofprints, clearly showing in the earth, he asked:

"What do they mean, Arqu-wao?"

The Shawanoe merely glanced at the ground. He had noticed the signs before, and it was not necessary for him to scrutinize or study them in order to know what the youth meant.

"Horses--so many," he said, holding up two fingers of his hand.

"How long ago did they pass this way?"

While the Indian understood the question, he was puzzled for a moment as to how to make an intelligent answer. He fixed his keen black eyes on the face of the questioner, then looked around the trees as if searching for some aid. These shut out the sun, but it was easy to locate the orb about one-third of the way between the horizon and the zenith. He had struck the key.

"When sun dere," he replied, pointing low down in the sky, "den men ride along on horses."

Wharton Edwards's heart gave a painful start. Of course the Shawanoe could not know that one of the horses carried a woman instead of a man, nor, with all the woodcraft of the American Indian, could he determine within an hour or two the time when the animals had passed along the trail, but he did know of a verity that the passage had taken place since the sun went down on the night before.

Understanding, now, the precise distance to the block-house, and the strong probability that the parties would not leave there in the night time, and well aware, also, from the marks of the hoofprints, that the horses were walking at a leisurely pace, it became an easy matter for him to tell at what time they were due at this particular spot. He had indicated the hour, which was another evidence that the boys were at no great distance from their destination.

"We don't want to go to the block-house," said Wharton, impetuously. "We want to travel the other way. We must overtake those horsemen before they reach the falls."

CHAPTER XXV.

A SINGULAR MEETING.

The paint on the face of the Shawanoe could not hide the astonishment caused by the words of Wharton Edwards. Despite the askew brain, the Indian was wonderfully shrewd in some respects.

"Go after dem--den be killed."

"Why will we be killed?"

"Shaw'noe wait for dem--bimeby dey shoot--both fall off horse--Shaw'noe take scalp--you go dere--take your scalp."

"Arqu-wao," said the distressed youth, stepping in front of the red man, "those horses are ridden by my father and mother; they are on their way to the settlement; we started out to come home with them; we must save them; we will do so or die with them."

These words, uttered with a depth of feeling hard to describe, were understood by the Shawanoe. He comprehended on the instant that the couple on horseback were so far along the trail that it was impossible for the two boys on foot to overtake them. Such was the fact concerning the elder of the two, but he probably would have changed his mind had he been aware of the fleetness of the younger one.

"Me catch dem," he hastened to say; "horse walk--Arqu-wao run faster den horse--he hurry--tell dem--me do that?"

The rising inflection showed that he only awaited the word to start off like the wind, but young Edwards was in a distressing quandary. The revelations of the last few minutes pointed to the loyalty of this strange being. He had certainly started them along the trail toward the block-house, as he had promised, and there was every reason to believe that he would have soon landed them there but for this unexpected check. Nevertheless the youths could not free themselves from the suspicion that the whole proceeding was a part of a deep laid scheme for their own overthrow.

If he should be told to hurry back over the path and do his best to warn the parents of their peril, he would pass beyond reach of the boys, and consequently beyond any punishment they could visit upon him for his treachery.

But what should be done?

True, Wharton could have run, too, and there was little doubt that he was fully the equal of the guide, since he had vanquished the champion runner of his tribe.

He turned his head and asked Larry in a low voice for his advice, stating the project that had come into his mind. Larry urged him to carry it out.

"Ye can travel as fast as him, and ye can shoot him if he tries his tricks."

"But it will separate you and me."

"I'll follow as fast as I can go; I can't run like ye, but I'm sure that if there's any fighting to be done I'll be on hand in time to give some help."

"Go 'mong trees--hide quick--Shawanoe coming."

It was Arqu-wao who uttered these words, with every evidence of agitation. He made quick gestures, and was so urgent that he compelled instant obedience.

Wharton and Larry sprang out of the path, and each darting behind the trunk of a large tree, peered cautiously out to learn the cause of the sudden alarm of their guide.

They saw nothing, but his actions were singular. Instead of remaining where he was, he took a number of short, quick steps, which carried him several rods farther toward the block-house. Then he halted as suddenly as a soldier in obedience to the command of his officer.

"Sh! look out! there they are!" whispered Wharton to his friend, but a few paces away.

Several flickering objects, seen through the trees, revealed themselves to be three Shawanoes in their war paint, striding along the trail as though they were runners from the block-house to the settlement. In fact their gait was a loping trot until they slowed down on seeing Arqu-wao.

There could be no mistaking them for runners, for not only did their war paint forbid this, but with feelings that can be imagined the youth recognized the leader as Blazing Arrow, the savage who hated the white people with an intensity beyond imagination.

"This will settle the question about Arqu-wao," thought Wharton, "for he now has our lives in his hands; if he tells the truth to Blazing Arrow, and joins him and the rest, they will separate and shoot us down in spite of all we can do."

This was the situation, and a few brief minutes must determine the fate of the boys, who, in the event of betrayal, were doomed. Hardly daring to look around the bark of the trees, they could only wait and prepare themselves for the issue of the conference.

They saw Blazing Arrow stride forward, and, halting in front of Arqu-wao, address him in tones so loud that they were plainly heard by the listeners, who, however, could form no idea of their meaning.

Not only that, but the fierce warrior gesticulated as if angry. If so, the one to whom he spoke showed no fear of him. He answered in a voice as loud, and with more gestures, the other two warriors remaining in the background and leaving all to their leader.

Blazing Arrow made a threatening gesture, placing his right hand on the knife at his girdle. Arqu-wao withdrew a couple of steps and whipped an arrow from his quiver. Possessing no other weapon than the bow, he made ready to use that. Not once, so far as the boys could see, did he show a sign of quailing.

It was evident that, desperate as might be the resistance he offered, he was helpless, inasmuch as each of the three warriors possessed a loaded rifle, and he could have been shot down in a twinkling; but he was ready to fight for his life.

Blazing Arrow moderated his manner. His hand slipped from the weapon at his waist, and he talked in a lower voice. Arqu-wao stepped a little closer and responded in kind. Neither one of the others so much as opened his mouth.

Blazing Arrow pointed down to the ground several times, and it looked as if he were discussing the hoofprints which showed so plainly at their very feet.

A thrill of admiration shot through Wharton Edwards, for at that moment he read the meaning of Arqu-wao's strategy on discovering the approach of the Shawanoes. He had hurried forward a short way, so that when the meeting took place nothing would be visible of the footprints made by the boys. They would reveal themselves, as a matter of course, farther along the trail, but Blazing Arrow was not likely to make as diligent search there as at the spot where the interview took place.

"I believe he is honest after all," was the conclusion of Wharton, when this thought came to him. "I wonder whether, if we have a fight, he will help us or Blazing Arrow? I don't see why he should be such a friend to us, when he tried to kill us a short time ago."

There was plenty to occupy the minds of the boys during the few minutes they shrank behind the trees in such suspense, not knowing the instant when they would be called upon to fight for their lives.

They asked themselves that, if the hoofprints in the trail had been made by the horses of Mr. Edwards and his wife, how was it that they had got by Blazing Arrow and his companions without detection? It was not to be supposed that they had been permitted to do so for the purpose of drawing them into a trap, for there was no call for such a course. Three Indians, crouching in ambush, could shoot a man and his wife from their horses without the slightest danger to themselves, or, if they chose, they could have slain the man and made the woman captive.

It looked as if, by some strange turn of events, the couple had slipped by undiscovered.

The conference continued but a few minutes. After the outburst of Blazing Arrow, he did not show any more excitement. He exchanged some words with Arqu-wao, and then waved him aside. The fellow obeyed rather sullenly, and the three Shawanoes resumed their walk in the direction of the falls.

It was a dangerous proceeding for the boys to watch them as they drew near their hiding-place. Larry did not do so, but shrank as close as he could against the trunk of a tree, fearful of betraying himself, and trying to shift his position, as they moved along, so as to prevent any part of his body being seen by any of the roving glances of the party.

Fully aware of the danger, Wharton could not help yielding to his curiosity to that extent that he had kept an eye on Blazing Arrow, even when he was at the nearest point of the trail. He studied the ugly countenance, smeared with paint, and the irregular profile of each warrior in turn as he filed past. Not one of them looked down at the ground, but their eyes seemed to be fixed on the farthest point of the trail which was in their field of vision, as though they were

expecting some one to reveal himself.

Had they looked down at the ground they must have discovered the footprints of the boys, and what then?

Arqu-wao, rather curiously, held the same position which has already been described; his left side was toward the boys, and also toward the vanishing group of his people. It was the attitude he would have taken had he intended to use his bow and arrow, and, after what had occurred, the boys could not believe he thought of injury to them. Beyond all question he had allowed the best opportunity to overcome them pass. Having done that, it seemed idle to suspect him any longer.

The only "fly in the ointment" was the explanation of the sudden friendship on the part of the strange being. He had been caught in the very act of an attempt to slay the boys, as he would have been glad to do, when they paddled away with his canoe. They, in turn, after sparing his life, had partially disarmed him, and then compelled him by threats to act the part of a guide.

The motive of gratitude which sometimes influences the American Indian (and just as frequently does not) could hardly be expected to crystallize at such brief notice into a sentiment strong enough to lead the red man to risk his life so soon for them; and yet, admitting that he was true to his pledge, no other explanation of Arqu-wao's course was possible.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOOTPRINTS.

"He's either the biggest wretch among the Shawanoes," said Wharton, "always excepting Blazing Arrow, or he is working like a major to help us."

"Look at him!"

The Indian whom they were discussing was standing in the same position as before, but was excitedly beckoning for them to approach.

Both boys broke into a trot and quickly joined him.

"Dat Blazing Arrow," said Arqu-wao; "he kill white folks."

"How is it that he and the others did not kill my father and mother as they rode along the trail?"

"No see 'em," was the quick reply.

"But why not? I do not understand."

"Arqu-wao no tell--don't know--not be looking."

This, apparently, was the explanation possible, but it did not satisfy the youths.

"Come wid me," said the Shawanoe, motioning the boys to follow him, which, despite their anxiety, they did.

"See dere--eh--see dat?"

The Indian stooped, and with his forefinger almost on the ground, pointed to the imprint of a shoe. It was not made by a moccasin, but by a regular heavy-soled shoe or boot.

"Who made that?" asked the astonished Wharton.

"White man," replied Arqu-wao, with almost a chuckle. "White man like him on hoss--he friend--Blazing Arrow don't know dat."

It seemed incredible that this half-demented creature had discovered signs which had escaped the eye of the fierce Shawanoe leader and his companions, but such was the fact, as afterwards came to light.

After much labored explanation, the guide made clear to the boys a state of facts hitherto unsuspected by them, whose existence they still half doubted.

A white man from the block-house had passed over the trail after the two horses. This was readily determined by studying his footprints where they interfered with those of the animals. He had walked at a rapid gait, as was evidenced by the length of the stride. In all probability he was an experienced ranger, for even while following the path he made an effort to hide his footprints. It was only at rare intervals that he stepped in the trail itself; he had generally walked at the side, where the leaves and harder earth hid the impressions from sight.

Had Blazing Arrow and his companions been searching for this stranger's footprints it is not to be supposed that they would have missed them, for their eyes were as keen as those of Arqu-wao, but the presumption was that they were not looking for them.

The rapid stride of the strange white man was accepted by the guide as a proof that he was trying to overtake those on horseback. It might be that, after their departure from the block-house, news had reached the small garrison there of the ambush the couple were liable to run into, and this runner had set out to warn them; or it might be that he had struck the trail a short distance off, and was seeking to join the two for the sake of their companionship, or for some reason of his own.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that, though the presumption was strongly in favor of the two riders being the father and mother of Wharton, it was not yet absolutely certain that such was the case. That could not be known for some time to come.

It was evident that some curious complication had taken place, since all three of the party had passed Blazing Arrow and his men without their detection. There was nothing remarkable in the single person doing so, since he had given

evidence of unusual care in his action. Skilled in the ways of the woods and Indian subtlety, he knew enough to avoid the most cunning ambush, but the hostiles must have been derelict to allow a mounted man and woman to pass unnoticed.

Be that as it may, Wharton and Larry were as resolute as ever in following the party. If it should prove that the parents had passed that point on their way to the settlement, there was no call for approaching any nearer to the block-house.

"We will go back," said Wharton, with only a moment's hesitation. "Lead the way, Arqu-wao, and serve us as well as you have already done."

"Me good Indian," he replied. "Me take care ob you."

"We know that. We shall depend on you. You needn't run, for we don't want to overtake Blazing Arrow too soon."

The Shawanoe showed a remarkable quickness in comprehending the wishes of the boys. He asked them to stand where they were until he signalled them to follow. They watched his figure out of sight, when he turned, with the same sidelong attitude as before, and beckoned them to come on.

"We've got to trust him now," said Larry.

"There's no help for it; but we couldn't ask much better proof of friendship than he has given already."

"But we'll keep our eyes on him. It may be he's fixing things so as to gather in the whole lot of us."

Wharton thought his companion was unduly suspicious, but at the same time he recognized the prudence of his words, for he knew that these people sometimes show a boundless patience in waiting for the minute when they can make their vengeance the more complete.

The Shawanoe walked so fast that Larry was forced to break into a trot now and then to keep pace with him and the cleaner-limbed Wharton. The presence of the three hostiles at no great distance in front rendered necessary the precaution of Arqu-wao; for, if he ran upon them with the youths at his heels, a collision would be inevitable, with disastrous consequences.

The guide was putting forth all the cunning of which he was capable. It was necessary to come up with Blazing Arrow and his companions, and at the same time prevent their knowing it.

The journey was pushed in this manner for nearly a mile, and Wharton recognized, from familiar sights, that they were drawing near the turn in the dry ravine where he had had his singular encounter with Blazing Arrow when he recovered his gun from him.

Somehow or other the conviction had fastened upon him that the spot was again to be the scene of stirring events.

"Halloo!" he exclaimed in an undertone. "He has discovered something, and we must wait till he signals us to go on."



CHAPTER XXVII.

RED CROW.

The boys kept such a close watch on the Shawanoe that the moment he signalled them to stop they obeyed. Although he assumed his favorite attitude while doing so, he instantly faced about so that his back was toward them. There could be no doubt that he had made some important discovery.

The youths stood still in the trail, Wharton slightly in advance; but Larry was near enough to his side to note every movement of the singular being who had been acting as their guide ever since the rise of the sun.

"I wonder whether he means us to stand right here or to dodge behind the trees, as we did before?" remarked Larry.

"We shall know, for he will tell us. There it is!"

Arqu-wao at this moment made a peculiar sweep of the hand holding the bow, which was interpreted as an order for them to screen themselves from sight. They did so with the cleverness of a short time before. Nothing to explain the cause for this caution appeared, and the lads kept their eyes on the Indian in whose hands they had placed their lives before this critical moment.

The tree trunks which sheltered them were not more rigid and motionless for the next five minutes than he. Then he was seen to take a single step forward, when he again paused. A second followed with the same deliberation as before, and the advance continued, foot by foot, until the intervening trees and the turn in the trail shut the guide from sight.

"We're near the clearing where I had my race with Blazing Arrow," remarked Wharton, in a guarded voice.

"Ye may have anither one with him."

"It isn't likely, but I believe he isn't far off."

"And the others are with him."

"Of course, and more than likely father and mother are near. Oh, I do hope that they will find out their danger soon enough to save themselves; but I fear the worst."

"Do ye hear that?"

The faces of the youths blanched, for at that moment the sharp crack of a rifle rang out in the stillness. It was near at hand, and was followed by a wild cry, which, echoing through the forest arches, left the silence more oppressive than before.

"Somebody is killed!" whispered the frightened Wharton.

"I don't doubt ye; but that yell wasn't a white man's."

"Then the shot must have been."

"I don't know the same; mebbe Blazing Arrow has found out what Arqu-wao has been doing and shot him."

"I believe that is what has happened; they had a quarrel when they met in the trail; why didn't Blazing Arrow kill him then?"

"He didn't know as much then as he does now; he has seen the thracks of oursilves along the path after the two parted, and then the whole thruth come upon him."

"I wish we could have the chance to save the poor crazy fellow, for he has given his life for us--that is, if he has been shot by any of his people."

"We don't know that he is dead yit; mebbe he managed to use his bow and arrow, and didn't miss, while the other chap as used his gun did, so the yell was the other fellow's."

"We ought to have given him back his knife and tomahawk; I didn't think of it, or we would have done so."

"It couldn't have done him any good in this sort of rumpus."

Some tragedy had been enacted so near them that the youths might well shudder for themselves as well as for their friends.

The sultry summer day was well along. The sun, high in the sky, penetrated the woods with its warmth, and in the broad open plain the heat must have been oppressive. Here and there a tiny bird fluttered among the trees, and suddenly a noble buck came striding along as if he meant to follow the trail to the falls for a drink, but, catching sight of the two young men standing beside the trees weapon in hand, he wheeled and was off in a twinkling, though not before either one of the lads could have gained the best kind of a shot had he dared to fire.

Minute after minute passed, and still there was no sign of the returning guide. The young friends would have been glad to believe he had escaped, but the fleeting minutes caused their hope to sink lower and lower, until at last it was gone.

"It seems to me," said Wharton, "that we are throwing away time by standing here; we shall never see Arqu-wao again."

"I agree with ye; the rest of 'em are miles off, and we might stay here till the sun went down and that's all the good it would do us."

Thump! and the startled boys, turning their heads, saw a stone, weighing fully a pound, that must have been thrown by some person at them. This was a curious proceeding by whomsoever done; but the explanation came the next moment, when a tall, finely formed figure, clad in the costume of the border ranger, stepped from behind a tree and motioned to them to make no noise.

The astonished and delighted boys recognized the individual as Simon Kenton, the most famous scout, not excepting Daniel Boone, known in Ohio and Kentucky. He had approached them from the rear, and announced his coming in this characteristic manner.

"Yer needn't be afear'd, younkers," he said, as he came up, "provided yer don't speak too loud. The varmints are powerful plenty yerabouts. Howdy?"

He shook the hand of each in turn, and Wharton asked:

"Where did you come from, Kenton?"

"The block-house."

"How long ago did you leave?"

"Shortly after sun-up; it isn't very fur, and I've travelled powerful fast."

Wharton yearned to ask the question that was on the tip of his tongue, but an awful fear held it back.

"We heard a rifle awhile ago; do you know anything about it?"

"I reckon," replied the ranger with a significant grin, "bein' as I was the chap that touched her off."

"At whom did you fire?"

"Why don't ye ask who did I hit, for when that piece speaks I reckon some one is hit. Did you hear him yell?"

"We might have heard the chap a mile off," replied Larry. "Was the same Blazing Arrow."

"No; I am sorry to say he kept out of the way, and I picked off the one that was nearest to him."

"Did you see anything of an Indian with a bow and arrow?"

"You mean Arqu-wao, or, as we call him, Red Crow."

"That must be the one. Why does he have such a strange name?"

"Did you ever see a red crow, younkers?"

"No; and I never saw a person that has seen one."

"And you never will; such a thing would be powerful qu'ar, but he wouldn't be any qu'arer than the varmint that Boone, M'Clelland, the Wetzel boys and some of the others have given the name to. He's a bit off, ain't 'zactly right here," added the scout, tapping his forehead. "Have you had anything to do with him?"

Wharton related in as few words as possible their experience with the strange creature, and asked:

"Has he always been that way?"

"No; his brother and him had a big fight when they were on the warpath. His brother was older and stronger, and threw him down among the rocks in such a way that his head was hurt and he was never right afterwards. He has lived by himself along that lake over yender for ten or a dozen years. He won't have anybody with him; you know how the Injuns look on such a person; they think he's a little different and better than other folks and none of 'em will harm him. Of course none of the boys would hurt a hair of his head, though he's quick enough with his bow and arer to shoot any one that comes pokin' round his place. It's powerful qu'ar that he acted the part of a friend toward you, but thar's no sayin' what crank may come into the head of such a person."

"But he had a quarrel with Blazing Arrow, who seemed on the point of striking him."

"That's nateral, for you know you hate anyone that you've already done an injury to."

"Has Blazing Arrow ever injured him?"

"Why, he's the one that throwed him over the rock; him and Blazing Arrow are full brothers."

This was surprising news to both, and Larry said:

"He once mentioned the name of that chap as his brother, but I didn't think that was what he meant."

"I don't think the Red Crow loves his brother any more than his brother loves him. Some time thar'll be the biggest kind of a fight between 'em. They don't often meet, but when they do they allers strike fire."

"How was it, Kenton, that you came to shoot awhile ago?"

"One of the varmints got in my way, and if you know of any better plan for heavin' him out, let me hear it."

"But you don't explain; did you see anything of Red Crow?"

"You asked me awhile ago, and I beg pardon for not answerin'. No, I haven't seen him lately, that is, for the last few weeks; but while I was out yender, just on t'other side of the ravine, whar the trail makes a sharp turn, I caught sight of one of the varmints stealin' along as though he was lookin' for somethin'. He caught sight of me at the same time. We had not time to dodge behind anything, and it was a question which could aim and fire the quickest. Wal," added Kenton, with a sigh of complacency, "mebbe thar's a varmint somewhar that can do that thing quicker'n me, but I haven't met him yet."

"But you say you saw Blazing Arrow?"

"Yas, and another of the redskins; they war some way ahead, and the trees war so plenty that we couldn't draw bead. I waited for 'em to come nigher, but they didn't seem to be lookin' for that sort of thing just then, and they scooted t'other way. I 'spect I'll meet 'em agin purty soon, and I'm ready."



CHAPTER XXVIII.

GOOD NEWS.

Wharton Edwards could not keep back the question any longer.

"Kenton, why was it you were in such a hurry to get along the trail when you left the block-house?"

"I wanted to catch up with your father and mother, that left before sun-up this mornin'."

The poor lad staggered back, and, had he not caught hold of a sapling, would have fallen to the earth.

"There is no hope for them."

"Who said there wasn't, younker?" demanded Kenton, sharply.

"I can see none; do you?"

"It looks putty bad, I'll own, but Brigham Edwards and his wife are no fools, unless they've become so since they left the block-house."

The words of the great ranger lifted part of the weight from the shoulders of the boys (for the grief of Larry was almost as deep as that of the son), though they were still in anguish of spirit.

"What led you to follow them in such haste? How did you know they were in such great danger?"

"I got in late last night to the block-house; I had been out on a scout for Colonel Quimby and was gone more than a week. The Shawanoes and Wyandots are raising the dickens, and I knowed thar war lots of 'em hanging round the settlement. I told your father, bein' that war so, he had better wait whar he war for a few days, or until we could spare several of the boys to go with him.

"Howsumever, instead of that leadin' him to do as I wanted, it made him and your mother twice as determined to be off. They wouldn't wait at the block-house for you younkers to come in, as they orter done, and made up thar minds to start the fust thing in the mornin'. I talked so hard with your father that I war sure he would change his mind, and so, bein' powerful tired, I went to sleep. I slept so late that when I woke up they'd been gone an hour. I swallered two or three mouthfuls and started after them."

Wharton explained what he had seen for himself, all of which indicated that Blazing Arrow and his two warriors had laid an ambush for the boys.

"Thar ain't no doubt of that after what you tell me. They larned that you war goin' to make a start for the block-house, so they went a good long way along the trail and waited for you to walk into thar open jaws."

"Which we might have done had we gone farther; but, that being so, how was it father and mother rode this way without harm when they must have passed the very spot where Blazing Arrow and the rest were waiting for us?"

"I came by 'em," said Kenton, with another smile.

"You could go by any number of them, for you know how. You were on foot and were prepared for them, but they were on horseback."

"Which leads me to say agin that Brigham Edwards and his wife ain't fools, unless they've become so powerful sudden. Your father knowed thar war three places whar, if thar war any ambush laid, it war sartin to be in one of 'em. Countin' from the settlement, the fust was whar the path goes close to them falls, for the lay of the land jes' invites it; the second are at the ravine down thar, only a little way beyond whar you are standin' this minute; and the third are ten miles this side of the block-house, whar the trail goes through that swampy spot, and the branches are so thick over it that they almost sweep you off the back of your hoss. If he could pass them there three places without runnin' agin the varmints, he would be safe."

"And where were Blazing Arrow and the rest in waiting?"

"At the swampy place I war speakin' of; the varmints made up thar minds that they would be sure of you by goin' close to the block-house."

"And how came father and mother to miss them?"

"Jes' before reachin' the spot they turned out of the trail and went round it. It war powerful hard work pickin' thar way with thar horses among the trees and round the rocks, but they managed to do it, and did not come back to the trail till they war a half mile this side the spot whar the varmints war waitin' for 'em."

"And ye mustn't forgit," said Larry, "that the spalpeens warn't looking for thim, but for us."

Wharton's eyes kindled with pride at this proof of the wisdom of his parents. It made clear that which had been mystifying to him.

"Bein' as your folks had done that," continued Kenton, "why, I thought it only perlite to do the same."

"Why didn't Blazing Arrow and the others wait for us to come?" asked Wharton.

"They got tired, though an Injun has more patience than a white man; but they begun to think that mebbe they war too late after all, and they set out to meet you."

"But you say that we are close to the second place, that is to the ravine where I got my rifle back from Blazing Arrow."

This was the first reference the fleet-limbed youth had made to his great race with the Champion of the Shawanoes, though he had told almost everything else. Remarking that the parents were safe for the present, Kenton demanded an account of the contest, and expressed the greatest delight, declaring that he would have swapped his favorite rifle for a powder-horn could he have stood where he might have witnessed the wonderful burst of speed on the part of the youthful runner.

But Wharton was impatient. All his thoughts were with the folks; and though quite certain, from the words and manner of the scout, that there was no cause for immediate alarm, he could not be denied fuller information.

"We are near the second place that you say would be used by the Shawanoes for ambush. Have the folks passed that yet?"

"No, they ain't two hundred yards off from you this blessed minute."

Wharton bounced from the ground and could hardly repress a cheer in the excess of his delight.

"Why, Kenton, didn't you tell me this before?"

"What war the hurry? They'll keep."

"Where did you overtake them?"

"Some distance back along the trail; I give a signal to your father and he waited for me to come up. I told him the varmints had sot the trap close to the swampy spot that he had sarcumvented, for I had seen their tracks along the trail, and, unless they came trottin' after us, we must look out for that ravine next. It's purty hard work sarcumventin' that, but, leavin' them to do it, I sneaked back hyar to keep a lookout for the varmints."

"Where does father intend to return to the main trail?"

"A little way beyond the clearin'; but the varmints will find out that he are ahead of 'em, and, havin' slipped up once already, they may try some trick; they'll be powerful careful, now that they know your folks ain't alone."



CHAPTER XXIX.

RED CROW'S ERRAND.

The Shawanoe Indian known as Arqu-wao, or Red Crow, had come in sight of the ravine, which was the scene of Blazing Arrow's mishap the preceding day, when he halted with the abruptness described, for he had caught sight of the three Indians, with his detested brother at their head.

They were walking rapidly, and when Red Crow stopped they soon passed beyond his sight again. Looking for them to halt, and half expecting them to turn back at any moment, he signalled the youths to hide themselves, while he advanced in the cautious manner known to the reader.

Sure enough, he had gone but a little way when he observed the three Indians standing in a group and discussing some question with great earnestness. Quite sure that it had something to do with the action of the couple who had passed that way a short time before, he stealthily watched them.

The truth was, Blazing Arrow, probably suspecting the identity of the couple, was giving his attention to them. They were sure to run into danger if they kept on to the falls, but they might escape unless he took a hand in the business.

Almost on the edge of the clearing, in sight of the ravine, the hoofprints showed that the horses had turned off from the trail, and with the evident intention of coming back to it at some point farther on. The result of the conference was that Blazing Arrow and one of his warriors continued in the direction of the natural clearing, while the third was sent to track the horses through the rough wood, and to signal the results to the leader.

Red Crow cautiously followed the single warrior to learn how he made out. No doubt the latter would have done well had he not run against an unexpected obstruction in the person of Simon Kenton, who, having accompanied Mr. Edwards and his wife a part of the way, turned back with the intention of acting as a rear guard.

The meeting was as much of a surprise to the white man as to the red man, but, as has been intimated by the famous scout himself, he was just too quick for the Shawanoe. With characteristic bravery, Kenton leaped behind a tree, reloaded his rifle, and coolly awaited the attack of Blazing Arrow and his companion; but they proved their cowardice by slinking off toward the clearing, across which they made their way, in the hope of gaining a better chance at the couple, who could not be far off.

Red Crow now kept well out of sight of Kenton, as well as of his brother, not stirring from his hiding-place until the way was clear. Then he stole along the tracks made by the horses. These were so clearly defined that a child would have had no difficulty in following them.

He knew that the couple were the parents of the young men whom he had set out to serve. The course of the great white hunter made it clear that he would soon join the youths, while the route of Blazing Arrow showed that they were in no present danger from him. Accordingly, without taking the trouble of telling the boys his intention, he hurried over the broken ground, anxious to meet the man and wife before they penetrated too far.

Red Crow had formed a plan the moment he fully understood what was going on, and he knew the need of haste.

Despite the almost marvellous cleverness he had displayed from the beginning, he narrowly escaped making a fatal error. In his eagerness to reach the couple he forgot that he was in war paint and resembled in every respect, except one, the Shawanoe whom the settler was trying to circumvent.

It was that one point of difference which saved Red Crow's life. Brigham Edwards was picking his way as best he could, when he caught sight of one of the Shawanoes hurrying along the trail as though intent on overtaking him at the earliest moment.

Before the Indian knew his danger the vigilant settler had his unerring rifle at his shoulder, and his keen eye was running along the barrel. But he noticed that the Indian carried a bow and arrow instead of a gun. This was so unusual that he hesitated. At the moment of doing so Red Crow stopped short and looked up with a startled look, as though recalling his forgetfulness. Despite his paint, Edwards recognized him as Arqu-wao, whom he had often seen when he was actively engaged in scouting along the frontier.

The pioneer had stopped both horses, and he and his wife were on foot when this little episode took place.

"By George!" he exclaimed to his companion, "I came within a hair of killing that poor crazy fool, Red Crow."

"What can be his business with us unless it be unfriendly?" asked the wife, who also held a weapon in her hands. "He

may have been sent forward by some of the others."

"I don't think we have anything to fear from him. I never heard that he harmed those who did not interfere with him. I will see what he wants with us."

As Red Crow approached, Mr. Edwards addressed him by name and repeated his own, but the Shawanoe showed no signs of recognizing it.

"Why did you come here?" asked the white man, sternly.

"Shaw'noe dere and dere and dere," replied Red Crow, pointing toward every point except that of the block-house; "if go on path, Shaw'noe kill white man--kill white woman."

"Do you want to help us?"

"Me show way--Shaw'noe not see--not find."

This promise was received with a good deal of skepticism, but the feelings of the parents were greatly stirred by the next words that were quickly uttered:

"White boy Wart'n--white boy Larr--dey come with Arqu-wao."

"What!" exclaimed the father, recognizing the names, and striding in front of the Indian; "do you know anything about those two boys?"

Red Crow nodded his head several times.

"Where are they?"

"Up dere," he replied, pointing in the direction of the point in the trail where he had left them but a short time before.

"What can this mean?" demanded the agitated parent. "I must investigate it. We will leave the horses here while we go back with him."

The mother was as anxious to meet her son and Larry, and they quickly made ready to start.

CHAPTER XXX.

ALL TOGETHER.

Brigham Edwards stopped short on hearing the signal of Kenton, and he and his wife held themselves ready to repulse any attack from the Indians, whom they knew to be in the neighborhood. Red Crow did a little thing which won the confidence of the couple, who could not help regarding him at first with suspicion: he placed himself directly in front, with his bow and arrow ready for use.

The little party was not kept long in suspense. From among the trees strode the athletic figure of the famous scout, who, at that time, was in his magnificent prime. Directly behind him walked Wharton Edwards and Larry Murphy.

At the sight of her son, the mother forgot everything else. Dropping her rifle to the ground, she ran forward with the exclamation:

"Wharton! my darling boy!"

"Oh, mother, my dearest mother!"

The lad, equally forgetful, flung aside his weapon and met his beloved parent more than half way, throwing his arms about her neck, while both wept with joy. The father smilingly advanced, and waited until the youth was released. Then he clasped the boy to his breast with a happiness and gratitude as deep and all-pervading, though it was less demonstrative.

Larry stepped blushing forward, when the way was clear, and was warmly greeted in turn by the parents, for he held a warm place in their hearts. He was a dutiful and respectable youth, who appreciated the unselfish goodness those people had always shown to him.

Even the grim, iron-hearted scout betrayed a suspicious moisture of the eyes at the affecting scene. He looked on in silence, while Red Crow gazed off among the trees as though he saw something that interested him. What strange musings coursed through that warped brain is beyond the power of fancy to imagine.

"This 'ere looks sorter like a family reunion," remarked Kenton, with a smile, when the first flurry was over; "I shouldn't wonder now, Brigham, if you and Margaret thar are summat glad to see the younkens agin."

"Indeed, I shall always thank heaven for its mercies. Wife and I did not sleep a wink last night after we learned how bad things looked, and nothing could have kept us from hurrying to them."

"And how about you chaps?" asked the scout, turning toward the two happy boys.

"Neither of us can express our thankfulness," replied Wharton; "we have seen a good deal of trouble during the last few days, but our suffering all the time had been about them."

"Yis," added Larry with a sigh; "it was mesilf that had not only them to think about, but Whart was on me hands, too, and thare was times whin I was ready to give up entirely."

"Well, Simon," said the head of the family, "we've had good fortune so far, but I have had enough experience to know that we are not out of the woods yet."

"Not by a long shot," was the expressive comment.

"How do things look to you?"

"Yer see that Blazing Arrer and one of his varmints has gone ahead and across the clearin' out yender. They know that we have started to round this part of the trail with the idee of comin' back agin beyend whar they're watchin' for us."

"And they will try to prevent us doing so?"

"That's it, and it's goin' to be a tough job, with the hosses to take care of."

"I've been thinking lately that the only safe plan is to abandon the animals and push on ourselves."

"That will give us the best show, thar's no doubt about that; but I hate powerfully to let the varmints get ahead of us, even as much as that."

"You and I, Simon, have tramped the woods long enough to know that we must take things as we find them. It's a

hundred times better that we should leave the horses than to imperil our lives by keeping them with us."

"The man as would deny them sentiments is a fool, but we hain't got to that p'int yet."

"I notice that the ground is much more difficult to get over than where we turned out to avoid the swamp. Both the horses fell once or twice with their loads, and I had almost reached the conclusion that we would have to turn back or abandon them. They are the only animals I own, and their loss would be a serious one, but it won't do to stop at that."

While this fragmentary conversation was going on, Arqu-wao, or Red Crow, held his position as motionless as before, and seemingly occupied with something among the trees, invisible to the rest. The boys noticed that he assumed his old attitude, which had caused them so much uneasiness before. But, inasmuch as there could be no misgiving now as to his intentions, they were certain that their former suspicions were unjust. When he surrendered to them in the early light of that breaking morning, he did so unreservedly, and had done his best to serve them. It was a great comfort to know this, but how much greater it would have been had they known it from the first.

He showed a quicker perception than any of his companions suspected, for he understood the doubt in the mind of the ranger and the settler concerning the horses. Turning about, he said:

"Arqu-wao show way to settlement."

"But we know the way ourselves," said Mr. Edwards, kindly.

"Show way for hosses."

"You mean by the trail yonder; we have come over that, but the Shawanoes are on the watch, and we dare not follow it."

"Arqu-wao show way for hosses--Shaw'noe don't know--get dere quick--Snaw'noe don't see."

The pioneer turned to the scout.

"He means to say that he knows of a route to the settlement different from the regular trail, over which we can take the animals in safety."

"That's what the varmint is drivin' at."

"What do you think of it, Simon?"

The scout significantly touched his forehead and shook his head.

"I know that, but he has done well so far. He lives by himself in the woods, and must be more familiar with it than any of his people. I'm inclined to believe there is something in what he says."

"I haven't much faith in a chap whose brain is twisted hind side afore, but I don't know as it will do any harm to try it; leastways we've stood here longer than we oughter."



CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NEW ROUTE.

Simon Kenton had spent so many years of his life in the woods and had been among the Shawanoes so much that he spoke their language like a native. The reader need not be told that he was once a prisoner of the Shawanoes, and was condemned to death by them, but was saved through the interference of the renegade Simon Girty, to whom the scout had done a kindness years before. This is the only instance of the kind known of that miscreant.

It had also fallen to the lot of Kenton to run the gantlet, and he had desperate scrimmages without number with members of that warlike tribe. His frequent association with them, his companionship with the extraordinary but unfortunate Deerfoot, had given him a mastery of the tongue used by these people.

Kenton now turned to Red Crow and addressed him in the language of his tribe:

"Arqu-wao, tell me why you wish to prove yourself a friend of the white man."

"Arqu-wao crept upon the palefaces; they ran away with his canoe; they came near his home, where the red and white man must not come; but they went away, they did not hurt his canoe; he followed them; he was about to kill them when they slept, but they awoke; they could have killed him, but they did not; they spared his life; then the Great Spirit whispered in his heart that he must be the friend of the paleface youths; so Arqu-wao is their friend; he will give his life for them."

Kenton listened gravely to this singular statement. His knowledge of the Indian character assured him that every word was the truth. Red Crow did not show by his words or manner that his brain was not as clear as that of his brother, Blazing Arrow. The probability was that it was partially affected only by the injury received years before. It had led him to make a recluse of himself, and to indulge in some whimsical performances. In other respects, as he had proven, his cunning and ability were greater than before.

All doubt of his loyalty removed, Kenton proceeded to the business he had in mind:

"To-day you met your brother, and you had a quarrel."

The black eyes flashed.

"Blazing Arrow is a snake in the grass, that bites when you are not looking; he hates Arqu-wao; Arqu-wao hates him; some time one will kill the other; the Great Spirit has said so."

"But you quarrelled," repeated Kenton, wishing to hear the explanation of that dispute.

"Blazing Arrow said to Arqu-wao that he had turned against his people; he said he had become the friend of the white man, and he said he would kill him."

"And what did Arqu-wao do?"

"He drew his bow and arrow," replied Red Crow, with another flash of his black eyes, "but Blazing Arrow said he would wait till he learned more; then he would kill him."

Kenton suspected this from what the boys had told him, and he plainly foresaw that the fatal encounter must come, sooner or later, between these brothers, who hated each other with consuming hate.

"You say that you know a better way to the settlement, where we can take the horses?"

"Yes--me know--me show," replied Red Crow, with such haste that he unconsciously dropped into English, which he spoke ill.

"Where is it?"

The Shawanoe pointed behind him, and almost in the direction of the lake, on whose shore he made his home.

"Ober dere--not far--show de way."

While Kenton believed in the truthfulness of the strange being, he was disturbed by the fact that he himself had traversed this section so many times that he was familiar with every portion, and he could not recall any part answering to the description of Red Crow. He feared that, while his intention was honest, the thing itself was only a figment of the Indian's brain, and that he was liable to draw them into greater difficulties than before.

If this should prove to be the case, it would be better to abandon the animals at once, for the remark of Mr. Edwards about the forest being most difficult of passage was true. Not only that, but it grew worse, until it became absolutely impassable for any quadruped as large as a horse.

The plan the scout had in mind was that of the whole party returning without delay to the block-house, and waiting till the danger passed. Inasmuch as there was no call for haste on the part of the pioneer in reaching his home, this, unquestionably, was the better course to adopt. But Kenton was curious to learn something more about this new route, for he saw that if it proved an actuality, and was known to the Shawanoes, it was sure to be of vast value to himself and other rangers who were compelled frequently to pass back and forth between the two points. So, after a little more unimportant talk, he added:

"Well, Arqu-wao, we will follow you. Show the way."

It will be remembered that when the pioneer and his wife set out with Red Crow to find the boys they left the two horses behind them. It was useless to bring them back over the route that had cost the animals so much labor, and which would necessitate the whole thing being done over again. In order to carry out the plan of Red Crow it was necessary to go to where the horses were, or to bring them back to the party. Kenton asked him what should be done, and he replied that they were to await him where they were while he brought the beasts to them. Accordingly the company assumed new positions on the ground, Wharton sitting close to his mother.

Before Red Cloud left, the boys restored to him the knife and tomahawk, so that he was as fully armed as before. The Indian smiled in his shadowy way, and showed that he appreciated the confidence implied in the little act, which would have been performed before had it not been overlooked.

When the Shawanoe was beyond hearing, Kenton said:

"I shouldn't be surprised if that varmint had trouble afore he brings them hosses back."

"Why so?" asked Mr. Edwards.

"We've been talkin' and actin' as though thar warn't one of them varmints in ten miles of us; but I haven't forgot that Blazing Arrow knows why you turned off the trail with the hosses, and if he hain't gone back himself he has sent some of 'em to l'am how things are goin'."

"Why haven't they appeared to us?"

"We ain't in the hole they want to get us into," replied Kenton, who, in accordance with the custom of those of his calling, kept glancing to the right and left, on the lookout for the first appearance of peril. "They may have had a peep at us, and will keep an eye on our movements, but are more likely to watch the hosses. They ain't fur off, Brigham?"

"No; I didn't go far with them."

"Has Red Crow had time to reach the spot?"

"If he kept up the gait with which he started I should say he is about there."

"Now, don't speak till I give the word," said Kenton, in a low voice, "but listen with all your ears."

The entire party assumed attitudes of intense attention, and were rewarded sooner than they anticipated. Amid the profound stillness a sudden, sharp, twanging noise reached them, followed instantly by a smothered, gasping cry, and then all was still.

The party looked in one another's faces. No need of any one speaking a word, for all knew what those awful sounds meant.

Red Crow had driven an arrow into some dusky thief with such swiftness and force that he had no time to utter the proverbial yell of his race when he sank to the ground.

"Thar must have been only one of 'em," quietly remarked Kenton, "or thar would be more of a rumpus. He has started."

The sound of the animals laboring through the bushes and among the trees was plainly heard, and a minute later Red Crow appeared, leading the pioneer's horse, while that of his wife followed close behind.

It was agreed that no reference should be made by any one to the tragedy that had taken place so near them. They waited for Red Crow himself to tell the story, but though he was questioned quite closely, he never said a word.

"Arqu-wao," said Kenton, in the Shawanoe language, "you have a single tongue; you are a good Indian; now lead the

way; we believe in you and will trust you to the death."

For the first time since the Shawanoe had joined them, his painted face gave evidence of emotion. He stood for several seconds with his eyes fixed on Kenton, who calmly confronted him. He was on the point of speaking, and once the boys, who were studying his countenance with curious interest, observed a movement of his thin lips, but he changed his mind and no words escaped him.

Turning abruptly away, he held the bridle-rein of the pioneer's horse in one hand, and, with his long bow in the other, began moving through the wood, which route may roughly be described as half way between that just followed and the course of the trail nearest them.

The work for a time was as hard as before, and the animal showed so much reluctance that, in addition to the tugging at the rein by the leader, he required some vigorous prodding from his master before he would do his duty; but ere long a pleasant fact became apparent to all; the wood was so open that it was a comparatively easy matter for all to advance. If it should remain thus, they could push on with little more trouble than that encountered in travelling over the trail itself.

Of course, nothing was easier than for the Shawanoes to follow the footprints of the party, and it was to guard against any surprise of this kind that Kenton remained some distance behind the others.



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST HALT.

Within the following half hour a pleasant surprise came to the little party.

"My gracious!" exclaimed the pioneer to his wife, "do you see that, Margaret?"

He pointed to the ground between them as he spoke, and she nodded her head with a smile.

"We are travelling over a trail," he added; "Red Crow is keeping his promise; he knows what he is doing."

It was the truth. The path was faintly marked, but it was unmistakable, and all knew the meaning. They were approaching one of those open spaces, known as "salt licks," which are quite numerous in Kentucky and Ohio. Naturally they are the resort of animals who thread their way over long distances to the spots where the brackish moisture, oozing through the ground, affords a taste of the mineral which is as indispensable to beasts as to human beings.

The bears, deer, buffaloes and other inhabitants, journeying toward one common point, gradually form paths through the forest, into which additional brutes turn, adding to the distinctness of the trails, which sometimes radiate outward from the common centre like the spokes of a wheel, until they gradually lose themselves in the wood, as the brutes diverge from the route, whose individuality becomes lost like the course of the streams in the sandy wastes of Africa or the barren regions of the Southwest.

By and by the path was as clearly defined as the trail connecting the settlement and the block-house. A short distance farther and they arrived at the lick.

The favorite time for the wild animals to visit these places of refreshment is early in the morning, but when our friends arrived there, a huge wolf was lapping the ground on the other side. They caught but a single glimpse of him, when he skurried off among the trees, vanishing in a twinkling.

The sight was a singular one, with the ground worn as smooth as the floor of a barn by the licking of multitudinous tongues, and its moisture glistened in the sunlight, as if it had been oiled.

The horses showed their appreciation of the luxury by stretching out their necks and eagerly applying their tongues to the saltish surface. They were allowed to do so freely, and a few minutes later Kenton joined them. His handsome face expanded with a broad grin, and he surprised all, especially the recipient of the compliment, by slapping Red Crow on the shoulder.

"Arqu-wao, you're a powerful good chap, and here's my hand on it."

The Shawanoe, rather gingerly, allowed his palm to be almost crushed in that of the scout.

"He's doin' jes' what the varmint said he would," added Kenton, addressing the rest of the party. "If nothin' don't happen, he'll land us at the settlement all right, but we're goin' to be followed."

"Have you discovered anything?" asked Mr. Edwards.

"Not as yet, but they won't let us slip away in this style without some kind of a rumpus; we musn't stay here too long."

Red Crow was of the same mind, for he tugged at the rein of the leading horse, who was reluctant to abandon his feast, while the pioneer had to work as hard with the other before he would leave the spot. The lick was skirted and another trail taken on the other side, so that the journey was continued in substantially the same direction as before. Inasmuch, however, as this path must soon dissipate itself, there was some curiosity to know what their guide would do when the point of vanishing was reached. Not a member of the party, however, felt distrust of his ability and loyalty to them.

Kenton, as before, fell to the rear, for there was every reason to believe that whenever the Shawanoes chose to make a demonstration, it would be from that quarter. As anticipated, the path grew fainter as they progressed until it was hardly perceptible, but the wood remained open, and progress was comparatively easy.

For some minutes before this the whites had been sensible of a dull, roaring sound, which at times was quite distinct, and then sank again beyond their power of hearing.

"I believe that is the stream where Larry and I had so much trouble yesterday and last night," said Wharton to his father.

"Undoubtedly you are right."

"I wonder whether he intends we shall cross it?"

"If he does, he knows the way."

"I guess we will not, for you know the regular trail doesn't take the other side."

"But if he means to follow a new course to the settlement, it may be necessary."

The afternoon was well along, and some of the party had eaten nothing since early morning. All were hungry, but though there was a substantial lunch in the packs carried by the horses, no one spoke of it. They were too desirous of getting forward while the opportunity was theirs, to pay any attention to their appetites.

They had not yet reached the torrent, which was now close at hand, when Red Crow halted the animals and said to the pioneer:

"Wait here--Arqu-wao go ahead--won't stay long--want to see."

Mr. Edwards bowed his head, signifying that it should be as he wished, and the Shawanoe was off in a twinkling before Kenton, who was hardly out of sight to the rear, could come up. He soon appeared, and inquired what had taken place.

"Thar's trouble," was his emphatic comment.

"How can you know that?" asked the pioneer, with slight impatience; "you haven't seen anything."

"We're not far from where the younkers had the row yesterday; the lake isn't more'n half a mile up stream, and the reg'lar trail ain't that fur off in t'other direction."

"Don't you think Red Crow is acting wisely?"

"No one could do as well. It ain't that; but I told you we wouldn't reach the settlement without a rumpus. He means to take us across the gorge. The other varmints may not know the course we've took, but they'll be smart enough to 'spect that we'll try to cross at this spot, and some of 'em will be on the watch thar as sure as you're born. Wait hyar whar you be till I go ahead and lam how things stand. I think Red Crow is likely to need me."

The words proved true sooner than the sagacious scout suspected.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

Red Crow, the friendly Shawanoe, who had proved his loyalty to the whites in so many striking instances, left the little party where he had halted them in the wood and walked rapidly toward the gorge, which he intended should be crossed by the fugitives and their animals.

It followed that, if such was his intention, the means of crossing was at his command. So it proved.

He struck the gorge at a place where it was so narrow that Larry Murphy, and even Mrs. Edwards herself, would have found no difficulty in leaping it. The horses, if stripped of their loads and sharply urged, would no doubt have done the same; but to meet such an emergency some one had caused the trunks of two trees to lie as close as possible side by side, the "dip" between the logs being packed with dirt and gravel, so that a space of fully two feet wide and quite level was presented. It was strong, and any horse could walk over without trouble.

It was curious that the youths, while searching for just such a spot the previous evening, should have missed it. They must have passed quite near to it.

Red Crow stood a moment calmly contemplating the rude work of art, his eyes roving from where he stood to the other side and beyond. It would seem as if he ought to have been satisfied with the strength of the bridge, but he appeared to be in doubt, and to test it he started to walk across.

At the moment of doing so a figure stepped from behind one of the large trees and advanced to him. Red Crow looked up and saw Blazing Arrow, who, detecting his approach, had dodged behind shelter. The face of the miscreant was the embodiment of rage as he ground out the words: "Dog of a Shawanoe! friend of the white man! you shall die! rot at the bottom of the water!"

The words were loud enough to be heard above the dull roar of the current. Red Crow recoiled for a moment on catching sight of his execrated relative, but it was through surprise rather than fear. The next moment he took a step forward.

"Blazing Arrow is a rattlesnake! Arqu-wao does not fear him! he hurt him when he was young and weak like a squaw, but Arqu-wao is now a man and a warrior!"

While speaking, Red Crow hung his bow behind him and drew his knife. Blazing Arrow had left his rifle leaning against the tree where he was hiding, and his hunting-knife was in his hand when he stepped upon the bridge.

Had the two been obliged to stay apart for a few minutes they would have used the time in taunting each other, an art in which the American race is hardly less adept than the Caucasian; but they were eager to come together; their hatred was too burning for either to waste any time.

They met in the middle of the bridge, directly over the sweeping current, and assailed each other like a couple of catamounts. It was a fight to the death, and was fiercely waged by each. Neither would ask or show mercy, and one or both must succumb.

It would be distressing to describe the terrific encounter in detail. Nothing could have been fiercer, but it continued only a few minutes, when a spectator would have seen that Arqu-wao was overmatched. Blazing Arrow was much the larger, and not only was fully as active, but more powerful. He pressed his advantage remorselessly, and, though he was severely wounded by the weapon of the other, he conquered.

The swaying bodies kept their places on the narrow bridge, though sometimes they narrowly missed rolling into the torrent beneath, until finally the efforts of Arqu-wao relaxed. Then, seizing him in his brawny arms, Blazing Arrow lifted him high in the air, and holding him aloft for a moment, hissed:

"Die, dog of a Shawanoe, your blood is white!"

He swung the senseless body outward, and it shot downward like a boulder, and with a loud splash vanished beneath the surface.

But the bloody form of Blazing Arrow was scarcely ten seconds behind it. The furious exclamations were yet trembling on the dusky lips when the crack of a rifle broke the stillness. The miscreant, with a resounding shriek, leaped clear of the bridge and sped downward like a meteor, the spray flying high in the air as he, too, vanished from human sight.

"Confound it!" muttered the enraged Simon Kenton, "why didn't I get hyar jes' a minute sooner? I've give Blazing Arrer his last sickness; but afore I done that he put poor Red Crow to sleep; but it's all over now, and thar's no use of kickin'."

Advancing to the edge of the torrent, he looked in the direction of the falls to see the bodies disappear. Once he thought he saw a dark object for a moment, which he fancied might be one of them, but it disappeared before he could make certain, and was not seen again.

As he had remarked to himself, there was nothing to be gained by "kicking," and with a sigh of regret over the unfortunate Red Crow, or, as he was known among his own people, Arqu-wao, he turned about and hurriedly rejoined his friends, who were greatly agitated at the tragedy that they knew had taken place near them.

The scout told, in as few words as he could, what had occurred, and added:

"It's too bad for Red Crow, but I'm afeared that rifle-shot and the beautiful yell of Blazing Arrer has been heard by the rest of the varmints; leaswise we don't want to stay hyar any longer."

Before allowing the party to cross the rude bridge with the animals, Kenton preceded them and made a careful reconnoissance. He could discover no signs of Shawanoes, and, picking up Blazing Arrow's rifle from where it rested against the tree, he signalled the pioneer and the rest to follow him over.

It was easy for all to obey, but a vexatious delay was caused by the reluctance of the horses to trust themselves on the narrow foot-bridge, with the rushing current below. In the very middle of the support the leader became panic-stricken, and, in attempting to back to the shore from whence he started, lost his balance, and that was the last of him. The other reached the bank in safety.

There was no semblance of a path on the other side, and what Red Crow would have done, had he lived, after crossing, cannot be known; but Kenton did not hesitate. His knowledge of the country enabled him to proceed intelligently. He explained the route clearly to the pioneer, and leaving him to follow orders, he again assumed the duties of rear guard, adding:

"Push ahead, Brigham, as best you can; to-night will settle whether the folks get to the settlement or not. If we can dodge the varmints till after the sun goes down we'll be all right."

"Suppose we get into trouble?"

"I'll signal you. If you hear this gun go off, don't pay any 'tention to it except to travel faster, if you can."

With an exchange of these brief sentences, the pioneer set out, closely followed by his wife, the boys and the scout.

Fortunately the horse that went off the bridge did not take all the lunch with him. Mr. Edwards brought out what was left and divided it among his companions, and they ate as they walked.

They were now pursuing a clearly defined policy. It was to come back to the regular trail at a point well beyond where the Indians were believed to be waiting in ambush. If the hostiles could thus be thrown behind them, there was reason to hope for the best.

The chief trouble was because of the horse. Without any path for his feet, and with the trees now and then interfering, and with places so impassable that they were compelled to make laborious detours, the progress was exasperatingly slow; but with the passing of the afternoon and the approach of night, hope strengthened. Safety lay in darkness, which was close at hand.

At intervals the listening ear of the pioneer caught a familiar signal from Kenton, but in every instance it was interpreted "All right," and served to add to the buoyancy of the spirits of all.

The scout was strongly inclined to place a favorable explanation on this immunity from attack. The Shawanoe war party was small in numbers; it had suffered the loss of three or four of their best men, among them their leader, Blazing Arrow. This weakened them greatly.

On the other hand, if the Shawanoes were hunting for the two boys, or for the pioneer and his wife, they were confronted by a marked change in the situation. Not only had the two couples been united, but the most dreaded ranger of the border was with them. There were five rifles among the whites instead of two, and every person holding a weapon was not only ready, but was skilled in its use. They knew of the threatened peril, and were on the alert to guard against it.

In other words, the whites had increased and the red men decreased to that extent that Kenton half believed the Shawanoes hesitated to attack them. It was certain that they would not do so unless they could gain some great

advantage over them, which was what the scout determined should not be gained if it lay in his power to prevent it. Certainly, if skill and woodcraft could avail, it never would come about.

The veteran ranger employed all the consummate art of which he was master. He fell farther behind than any of his friends ever suspected; he made long half way circuits through the woods, and as they neared the trail he once passed entirely round the company without their knowledge. Nothing escaped his lynx eyes, but, when the sun at last went down and twilight stole through the forest, he had not caught the first suspicious sign.

It was only fairly dark when Edwards stopped, as he had agreed to do, on reaching the trail. Kenton was with them a few minutes later.

"Things look powerful well," was his encouraging remark; "I haven't caught sight of hide or hair of the varmints since that hoss of yours turned summersets off the bridge."

"That is something to be grateful for," was the response of the pioneer. "I feel more hopeful than at any time since leaving the block-house."

"It is a purty good tramp yet afore we reach the settlement; can you all stand it?"

"You know better than to ask me that question," replied the settler with a laugh; "we have been on too many tramps ourselves, but I don't know about the rest."

"Excepting me," was the cheery response of the wife. "I am so glad to have Wharton and Larry safe with me that I know not what fatigue is; I believe I could walk all night without suffering."

"If you give out, make the hoss help."

"No; he has had it harder than any of us. He'll be the first to stop; but, Wharton, what about you?"

"I'll never let my mother beat me walking," he said with a laugh, affectionately kissing her ruddy cheek.

"And as for Larry Murphy," added the young gentleman alluded to, "it'll be a few years from now before he allows any one to beat him in walking towards home, when he knows that a good supper and bed is awaiting him there. I'm riddy, gintlemen, when ye say the word."

The good fortune which attended the members of the party did not desert them. What movements were made by the Shawanoes and what their intentions were could never be known, but not a hostile shot was fired within hearing of the fugitives, who at last reached the settlement in safety, all profoundly grateful to heaven for its mercy.

FAMOUS STANDARD JUVENILE LIBRARIES.

HORATIO ALGER, JR.

The enormous sales of the books of Horatio Alger, Jr., show the greatness of his popularity among the boys, and prove that he is one of their most favored writers. I am told that more than half a million copies altogether have been sold, and that all the large circulating libraries in the country have several complete sets, of which only two or three volumes are ever on the shelves at one time. If this is true, what thousands and thousands of boys have read and are reading Mr. Alger's books! His peculiar style of stories, often imitated but never equaled, have taken a hold upon the young people, and, despite their similarity, are eagerly read as soon as they appear.

Mr. Alger became famous with the publication of that undying book, "Ragged Dick, or Street Life in New York." It was his first book for young people, and its success was so great that he immediately devoted himself to that kind of writing. It was a new and fertile field for a writer then, and Mr. Alger's treatment of it at once caught the fancy of the boys. "Ragged Dick" first appeared in 1868, and ever since then it has been selling steadily, until now it is estimated that about 200,000 copies of the series have been sold.

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A writer for boys should have an abundant sympathy with them. He should be able to enter into their plans, hopes, and aspirations. He should learn to look upon life as they do. Boys object to be written down to. A boy's heart opens to the man or writer who understands him.

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The Young Bank Messenger.

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JED, THE POOR-HOUSE BOY.

HARRY CASTLEMON.

HOW I CAME TO WRITE MY FIRST BOOK.

When I was sixteen years old I belonged to a composition class. It was our custom to go on the recitation seat every day with clean slates, and we were allowed ten minutes to write seventy words on any subject the teacher thought suited to our capacity. One day he gave out "What a Man Would See if He Went to Greenland." My heart was in the matter, and before the ten minutes were up I had one side of my slate filled. The teacher listened to the reading of our compositions, and when they were all over he simply said: "Some of you will make your living by writing one of these days." That gave me something to ponder upon. I did not say so out loud, but I knew that my composition was as good as the best of them. By the way, there was another thing that came in my way just then. I was reading at that time one of Mayne Reid's works which I had drawn from the library, and I pondered upon it as much as I did upon what the teacher said to me. In introducing Swartboy to his readers he made use of this expression: "No visible change was observable in Swartboy's countenance." Now, it occurred to me that if a man of his education could make such a blunder as that and still write a book, I ought to be able to do it, too. I went home that very day and began a story, "The Old Guide's Narrative," which was sent to the *New York Weekly*, and came back, respectfully declined. It was written on both sides of the sheets but I didn't know that this was against the rules. Nothing abashed, I began another, and receiving some instruction, from a friend of mine who was a clerk in a book store, I wrote it on only one side of the paper. But mind you, he didn't know what I was doing. Nobody knew it; but one day, after a hard Saturday's work--the other boys had been out skating on the brick-pond--I shyly broached the subject to my mother. I felt the need of some sympathy. She listened in amazement, and then said: "Why, do you think you could write a book like that?" That settled the matter, and from that day no one knew what I was up to until I sent the first four volumes of Gunboat Series to my father. Was it work? Well, yes; it was hard work, but each week I had the satisfaction of seeing the manuscript grow until the "Young Naturalist" was all complete.

--Harry Castlemon in the *Writer*.

GUNBOAT SERIES.

Frank the Young Naturalist.
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Frank on the Lower Mississippi.
Frank on the Prairie.

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The Sportsman's Club Among the Trappers.

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Frank in the Forecastle.
The Boy Traders.

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George at the Fort.
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Go-Ahead.
No Moss.

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Rodney the Overseer.
Marcy the Blockade-Runner.
Marcy the Refugee.
Sailor Jack the Trader.

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The Mystery of Lost River Canon.
The Young Game Warden.

AFLOAT AND ASHORE SERIES.

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A Sailor in Spite of Himself.
The Ten-Ton Cutter.

THE PONY EXPRESS SERIES.

The Pony Express Rider.
The White Beaver.
Carl, The Trailer.

EDWARD S. ELLIS.

Edward S. Ellis the popular writer of boys' books, is a native of Ohio, where he was born somewhat more than a half-century ago. His father was a famous hunter and rifle shot, and it was doubtless his exploits and those of his associates, with their tales of adventure which gave the son his taste for the breezy backwoods and for depicting the stirring life of the early settlers on the frontier.

Mr. Ellis began writing at an early age and his work was acceptable from the first. His parents removed to New Jersey while he was a boy and he was graduated from the State Normal School and became a member of the faculty while still in his teens. He was afterward principal of the Trenton High School, a trustee and then superintendent of schools. By that time his services as a writer had become so pronounced that he gave his entire attention to literature. He was an exceptionally successful teacher and wrote a number of text-books for schools, all of which met with high favor. For these and his historical productions, Princeton College conferred upon him the degree of Master of Arts.

The high moral character, the clean, manly tendencies and the admirable literary style of Mr. Ellis' stories have made him as popular on the other side of the Atlantic as in this country. A leading paper remarked some time since, that no mother need hesitate to place in the hands of her boy any book written by Mr. Ellis. They are found in the leading Sunday-school libraries, where, as may well be believed, they are in wide demand and do much good by their sound, wholesome lessons which render them as acceptable to parents as to their children. All of his books published by Henry T. Coates & Co. are re-issued in London, and many have been translated into other languages. Mr. Ellis is a writer of varied accomplishments, and, in addition to his stories, is the author of historical works, of a number of pieces of popular music and has made several valuable inventions. Mr. Ellis is in the prime of his mental and physical powers, and great as have been the merits of his past achievements, there is reason to look for more brilliant productions from his pen in the near future.

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IRON HEART, WAR CHIEF OF THE IROQUOIS.

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THE BLAZING ARROW.

J. T. TROWBRIDGE.

Neither as a writer does he stand apart from the great currents of life and select some exceptional phase or odd combination of circumstances. He stands on the common level and appeals to the universal heart, and all that he suggests or achieves is on the plane and in the line of march of the great body of humanity.

The Jack Hazard series of stories, published in the late *Our Young Folks*, and continued in the first volume of *St. Nicholas*, under the title of "Fast Friends," is no doubt destined to hold a high place in this class of literature. The delight of the boys in them (and of their seniors, too) is well founded. They go to the right spot every time. Trowbridge knows the heart of a boy like a book, and the heart of a man, too, and he has laid them both open in these books in a most successful manner. Apart from the qualities that render the series so attractive to all young readers, they have great value on account of their portrayures of American country life and character. The drawing is wonderfully accurate, and as spirited as it is true. The constable, Sellick, is an original character, and as minor figures where will we find anything better than Miss Wansey, and Mr. P. Pipkin, Esq. The picture of Mr. Dink's school, too, is capital, and where else in fiction is there a better nick-name than that the boys gave to poor little Stephen Treadwell, "Step Hen," as he himself pronounced his name in an unfortunate moment when he saw it in print for the first time in his lesson in school.

On the whole, these books are very satisfactory, and afford the critical reader the rare pleasure of the works that are just adequate, that easily fulfill themselves and accomplish all they set out to do.--*Scribner's Monthly*.

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