

The Lost Trail

Edward S. Ellis

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THE LOST TRAIL

By Edward S. Ellis

CHAPTER I

AN ENEMY IN A TREE

One afternoon in early spring, Jack Carleton, a sturdy youth of seventeen years, was following a clearly-marked trail, leading through the western part of Kentucky toward the Mississippi river. For many a mile he followed the evenly spaced tracks made by a horse on a walk, the double impressions being a trifle more than three feet apart.

"Helloa!" exclaimed, Jack, when he looked at the earth again and observed that the tracks had taken a new form, with nearly eight feet between them. "Otto has forced the colt to a trot. He must be in a hurry, or he thinks I am fond of traveling."

Thus far the lusty young Kentuckian felt no misgiving, but within fifty yards the trail underwent the startling change--the footprints being separated by more than three yards now.

"My gracious," muttered the boy, coming to a full stop, "something is wrong: Otto would not have put the horse on a dead run if he hadn't been scared."

Jack Carleton proved his training by the keenness and quickness with which he surveyed his surroundings. The woods were on every hand, but they were open and free from undergrowth, so that he gained an extensive view.

As he advanced with vigorous steps along the winding path, his eyes sometimes rested on the pendulous branches of the majestic elm, a small purple flower here and there still clinging to the limbs and resisting the budding leaves striving to force it aside; the massive oak and its twisted, iron limbs; the pinnated leaves of the hickory, whose solid trunk, when gashed by the axe, was of snowy whiteness; the pale green spikes and tiny flowers of the chestnut; the sycamore, whose spreading limbs found themselves crowded even in the most open spaces, with an occasional wild cherry or tulip, and now and then a pine, whose resinous breath brooded like a perennial balm over the vast solitude.

Jack Carleton was arrayed in the coarse, serviceable garb of the border: heavy calf-skin shoes, thick trousers, leggings and coat, the latter short and clasped at the waist by a girdle, also of woolen and similar to that of the modern ulster. The cap was of the same material and, like the other garments, had been fashioned and put together by the deft hands of the mother in Kentucky. Powder-horn and bullet-pouch were suspended by strings passing over alternate sides of the neck and a fine flint-lock rifle, the inseparable companion of the Western youth, rested on the right shoulder, the hand grasping it near the stock.

Jack's hasty survey failed to reveal any cause for fear, and he resumed his pursuit, as it may be termed. The quick glances he cast on the ground in front showed, in every instance, that the horse he was following was fleeing at the same headlong pace. His rider had spurred him to a dead run, at which gait he had shot underneath the limbs of the trees at great risk to himself as well as to his rider.

The trail was broad, for loaded horses had passed in both directions, and wild animals availed themselves of it more than once in making their pilgrimages to the Mississippi, or in migrating from one part of the country to the other.

But there were no footprints that had been made within the past few days, with the single exception noted--that of the horse which had abruptly broken into a full run.

The balmy afternoon was drawing to a close, and Jack began to believe the chances were against overtaking his friend and companion, young Otto Relstaub.

"If he has kept this up very long, he must be far beyond my reach, unless he has turned about and taken the back trail."

Glancing at the sky as seen through the branches overhead, the youth observed that it was clear, the deep blue flecked here and there by patches of snowy clouds, resting motionless in the crystalline air.

Comparatively young as was Jack, he had been thoroughly trained in woodcraft. When beyond sight of the cabins of the straggling settlement, where he made his home, he was as watchful and alert as Daniel Boone or Simon Kenton himself. His penetrating gray eyes not only scanned the sinuous path, stretching in front, but darted from side to side, and were frequently turned behind him. He knew that if danger threatened it was as likely to come from one point as another.

He could not avoid one conclusion: the peril which had impelled the young German's horse to such a burst of speed must have been in the form dreaded above all others--that of the wild Indians who at that day roamed through the vast wilderness of the West and hovered along the frontier, eager to use the torch, the rifle, or the tomahawk, whenever and wherever the way opened.

The probability that such was the cause of the horseman's haste threw the young Kentuckian at once on his mettle. Inasmuch as he was putting forth every effort to rejoin his companion, there was good reason for fearing a collision with the red men. He had been in several desperate affrays with them, and, like a sensible person, he spared no exertion to escape all such encounters.

"If they will let me alone I will not disturb them," was the principle which not only he, but many of the bravest frontiersmen followed during the eventful early days of the West.

The youth now dropped into the loping trot of the American Indian--a gait which, as in the case of the dusky warrior himself, he was able to maintain hour after hour, without fatigue. The sharp glances thrown in every direction were not long in making a discovery,

though not of the nature anticipated.

A short distance in front a white oak, whose trunk was fully two feet in diameter, grew beside the trail which he was following. Its shaggy limbs twisted their way across the path and among the branches on the other side. The exuberant leaves offered such inviting concealment to man and animal that the youth subjected them to the keenest scrutiny.

His trot dropped to a slow walk, and he instinctively glanced at the lock of his gun to make sure it was ready for any emergency.

Something was moving among the branches of the forest monarch, but Jack knew it was not an Indian. No warrior would climb into a tree to wait for his prey, when, he could secure better concealment on the ground, where he would not be compelled to yield the use of his legs, which play such an important part in the maneuverings of the red man.

The lad caught several glimpses of the strange animal, and, when within a few rods, identified it.

"It's a painter," he said to himself, with a faint smile, resuming his slow advance and giving a sigh of relief; "I don't know whether it is worth while to give him a shot or not."

The name "painter," so common among American hunters, is a corruption of "panther," which is itself an incorrect application, the genuine panther being found only in Africa and India. In South America the corresponding animal is the jaguar, and in North America the cougar or catamount, and sometimes the American lion.

Jack Carlton did not hold the brute in special fear, though he knew that when wounded or impelled by hunger he was a dangerous foe. During an unusually cold day, only a few months before, one of them had made an open attack on him, inflicting some severe scratches and tearing most of his clothes to shreds.

It would have been one of the easiest things in the world for the young Kentuckian to settle the whole question by leaving the trail and making a detour that would take him safely by the treacherous beast, which, as a rule, is afraid to assault a person. The lad was certain that at that season of the year it would not leave the tree to attack him.

But if he took such a course, it would be a confession of timidity on his part against which, his nature and training rebelled.

"No," said he, after brief hesitation, "I won't leave the path for all the painters this side of the Mississippi. It may not be wise for me to fire my gun just now and I won't do it, if he behaves himself, but I don't mean to put up with any nonsense."

He brought his weapon in front, raised the hammer and closely watched the animal above, while the quadruped was equally intent in observing him. It was a curious sight--the two scrutinizing each other with such defiant distrust.

The cougar was crouching on a broad limb, just far enough from the

trunk of the oak to be directly over the trail. He was extended full length, and, as partly seen through the leaves, offered the best target possible for the marksman below.

But Jack preferred not to fire his gun, for the reason that the report was likely to be heard by more dangerous enemies. His purpose was to refrain from doing so, unless forced to shoot in self defense, and his pride would not permit him to deviate a hair's-breadth from the path in order to escape the necessity of shooting.

He walked with the deliberate, noiseless tread of an Indian, looking steadily upward at the eyes which assumed a curious, phosphorescent glare, that scintillated with a greenish light, as the relative position of the enemies changed.

The lad passed under the limbs staring unflinchingly aloft. When exactly beneath, the cougar was hidden for an instant from sight, but, recognizing the changing conditions, he quickly lifted his head to the right, and the lad again saw the greenish glare, the white teeth, and blood red mouth. He traced the outlines of the sinewy body close along the limb, and through which he could have driven a bullet with fatal certainty. The "painter," whose scream is often mistaken for the cry of a human being, uttered an occasional snarling growl as he looked down on the lad. His attitude and manner seemed to say: "I've got my eye on you, young man! Walk very straight or you will find yourself in trouble."

The probability that a cougar is gathering his muscles on a limb with the intention of bounding down on one's shoulders, is enough to make the bravest man uneasy. Jack Carleton did feel a creeping chill, but the same pride which prevented him deviating a hair's-breadth from the trail, would not allow him to increase or retard his gait.

"If you think you can make me run, old fellow," he muttered, with his gaze still fixed on the beast, "you are mistaken. We don't meet wild animals in Kentucky that are able to drive us out of the woods. You needn't fancy, either, that I am in any hurry to walk away from you."

And, to show the contempt in which he held the beast, the youth at that moment came to a full stop, turned about and faced him.

CHAPTER II

WHAT A RIFLE-SHOT DID

The moment the young Kentuckian assumed this attitude, he became aware that the cougar had determined upon hostilities.

With a rasping snarl he buried his claws in the shaggy bark, pressing his body still closer to the limb, and then shot downward straight toward Jack, who was too vigilant to be caught unprepared. Leaping backward a couple of steps, he brought his gun to his

shoulder, like a flash, and fired almost at the moment the animal left his perch. There could be no miss under the circumstances, and the "painter" received his death wound, as may be said, while in mid-air. He struck the ground with a heavy thump, made a blind leap toward the youthful hunter, who recoiled several steps more, and then, after a brief struggle, the beast lay dead.

During these moments, Jack Carleton, following the rule he was taught when first given his gun, occupied himself with reloading the weapon. A charge of powder was poured from the hollow cow's horn, with its wooden stopper, into the palm of his hand, and this went rattling like fine sand down the barrel. The square piece of muslin was hammered on top until the ramrod almost bounded from the gun; then the bullet which the youthful hunter had molded himself, was shoved gently but firmly downward, backed by another bit of muslin. The ramrod was pushed into its place, and the hammer, claspings the yellow, translucent flint, was drawn far back, like the jaw of a wild cat, and the black grains sprinkled into the pan. The jaw was slowly let back so as to hold the priming fast, and the old fashioned rifle, such as our grandfathers were accustomed to use, was ready for duty.

Jack surveyed the motionless figure on the ground and said:

"I don't think you'll ever amount to anything again as a painter; at any rate, you ain't likely to drop on to a fellow's head when he is walking under a tree."

And, without giving him any further notice, he turned about and resumed his walk toward the Mississippi.

It was vain, however, for him to seek to suppress his anxiety. The trail of the flying horse still indicated that he was going on a dead run, and some unusual cause must have impelled him to do so. Jack could not doubt that his friend Otto was driven to such severe effort by the appearance of Indians, but it would seem that the terrific gait of the Steed ought to have taken him beyond all danger very speedily, whereas, for more than a mile, the pace showed not the slightest diminution.

At the most, Otto was not more than an hour in advance, and his friend, therefore, had good reason to fear he was in the immediate vicinity of the dreaded red men.

The young hunter was brave, but he was not reckless. He had refused to turn aside to avoid a collision with the cougar, but he did not hesitate to leave the trail, in the hope of escaping the savages who were likely to be attracted by the report of the gun.

From the beginning the lad had stepped as lightly as possible, bringing his feet softly but squarely down on the ground, after the fashion of the American Indian, when threading his way through the trackless forest. He now used the utmost care in leaving the trail, for none knew better than he the amazing keenness of the dark eyes that were liable to scan the ground over which he had passed.

Not until he was several rods from the footprints of the flying horse did he advance with anything like assurance. He then moved with more certainty until he reached a chestnut, whose trunk was broad enough to afford all the concealment he could desire.

Stepping behind this, Jack assumed a position which gave him a view of the trail, with no likelihood of being seen, unless the suspicion of the Indians should be directed to the spot.

"If they are coming, it is time they showed themselves."

The words were yet in the mouth of the youth, when something seemed to twinkle and flicker among the trees, in advance of the point where he had turned aside from the path. A second look allowed that two Indian warriors were returning along the trail.

He recognized them as Shawanoes--one of the fiercest tribes that resisted the march of civilization a century ago. It may be said that they corresponded to the Apaches of the present day.

The couple were scrutinizing the ground, as they advanced with heads thrown forward and their serpent-like eyes flitting from side to side. Manifestly they were expecting to discover certain parties along the trail itself. There may have been something in the peculiar sound of the rifle, which raised their suspicions, though it is hard to understand wherein the report of two similarly made weapons can possess any perceptible difference.

Be that as it may, that which Jack Carleton feared had taken place--the shot which killed the cougar brought far more dangerous enemies to the spot.

The lad would have had no difficulty in picking off one of the warriors, but he had not the remotest intention of doing so. There could be no justification for such a wanton act, and the consequences could not fail to be disastrous to himself. He was never better prepared to support the creed of the frontiersmen who would willingly leave the red men unmolested if they in turn sought to do them no harm.

The Shawanoes soon passed by, making no pause until they reached the carcass of the panther. They quickly saw the bullet-wound, between his fore legs, and understood that his heart had been pierced while in the act of leaping from his perch upon the hunter beneath. A brief scrutiny of the ground brought to light the impressions of the calf-skin shoes of him who had fired the fatal shot.

They understood at once that the party was a white person, and, judging from the size of the footprints, he clearly was an adult--one who, it was safe to conclude, was able to taking good care of himself; but it must have been a relief to the warriors when their examination of the earth showed that only a single member of the detested race had been concerned in the death of the cougar.

That which followed was precisely what the watcher expected. The moment the red men were certain of the direction taken by the hunter they started along the same line. The foremost looked down for an instant at the ground, and then seemed to dart a glance at every visible point around him. The other warrior did not once look down, but guarded against running into any ambush for it need not be said that the task on which they were engaged was most delicate and dangerous.

The American Indian cannot excel the white man in woodcraft and

subtlety, and no Kentucky pioneer ever stood still and allowed a dusky foe to creep upon him.

It will be conceded that a point had been reached where Jack Carleton had good cause for alarm. Those Shawanoe were following his trail, and they had but to keep it up for a short distance when he was certain to be "uncovered."

"I wish there was only one of them," muttered the youth, stealthily peering from behind the tree; "it will be hard to manage two."

The coolness of Jack was extraordinary. Though he felt the situation was critical in the highest degree, yet there was not a tremor of the muscles, nor blanching of the countenance, as it would seem was inevitable when such a desperate encounter impended.

There was a single, shadowy hope; it was fast growing dark in the woods, and the eyes of the Shawanoes, keen as they were, must soon fail them. The sun had set and twilight already filled the forest arches with gloom.

Peering around the bark, Jack saw the leading Indian bend lower, leaving to the other the task of guarding against mishap. He walked more slowly; it was plain his task was not only difficult, but was becoming more so every moment.

Jack followed the movements with rapt attention. Knowing the precise point where he had left the path, his heart throbbed faster than was its wont, when he saw his enemies close to the tingle in his course. A half minute later they were beyond--they had overrun his trail.

A short distance only was passed, when the warriors seemed to suspect the truth. They came to a halt, and the trail-hunter sank upon his knees. His head was so close to the ground that it looked as if he were drawing lines and figures with his curving nose, which slowly circled around and back and forth. At the same time the palm of his right hand gently moved over the leaves, touching them as lightly as the falling snowflakes, and with as wonderful delicacy as that of the blind reader, when his fingers are groping over the raised letters of the Book of Life.

The young Kentuckian from his place of concealment smiled to himself.

"There are some things which even a Shawanoe, cannot do, and that's one of them."

Such was the fact; for, with that care which the trained pioneer never permits himself to forget or disregard, the lad had adopted every artifice at his command to add to the difficulty of identifying his footsteps.

The warrior straightened up with an impatient "Ugh!" which brought another smile to the face of the watcher, for it proved beyond question the failure of his foes.

The Shawanoe, however, had established one fact--the overrunning of the trail. The one for whom they were searching had left the path

at some point behind them. Scant chance was there of learning the precise spot.

"Follow me if you can," was the exultant thought of Jack, who carefully lowered the hammer of his rifle. "I'm glad that as the painter was determined on picking a quarrel with me he did not do it earlier in the day--helloa!"

While speaking to himself, he became aware that the warriors were invisible. They may have believed they were acting as oscillating targets for some hidden enemy, who was likely to press the trigger at any moment; and, unable even to approximate as they were his bidding-place, they withdrew in their characteristic fashion.

Jack thrust his head still further from behind the tree, and finally stepped forth that he might obtain the best view he could. But the red men had vanished like the shadows of swiftly-moving clouds. Nothing more was to be feared from that source.

But with the lifting of the peril from his own shoulders, there returned his distressing anxiety for his absent companion. No doubt could exist that when he put his horse to his hurried flight, he had done so to escape the Indians. Whether he had succeeded remained to be learned, but Jack felt that every probability was against it.

He might well debate as to his own duty in the premises. His one desire was to learn what had become of Otto, the German lad, with whom he left the Settlements a couple of days before. Neither had ever visited this section, but they were following the instructions of those who had, and the young Kentuckian knew the precise point in their journey that had been reached.

Standing as motionless as the trees beside him and amid the darkening shadows, Jack Carleton listened with the intentness of an Indian scout stealing into a hostile camp.

The soft murmur which seems to reach us when a sea-shell is held to the ear filled the air. It was the voice of the night--the sighing of the scarcely moving wind among the multitudinous branches, the restless movements of myriads of trees--the soft embrace of millions of leaves, which, like the great ocean itself, even when the air is pulseless, is never at rest.

Jack Carleton had spent too many days and nights in the woods to be greatly impressed with the solemnity and grandeur of his surroundings. That which would have awed his soul, if noted for the first time, had lost the power to do so from its familiarity; but while in the attitude of listening, he became conscious of another sound which did not belong to the vast forest, the throbbing air, nor the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER III

ON THE BANK OF THE MISSISSIPPI

That which reached the ears of Jack Carleton, while he stood in the woods, silent and listening, was a peculiar swashing noise, which continued a few seconds, followed by the same space of silence--the intervals being as regular as the ticking of a huge pendulum. Accompanying the sound was another, a soft, almost inaudible flow, such as one hears when standing on the bank of a vast stream of water.

He knew that both were caused by the sweep of the mighty Mississippi which was near at hand. The reason for the first he could not understand, but that of the latter was apparent. He had never looked upon the Father of Waters, but many a time he had rested along the Ohio and been lulled to sleep by its musical flow, even while the camp-fires of the hostile red men twinkled on the other shore.

Manifestly nothing could be done by remaining where he was, and, in the same guarded manner in which he left the trail a half hour before, he began picking his way back. Probably he ran greater personal risk in following the beaten path, yet he was controlled by a true hunter's instinct in every movement made.

When he reached the trail, he observed that not only had the night descended, but the full moon was shining from an almost unclouded sky. The trees, crowned with exuberant vegetation, cast deep shadows, like those of the electric light, and only here and there did the arrowy moonbeams strike the ground, redolent with the odors of fresh earth and moldering leaves.

"Some of the warriors may be returning or groping along the trail," was the thought of the youth, who glided silently forward, his senses on the alert. His misgivings, however, were much less than when watching the two Shawanoes, for with the dense gloom of the forest inclosing him on every hand, he felt that the shelter was not only secure but was of instant avail.

Less than a furlong was passed, when he caught the shimmering of water. A few steps further and he stood for the first time on the bank of the Mississippi.

The youth felt those emotions which must come to every one when he emerges from a vast forest at night and pauses beside one of the grandest streams of the globe. At that day its real source was unknown, but Jack, who was unusually well informed for one of his years, was aware that it rose somewhere among the snowy mountains and unexplored regions far to the northward, and that, after its winding course of hundreds of leagues, during which it received the volume of many rivers, enormous in themselves, it debouched into the tropical waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The reflection of the turbid current showed that it was flowing swiftly. The dark line of the forest on the other shore appeared like a solid wall of blackness, while to the north and south the view ended in the same impenetrable gloom.

Impressed and awed by the scene, the lad saw something which at first startled him by its resemblance to a man, standing in the river, with his feet braced against the bottom and his head and shoulders above the surface. The current seemed to rush against his

bared breast, from which it was cast back and aside, as though flung off by a granite rock. Then the head bowed forward, as if the strong man sought to bathe his brain in the cooling waters, that he might be refreshed against the next shock.

A minute's scrutiny was enough to show Jack that the object was a tree, which, rolling into the river at some point, perhaps hundreds of miles above, had grown weary of its journey, and, plunging its feet into the muddy bed of the stream, had, refused to go further. The fierce current would lift the head several feet with a splash, but could hold it thus only a part of a minute, when it would dip for a brief while, to rise again and repeat the action.

The tree was what is known to-day on the Mississippi as a "sawyer," and which is so dreaded by the steamers and other craft navigating the river. Many a boat striking at full speed against them, have had their hulls pierced as if by a hundred-pound shell, and have gone to the bottom like stone.

It was the sound made by the "sawyer" which had puzzled Jack Carleton before he caught sight of the great river. He could not wonder that he had failed to guess the cause of the intermittent swash which reached him through the woods.

"And we must cross that stream," murmured Jack, with half a shudder, as he looked out upon the prodigious volume rushing southward like myriads of wild horses; "it seems to me no one can swim to the other shore, nor can a raft or boat be pushed thither."

The plucky boy would not have felt so distrustful and timid had the sun been shining overhead.

"Ish dot you, Jack?"

Young Carleton turned his head as if a war hoop had sounded in his ear. He fairly bounded feet when he recognized his old friend at his elbow. The good-natured German lad was grinning with delight, as he extended his chubby hand and asked:

"How you vos?"

"Why, Otto!" gasped Jack, slapping his palm against that of his friend and crushing it as if in a vise. "I am so glad to see you."

"So I vos," was the grinning response; "I'm always glad to shake hands mit myself"

"But," said the other, looking furtively over each shoulder in turn, "let's move away the trail, where we cannot be seen or heard."

The suggestion was a wise one, and acted upon without delay. The friends entered the wood, which continued quite open, and tramped steadily forward with the intention of finding place where they could start a fire and converse without danger of discovery by enemies.

The hearts of both were too full for hold their peace while stealing forward among the trees.

"Otto," said Jack, "where is the colt?"

"I dinks he's purty near New Orleans as soon as dis time."

Young Carleton looked wonderingly toward friend and asked, "What do you mean?"

"I don't mean vot I don't say and derefore dinks I mean vot I vos."

"So the colt went into the river? Where were you?"

"Mit de colt and he vos mit me, so we bot vos mit each other. Just feels of me."

Jack reached out his hand and pinched the clothing of his friend in several places. It was saturated.

"Ven I walks, de vater in my shoes squishes up to mine ears--don't you hear 'em?"

"Why don't you pour it out?"

"I hef done so, tree time already--I done so again once more."

And, without ado, the young German threw himself forward on his hands and head and kicked his feet with a vigor that sent the moisture in every direction. Indeed the performance was conducted with so much ardor that one of the shoes flew off with considerable violence. Otto then reversed himself and assumed the upright posture.

"Mine gracious," he exclaimed, "where didn't dot shoe of mine went?"

"It just missed my face," replied Jack, with a laugh.

"Dot vos lucky," said Otto, beginning to search for his property.

"Yes; it might have hurt me pretty bad."

"I means it vos lucky for de shoe," added Otto, who, in groping about, stumbled at that moment upon the missing article. "Bime by de vater soaks down mine shoes agin and I stands on head and kicks it out."

But Jack Carleton was anxious to learn what had befallen his friend since their voluntary separation some hours before, and so, while they were advancing along the shore, the story was told.

Otto, as he had agreed to do, was riding at a leisurely pace, when, without the least warning, the sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness of the woods on his right, and the bullet zipped so close to his forehead that it literally grazed the skin, leaving a faint mark, which was visible several days afterward.

The lad was never so frightened in all his life. For a minute or so he was absolutely speechless, during which the horse, alarmed in a less degree than he, broke into a trot. Otto, however, quickly regained his self-control, and fully realized his danger. He did not glance behind him nor to the right or left. No investigation

was needed convince him of his peril. He put the horse to a dead run, first throwing himself forward on his neck so as to offer the least possible target to his enemies.

Only the single shot was fired, and Jack counted it strange that the report failed to reach his ears. When the fugitive had gone a considerable distance, he ventured to look back. He thought he saw several Indians, but it was probably fancy, for had they observed he was leaving them behind (as would have been the case), they surely would have appealed to their rifles again.

Otto was in such danger from the overhanging limbs, and was so fearful that he was running a gauntlet of Indians, that he kept his head close to the mane of his steed and scarcely looked to see where they were going.

The awakening came like an electric shock, when the terrified horse made a tremendous plunge straight out into the river. The first notice Otto received was the chilling embrace of the waters which enveloped him to the ears. He held his rifle in his right hand, and, in his desperate efforts to save that, was swept from the back of the animal, which began swimming composedly down stream, carrying saddle, blankets and other valuable articles that were strapped to him back.

Encumbered with his heavy clothing and his gun, young Otto Relstaub had all he could do to fight his way back to land. He escaped shipwreck as by a hair's-breadth, from the sawyer which had attracted the notice of Jack.

"I vos swimming as hard as nefer vos," he explained, "and had just got in front of the tree, ven as true as I don't live, it banged right down on top mit me and nearly knocked out my brains out. I grabbed hold of it, when it raised up and frowed me over its head. Den I gots mad and swims ashore."

Jack laughed, for, though he knew his friend was prone to exaggeration, he could understand that his experience was similar, in many respects, to what he had stated.

"After the shore reaches me," continued Otto, "I turns around free, four times to find where I ain't. I see de colt going down stream as fast as if two Indians was on his back sitting and paddling him mit paddles. I called to him to come back and explained dot he would cotch him cold if he didn't stay too long in de vater, but he makes belief he don't hears me, and I bothers him no more."

"There will be trouble at home when your father finds out the colt is lost," said Jack Carleton, who knew how harsh the parent of Otto was; "it must be he returned to land further down."

"Yes; bimeby he comes ashore."

"Why didn't you recover him?"

"Cause he swims out on de oder side and he would not wait till I could go back mit de settlenients and got mine frens to come and build one boat. I vos gone so long dot it vos night ven I comes back, and ven I sees you I dinks you vos an Indian or maybe some

other loafer."

Jack Carleton was about to reply to this remark when both he and his friend caught sight the same moment of the star-like twinkle of a point of light.

While there was nothing specially noteworthy in this, yet both were impressed by the fact that the light was not only on the river, but was serving as a signal to some one standing on the same shore with them.

CHAPTER IV

THE VISITOR FROM THE OTHER SHORE

Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub saw the twinkling point of light, glowing like a star from the bank of darkness on the other side the Mississippi. It shone for a minute with an intense brightness, and then, to their amazement, began revolving in a circle of a foot or more in diameter. It sped round and round with such swiftness that it resembled a wheel of fire without the slightest break in the flaming periphery.

"What can it mean?" asked the mystified Jack.

"I vos told something apout afire dot vos to jump apout in one circle," was the remarkable statement of Otto.

"What was it?"

"I don't forgot him now," replied the German with the hesitating speech of one in doubt.

"Well, you're the prize blockhead of the West," was the impatient comment of the young Kentuckian. "How you could have heard anything of that signal--as it must be--and forget it is beyond my understanding."

"Dot's what I dinks. I'll remember sometime after a few days--helloa!"

His exclamation was caused by the blotting out of the circular fire which had caused so much speculation. Looking toward the western bank of the Mississippi all was darkness again, the light having vanished.

Jack stooped so as to bring his head on a level with the surface of the river, and peered intently out over the moonlit surface.

"That torch was waved by an Indian in a canoe," said he, in a low voice, "and he is paddling this way."

Otto imitated the action of his friend, and saw that he had spoken the truth. The outlines of a boat, dimly distinguishable, were assuming definite shape with such rapidity that there could be no doubt the craft was approaching them.

As there was no question that the fiery ring was meant for a signal, Jack Carleton concluded that a party of red men were communicating with those from whom the boys had effected so narrow an escape. Such a supposition showed the necessity of great care, and the friends, without speaking, stepped further from the edge of the stream, where they were in no danger of being seen.

As the boat came nearer, and its shape was more clearly marked, the boys discovered that only a single warrior sat within. He was in the stern, manipulating his long, ashen paddle with such rare skill that he seemed to pay no heed to the current at all.

"There's only one of them," whispered the astonished Jack. "How easily we can pick him off!"

Otto brought his gun to his shoulder.

"What do you mean?" demanded the angry Jack.

"Pick him off!"

"No, you don't. He may be a friend."

"We'll found dot out, after we don't shoot him. Let's shoot him first," was the suggestion of Otto, "and then ax him the question."

"Even if an enemy--as he undoubtedly is--it would be cowardly to slay him in that fashion. As there is only one--!"

"Dere!" exclaimed the young Teuton, hardly to suppress his excitement over the recollection; "I knowed dat I had recumlected some dings."

"What is it?"

"Dot young gentleman in dot boat is a great friend of mine. He told me he would meet me at the crossing, if I didn't reach him pefore till it was come dark. Dot vos vat I didn't forget till de fire pegun to whirl apout, and then I didn't remember."

"Who is he?" asked the astonished Jack.

"Deerfoot, the Shawanoe," was the reply of Otto, who, with a light heart, stepped closer to the edge of the swiftly flowing river and called out:

"Holloa, Deerfoot! How you vos?"

The mention of the name called up strange emotions in the breast of Jack Carleton. For a year previous, stories had reached the settlement where he had made his home, of the wonderful Shawanoe youth, who was captured when a child, and while he was as untameable in his hatred of the whites as a spitting wildcat, but who was transformed by kindness into the most devoted friend of the pioneers.

Ned Preston, who lived at Wild Oaks, nearly a hundred miles distant from Jack's home, visited the latter a few months before, while on a

hunting excursion, with his colored friend Wild-blossom Brown, and it was from him that Jack had gained many particulars of the remarkable history of the young Shawanoe.

Jack credited the statements of Deerfoot's amazing skill in the use of his bow and arrow, his wonderful fleetness of foot, and his chivalrous devotion to his friends; but when told that the youth could not only read, but could write an excellent hand, and that he was a true Christian, Jack felt many misgivings of the truth of the whole story.

Jack recalled further the statement that Deerfoot was held in such detestation by his own race that he became convinced his presence was an element of weakness rather than strength to his friends, and it was for that reason he had migrated west of the Mississippi.

The youthful warrior, seated in the stem of the canoe, gave no evidence that he saw the stubby figure of the German lad who stepped close to the water and hailed him by name. One powerful impulse of the paddle sent the bark structure far up the bank, like the snout of some aquatic monster plunging after the lad awaiting it.

Before it came to rest, Deerfoot sprang lightly ashore, and, grasping the front of the boat, drew it still further from the river, where it was not only safe against being swept away, but could not be seen by any one passing in the neighborhood.

His next proceeding was to pick up his bow from the bottom of the canoe, after which he was prepared to see that others were near him. Turning about, he extended his hand to Otto with the smiling greeting: "How do you do, my brother?"

The words were spoken with as perfect accentuation as Jack Carleton could have used. Had the speaker been invisible, no one would have believed him to be an Indian.

"I does vell," replied Otto, shaking his hand firmly. "Dis ish my friend, Jack Carleton, dot I dinks a good deal of."

Dropping the hand of the German, Deerfoot took one step forward and saluted the young Kentuckian in the same manner. He pressed his hand warmly, and, with the same smile as before, said:

"Deerfoot is glad to meet his brother."

As he uttered these words the moonlight fell on his face and the front part of his body, so that a better view of countenance and features could not have been obtained.

Nearly a year had passed since we last saw Deerfoot (see "Ned on the River"). During that period, he had almost attained the full stature of a warrior. It may be said that there was no single person, whether of his own or the Caucasian race, whom Deerfoot held in personal fear.

Those who have done me the honor of reading the "Young Pioneer Series," will recall the marked attractiveness of Deerfoot's countenance. The classical regularity of his features was relieved from effeminacy by the slightly Roman nose, which, with the thin

lips, gave him an expression of firmness and nerve that was true to his character.

When he stepped in front of the great Tecumseh, with his knife clenched in his hand, and dared the chieftain to mortal combat, the luminous black eyes flashed lightning, and the muscles on the graceful limbs were knotted like iron. They were now in repose and the eyes were as soft as those of a maiden.

When Deerfoot smiled it was rarely more than a faint, shadowy expression, just sufficient to reveal the small, even, white teeth and to add to the winsomeness of his expression.

The love of finery and display seems natural to every human being, and it manifested itself in the dress of the young Shawanoe. The long black hair, which streamed down his shoulders, was ornamented at the crown by several eagle feathers, brilliantly stained and thrust in place. The fringes of the neatly fitting leggings were also colored, and the moccasins which incased the small shapely feet, were interwoven with beads of every line of the rainbow. The body of the hunting shirt as well as the skirt, which descended almost to his knees, showed what may be called a certain subdued gaudiness which was not without its attractiveness.

The waist of the Shawanoe was clasped by a girdle into which were thrust a knife and tomahawk. Relying upon the bow, instead of the rifle, he carried a quiver full of arrows, just showing over the right shoulder, where they could be readily plucked with his deft left hand, whenever required.

Deerfoot had tested both the rifle and the bow and as has been shown gave his adherence to the latter.

Jack Carleton said to himself, "He is the handsomest being I ever looked upon."

He was perfect in build, graceful in every movement, with an activity and power almost incredible, an eye large, black, and honest, but keen and penetrating, and a command of which approached the marvelous.

These characteristics of the young warrior struck Jack Carleton while pressing the warm hand of his new friend and looking into his pleasing countenance for the first time.

"I am delighted to see you," he said, recalling the amazing stories told of Deerfoot by Ned Preston, and beginning to think that, after all, they may have contained more truth than fiction.

Before Jack could add anything more, Otto Relstaub, who was staring at the two, heaved a great sigh, as if fearing some danger would come upon them.

"What is the matter with my brother?" asked Deerfoot, looking inquiringly toward him with his old smile.

"I asks mineself if we stands here till all last night, don't it?"

"I suppose we may as well seek more comfortable quarters," remarked

Jack Carleton, who turned to the young warrior and added, "When Deerfoot is present no one else dare lead. What says he?"

CHAPTER V

AROUND THE CAMP-FIRE

On a tempestuous night in midwinter the little settlement of Coatesville, in Kentucky, was assailed by a fierce band of Shawanoes and Hurons. The pioneers were surprised, for the hour was near daybreak, and, accustomed as they were to the forays of the border, they were without the slightest warning of the danger which burst upon them. They rallied, however, and made an heroic defense, but when with the dawning of day the warriors withdrew, they left more than half the hearthstones darkened with sorrow and woe, because of one or more of its defenders who had fallen in the strife.

Among those that had perished was Abram Carleton, shot down on his own threshold while fighting for his wife and his boy Jack, who themselves were doing their utmost to beat back their merciless enemies.

The youth, as he grew older, gradually recovered from his grief, but the blow was so terrible to the stricken widow that its effect remained with her through all the years that followed. The vivacious, bright-hearted wife became the sad, thoughtful woman, who rarely smiled, and who walked forever in the shadow of her desolation. She had only her boy Jack, and to him she gave the whole wealth of her attention; but she could never forget the brave one that had yielded his life for her and her child.

Some years later a portion of the settlers became dissatisfied with their home, peculiarly exposed as it was to attacks from marauding red men, and determined to cross the Mississippi into that portion of Louisiana which to-day forms the great State of Missouri.

To many it seemed a strange refuge, for the change, it may be said, took them still further from civilization; but the reader well knows that the settlement of no portion of the Union was marked by such deeds of ferocity as that of the Dark and Bloody Ground, and the pioneers had good grounds to hope for better things in the strange land toward which they turned their footsteps.

The lead mines of Missouri attracted notice as early as 1720, and Saint Genevieve, its oldest town, was founded in 1755. At the breaking out of the Revolution, St. Louis contained nearly a thousand inhabitants, the country at that time belonging to Spain, and a considerable fur trade was carried on with the Indians.

Among those who crossed the Mississippi was the widow Carleton. Her friends believed that if she removed forever from the scene of her great affliction she might recover; but if she remained she must soon succumb. She suffered herself to be persuaded, and went in the company of those who promised to give her the tenderest attention and care.

Her decision was not made until the little company, that had spent weeks in preparation, was on the eve of starting. It thus became necessary for Jack to stay behind to look after certain interests of both, his purpose being to follow in the course of a few weeks.

The long journey westward was made in safety, a thriving settlement begun, and young Otto Relstaub, the son of a hard-hearted, penurious German, was sent back over the trail, according to promise, to guide Jack Carleton, who was impatiently awaiting him. The next morning after his arrival the two started westward, all their earthly effects packed upon the single horse.

They took turns in riding the animal. Accustomed as they were to constant activity, they would have enjoyed the journey on foot much more than on horseback. At first both walked, but, after their animal had run away several times, his capture causing much delay, trouble, and roiling of temper, they concluded that a change would have to be made if they expected ever to reach their destination.

One afternoon, when Otto was riding considerably in advance of his friend, he was fired upon by Indians, narrowly escaping with his life. The incidents immediately following have already been told the reader.

It was yet early in the evening when Deerfoot the Shawanoe acted upon the request of Otto, that some more convenient spot should be selected in which to continue their talk.

Inasmuch as the destination of the boys lay to the westward, it seemed to Jack Carleton that, the wisest thing to do was to enter the canoe, and allow the young Shawanoe to paddle them across; but he held the gifts and skill of the wonderful warrior in such high estimation that he feared a hint of the kind might not be received with favor.

Deerfoot led the way through the wood until a depression was reached, where considerable undergrowth grew. He came to a stop and seemed to be looking around in the darkness, which to the others was impenetrable.

"Let a fire be kindled," said he.

Only a few minutes were needed to gather all the fuel required. It was heaped against the trunk of a tree, and as each carried a flint and steel, a bright roaring blaze was soon under way.

Had Jack and Otto been alone, they would have been troubled by the fear that their campfire would be seen by prowling enemies but the air of unconcern on the part of the Shawanoe infused into them a feeling of confidence which drove away all fear.

Enough branches and leaves were piled together to afford them the best sort of couch. Not one had it blanket with him, and had the weather been cold, they must have suffered not a little. The boys had lost theirs when their horse ran away the last time, and Deerfoot had not brought any with him, though one remained in his canoe.

Fortunately the night was not only mild, but scarcely a breath of air was stirring. The fire radiated all the heat needed to make each comfortable. They assumed easy postures on the ground, and, as the reflection lit up each countenance, they looked curiously at one another, as if seeking more intimate knowledge of their appearance.

Deerfoot and Jack have already been sufficiently referred to, and a little attention is due to the honest German youth, who has his part to play in the following pages.

Otto was about a year younger than his friend, and bore very little resemblance to him. Jack possessed a certain rugged grace, and, while he was not handsome, his face showed intelligence with mental strength, sustained by bounding youth, and a physical vigor which was perfect.

Otto was a head shorter than Jack, and his growth seemed to run mostly to breadth. His short legs bowed outward at the knees, and a curve seemed necessary in order to preserve the harmony of general expanse.

His face was very wide, the small twinkling eyes fax apart, and the funny pug nose inclined in the same direction. His neck was short, and hair long and thick. His dress was similar to that worn by Jack Carleton, except that everything, even to the shoes, were of the coarsest possible nature.

Jacob Relstaub, the father of Otto, was not merely penurious, but he was miserly and mean. Jack Carleton knew him so well that he was certain there would be serious trouble with the lad if he showed himself in the little frontier town without the valuable horse which had run away and swam the river.

There was one respect in which the dress of the German differed from that of the American. Instead of wearing a cap, he was furnished with a hat something similar to those seen in some portions of the Tyrol. It had a brim of moderate width, and the crown gradually tapered until it attained a height of six inches, where it ended in it point. The thrifty mother possessed a secret of imparting a stiffness to the head gear which caused it to keep its shape, except when limp from moisture.

Such youths as Otto and Jack are always blessed with the most vigorous appetites, but they had eaten during the afternoon and were well content to wait until the morrow. As for Deerfoot, it made little difference to him whether he had partaken since the rising of the sun, for he had been taught from his infancy to hold every propensity of his nature in the sternest check. Oft-times he went hungry for no other purpose than that of self-discipline.

"How was it you came to meet Otto?" asked Jack of the dusky youth, who, assuming an easy position on the ground, was examining his bow. He looked up, smiled faintly, and hesitated a moment before answering.

"Two suns ago Deerfoot came upon a log cabin. It was raining and cold, and he was a long ways from home. He saw the glimmer of a light and reached for the latch-string, but it was pulled in. He knocked on the door and it was opened by the man who lived there.

Deerfoot asked that he might stay till morning, but the pale face called him an Indian dog, and said that if he did not hasten away he would shoot him--"

"Don't you know who dot vos?" interrupted Otto, whose face seemed to grow wider with its immense grin.

"How should I know." asked Jack, in turn.

"Dot was mine fader. I dinks yon vosn't such a fool dot you wouldn't know dot right away."

"I knew that he was the stingiest man in Kentucky, but I didn't suppose you spelled his name 'h-o-g.'"

"Dot's just de way to spell it," said Otto, slapping his friend on the shoulder and laughing as though pleased beyond measure. "Wait till you don't know him as well as I don't."

"Deerfoot turned to walk away," continued the young Shawanoe; "he had slept many times in the wood, and he was not afraid, but he had not taken many steps when some one called him. It was too dark to see, but the voice was of a boy. While Deerfoot waited he threw a heavy blanket over his shoulders and made Deerfoot walk back to the cabin. He asked him to enter the window where the father could not see him, and he told Deerfoot he would place him in his bed and he should have food."

The narrator paused in his story and glanced toward Otto Relstaub. Jack, with a laugh, looked at the stubby youngster, who was blushing deeply and holding one hand over his face, the fingers spread so far apart that he could see the others. Otto was also smiling, and his hand could not begin to hide it, so that each side of his mouth wits in sight.

"Deerfoot was too proud to receive the offer of the boy, but he took the blanket."

"And mine gracious!" struck in the lad again; "didn't mine fader whip me for dat? He proke up three hickory sticks onto me and kept me dancing out of de cabin and in again, and over the roof, till I vos so disgusted as nefer vos."

"How did you explain the absence of the blanket?" asked Jack.

"I told mine fader I didn't know not any nodings apout it, and he whipped me 'cause I didn't know vot I did know, and, when Deerfoot brought pack de blanket next day, den he knows dat I lied and he whipped some more as nefer pefore."

Jack Carleton threw back his bead and laughed, though he took care that he made little noise in doing so; but the face of the Shawanoe was grave. His refined nature could see nothing mirthful in the cruel punishment inflicted upon the boy because he did a kindness to a stranger of another race. The brutal father had only to thank the Christian restraint of Deerfoot that he was not pierced by an arrow from his bow for his conduct.

The Shawanoe did not need explain that the little act of Otto had

secured his lasting gratitude. The latter was not one to seek his company or intrude himself upon him; but he was ready to do the young German any service in his power.

A few days before, when Deerfoot was returning from the direction of the Mississippi, he met Otto on horseback. The latter told him he was going to Coatesville to bring back a young friend, whose mother was in the new settlement. For some reason, which the Shawanoe did not make known, he could not accompany Otto, or he would have done so; but he gave him full directions and numerous suggestions, every one of which Otto forgot within the following fifteen minutes.

Deerfoot, however, after making some calculations as to the time the boys would reach the Mississippi on their return, promised to meet them there and to take them across in his canoe, which was hidden not far away.

The Shawanoe particularly instructed Otto that, if the meeting should take place at night, he would make known his departure from the Louisiana side by swinging a torch in a circular manner. It was this signal which recalled the agreement to the mind of Otto Relstaub, who remembered much more than he would have Jack Carleton believe.

CHAPTER VI

NIGHT AND MORNING

Deerfoot made known his purpose to take his friends across the Mississippi on the morrow in his canoe, after which he would keep them company for some distance along the trail, though he would be forced to leave them long before reaching their destination.

Jack Carleton naturally felt a deep interest in the youthful warrior, and expected him to give some facts in his wonderful history, as well as an intimation of what his life was likely to be in the new country to which he had removed, but much to the young Kentuckian's disappointment, he carefully avoided all reference to himself. His conversation being of such a nature that it is hardly worth recording in this place.

When the evening was well along, Otto threw more wood on the flames which crackled and gave out a cheerful glow. Deerfoot rose to his feet, and without a word passed out into the gloom. The hour for retiring was close at hand, and he preferred to make a reconnaissance before trusting themselves to slumber.

He returned as noiselessly as he went, remarking as he resumed his seat that no danger whatever threatened them, and they could slumber in peace. While speaking, he drew from a pocket within the skirt of his bunting-shirt, the little Bible which had been presented to him months before by Mrs. Preston of Wild Oaks, after the other volume was destroyed by the bullet that was aimed at the heart of the youth, by the hostile chieftain.

Adjusting himself in an easy posture on the ground, so that the ruddy fire-light came over his shoulders and fell upon the page with its minute letters, the young Shawanoe read for several minutes to himself. The others held their peace, impressed with the singular sight. Neither could doubt that he clearly comprehended every word of the sublime volume, and they felt that it was wrong to break in upon his meditation.

All at once he raised his head and asked, "Would my brothers wish to hear Deerfoot read?"

"We would, indeed," was the reply of Jack Carleton; "I never saw an Indian who could read from a printed book, but I have been told that you can write an excellent hand."

Deerfoot shook his head disparagingly.

"My brother mistakes, but Deerfoot will try and read the words which the Great Spirit speaks to all his people, whether they are pale faces or red men."

And then, in a low musical voice, tremulous with emotion and impressive beyond description, the Shawanoe read an entire chapter from the book of Revelations, his favorite portion of the blessed Book, the others listening spellbound. Even Otto Relstaub, who saw and heard little of genuine Christian teachings in his cheerless home, was touched as never before by the indescribably solemn story of the apocalyptic vision.

The silence which succeeded lasted several minutes, when Jack said in a low voice:

"Deerfoot, I wish you would speak some sentences from the Bible in your own tongue."

"Does my brother wish to learn the Shawanoe language?"

"I have heard Shawanoes, Hurons and Miamis talk, but I can't understand a word; I have a curiosity to know how it will sound to hear some parts of the Bible with which I am familiar tittered in an unknown tongue."

"What part of the book can my brother repeat without reading the words?"

"Well--that is--I don't know," replied Jack, confused by the question of Deerfoot, who fixed his eyes inquiringly upon him; "I mean any sentence."

"Does my brother not read the Bible every day?" asked the Indian, in a grieved rather than a reproving voice; "he must know the Lord's Prayer--"

"O yes, yes," replied Jack, desperately clutching at the single straw. "I meant to ask you to repeat that."

In the same low, reverent voice he had used while reading, the warrior uttered the inspired petition, which shall last through all time. When he had finished, he said:

"My brother would like to remember the words as Deerfoot has spoken them; Deerfoot will print them for him."

And drawing a species of red chalk from the same pocket which held the Bible, he wrote for several minutes on one of the fly-leaves of the book. When he had finished he glanced over the words, carefully tore out the leaf and handed it across to Jack.

The latter examined the paper, and saw written in a fine, delicate hand the following words, which are preserved to this day, and which, when properly pronounced, constitute the Lord's Prayer as it has been uttered many a time by the dusky lips of the Shawanoe warrior, when his fiery nature was subdued by its blessed teachings:

"Coe-thin-a, spim-i-key yea-taw-yan-ee, O wes-sa-yeg
yey-sey-tho-yan-ae; Day-pale-i-tum-any-pay-itch tha-key,
yea-issi-tay-hay-yon-ae, issi-nock-i-key, yoe-ma assis-key-kie
pie-sey spin-l-key. Me-li-na-key oe noo-ki cos-si-kie ta-wa-it-ihin
oe yea-wap-a-ki tuck-whan-a; puck-i-tum-l-wa-loo
kne-won-ot-i-they-way. Yea-se-puck-l-tum-a-ma-chil-i-tow-e-ta
thick-i na-chaw-ki tussy-neigh-puck-sin-a wa-pun-si-loo wau po won-
ot-i-they ya key-la tay pale-i-tum-any way wis-sa kie was-
si-sut-i-we-way thay-pay-wo-way."

Jack studied the singular words several minutes, and then, with some hesitation, undertook to pronounce them. He did only fairly, even when corrected by Deerfoot, who added the rebuke:

"Let my brother say them over many times in his own language, for the Great Spirit knows all tongues when he who speaks the words speaks them with his heart."

The consciousness that these words were uttered by one who belonged to what is generally regarded its a pagan race, brought a blush to the face of the sturdy youth that had listened to the same appeal more than once from the lips of his mother.

Under the assurance of Deerfoot, the boys stretched themselves on the leaves and branches and soon sunk into a refreshing slumber. Jack recalled that his last remembrance was of Deerfoot resting his head on his elbow, while he seemed absorbed in his book. He lay as motionless as a figure in bronze, but no matter how much he might be enchained by the words, he could not be insensible of what was going on around him.

Both Jack and Otto slept until the light of morning was stealing through the woods. Then, when they arose to their feet, they saw the Shawanoe broiling a couple of whitefish which he had managed to coax from the Mississippi. He had almost finished before his friends suspected what was doing.

After greeting the warrior, the others passed through the woods to the margin of the mighty river, where they bathed their faces and hands, took a slight swallow of the somewhat muddy water and then rejoined Deerfoot, who had their breakfast ready.

"Did my brothers see any signs that frightened them?" asked Deerfoot, when the three had seated themselves on the ground and

were partaking of their meal.

"I took the best survey I could of the river," replied Jack, "but saw nothing of friend or foe. I don't suppose, as a rule, there are many Indians in this section."

"The Shawanoes often hunt to the river, but do not cross; the Miamis come down from the north, and Deerfoot sees their footprints in the Woods."

"What tribes are we likely to meet on the other side of the Mississippi?" asked the young Kentuckian, who naturally felt much interest in the land wherein he expected to make his home.

"There are many red men, even to the mountains which stretch far beyond the rivers and prairies, and raise their heads among the clouds."

Jack Carleton was surprised at this reference, which, he believed, was to the Rocky Mountains, of which little more than their simple existence was known to the rest of the Union at that day. But the words which followed astonished him still more:

"Beyond the mountains opens the great sea, wider than that which the pale faces came across from the Old World; beyond that great sea lies the land where He died for you and me; all the way to the shore, of the great water you will find the red men; they are like the leaves in the woods, and Deerfoot and his friends will die without ever hearing their names."

"But you have spent some time on the other side the Mississippi, and must know something of your race there."

"Deerfoot has seen the Osages hunting among the mountains and in the forest; has seen the Miamis, and, to the northward, may be met the Sacs and Foxes. Far toward the ice of the North is the land of the Assiniboine and the Dacotah."

"I should like to know where you gathered all that information?" remarked the amazed Jack Carleton; "the country beyond the Mississippi is greater than that on this side, and one of these days it will overflow with population, then what a country ours will be!" exclaimed the young patriot, with kindling eye. "But you and I, Deerfoot, can never live to see that time, which is for those that come after us."

"Yaw," said Otto, seeming to feel it his duty to say something; "dere is enough land over dere, I 'spose, for that horse to hide a week before I don't catch him."

Jack intimated that he was likely to find his search extended beyond that time, while Deerfoot smiled over the simplicity of the lad, whose information was so small compared with his opportunities.

Conversing in this pleasant manner, the meal was soon finished, and they made ready to cross the river.

When the three emerged from the woods they were close to the swiftly flowing current. Jack and Otto paused, while Deerfoot walked the

few rods necessary to find the canoe that had been drawn up the bank.

Both the boys could swim the Mississippi if necessary, though, with their rifles and clothing to take care of, it was anything but a light task. Had they been without any boat at command, they would have divested themselves of their garments and placed them and their "luggage" on it small float, while they swam behind and pushed it forward.

When the emigrants moved westward they halted long enough on the bank to construct a raft, sufficient to carry everything in the course of several trips back and forth. Otto made preparation when he reached the river some days before on horseback, and, forcing the animal into the current, slipped back, grasped his tail and allowed himself to be towed across. He might have done the same on the preceding day had he been given a few minutes in which to make preparation, and had he not been unwilling to leave his friend behind.

"But it will beat all that," remarked Jack Carleton, after they had discussed the different plans, "to be paddled over in the canoe of Deerfoot."

"Yaw, but I dinks dot we should go across last, night."

"What would we have gained by that?"

"Then we wouldn't have to go ober agin dis mornings."

"True, but there is no haste called for; if it was not that I am so anxious to see mother, I would as lief spend a week on the road."

"Dot wouldn't do for me, for mine fader would be looking for me wid two big gads to him--"

"Helloa! Here comes Deerfoot. What can be the matter? He is excited over something."

Such was the fact, indeed, for the sagacious Shawanoe had made an annoying if not alarming discovery.

CHAPTER VII

A SURPRISED FISHERMAN

It may be said that Deerfoot the Shawanoe never lost his senses excepting when slumber stole them away. Young as he was, he had been through some of the most terrific encounters the mind can conceive, and yet, when he stood erect in the full glare of the noonday sun, not a scratch or scar spoke of those fearful affrays in the depth of the forest, among the hills and mountains and along the Shores of the rivers of Kentucky and Ohio.

I have said that he was so hated by his own people that he felt his

presence near the settlements to the eastward was more to the disadvantage than the help of his friends, and that was one of the causes which led him to bid adieu forever to his friends.

It has been intimated also that still another reason actuated him, and that reason shall appear in due time.

When Deerfoot assured Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub that they might slumber in peace, he spoke the truth; it has been shown that not the first breath of danger touched them during the darkness, and the morning meal was partaken in the same enjoyable fashion.

But before the subtle young Shawanoe reached the spot where he left his canoe, he was disturbed by discovering the imprint of moccasins along shore. They led away from his friends and toward the canoe. A few minutes showed the latter had "received" some visitors since its owner left it.

It was utterly destroyed. The knives and tomahawks of several, warriors had hacked the bark structure to pieces. Even the paddle had been broken into a half dozen parts. Nothing was left of which use could be made, the blanket of the owner of course being absent.

Deerfoot looked on the wreck with something like dismay, which speedily turned to anger. The wantonness of the act roiled his feelings and stirred up the "old Indian" in his nature.

He surveyed the destruction for a minute or two, and then made a careful examination of the signs the perpetrators could not avoid leaving behind them.

There had been three Indians engaged in the mischief, and the first supposition of Deerfoot was that they were the Shawanoes whom Jack Carleton saw the day previous; but a few minutes' study of the footprints betrayed a certain peculiarity (a slight turning outward of the left foot so slight, indeed, as almost to be imperceptible), which identified them as Miamis. Deerfoot had noticed the "sign manual" years before, so there was no room for mistake on his part.

The party had come down from the northward, most likely with other warriors, and had stumbled by mere chance upon the partially hidden canoe. They probably investigated matters enough to learn that it was in charge of two white persons and one red one--enough to satisfy them that the single Indian was friendly to the settlers, and therefore one to be despised and harried in every way possible.

It was that discovery which undoubtedly caused them to destroy the property and steal the blanket. They were not enough interested to seek the lives of the others, though it may be they were restrained by fear from doing so.

When Deerfoot came back to the boys, he purposely displayed some excitement in order to amuse them. He quickly explained what he had learned, and then, in the most indifferent voice and manner, said "The Miamis shall pay Deerfoot for his canoe."

"How will you make them do that?" asked Jack, who noticed the peculiar sparkle which the friends of the warrior always observed when his feelings were stirred.

"I doesn't not believes dot you and dem cannot agrees mit de price," said Otto; "derefore you sends for me and I tells you what de price ain't, and if dey don't agrees, den I knocks 'em ober de head--don't it?"

"Deerfoot will not need his brother," said the Indian, gravely; "but he asks his brothers to wait till he comes back"

"We'll do that," said Jack; "that is, as long as there is a prospect of your return. When shall we expect you?"

"Deerfoot will be with his brothers before the sun reaches yonder."

He pointed to the place in the sky which the orb would touch about the middle of the afternoon. Then, warning the two to be very careful, and to keep continual watch against detection, he moved away, vanishing from sight in the woods behind them, instead of keeping close to the shore.

He wept to the southward until he once more reached the spot which contained the remains of his canoe. He spent another minute in grimly surveying the ruins, and then, glancing down at the footprints, followed their direction. He had determined to call the scamps to account for the injury done him.

As they belonged to the Miami tribe, it was quite likely they had a boat with them, though their hunting-grounds were east of the Mississippi, and possibly they had other property upon which the offended Shawanoe meant to levy.

He followed the trail for nearly a furlong, when it divided; two of the warriors turned to the left and went deeper into the woods, while the third continued down stream in the same general direction as before.

The sagacious Shawanoe suspected the truth; the single Indian had gone to look after a canoe or something which lay close to the river, while the others were about to engage in a hunt of so kind. The discovery pleased Deerfoot; for, beside indicating that there was a boat for him to take it showed that he had but a single red man to meet.

Within less than a hundred yards this solitary warrior was found. A large canoe, evidently belonging to the three warriors, or possibly a larger party, lay against the bank, with one end on the land, while the other projected several yards into the river. In the stern sat an Indian, after the fashion of a civilized man; he was astride of the end, his moccasins banging over, one on either side, his back toward shore, while he leaned forward and sleepily watched a fish-line, one end of which rested in his hand, while the other was far out in the Mississippi.

His attitude was as lazy and contented as though he were a white man. It looked as if he had chosen the sport while his companions were off on a hunt that required more effort and exertion.

Deerfoot stood only a few seconds, when he smiled more fully than he had done for along time. He saw his opportunity, and he proceeded

straightway to "improve" it.

He stole forward, as quietly as a shadow, until he had gone the few yards intervening. All that he feared was that the aboriginal fisherman might obtain a bite before the boat was reached. If he could catch a fish on his bone hook, he would be likely to fling him into the canoe behind him and to turn himself around.

From the moment Deerfoot placed eyes on the motionless figure, he felt he was master of the situation; but, with his usual quickness, he had formed his plan and was desirous of carrying it out in spirit and in letter.

Reaching the canoe, he laid his long bow on the ground beside it; then, stooping over, he seized the gunwale with both hands and, quickly as the blow of a panther, he jerked the craft slightly more than a foot further up the bank.

The result was inevitable. The astonished Miami sprawled forward from his seat and went down into the muddy Mississippi out of sight, doubtless frightening away the fish that was nibbling at his bait.

"Hooh!" he groaned, ejecting the water from his mouth as he came to view, and following it with an expression much in the nature of an expletive.

Only a couple of strokes were needed to bring him into the shallow water, when he rose to his feet and walked out upon dry land. Up to that moment he did not know the cause of his mishap, for the author stooped down on the upper side of the craft; but as the Miami stepped out, Deerfoot rose to his full height, with his keen tomahawk grasped in his left hand--that being his best one.

The dripping warrior, to put it mildly, was astonished, when he found himself confronted by the stranger. He stood staring and speechless, while the mouth of Deerfoot again expanded.

"Does my brother's heart grow weary that he seeks to urge the fish to bite his hook before they are ready?" asked the Shawanoe in the Miami tongue.

It was all clear to the victim, and, when he understood the trick that had been played upon him, his anger showed through the paint daubed on his face.

"The Shawanoe is a fool," he replied. "His heart is filled with joy when he acts like a papoose."

"But he will now act like a warrior," said Deerfoot, in a sterner manner. "The dogs of the Miamis broke the canoe of the Shawanoe and stole his blanket."

"The Shawanoe is the friend of the white man," said the other with a sneer, though not without some misgiving, for, to use the language of the West, the young warrior "had the drop on him." He had only to make one movement in order to drive the glittering weapon through the skull of the Miami, as though it were mere card-board.

It must be confessed that he looked very much as if such was his

intention.

"Deerfoot is the friend of the white man," repeated the Shawanoe; "he hoped to paddle them across the great river. The Miami dogs have broken his canoe, so Deerfoot will take their boat."

The warrior showed that he was astounded by the daring of the youth. Within the canoe lay the blanket of Deerfoot, beside the rifle; powder-horn, and bullet pouch, doubtless owned by the moist fisherman. The latter looked at his property as if he could not believe any one would dare molest that; but Deerfoot settled the question in his terse fashion.

"Let the dog of a Miami seat himself on the ground like a squaw, and watch his Shawanoe master while he takes the canoe and all that it holds."

The Miami stared at his conqueror as if uncertain whether he had heard aright. The conqueror enlightened him.

"The dog of a Miami longs to go to the happy hunting-grounds of his fathers."

As he uttered the words, he quickly fainted with the hand grasping the tomahawk. The warrior made such a sudden start to obey that his moccasins slipped on the wetter earth, his feet spread apart, as though he were learning to skate, and he sat down with such a sudden bump that it forced a grunt from him. He hastily scrambled up, and, with a frightened glance over his shoulder, sprang forward and sat down again, though the last time was according to instructions.

It required all the self-restraint of Deerfoot to suppress his mirth over the ridiculous performance of his captive, if such he may be called. When, the Miami seated himself with a grotesque effort at dignity, the Shawanoe placed his bow in the front of the canoe and then shoved the boat into the stream.

As it shot from the shore, he leaped in, and caught up one of the long three paddles with which it was navigated. Dipping it beneath the surface he made one prodigious sweep, which drove the craft swiftly ahead.

While thus employed the Miami faithfully obeyed orders. He sat immobile and silent, watching the daring young warrior making off not only with his private property, but with that which belonged to others.

The Miami must have thought to himself more than once--"Ah, if my comrades would only appear at this moment! They would make you change your tune very soon."

All at once the warrior uttered a whoop which plainly was meant as a signal to his friends. Instantly Deerfoot laid down his paddle, and, catching up the gun, pointed it at the redskin. The latter, in the extremity of his terror, turned a somersault backwards, and tumbled and scrambled into the woods, desperately striving to get beyond sight of the terrible youth who showed such recklessness in handling weapons.

No doubt the Miami believed his escape was a narrow one, when, the next instant, the rifle was discharged and the bullet cut through the leaves near his face.

And so, in truth, his escape was very narrow, but it was just as narrow as Deerfoot chose to make it. He had not the remotest intention of injuring the Miami.

CHAPTER VIII

BEHIND THE TREE

The report of the gun reached the ears of Otto and Jack, and naturally caused them alarm. They hurriedly made their way to the edge of the river and peered out from cover, not forgetting the warnings previously given by Deerfoot.

They had but to look a short distance down stream to see the Shawanoe paddling the large Indian canoe toward the other shore.

"Well, dere!" exclaimed Otto. "Deerfoot dinks as how I ain'ty forgotful, but don't he forget more than I does, when he dinks he has us in the canoe and we be here?"

"There is no danger of that," said Jack; "he knows it would not do for him to come after us, for the Indians would shoot him from this side."

"Why would dey do dem things?"

"Because it is the nature of Indians to revenge themselves that way. Don't you see he has taken their canoe, and I shouldn't wonder if he killed one or two of their warriors before he was able to get off with it. That shot which we heard was probably fired at him."

But in this instance the ears of the German proved more correct than those of the American. He had noticed that the gun was discharged from the river, establishing the fact that it was fired by Deerfoot, though Jack Carleton could not understand the reason why it was done.

It was manifest that the Shawanoe meant to cross to the other side the Mississippi, in order to throw the Miamis "off the trail"--that is, he would keep out of their sight until he gained a chance to return for his friends.

It occurred at once to the young Kentuckian that such being the case, the situation of himself and Otto was one of considerable danger.

The high-handed course of the Shawanoe would rouse the enmity of the Miamis to the highest point. Revenge is one of the most marked characteristics of the American Indian, who is eager to retaliate upon the innocent when he cannot reach the guilty. The three who had suffered the indignity could easily follow the trail of the

boys, wheresoever it might lead, excepting through water. What, therefore, was more likely than that they would seek to adjust matters by slaying those who had taken no hand in the capture of the canoe?

Jack knew that there were only three Miamis directly concerned, but Deerfoot had spoken of others in the neighborhood, beside which the young Kentuckian himself had seen a couple of Shawanoes, only a few hours before, at no great distance from that very spot.

When he made known his fears to Otto, the latter agreed they were in great peril, and the utmost care was necessary to keep clear of the red men.

The precise course best to adopt was hard to determine, but they began a guarded departure from the spot, stepping as carefully and lightly as possible.

Though Otto Relstaub, like his, parents, had never been able to handle the English language intelligently, and though he was afflicted with a forgetfulness all too common with most boys of his age, yet his life on the frontier had not been without its lessons to him. At times he showed a shrewdness and knowledge of woodcraft which surprised Jack Carleton, who often became impatient with his shortsightedness. The manner in which he seconded the efforts of his companion to mislead the Indians, known to be close at hand, certainly was deserving of high praise.

The friends advanced some twenty rods or more, Otto keeping close behind Jack, without seeing or hearing anything of their enemies. Looking across the Mississippi, nothing was observed of Deerfoot or his canoe, so that no help was to be expected for many hours from him. Indeed, Jack was confident that nothing of the kind could be done before night, when the matchless Shawanoe would have the darkness to help him. To the young Kentuckian, the advent of Deerfoot was of that nature that he failed to see that it had accomplished any good. If he and Otto could gain a suitable start, they would swim across.

"Sh!" whispered the German, reaching forward and catching the arm of his friend; "waits one, two, dree smond."

"What is the matter?" asked the alarmed Jack, as he turned hastily about.

"Let you go dot way and me go dot way, and it leetle ways off we comes togedder agin once inore."

Rather curiously, the leader was asking himself at that moment whether something could not be gained by him and Otto separating and afterward meeting at some point further up stream.

Such, as is well known, is the practice of the Apaches when hotly pursued to their mountain fastnesses. A large company will dissolve into its "original elements," as may be said, rendering pursuit out of the question.

The wisdom of this course on the part of Jack and Otto might well be questioned, but, without giving the matter any thought, the young

Kentuckian acted upon the suggestion.

"You keep close to the river," he said, "while I turn to the right, and will come back to the shore a few hundred yards above. We'll use our old signal if we have anything to say to each other."

Otto nodded his head to signify that he understood the arrangement, and, without another word, the two diverged, speedily losing sight of each other in the wood, which showed more undergrowth than that through which they passed the day before.

"I declare," said Jack to himself, before he had gone far, "I much misgive myself whether this is going to help matters; it must be a good deal easier for the Indians to pick up one of us at a time, than it is to take the two together. It may be best after all," he added a minute later, with the natural hopefulness of his nature, "for I learned long ago that if two or three hunters separate while in the Indian country, they can take better care of themselves than if they stay together."

He stood still and looked and listened. The wood, as has been said, was denser than that to which he had been accustomed, and, when he used his eyes to the utmost, he saw nothing to cause alarm. The lynx-eyed Miamis could follow his trail with little trouble, no matter how much he sought to conceal it, and the fact that he saw and heard nothing could be no proof that danger itself was not near.

"I am sure those were Shawanoes that I saw yesterday," he muttered, "and yet Deerfoot insists they were Miamis who broke up his canoe. Wonder whether there's a war party of both--"

The bright eyes of the youth at that very moment told him a singular fact: only a short distance in front of him stood two red men in their war paint. They were talking together and had their backs toward him. Indeed, they were so motionless, that he had failed to see them in the first place, and would have failed again but for the low, guttural murmur of their voices.

Jack instantly stepped behind the large trunk of a tree and peered out with an interest that may well be understood. It was curious that the youth should have approached so close without detection, but it was complimentary to his woodcraft that such was the fact.

Whatever the subject of conversation between the Indians, they speedily became absorbed in it, their arms sawed the air, and their voices rose to a pitch that carried the sound far beyond where he stood.

Their interest in the discussion frequently brought the profile of the further one into view and showed so much of his front, that his tribal character was settled beyond question; he was a Shawanoe, one of the dreaded people who did more than any other to earn the name of Dark and Bloody Ground for one section of the Union.

It was established, therefore, that there were two distinct parties in that particular section. The Miamis and Shawanoes were natural allies, and there could be no question that a perfect understanding existed between those who gave our friends so much concern.

Jack Carleton was debating with himself whether it would be a safe undertaking for him to withdraw, and, venturing further into the woods, seek to flank the warriors who had risen so unexpectedly in his path. He had already been so delayed that his agreement with Otto was likely to be disarranged, and it would not do to stay too long where he had halted.

Before a conclusion was formed, the interview between the couple ended. They abruptly ceased talking, and one started north and the other south.

As they did so Jack learned another significant fact--they belonged to different tribes. The one who went northward looked squarely in the face of his friend, just before moving out, and, in doing so, gave the best view of his countenance that the boy had yet obtained. That view revealed him as a Miami beyond all question.

The other wheeled about and advanced almost in a direct line toward Jack, who felt that his situation was becoming very delicate and peculiar. There could be no mistaking the tribe of that warrior, who was a splendid specimen of physical vigor and manhood. Jack suspected that he was not only a Shawanoe, but was a chief or leader. The hideous paint which was smeared over his repulsive face, was more elaborate than in the case of the two from whom the youth effected such a narrow escape.

That which Jack saw confirmed his belief of a perfect understanding between the different parties. They probably numbered a dozen altogether, and had determined to bring the friendly Indian and two white men to account for the outrage of the young Shawanoe--for, brief as was the time since it had been perpetrated, it was more than probable that it was known to all.

"I wish that heathen would take it into his head to move some other way," thought Jack to himself, as he drew his head back, fearful of being seen. "If he comes straight on, he'll bump his forehead against this tree, and, if he turns out, he will pass so close to the trunk that I've got to be lively if he doesn't run against me."

Listening intently, he was able to hear the soft footfall of the warrior upon the leaves, scarcely louder than the faint tipping of the claw of a small bird. Had the Shawanoe suspected there was the slightest need for care, his tread would have been silent.

A few seconds passed when the delicate sound ceased. What could it mean? Did the Indian suspect the truth? Was he standing motionless, or was he advancing with that noiseless step which the ear of the listening Indian himself fails to note?

These were the questions which the young Kentuckian asked, and which for the time he could not answer. He shrank close to the bark of the tree, with his gun clasped and the hammer raised ready to fire at an instant's notice. Knowing so well the subtlety of the red men, it occurred to Jack that his foe perhaps was stealthily flanking him. He was moving to one side and the moment he could gain a shot he would fire.

The suspense became more trying than disaster itself could be, and Jack determined to end it by learning the precise situation of the

Shawanoë, and what he was likely to attempt to do in the way of hostilities.

CHAPTER IX

A TIMELY ARRIVAL

One of the most convincing evidences of a Power beyond our comprehension, governing and directing everything for the best, is the marvelous degree to which the different faculties of our nature can be trained. There is a skill which cannot be explained or understood by him who attains it; and, interwoven through the five senses which science assigns to us, seems to be a sixth not yet understood, of whose wonderful functions every one of us has seen proof.

The Shawanoë warrior, after parting with his companion, walked leisurely toward the tree behind which the young Kentuckian was hiding, until about twenty yards separated them. Then he stopped as abruptly as if stricken by a thunderbolt. There was "something in the air" which whispered danger.

The Indian had neither seen nor heard anything to cause this misgiving, but he knew that peril confronted him. What he would have done in the event of Jack Carleton remaining silent and stationary behind the trunk can only be conjectured; but the impatience of the youth ended that phase of the situation.

Softly removing his cap, the young Kentuckian slowly moved the side of his head to the right. In doing so, he kept his face in a perpendicular position, so that the least possible part of his head was exposed. Had he inclined it, the upper portion would have shown before the eye could have been brought into use.

The first object on which Jack's vision rested was the Shawanoë warrior, standing erect, one foot slightly advanced and both hands grasping the rifle in front of him. The face was daubed and streaked with paint, and the gleaming black eyes were looking straight at the startled youth.

Like a flash the dusky arms brought the gun to his shoulder, and it is safe to say that Jack Carleton never in all his life drew back his head with such celerity.

Quick as was the Indian, he was not quick enough to catch the lad, who, it will be seen, had very little to do in order to save himself for the moment. With a faint whoop, the redskin bounded behind the nearest tree, and, with his cocked rifle at command, awaited an opening that would allow him to slay his foe.

Thus the two occupied precisely the same, relative position; each was protected by a trunk of a tree large enough to shield his body, and each grasped a loaded and cocked rifle, eager to use it the instant the opportunity presented itself.

Who was to win in this curious contest? Looking at the situation dispassionately, it must be admitted that the chances favored the Indian. He was older, stronger, more active, and possessed greater cunning than did the youth. What, after all, is one of the most important factors in such a problem, the American race possess by training, and nature--patience scarcely second to that of the Esquimau. The probabilities were that the Shawanoe would wait until the youth was led into some fatal indiscretion.

All this, be it remembered, is based on the condition that no such thing as "foreign interference" took place.

Is there any reader of mine who has not been entertained in his early youth by the story of the white man and the Indian, who, being placed in the situation of Jack and the Shawanoe, remained in hiding from each other, until the Caucasian drew the shot of the American, by placing his cap on the end of the ramrod or gun and projecting it far enough from behind the tree, thus leading the Indian to believe that the head of his foe was in range? If such an incident ever took place, the warrior must have been unusually stupid to leap from cover, as the story makes him do, until certain he had brought the other down.

Jack Carleton attempted the same artifice, except that, instead of taking the trouble to draw his ramrod or using his rifle for that purpose, he held his cap in hand, shoving it forward very slowly and with great care,

The trick failed. The Shawanoe must have suspected the truth on the first appearance of the head-gear. Jack pushed it forward until sure it was seen, but no demonstration came from the warrior, who, for aught the youth knew, was essaying the same deception.

Determined to learn something about his enemy, Jack threw his head to one side and drew it back again before the warrior could pull the trigger. He knew precisely where to look, but he was unable to catch sight of the Shawanoe or his weapon.

"I wonder whether he has shifted his quarters," said Jack to himself. "If he has, he will shot at me before I can learn where he is. Holloa!"

The second time he thrust forward his face withdrawing it with the same celerity as before, he caught a passing glimpse of the Shawanoe, who, rather curiously, adopted exactly the same artifice. This "located" the savage and relieved Jack, for the moment, of his terrifying dread that death threatened from an unknown point.

But, within the next minute, the redskin utterance to a faint whoop, clearly meant as a signal to a comrade not far off.

"He is calling back the Miami, who left him a few minutes ago," was the conclusion of Jack. "It'll go rough with me if I have two of them to fight. I'll try a little of the signaling myself."

Placing the thumb and forefinger of his left hand against his tongue, he emitted a low, tremulous whistle, such as he and Otto used when on hunting expeditions together. He repeated it, and then, greatly to his relief, received a reply, though it was so

guarded that he could not guess the point whence it came.

"Now, if Otto proves sharp enough to grasp the situation, without running into ambush, we may settle the matter with this fellow before the other can take a hand--"

As on the previous day, something twinkled among the trees to the left. A glance in that direction and Jack saw, with dismay, that the Miami warrior had arrived.

The worst of it, too, was that he appeared so far over from where the Shawanoe stood that lines connecting the three would have made almost a right angle. It looked as if the youth must be exposed to the enfilading fire of one of his enemies.

It was a frightful situation, but the brave Kentuckian did not lose heart. He pressed against the bark as closely as he could, endeavoring to watch both points, but he was fearfully handicapped, and there was little hope for him, unless his friend could interfere.

Suddenly the Miami, who, naturally enough, had taken to the shelter of a tree, after the manner of his comrade, made a bound of several feet which placed him behind a second trunk that was still further to the rear of Jack Carleton. Another such leap and the youth would be effectually uncovered.

But the anxiously prayed for deliverance came at this critical moment. While the Miami was maneuvering for position, Otto Relstaub appeared behind him, and, in the twinkling of an eye, the merciless warrior was placed between two fires.

"You let dot chap alone?" called out the German, with his gun to his shoulder, "or py gracious I'll shoot my ramrod clean through you as nefer vos I don't it?"

The unexpected discovery of his mortal peril threw the Miami into a panic. It was impossible for him to find shelter at the same moment from both his enemies, for, on whatever side of the tree he took refuge, he would be in range of one of them. With a howl of consternation, he whirled on his heel and ran like a frightened deer. As he did so, he ducked his head and leaped from side to side, after the manner of the Digger Indians of the present day, with a view of distracting the fire of his enemies.

It would have been a feat of marksmanship had either lad brought him down, when so many and varying objects intervened, and neither of the youths made the attempt. When the terrified fugitive vanished, he was without a wound or scratch to tell of the danger from which he had fled.

During these stirring moments, the Shawanoe had taken no part and given no sign of interest in what was going on; but Jack, who was fully aroused by the venomous attempt on his life, called to his friend, whose position he knew commanded that of the savage:

"Otto, shoot the wretch!"

"Dot is vot I vos going to do," was the reply of the German, who

took careful aim around the side of the tree.

He was in plain view of Jack, who watched him with a rapidly beating heart, knowing as he did that the fellow carried an excellent gun and was it good shot.

But, while glancing along the rifle-barrel, with one eye closed, Otto raised his head, opened both eyes and looked toward the point at which he had been aiming. Then his cheery laughter rang out.

"What is the matter?" asked the astonished Jack.

"Now, ain't dot funny? He Indian ain't dere!"

"Yes, he is," shouted Jack, suspecting trickery. "He will shoot you, if you don't bring him down!"

Otto glanced affrightedly behind him, as though he heard a stealthy footstep, but called back once more that the Shawanoe had disappeared.

It occurred to the other youth, just then, that if the warrior was in the vicinity and could be seen by Otto, he must be visible to him. But a sweeping survey of the field failed to bring to light the painted face and feathered crown.

There could be no doubt that the Shawanoe had taken advantage of the diversion caused by Otto's arrival, and had not stood on the order of his going. Five minutes before, there seemed no chance of Jack Carleton preserving his life. Now, how changed! Toward whatever point of the compass he looked, he saw not the first evidence that peril threatened.

But for all that, it was uncomfortably nigh, and it was difficult to find a place in which there was less safety than where they were. Jack resolved to leave at once.

At the moment he stepped from behind the tree which had sheltered him, Otto strode toward him, his broad face still broader on account of his beaming pleasure.

"Dot vos me," he said, triumphantly. "Otto doned it."

"Did what?"

"Scared 'ern so dot they forgits him nefer."

"You did well, beyond question. I cannot see how I would have saved myself if you hadn't come as you did. I shall never forget it, Otto, though I think it was a mistake when we parted company it short while ago. It looks as though these Miamis and Shawanoes are on all sides of us, and we must find some kind of shelter or make a hasty change of base."

"Dot's vot I dinks," assented the other. "I am waiting for you to show me vot's I doesn't do."

"It is hard to tell what is the best course," said Jack, who, while talking, was moving slowly toward the Mississippi, watching,

meanwhile, every point of the compass. "But, somehow or other I feel there's less danger by the river than anywhere else."

"I likes it dere better than other places, for if we finds the Indians are going to boder us, we can cheat 'em as easy as nefer vos."

"How?"

"We can jump in the river and drowns mit, ourselves; won't dey be fooled!"

"Perhaps they would be disappointed; but I don't see where we are likely to gain anything."

"I doesn't see hims mineself," grinned Otto, whose whims led him to be amusing during the most trying moments, as well as grave when others were light-hearted.

"I only wish we were on the other side," said the young Kentuckian, who at that moment caught the gleam of the Mississippi through the trees in front.

CHAPTER X

AT BAY

While Jack and Otto were talking in guarded tones, and carefully picking their way through the wood, each stopped and became silent at the same instant. They saw nothing, but their ears told them some person or animal was approaching through the undergrowth behind them.

Within the same minute the creature revealed himself in the form of a large, black bear, which was lumbering along unmindful that enemies were near.

"Mebbe he don't be an Indian," whispered Otto, who knew much of the cunning of the red men.

The same thought had occurred to the Kentuckian, who held his gun at full cock, until he should be able to learn the truth. While thus employed he could not help reflecting on the improbability of such a clumsy artifice being that time, for there was no call for the attempt, no prospect of deceiving two persons who displayed such excellent woodcraft.

Jack speedily saw that the bear was a genuine one, probably on his way to the river. There no occasion for shooting him, and the hunters stepped aside to allow him to pass. Jack kept eye on him, however, for it being the spring of year, he had not been long out of his hibernating quarters, and was likely to be lean, hungry, fierce.

Bruin caught sight of the hunters, while several rods off, and

throwing up his snout, took a look at them, as though uncertain of the species to which they belonged.

"He looks pig, don't he?" said Otto, referring to his size, and half inclined to give him a shot. "One pullet would make him put up dot snout down."

"Let him alone, so long as he doesn't disturb us. He isn't half so dangerous as the Indians and they would be likely to rush upon us before you could reload your gun."

Otto saw the prudence of his friend's words, and he not only let down the hammer of his rifle, but emphasized his intention by turning his back upon the bear.

The huge beast seemed disposed to attack the boys. It may be that the plump, ruddy-faced Gorman looked specially tempting to him while in his hungry state, for Jack fancied that it was he on whom his large eyes were fixed with a peculiar lodging.

The bear took several steps toward the couple, and Jack cocked his gun, believing he would have to fire. Otto, seeing the movement, turned, but at that moment the animal, if he had actually any purpose of opening hostilities, changed his mind, moving off to one side, and continued his awkward gait toward the river.

The boys watched him until he reached the stream and began lapping the water, when they resumed their withdrawal from the spot, still walking in a northerly course along the right bank of the Mississippi.

Both were anxious to get as far away as they could, in the hope that they would be able to keep a safe space between themselves and the red men, whom they held in such fear.

Their uneasiness was not lessened when the sharp crack of a rifle broke upon their ears, from a point not far down the stream. It was followed by another report deeper in the woods, and then several whoops came from different parts of the forest, all being within a short radius.

The boys could not guess the cause of the firing, unless they were meant as signals, but they were sure the cries referred to them. Most likely, as they viewed it, they were meant to direct the actions of the parties, who must have felt that it only needed a little care and energy to capture the youths that, up to that time, had baffled the enmity of both the Miamis and Shawanoes.

The result was, that Jack and Otto, keeping as near as was prudent to the river, pushed on as fast as they could. A species of running vine close to the ground caused them much annoyance, the more chubby one falling forward several times on his hands and knees.

They had traveled a short distance only, when the signals that had so alarmed them were heard again. The Indians called to each other by means of the whoops and shouts, as intelligible to those for whom they were meant as if they were so many spoken words.

The lads could not fail to observe that they were considerably

nearer than before. The red men were evidently converging in their pursuit, and meant to force the struggle to an issue with the least delay possible.

"We must travel faster," said Jack Carleton, compressing his lips, after glancing behind him. "This has settled down to a regular race between us."

"Dot is so," assented Otto, sprawling forward again on his hands and knees, from the running vine which caught, like fine wire, around his ankles. "If it Vos who falls down the most and cracks his head, den I would beat dem, don't it?"

"We shall have to make a fight for they can travel a great deal faster than we--"

"Let's jump mit the river; we gets so far off afore dey learns vot we don't do."

It seemed to be the only recourse left to the fugitives, and they turned toward the Mississippi. But at that very moment Jack caught sight of a pile of logs only a short distance ahead.

It seemed a direct interference of Providence, totally unexpected by both. Whether the logs were the retreat of a friend or enemy could only be guessed. The probabilities were that the former was the case, since the structure was not of the kind made by Indians.

Jack caught the arm of Otto and whirled him back.

"Vot ain't de matter?" asked the German, half angrily at the check, when there was so much necessity for haste.

"See?" asked Jack, in turn, pointing to the logs as seen through the trees.

Otto nodded his head. It was enough, and he made a desperate rush to reach the refuge, catching his foot and falling headlong again.

"Dunderation!" he exclaimed; "wonder if dere ain't no blamed vines that I hef not fall over and proke mine nose."

The whoops of the Miamis and Shawanoes sounded still closer; they were pressing the pursuit with utmost vigor, and were upon the heels of the fugitives.

The Kentuckian, who continually glanced back, caught sight of more than one figure flitting among the trees. Suddenly something red gleamed; it was the flash of a gun, and, at the same moment the sharp report rang out, the bullet passed between Jack and Otto, who were striving desperately to get beyond reach before a fair aim could tempt their enemies.

The second view which Jack caught of the shelter told him it was simply four walls of logs, a dozen feet square, half as high, and without any roof. When, why, and by whom they had been put up was a mystery.

But no oasis in the flaming desert could be more welcome to the

traveler dying with thirst than was this simple structure to the panting fugitives. Jack Carleton, with a recklessness caused by the imminence of his peril, flung his gun over into the enclosure, sprang upward so as to grasp the topmost log, and scrambled after it with the headlong impetuosity of a wounded animal.

Otto was only a second or two behind him, and, puffing and gasping, he dropped squarely on his head and shoulders, rolled over, caught up his gun again, and sprang to his feet.

"Dot's de way I always climb down stairs," he exclaimed, raising the hammer of his gun and holding it ready to fire on the first appearance of a foe.

"It's all well enough, if you ain't hurt, but look out for the red men; they're right on us."

"Dot's vot I don't dinks," replied Otto, who, still panting from his exertion, seemed to have recovered his coolness; "if dey climbs up dot vall, den dey run agin de, pall of mine gun and one of dem gets hurt, and it ain't de pall-don't it?"

The pursuers were so close to the fugitives that the tramp of their moccasins was heard at the moment the boys braced themselves for the shock which they were sure would come within the next few seconds. The sight of a flying foe intensifies the courage of the pursuer, and it may have been that the Shawanoe who discharged his gun at the lads, when they were so close to the shelter, believed he had wounded one at least, and that a vigorous assault could not fail to end the struggle speedily. There may, in fact, have been a dozen causes which incited him to a bravery and personal effort greater than that of any of his companions.

"They'll try to overwhelm us," said Jack. "Hold your gun ready."

The words were yet in his mouth, when a peculiar, soft scratching, which was ended the instant it began, told that one of the warriors had inserted the toe of his moccasin in a crevice of the logs, with the purpose of climbing over into the enclosure.

"I'll attend to him if there's only one," added Jack, naturally fearful of throwing away a shot.

"I dinks I 'tends him mit myself--"

Suddenly the painted face of a Shawanoe Indian rose to view. One hand had grasped the top log, and he was drawing himself rapidly upward with the purpose of leaping over. The countenance was frightful beyond description--the streaks and circles in red, yellow, and black, from amid which glared the black eyes, with an expression of ferocity like that of a Bengal tiger, and the white teeth, gleaming between the parted lips, drawn far back at the corners, gave a hideous fierceness to the visage that would have appalled a brave man who saw it for the first time.

"I dinks I 'tends him mit myself--"

Just as Otto Relstaub reached that point in his remark, he pulled the trigger of his rifle. A rasping howl followed, and the horrible

face vanished as speedily as if the owner had been standing on a trap-door, which was sprung.

"Yaw--I dinks I 'tends mit him," repeated Otto, coolly lowering his gun and looking at the spot where the head and shoulders were visible an instant before.

"Load up quick!" said Jack, who held his cocked rifle in hand while his eye glanced hastily along the upper part of the logs, "don't lose a second."

The thump of the body was heard as the Shawanoe--dead before he could fall the brief space--struck the ground on the outside. At the same moment a second warrior (a Miami that time), drew himself upward close to the place from which the Shawanoe had dropped. He rose until his tufted head, his sloping forehead and his gleaming eyes appeared just above the horizon of the enclosure. Staring downward, he looked straight into the muzzle of a rifle, held by a young Kentuckian, who had just become aware of his presence.

Down went the Indian, possibly with a suspicion that his bronzed skull was also perforated, as he fell across the limp body beneath him; but Jack Carleton had not fired, not because the opportunity was not inviting enough nor because he felt the least scruple about shooting one of the savages who were thirsting for his life, but he was afraid to discharge his piece before Otto should force another bullet home.

Repeating and percussion rifles were unknown at that day, and it took much valuable time to reload musket or gun after its discharge. Knowing this, the infuriated redskins were likely to make a rush whenever they knew that the weapons within the enclosure were unloaded.

Inasmuch as the boys possessed no other firearms, it will be seen that in such an event they would be helpless. Indeed, it was impossible for them to hold out if their assailants determined to force matters. They had but to leap over the walls, as could be easily done, and the contest would be decided right speedily; that decision must inevitably be against the daring defenders.

CHAPTER XI

A PRIMITIVE FORT

The sharp repulse of the Indians delayed rush which, as has been said, could end only in the discomfiture of the defenders. The occurrence proved that the first warriors to scale the walls were certain to share the fate of him who had already made the attempt.

With such knowledge it would be unnatural to expect any Shawanoe or Miami to throw himself into the breach, since, as a rule, men are not anxious to sacrifice themselves for others.

The brief respite thus afforded Jack and Otto enabled them to make a

closer survey of the shelter which had presented itself so providentially to them. They found little not apparent to their terrified gaze when they scrambled within. There were the four walls and nothing more. With that morbid interest in trifling things which often manifests itself in the most critical moments, Otto counted the logs on each of the four sides.

"Dere be nine dere," said he, indicating the western side, "ten dere, and nine and ten on de other sides."

"That must be right," remarked Jack, "for I make them the same."

"Tis funny dat we bofe counts dem at de same tine, when each one is not doing it togedder."

The only entrance to the enclosure, as it seems proper to call it, was the one used by the boys. Nothing to suggest a door, or any purpose of making one, was to be seen on any side of the walls.

It was not impossible that some hunters, who had encamped in the vicinity, had started the structure with the intention of roofing it over, and of providing some original means of ingress and egress which was not apparent to the little garrison.

Convinced that they would not be disturbed for some time to come, Jack hastily searched for loopholes, with which it would seem the structure ought to have been provided, but nothing of the kind was discovered.

Whoever had hewn and put together the logs, had done so with admirable skill. The gaps in the ends had been cut with a nicety that made a perfect fit in every case. Had the house been completed, it certainly would have been a substantial one.

While the absence of loop-holes removed to a great extent the fear of treacherous shots from the outside, yet in another respect it was an annoyance. The boys could see nothing of their assailants. The sense of hearing and conjecture it left were all that were left to inform them of what was going on so near them.

It was not to be supposed that the Indians, after driving the youths into shelter, would leave them undisturbed. The death of one of their warriors was enough to rouse the passion of revenge to the highest point--a necessity which, as shown by the incidents already narrated, did not exist.

When Jack and Otto were given a little time for reflection, they were forced to see that their situation was hopeless. Every advantage was with their enemies, who, if they chose to save themselves the risk of a determined assault, had only to wait. Without food or water, with no means of leaving the place, the hour must surely come when exhausted nature would compel this little garrison to yield.

The boy's were many miles from the settlements on either side of the river, and there was no means of sending word to their friends of the dire strait in which they were placed. Even could such message reach Coatesville, or the cabins on the other side of the Mississippi, several days must necessarily elapse before assistance

could arrive.

Jack Carleton's thoughts naturally turned to Deerfoot the Shawanoe. He had heard so many stories of his wonderful woodcraft and skill that he leaned upon him, when he was present to lean upon; but, hopeful as was the nature of the young Kentuckian, he could gather no crumbs of comfort in that direction.

Deerfoot had crossed the river in the Miami canoe, and could not be expected to return until under cover of darkness. Even then he must be powerless. There are limits to all human skill, and what greater folly than to expect him to release two boys, shut in a log enclosure, and surrounded by a score or less of vigilant Indian warriors.

But it was not the nature of either Jack or Otto, to yield without a struggle. So long as they could fight off the dread end, so long they would put, forth every effort to do so.

For fifteen minutes after the discharge of gun absolute silence prevailed. Not the slightest rustling told of the crouching savages without. The boys leaned against the logs of waited and listened.

During the interval, the young Kentuckian became filled with irresistible curiosity to learn what their enemies were doing. It was certain they were plotting mischief, but he could form no idea of its nature.

How was he to gain the coveted knowledge? Manifestly there was but the one way.

"Otto," he said in a low voice, "I'm going to climb up the logs and look over."

"And got your head blown off, dot's vot you does!" exclaimed his horrified friend.

"I'll come to that sooner or later any way," was the reply; "but I'm not going to be shot; I'm not such a dunce as that; I mean to take one glance over the logs, and will draw back so quickly that no one will get a chance to shoot me."

Otto protested, but, seeing it was useless, gave over and made the sensible suggestion that, instead of climbing up the wall and thereby probably making known what he was doing, he should stand on the shoulders of Otto. That would give him enough elevation, and the lad added:

"If I sees any noise vot I don't like, den I drops you so quick dot you vill bump the ground so hard dot it bulges out mit China on de other side."

At the very moment Jack made ready to avail himself of his friend's support, they heard a movement on the part of the Indians, the meaning of which was not understood.

A number of them seemed to be moving heavily over the ground, as though carrying some weighty body or marching in military step. The boys listened closely, but it was impossible to tell what it meant.

The noise added to Jack's curiosity, and, leaning his gun against the logs, he said"

"Help me up, Otto; I'm bound to find out what all that is about."

It was an easy matter to mount the shoulders of his young friend, whose strength would have supported double his weight. Jack found, as he anticipated, that he would be able to look over the logs without difficulty. Steadying himself by placing his hand against the wall, he slowly raised his head until almost on a level with the top, when he quietly looked over.

No movement of the kind was expected by the Indians, and the face was withdrawn before any one of them could fire.

Under such circumstances, a person can see a great deal in an exceedingly brief space of time. Jack Carleton learned much about that which had excited his curiosity.

Inasmuch as the walls had been put up from material cut in the immediate vicinity, a number of stumps surrounded the structure, beside which a single unused log was lying. It had been cut entirely off at the base, several of the lower limbs trimmed, but most of the bushy top remained. It looked as if the builders had been interrupted while at work, or they had voluntarily abandoned it for something else.

Some six or eight warriors had lifted this log from the ground and were laboriously heaving it in the direction of the fort (if the name can be permitted). Others were moving hither and thither, as though they enjoyed viewing the job more than assisting with it. One of them caught sight of the face of the young Kentuckian and brought his gun to his shoulder; but, quick as he was, he was just a moment too late. When he was ready to fire, the target was gone.

"They're going to batter down the logs!" exclaimed Jack, dropping lightly to the ground, and taking possession of his gun; "they're carrying a log toward us, and mean to hammer these down about our heads."

"What for they don't want to do dot?"

"It seems to me it would be a good plan for them to tumble our house about our heads."

"I don't dink they doos dots," persisted the German, and he proved to be right in his surmise.

With great labor the warriors bore the heavy tree forward, so that the larger end was against the side of the fort. Then, instead of using it as a battering ram, they lifted it higher until, with an exertion that must have been very great, it was raised even with the log wall. A combined effort rested the butt on the support, the trunk sloping downward, until the top reached the ground, probably thirty feet away.

As the butt was a foot in diameter, it will be seen that the work must have been very onerous to the American Indian, who hates

physical labor as much as does the tramp of modern times.

Having accomplished what must be admitted to be quite a feat, the toilers rested, while the boys looked up at the jagged end on the logs, suggesting the head of some monster peering down upon them, and speculated as to the meaning of the movement.

"Dot is so to help dem climbs to de top," said Otto, "or maybe they will runs him across and play I see-saw."

"It is to cover up some mischief on their part."

"If we only knowed when dey don't stands right under him, we would shove off de end off and let him drop onto dem and mash 'em all!"

"It would take a good deal more strength than we have to do that," said Jack. "I would like to take another peep over the edge, but it won't do, because they will be on the lookout for us."

"Dot's vot I didn't dink some times ago," said Otto, meaning a little different from what his words implied.

It was yet early in the day, and the boys could not but feel that the crisis was sure to come long before night. The temperature was mild and pleasant, no clouds floating in the space of clear sky visible overhead. The friends kept their loaded and cocked guns in their hands all the while and moved to and fro, in the circumscribed space, on the alert for the first demonstration from the red men, distressed by the consciousness that their cunning enemies were sure to do the very thing which was least expected.

Jack Carleton noticed that whenever he stood with his back against the logs, he could see the upper portions of the trees which grew close to the structure. It occurred to him that some of the daring warriors were liable to turn the fact to account. It would take no great skill for one or two of them to climb into the limbs, from which they would command a portion of the interior. No better opportunity could be asked--in case they were not discovered by the lads--to fire down upon them.

"I've been dinking of dot," replied Otto, when the matter was mentioned; "and I dinks dot iss de tree yonder, and py gracious dere is an Indian 'mong de limbs!"

This startling declaration was the truth. The friends were standing at the eastern end of the structure, so that they looked in the direction of the river, where towered a bushy oak, fully twenty feet of the upper portion being in sight. Something was among the branches, though the object could not be seen distinctly. Fortunate it was that both were gazing toward the point when their suspicion was first awakened.

"Yes, it is an Indian, as sure as I live!" added Jack, in an excited manner. "Rash fool! He has sealed his fate, for I couldn't want a fairer target. Leave him to me!"

"All right; I leaves him!"

The young Kentuckian was sure of his man, even though he was only

partially revealed, when the rifle was pointed. He took careful aim, but while in the act of pressing the trigger, he lowered the weapon, with the whispered exclamation.

"Great heavens! It is Deerfoot the Shawanoe!"

CHAPTER XII

AMONG THE TREE-TOPS

Jack Carleton was astounded. Up to that moment he was absolutely certain that the young Shawanoe was on the other side of the Mississippi, and would make no attempt to return to the Kentucky shore until night. Yet he had not only recrossed, but was actually within fifty feet of the enclosure, directly among his fiercest enemies, who were assailing it, and, more remarkable than all, he had climbed among the limbs of a tree, where he could gain a view of the interior.

There was a minute or so during which the Kentuckian actually doubted his own senses.

"He must be an enemy who closely resembles Deerfoot," was his thought; "I will shoot him before he shoots me."

The probability of such being the case was increased by the fact that the Indian had a rifle instead of a bow and arrow, and there were some daubs of paint on his face; but, for all that, the warrior was Deerfoot, as a second scrutiny convinced Jack and Otto beyond all question.

"It ish Deerhead! I means Deerfoot," whispered the German lad; "dinks a whirlwind lifs him out te boat and drops him in de tree; what don't he vants?"

The young Shawanoe had managed to reach a place amid the foliage, where, if he could be seen at all by those below, the view was indistinct, while, by pushing the branches carefully aside in front of his face, he was plainly revealed to his friends.

When Jack Carleton raised his gun and sighted at the object in the tree, the latter swept aside the curtain in front and made a signal with his hand, which declared his identity. Even though the paint had been plentifully used by him, his regular features were recognized when he smiled, and kept his hand waving in front of him as though brushing smoke from his eyes.

"Yes, it's Deerfoot!" muttered Jack, lowering his weapon, and staring with open mouth at the figure; "but things are getting mixed, and I ain't exactly understand what it is all about." But the situation was too critical on every hand for the young friends to give way to the wonderment caused by the discovery. It speedily became clear that while the Shawanoe dare not speak, he was trying very hard to convey some message to his friends by means of

pantomime. Holding the gun of the Miami in one hand, he kept the other going energetically, but neither Jack nor Otto could guess his meaning.

"Speak louder!" called Otto, forgetting himself; "vot vasn't dot dot you didn't say?"

Instantly Deerfoot drew back his head, allowing the bushes to close, so that he was only partly revealed.

"He is going to shoot!" exclaimed Jack.

Such, it was evident, was the intention of their friend, who brought his rifle to a level, the black barrel plainly visible as it was thrust among the branches. Instead of being aimed downwards, it was pointed at a considerable elevation above the defenders at some object at the other side of the fort.

Turning their beads, the boys saw, from the agitation in the branches of a tree, almost large as the oak, that something was moving among the limbs. The truth flashed upon both. While they were watching their friend, he had detected an enemy stealing into the tree behind them, and sought to make known the alarming truth by means of gesture. Seeing they failed to catch his meaning, he decided to attend to the matter himself, though it can be understood that the shot would render his own death almost certain.

"That will never do!" exclaimed the young Kentuckian; "Deerfoot is too valuable to be sacrificed."

The savage, who was climbing, did so with great care. Now a beaded moccasin would twinkle alongside the trunk, whisking out of sight like a frolicking squirrel; then a red feather flashed to sight and away again, the broad, painted face peeped from behind the tree, while glimpses of the clothing here and there showed the rate with which the warrior went upward.

Deerfoot must have seen the savage at the moment he began ascending the trunk, and could not fail to know his purpose. It was all-important that the dangerous individual should be "attended to," and, observing that his friends were too much absorbed in watching his movements to remember their own peril, the friendly Shawanoe did not hesitate to take the frightful risk upon himself.

It may be said that it would be utterly impossible for him to discharge his gun from the elevation without the other warriors discovering the fact, though one or two might suspect the weapon was fired within the enclosure; yet it was characteristic of the youth that, when the necessity presented itself, he did not hesitate.

But Jack Carleton's presence of mind came to his assistance. He began such vigorous gestures that the attention of Deerfoot was caught; without lowering his gun, he glanced downward. He saw Jack shaking his head from side to side, swinging his hand back and forth and darting his finger excitedly at the tree on the other side of the fort.

The quick-witted Shawanoe caught his meaning, and took his gun from his shoulder. Again he pushed the bushes aside, so that his face

came to view, and, looking down on his friends, smiled, nodded, and made several gestures toward the other redskin, who was still cautiously climbing the tree. Then the curtain was drawn again, and Deerfoot assumed the part of spectator instead of actor.

It is almost incredible that this performance could have taken place without detection from below; but it came about that, while it was going on, the attention of the red men was occupied by another occurrence which will be told at the proper time. The only ones who showed any interest in Deerfoot and his enemy, steadily making his way aloft, were the boys within the enclosure.

Accepting the lesson, Jack told Otto in a low voice to keep the closest watch on all the tree-tops within sight, for it seemed likely that still more of their enemies would resort to the same strategy.

"Let there be no mistake about this," he said to his companion; "if you catch sight of any one else, give him a shot, but I'm to settle the question with this particular gentleman."

"Dot ish all right," assented Otto; "dot ish, it will be all right if he ain't all wrong when you hits him."

Jack Carleton made no reply. He was standing with his left foot thrown slightly forward, his rifle, at his right shoulder, his head inclined and his left eye, closed. He was following the movements of the Miami (as he judged him to be), who was seeking a perch from which to fire down on the defenders of the primitive fort.

It would have been the easiest thing in the world for our friends to place themselves beyond danger from that particular warrior; they had only to step a little nearer the eastern wall, when it would intervene between them and the savage; but Jack grasped the situation well enough to understand the advantage of impressing their assailants with the danger of any kind of attack. If the defenders should busy themselves with dodging the aim of their foes, the trees were likely to swarm with them, and it would become impossible to elude their aim.

As before, the climbing Miami afforded occasional glimpses of himself. Now a moccasin, then a hand, his gun, the black horse-hair-like covering for his crown, with the painted eagle feathers, then an instant gleam of the eyes, and then nothing at all.

Remembering that a wound would be as effective its death itself, Jack coolly waited the opportune moment. Suddenly he saw the rifle, arm and shoulder of the warrior, as he flung them partly over a limb to help draw himself upward. Without a second's delay the youth fired, his view being much less obstructed than was the case with his friend in the other tree.

An ear-splitting screech broke the stillness, and the wounded Miami came tumbling downward as though every possible support had given way beneath him. To the watchful lads it looked as if he struck nothing at all in his descent, but fell with the swiftness of a cannon-ball, until the intervening logs shut him from sight.

"I dinks some dings dropped," said Otto, with a grin; "mebbe he don't try to fool us some more agin, don't it?"

Jack made no comment, but, as was his rule, reloaded his gun with utmost haste, dreading all the time a rush from their enemies. It may be set down as singular that something of the kind did not take place, since the assailants must have known it could not fail to be effective.

The sagacious Deerfoot seemed to believe that his position was no longer tenable, for, instead of staying where he was, he began descending, apparently in panic of fear, lest he should share the fate of the other red man. So far as he could, he kept the trunk of the tree between him and the youthful marksmen until beyond all danger of being harmed.

Jack saw just enough of the movement to understand its meaning, and he smiled grimly.

"After doing what you have done, you ought to take the part of leader and draw off the warriors."

The young Kentuckian stood near the middle of the enclosure glancing upward in different directions while reloading his piece, for he understood too well the necessity of unremitting vigilance whenever the American Indian takes a hand in proceedings.

Otto was not behind him in that respect. He walked softly around the fort close to the walls, attentively listening for sounds that would give some knowledge of what was going on outside. At intervals he stopped and with his knife gouged the wood, where it seemed thinner than usual, but in every case found the thickness too great to be pierced.

Just beneath the spot where the butt of the tree rested on the upper edge of the wall, he stopped. Once more and pressed his ear against the logs. He stood fully a minute, when, without moving his head, he looked sideways at his friend, who was watching him. The expression of his face was so significant that Jack knew he had made a discovery of importance.

"What is it?" he asked.

Otto motioned for him to keep quiet. Jack stepped forward in front of him.

As Otto was looked at him without speaking, he also pressed his ear against the logs, with a view of learning what was going on.

Every one knows that wood is a good conductor of sound, and, though in this case there were several layers of logs through which the noise passed, the second listener at once suspected the truth.

The scratching of the bark indicated that some one was carefully climbing up the inclined tree.

"That is to be their next move," muttered. Jack, hastily stepping back to the centre of the space; "if they make a rush over that

bridge they will be down in a twinkling--"

Otto kept his position, with his ear still glued to the logs, and not yet certain what the noise meant.

Just as Jack looked upward he saw, to his amazement, the head and front of the huge black bear coming up the inclined tree with the intent purpose of entering the interior. It instantly occurred to the youth that it was the same daring bruin that came so near attacking them a short while before.

He has used this place as his den and means to return to it; the Indians have seen him prowling around, and placed the tree so as to tempt him to climb upward on it.

The beast advanced until he could look downward on the couple, and then, gazing only a second or two, he backed out of sight and dropped to the ground with a strange, chuckling growl.

At the same instant a feeling of unutterable chagrin came over the lad who witnessed the maneuver, for, just a breath too late, he comprehended the shrewd trick by which he had been outwitted. Confused by the unexpected sight, he failed to note that the creature was not a bear at all, but a Shawanoe warrior skillfully disguised as much.

With the skin of one of the beasts gathered over his head and shoulders, he had made his way up the support, peered at the defenders, and then withdrawn before the watchful Jack could tumble him to the earth with the bullet that would have pierced his body had five seconds more been given in which to aim and fire.

CHAPTER XIII

A MESSAGE

Jack's chagrin was deepened the more he reflected upon the singular occurrence. Had he been outwitted by some skillfully-executed trick of the Indians, he would have accepted it as a mishap liable to overthrow the most experienced ranger of the woods; but he felt he ought to have known on the instant that no real bear would have attempted anything of the kind.

There was not a phase of the artifice which was not a reproach to him. Had the beast used the enclosure as a den or a retreat--a thing of itself incredible--the evidence of that fact would have been noticed the moment the boys climbed within. Then the likelihood of his clambering up the inclined tree in the presence of a war party of Shawanoes and Miamis, who had laid it for that very purpose, was too grotesquely absurd to be thought of with patience.

"Maybe it is as well," he said, with an effort to extract some consolation from the blunder; "for perhaps it will lead them to repeat the trick."

"Mine gracious! why didn't he drop down onto mine bead?" said Otto, stepping hastily away from his position; "he would have mashed me out as flat as---as--as a big tree itself."

"I don't see why they didn't form a procession of bears and walk right over among us? We would have stood still and allowed them to hug us to death."

Admitting the only explanation that presented itself, Jack and Otto were not yet able fully to account for the proceeding. The labor of dragging the fallen trunk and lifting the butt to the wall, seemed too great to suppose it was to be used only to allow one of the Indians to climb to the top and peer over upon the boys beneath. The same thing could be accomplished by ascending one of the trees and avoiding the peril to which some of them had been exposed.

But, beside all that, what in reality was gained by taking a peep at the youths? The assailants knew they were there, and it could not matter a jot in what particular manner they were employing themselves. They could do nothing that could give those on the outside the slightest concern. It was the defenders whose interests required the anticipation of the movements of the warriors.

"I can't understand it," said Jack, standing close to his friend and talking in a low voice.

"So ain't I--harks!"

They listened a full minute, but the silence could not have been more profound. A gentle wind stirred the leaves overhead, and the tops of the trees nearest them could be seen slightly swaying against the clear sky beyond. The murmur of the great forest was like the voice of silence itself while the almost inaudible murmur of the Mississippi, sweeping so near, made itself manifest the first time since they had turned at bay.

The deep quiet was more impressive than the whoops and screeches of the warriors would have been. Under such circumstances, it boded mischief, and the utter uncertainty of its nature almost unsettled the remarkable courage both up to that moment had displayed.

"I hears nodings," added Otto; "I'mebbe don't go to sleep and wait for the night to come."

"Night is a good many hours off," replied Jack, with an uneasy glance at the sky, which showed him the sun had not yet reached meridian; "they can beat any people in the world waiting, when they have a mind to do so, but there's been no necessity of halting at all. If they had followed up over the logs it would have been all ended by this time."

"Yaw; they would have tumbled all over us, like a pig lot of trees falling down, but now I dinks they waits."

"Why will they do that?"

"If dey climbs over like as dey didn't does, don somepody git hurt, but if dey holds on till night den we'll have to climb over and falls on 'em."

This was Otto's manner of expressing what was inevitable, in case the besiegers should conclude to wait for the hour, which could not be very distant, when the defenders must lose all power of resistance.

The two did not forget to keep a continuous guard over the "watch-towers" of the enemy. Despite the repulse that had followed their attempts, it was by no means uncertain that they would not repeat them. The success of the bear trick was likely to tempt them to another essay in the same direction.

Otto Relstaub was leaning against the solid logs, his position such that the sun, which was now near meridian, shone directly upon him. His friend was almost immediately opposite--the two looking in each other's face, and exchanging words in low tones.

All at once the German became sensible of something cool just behind his neck.

"Vot ain't dot?" he said, putting up his hand as though to brush away some insect. Striking nothing, he turned to look.

"O-oh-oh!" he said, with a wondering expression, and an expansion of his big, honest eyes.

"There's an opening behind you," remarked his friend, moving hastily across to where he stood.

"Yaw; I sees him. Where's he been hiding himself when I voon't looking for him not a little while ago."

It certainly was curious that both boys should have made such a minute examination of the interior without finding the crevice between a couple of the logs, large enough to admit the passage of several bullets, and through which it would have been an easy matter for their enemies to shoot him who stood immediately in front.

The opening was some six inches wide, and no more than an eighth of an inch in height, resembling the crevice through which the captain looks out upon the enemy from the turret of a monitor. The fact that the red men had made no use of it was proof they did not suspect its existence, though that did not lessen the wonder of Otto that he had failed to find it himself, when making search.

"I see!" suddenly exclaimed Jack, who was attentively examining the place. "No wonder you missed it, for it was closed up. You must have rubbed one of your long ears against the stick which fits it so closely."

The piece with which it had been closed lay on the ground, at the feet of the boys, and made clear why they had failed to find that for which they had hunted so carefully.

Jack cut the stick apart with his knife and reinserted one half with a view of rendering it less liable to attract the notice of the besiegers. Then, quite sure that it was still unknown to them, he leaned forward with his eye to the opening.

"While I'm peeping here keep a lookout elsewhere, Otto."

His friend nodded, to signify he would be obeyed, and then Jack took a survey of his surroundings.

It so happened that he stood nearly under the tree which leaned against the wall, and thus gained a good view. He certainly saw enough to interest the most indifferent spectator. Five painted Indian warriors were seen standing around what seemed to be a dancing bear, who was gesticulating with his fore paws. Suddenly he cast off the shaggy hide and revealed the redskin who had made the audacious ascent on the log in his disguise and peeped over on the boys below.

He seemed to be talking with his friends, while the whole half dozen were gesticulating with great energy, though, in spite of their excitement, their words were spoken so low that our friends could hear little more than the jumbling murmur of their voices.

No doubt more Indians were close at hand, but Jack saw none. He stealthily removed the other part of the stick, and thereby widened his view considerably, but he still failed to discover anything more. His vision took in the tree up which Deerfoot had climbed, but nothing was to be observed of him, or of any others gathered around the base.

Convinced that they were on the other side of the fort, Jack gave his whole attention to those before him.

It looked very much as if the author of the trick described was regaling his friends with an account of the highly successful manner in which he had played his points on the unsuspecting parties within the enclosure.

Jack was convinced that the rifle-shot which he and his friend heard, before rushing into the refuge, was the one that slew the bear. The Indians had hastily skinned the animal, probably completing the task near the time they became aware of the presence or rather the flight of the two boys. They had united in the pursuit, taking the bear-skin with them, and its use in the manner described was suggested by the prostrate tree lying so close to the logs, though even that theory failed fully to satisfy the questions of the youth.

Another interesting discovery was that he had seen two of the Shawanoes before. He had no difficulty in recognizing them as those who had shown such eagerness to follow the trail of the hunter that had shot the panther some distance back on the path.

The warrior who had masqueraded in the character of a big, black bear belonged to the Miami tribe, the representatives of the two joining hands in the crusade against the young pioneers. Neither the wounded red man nor the one who was past wounding was to be seen anywhere.

The vigorous and somewhat suppressed conversation among the group continued a few minutes and then abruptly stopped. The entire party seemed to have become "talked out" the same instant.

"Now they will hatch up some more mischief," was the thought of the watcher. "I don't think it likely they will send that bear up the tree again. If they do he will come down a little quicker than he goes up."

The sensations of the young Kentuckian were very peculiar, when he became aware that the Shawanoe who had displayed so much skill in hunting for his footprints in the twilight was looking directly toward him. He seemed in fact to be gazing into the eyes of the youth, as though he was striving to stare him out of countenance.

Jack would have been glad at that moment had the opening been hermetically sealed; but, hopeful that he was not seen, he held his place, not stirring in the slightest, and striving to the utmost to keep from winking his eyes.

The singular tableau lasted much less time than the boy imagined. All at once the hum of conversation was renewed, every one of the half dozen seeming to be seized with the impulse at the same moment. He who had been gazing so steadily at Jack looked in the face of one of his comrades. Instantly the boy moved to one side and replaced the rest of the stick, so that the crevice was closed once more.

"There," he exclaimed, with a sigh, "I never was placed in a more trying situation than that."

"Vot voon't dot?"

Jack quickly told his experience, and his companion shuddered and shrugged his shoulders in sympathy.

"Have you seen any of them among the trees?"

"No. They vill not go to roost, I dinks, till the sun comes down."

"It won't do to calculate on that. If they wait they will try some new tricks."

"Vot can't them try?"

"The trouble is we cannot guess. You know the Indians are so cunning that they will think out something--"

Zip!

Both boys started and looked around. Something had entered the enclosure like a bullet fired from a gun.

"Look!" whispered Jack, pointing to the other side, where an Indian arrow was seen sticking in the logs, at a point half way between the ground and the top.

"I dinks they used guns and not arrows," said the astonished, Otto, standing motionless and staring at the missile, whose barb was still trembling from the force with which it had been driven into the solid wood.

"They do use guns only," said Jack. "That arrow was fired by Deerfoot!"

"Dere is one piece of paper tied around mit it."

"It is a message from Deerfoot!" said Jack, stepping forward and, with considerable effort, drawing forth the arrow.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MANEVRES OF DEERFOOT

Deerfoot the Shawanoe committed a serious mistake as he himself was the first to discover, when he upset the Miami warrior into the Mississippi and made off with his canoe. He had started out to help his friends, but his course was an injury to them, for it increased their danger without giving them the least assistance.

What he ought to have done, when he observed the drowsy fisherman, was to bring the boys to the spot, so that, directly after the red man was dispossessed, the three could have entered the boat and hastened across the river. Had he done so, all that which followed would have been averted.

In referring to the course of the young Shawano the most incredible statement is that the blunder was altogether due to his waggishness, because in his eagerness to play a joke upon an enemy, he forgot his usual caution; but such was the truth.

The warrior, however, was not the one to stay on the western shore when his friends were in danger. Though he had told them to expect him back at a certain hour, early in the afternoon, his intention was to return much earlier. It would have been folly for him to make for any point near that from which he departed when he set out from the Kentucky shore. Such a proceeding would be seen by his enemies, and would invite them to riddle him with bullets as he approached.

The moment he touched the Louisiana side, he ran under the overhanging limbs far enough to be out of sight of any who might be on the watch, and then pushed vigorously up stream. He continued until he had gone fully a half mile and had rounded quite a bend in the river. Then he paddled straight across to the other bank, down which he made his way with the same haste.

He speedily arrived in the vicinity of the lads and prepared, in his characteristic fashion, to take a hand in their rescue. Hoping that the chance for flight would speedily come, he carefully drew the canoe under cover, where he was confident it would not be seen by any enemies prowling in the vicinity. Then he stealthily plunged into the wood to give what help he could to his friends.

It took him only a little while to find they were at bay within the log enclosure and in much greater danger than he first supposed. The discovery caused a change in his plans. He returned to the canoe and took out the rifle which he had captured; his bow and arrows were not left within the boat, for he valued them too highly to incur such risk; they were hidden where he knew no one could possibly steal them away from him. Then the little phial which he

carried in the receptacle with his Bible was uncorked and the crimson paint applied with his forefinger to his face. The ornamentation was as fantastical as the imagination of the native American could make it.

Viewed for the first time by those who did not know him, he would have been classed as one of the fiercest warriors that ever went on the war trail. Had he been a pagan instead of a Christian, the idea would have been a correct one.

But Deerfoot was handicapped from the first by the fact that he was known to more than one of the party. It may be said that at that day there was scarcely a Shawanoe east of the Mississippi who had not heard of the execrated friend of the white men. They knew that his favorite weapons, beside his knife and tomahawk, were his bow and arrows; that his skill with them approached the marvelous; they knew that his fleetness surpassed that of any living person that he possessed a form and features of rare beauty; that his courage was surpassed by none, for, when but a stripling, he had handed a knife to the furious Tecumseh, and dared him to fight unto the death, and that his cunning and subtlety were beyond the reach of the ordinary warrior.

Deerfoot himself was aware of his general notoriety, and, though he might not have been seen by the Shawanoes, yet they would identify him at the first glance, provided he appeared before them in his own proper person.

It will be understood, therefore, why he disguised his appearance with such care. With the shrewdness of one of our modern detectives, he made a change also, as may be said, in "himself" that is, he walked differently, and used his arms and legs in style altogether foreign to his custom.

It must be remembered that there were several strong points in his favor; his was the tribe whose warriors hated him with unspeakable hatred, and he therefore was a master of every detail. When he was assisted by the gloom of night, he was in scarcely any danger, though it was far different under the glare of the sun.

Another advantage should be named, inasmuch as the reader is apt to overlook it; the separate war parties from the Shawanoe and Miami tribes were not only few in numbers, but they had not met until after arriving in the neighborhood where the youthful pioneers were traveling with little fear of molestation. Thus, in a certain sense, the warriors, while allies, were comparative strangers. After disguising himself he believed his identity would not be discovered by the Miamis, unless, possibly, by the lone fisherman. There was also a fair prospect that he could avert suspicion for a time on the part of the Shawanoes, unless particular attention was directed to him.

The foregoing seems necessary in order to justify what was done by the wonderful Deerfoot. He managed to appear on the outer fringe of the ring of assailants, without drawing special notice, and he used all his skill in learning what the assailants intended to do.

The warrior who had been shot while in the act of climbing over the logs after the boys, met his fate before Deerfoot arrived on the

scene. The Indians were in a revengeful mood, and were unanimous in their determination to visit the worst punishment on the youths who were making such a brave fight for their lives.

"But for Deerfoot they would not be in this sad plight," was the thought of the young Shawanoe; "therefore the Great Spirit expects Deerfoot not to think of his own life until they are saved from the death which threatens them."

Fortunately for this purpose the warriors were scattered to a considerable extent, and seemed to give their whole thoughts to those within the enclosure. Deerfoot knew, when he observed the heavy log borne forward, and the butt placed on the wall, that it was meant to be used to carry out some plan not clearly settled in the minds of the assailants themselves. When he saw a move to climb the trees which stood near the rude fort, he feared his friends would be caught unawares, and he took to a tree with the hope of being able to give them warning in time.

On this point it will be seen the young warrior underrated the woodcraft of his friends. With a thrill of pleasure he glanced at the rifle of Jack Carleton pointed at him, before he had sought to open communication. It was only a natural precaution which led him to select a tree where he was able to use the sign language, without being seen by any of his enemies below. He made sure that enough foliage intervened to screen him from the inquiring gaze of his enemies during the proceeding.

Having made certain that his identity was known to his friends, it will be remembered that he sought to warn them of the very peril which threatened from the tree on the other side. Failing to make himself clear, he raised his own gun with the intention of shooting the savage from the perch, but providentially Otto Relstaub averted the necessity.

It is difficult to believe that had Deerfoot fired the shot he could have effected his own escape. The point from which the gun was discharged must have made itself manifest to more than one warrior below, and would have involved him in a labyrinth of peril, where his subtlety must have failed him.

But it need not be repeated that he would not have faltered on that account, had the need existed. He believed it his duty to hesitate at no risk, because he himself was wholly to blame for the dire straits in which the boys found themselves.

With a grim enjoyment that can hardly be understood, Deerfoot stood in the background and watched the antics of the warrior who had wrapped the bear-skin about his shoulders and body. He could not avoid a feeling of admiration for the cleverness with which the front was arranged, so as to resemble that of the beast, but he felt not the slightest fear that the trick would succeed. It was such an antiquated stratagem that he wondered it was attempted, especially after the defenders had given so convincing evidence of their watchfulness.

His amazement, therefore, may be appreciated when he saw the creature slowly make his way to the edge of the fort, look down on the boys, and then back a few steps and drop to ground.

He could not believe they had failed to penetrate a disguise which could scarcely be expected to deceive, except under very favorable circumstances but concluded they must have had some good reason of their own.

While these troublesome thoughts were in the mind of Deerfoot, he kept his eye on the Miami, whose scant clothing had not dried after his voluntary plunge into the Mississippi, from the bow of his canoe. His victim acted as though he entertained some doubts as to the identity of the individual that did not mingle with the main body of the warriors.

Deerfoot knew that if he did suspect the truth, his curiosity was likely to cause trouble. The time had come when it was the part of wisdom to withdraw.

At last the Miami walked toward the enclosure, where two of his own tribe were talking with some number of the Shawanoes. He said something which stirred up matters at once. All five began talking vigorously, and then they turned to take a look at the youthful warrior.

He was gone, having vanished as silently as he appeared on the scene, and it was well that he did so, for the deception could have been carried no further.

Within the succeeding ten minutes the report of a rifle came from the direction of the river. Then a second was heard from another point in the wood, and again a third report awoke the echoes among the trees.

The red men did not know what it meant. All the surviving members of the two parties were together, and they could not understand who the newcomers were. They were probably those of their own race, though the disconcerting possibility remained that they might be white men on their way to the help of the beleaguered boys.

The truth was, Deerfoot was convinced that if Jack and Otto were not extricated from their peril long before night, no hope could remain for them. It was so clearly in the power of the red men to capture or destroy them whenever they chose to put forth the effort, that he knew they would not wait until night.

There were trees on every hand which would shelter the sharpshooters. If they ensconced themselves among the limbs of these, the lads would be shut off from the chance of protecting themselves, for on whichever side of the space they stood, they would be within the range of one or two of the gunners.

The plan which he next proceeded to put into execution was in the mind of Deerfoot from the first moment he learned of the situation of the endangered ones. It was impossible to succeed without a perfect understanding with his friends, for they necessarily had an important part to play in the programme.

"Deerfoot will send them a message," he said to himself, with a throb of pride over the facility at his command; "that will tell everything."

Making his way to a safe point in the forest, he sat down on the ground, tore off a piece from the paper which he carried with his Bible, and with red chalk, sharpened to a point, he proceeded to write the words intended only for the eyes of his friends within the enclosure. The paper was twisted around the arrow, just back of the bead, and he then was ready to adopt the means which he had employed more than once in somewhat similar situations.

CHAPTER XV

"TALL OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW"

Jack Carleton walked across the slight space that separated him from the arrow, quivering in the log on the opposite side of the enclosure. He knew that it had come from the bow of the young Shawanoe, who displayed his extraordinary skill by sending it at such an elevation that it passed over the heads of his friends.

"It is a message from Deerfoot," repeated the Kentuckian, as he drew out the missile and unwrapped the paper wound around it. "Let us see what he has to say."

The paper being unfolded, showed the following words in the small but graceful hand of the Shawanoe:

"Let my brothers listen! They will hear one gun; they will hear another, and then will sound a third! Let them listen closer, for they are meant for their ears! Then will come shouts and the sound of a gun the fourth time! Let my brothers climb over the logs and run as fast as they can to the river. Close by the ash that lies with its limbs in the water, they will find the canoe; they must make haste to paddle across or it will be too late. They must not wait for Deerfoot. He will take care of himself. Let my brothers listen and be not slow."

"There's no trouble to understand what he means," said Jack, after reading the words aloud.

"What ish it dot he does?" asked Otto, not quite certain as to the purpose of their dusky ally.

"He means to start a panic. He is going to try to scare the red men so that they will scatter and give us a chance to get away."

The German lad shook his head.

"Nix. He can't do dot."

"It looks to me like a wild scheme, but as it is the last hope, we must be ready to give all the help we can, for I don't know of any one who ought to be more interested than we. Sh! What was that?"

Just then it was so still that the slightest noise made by a falling fragment of a stick reached their ears. Looking quickly around they

saw that the bit of wood which had been used to close the orifice between the logs had fallen or had been pushed out and lay on the ground. The narrow slit would have shown daylight through it had it not been closed by altogether a different object or rather series of objects; for when the astonished boys contemplated the spot they caught the gleam of two pairs of eyes peering at them.

The Indians had found the opening and were scrutinizing the interior. The glitter of the four orbs which filled the crevice caused most peculiar sensations on the part of the boys who saw them.

"Ain't you not ashamed mit yourselves!" exclaimed Otto, quickly bringing his gun to his shoulder and firing directly through the opening.

"I teaches you mit better manners."

But, quick as he was, the warriors were quicker, and the darkened slit became light with the noiseless speed of a twinkling sunbeam. The Indians needed no second intimation of what was coming.

The crisis which followed this shot was more imminent than the defenders supposed. The assailants had become convinced that they were throwing away valuable time, and they assembled in a group to consider the best means of forcing matters to an issue.

It was at that moment that the report of the gun was heard from the direction of the river. Shawanoe and Miami suspended conversation and, looking inquiringly at each other, listened.

A brief while after, the second shot was heard from another point, followed by a third from still another direction.

"There are strangers in the woods," remarked one of the warriors, in a guarded voice.

"Our brothers have come to look for us."

As suddenly as the crash of a thunderbolt, the Shawanoe war-whoop broke on the air, followed by what seemed to be the shouts of white men.

Then a voice of mortal terror shouted in the same tongue:

"The white men are coming! The white men are coming!"

The sound of hurrying feet was heard, as though a dozen warriors were fleeing in hot haste from a dreaded foe. The effect intended by this diversion of Deerfoot promised the brilliant success he hoped rather than expected. One of the savages standing close to the fallen tree, started with an exclamation and dashed off in an opposite direction from the point whence came the alarming sounds. The effect was contagious: the others followed pell-mell, every one plunging forward with the frantic desperation which the bravest man will show in moments of panic.

It need not be said that Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub listened to these favorable sounds with breathless interest. They understood

the stratagem of Deerfoot, and could not feel very hopeful of its success; but the noise of hastily departing warriors thrilled them with delight.

"They are running!" exclaimed the young Kentuckian, with beaming face; "who would have thought it?"

"I dinks it time dot we vasn't doing the same," said Otto, who, catching the top of the wall with both hands, drew himself upward and peered over. He was gratified with the sight of the two hindmost warriors just vanishing from sight. The whole party were panic-stricken.

Otto turned his head to tell the joyful news to his companion, when he saw that he had also drawn himself up beside him. The fourth report of a gun was heard.

"Now is your time," said Jack: "over with you; I'll hand you your gun."

Otto lost no time in scrambling over, and his feet scarcely touched the ground when his rifle whizzed end over end after him. It required all his activity to dodge it, and, while doing so, he received a sound thump from the gun of his friend, who seemed to be flinging weapons around with wild recklessness.

One important fact was clear to the boys: the panic of the Indians was certain to be short-lived. Before fleeing far, they would suspect the trick played on them, and would return with tenfold more fierceness than before.

The hearts of the boys throbbed high with hope when they found themselves outside the enclosure which had served them as a prison, and they knew the irrevocable step had been taken; they must now go forward at all hazards.

The Mississippi was near, and thither they made all haste, remembering the instructions of Deerfoot as conveyed through the note borne to them on the wings of the arrow. Jack, who was the fleeter of foot, kept slightly in advance, though he had no purpose of leaving his friend behind.

"Dot ish one good things as nefer vos," Otto took occasion to say, while panting close behind him: "dere ish not so many of demi blagued vines dot cotches me all de times ven I vos--oh mine gracious!"

As is too often the case, the lad rejoiced too soon, for the words were yet in his mouth when the very mishap he referred to overtook him. A running vine became entangled around his ankles, and he went forward on his hands and knees; but he was not injured, and speedily rose again.

In spite of their imminent peril, the young Kentuckian could not repress a smile when he glanced back and saw Otto picking himself up; but the smile was gone instantly, for the situation was anything but a mirthful one.

"Here we are!" called out Jack, halting on the bank of the river and

glancing around him. "But where is the canoe?"

"I dinks the first things ish to find the ash tree what ish not laying up but standing down," suggested Otto, moving along the stream.

It was manifest that the boat could not be found until after locating the landmark named by the young Shawanoe; for it was certain Deerfoot had taken care to hide the canoe where some search would be necessary to find it.

But in specifying the fallen tree, Deerfoot gave no idea of where it was to be found. He must have believed it was so conspicuous that no direction was required.

During the few seconds that the friends stood irresolute, they used ears as well as eyes. Suddenly the whoop of an Indian was heard a brief distance away.

"My gracious!" whispered Jack; "they're coming back! They have discovered the trick."

"Dot ish so; let's jump on to de water and swim to de oder side."

The situation was enough to make the bravest nervous, and the sturdy German could not repress his impatience. Every second was of incalculable worth, and yet, knowing they were close to the means which was to take them to safety, they could not seize it.

"No; that won't do," replied Jack, resolutely; they will stand on the bank and pick us off without trouble to themselves; we must find the boat."

"But how can't we do dot?"

"You move up the bank and I will hurry down it the canoe cannot be far off; the instant you catch sight of it, whistle, and I'll do the same if I see it before you."

Otto sprang away with a more anxious expression on his broad, honest face than it wore when he was crouching behind the logs, and the young Kentuckian was scarcely less agitated. His feelings were similar to those which come to us in sleep, when we see some grisly terror approaching and have no power to flee before it. Somewhere, almost within reach, was the vehicle to carry them out of peril, and yet they could not lay their hands on it.

Jack was resolved, in case the canoe was not speedily found, to do as Otto advised--leap into the Mississippi and swim boldly for the other shore. If they could gain a fair start, they would have cause to hope; but such an attempt, desperate as it was, must be undertaken very soon or not at all.

Again the dreaded whoop reached them from the woods, and the leader started as though he had caught the click of a gun-lock from behind a tree.

The cry was not a loud one, and was no doubt meant as a signal to some one not far off.

"I wonder where Deerfoot can be," muttered Jack, pushing his way hurriedly through the underbrush, and glancing in every direction for the fallen tree which was to show them the craft. "He told us not to wait for him, but it seems to me he ought to have given us help in finding the boat."

Again, and for the third time, the frightful signal trembled among the trees close behind him.

"He shan't catch me unprepared, at any rate," muttered the young Kentuckian, raising the hammer of his gun and looking defiantly toward the point whence came the cry.

The Indian did not show himself, and conscious that he was throwing away precious seconds, Jack pushed forward once more, keeping watch of his flank as well as his front, for a treacherous shot from the forest would render a canoe altogether useless, so far, at least, as Master Jack Carleton was concerned.

He was impatient and desperate. There is often a perverseness in inanimate things which is beyond endurance. He had started with the highest hopes a few minutes before, confident of finding the Indian canoe without trouble, and now he was baffled and held back when on the very threshold of safety.

"It is useless to wait," he finally said, coming to an abrupt halt. "I will call to Otto and we will swim for it."

But, before he could emit the whistle that had been agreed upon, his ears were set tingling by the identical signal coming from a point up the bank.

"Thank heaven!" was his exclamation, as he wheeled about and, forgetful of the other signal that had told him of peril, dashed along the bank of the stream with furious haste.

"Otto has been more fortunate than I," he added, as he bounded forward; "he has found the canoe, and I pray that he has not been too late for us to use it."

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE RIVER

The experience of Otto was somewhat similar to that which befell Jack Carleton in his search for the Indian canoe. Strong, self-possessed, and courageous by nature as was the German lad, he fretted over his forced restraint more than did the other.

He pushed forward with grim recklessness. He caught the signal of the warrior which caused Jack so much disquiet, but he did not permit it to interfere with his purpose.

"Let him boot all dot he doesn't vant to," muttered the angry lad;

"he don't drive me away from looking for dot canoe, don't it?"

Several minutes passed, during which he failed to discover the first sign of the missing boat. Finally, realizing that a considerable distance must intervene between him and Jack, he came to a pause, and, sitting on a fallen tree, took off his cap, mopped his forehead, and heaved a great sigh:

"Dot ish queerer as efer vos; Deerfoot, he tells me dot we find his boat and we don't finds him; he says we must jump into the boat and paddles out middle Mississippi, but we finds the Mississippi, but vere ain't dot canoe? Dot isn't the question. Vere isn't Jack? He ish looking for de canoe also mit likewise, and I don't bear him vistle for me--mine gracious!"

Otto spoke slowly, giving utterance only to a few of the thoughts which stirred his brain. He was on the point of signaling to his friend to return, and, insisting that they should swim the river together, when he became aware that the undergrowth in front of him and close to the water, partially screened some object whose outlines could be faintly trace from where he sat.

With the exclamation, he straightened up and stared in blank astonishment. The contour of what he saw was so distinct that there could be no mistake; he was staring straight at the canoe for which he had been hunting so long.

Otto softly rose to his feet and looked behind him. He had been sitting on the very ash which Deerfoot had named as the guide that would direct them in finding the craft. Otto threw back his head and laughed, overcome by the reaction from the tense strain to which his nerves had been subjected.

"Ven somepody axes for de biggest fool dot efer vos, he looks at Otto Relstaub and says, 'I Dot ish him,' and dot will be him."

But he, shivered at the thought of the minutes that had slipped by, and, without indulging in any more soliloquy, placed his finger and thumb in his mouth and emitted the whistle which thrilled Jack Carleton down the river and brought him hurrying to the spot.

Satisfied that no repetition of the call was required, Otto gave his attention to the boat. It was a fine Indian canoe, buoyant enough to carry six or eight warriors, and furnished with three long paddles which, in skillful hands, could drive it with great speed through the water. It was made of bark, bow and stern being similar, curving inward toward the middle of the boat, and painted with rude designs outside, which showed more taste than did the ornamentation of the aboriginal countenances.

Deerfoot had displayed no little ingenuity in screening the craft from sight. Inasmuch as Otto had forgotten himself so far as to sit down on the very tree for which he was searching without once suspecting his forgetfulness, it is not to be supposed he would have discovered the boat at all but for the accident named.

Grasping one end, he began vigorously pushing it into the current. It was heavy, and he wondered at the strength of the young Shawanoe, who had drawn it clear of the water, overlooking the fact that

moderate strength, skillfully applied, succeeds more frequently than does simple physical power.

After much effort, he shoved it clear of the land and held it floating on the surface.

"I wonder if Jack didn't hear me," he thought, looking around; "I think I call him again once more."

He did not utter the signal, however, for just then he heard approaching footsteps, and, a minute later, the flushed and panting Jack Carleton was beside him.

"Thank heaven!" he exclaimed; "I was in despair when your signal reached me; we haven't a second to lose."

"We aren't going to lose him, not at all. Hark!"

They heard just then, not only the faint whoop that had caused them so much disquiet, but caught sight of the warrior who uttered the alarming call.

He whisked between the trees with such bewildering quickness of movement that Jack, who had turned with his rifle half raised, saw no chance of firing with effect. Fortunately, the necessity for doing so did not exist, for the boys at the same moment recognized the red man as their friend Deerfoot, who walked forward smiling and pleased, carrying his bow and gun.

"My brothers did well," he said in his quiet way; "but they did not hasten as does the deer when the hounds are on his trail."

"We could not have hurried more than we did," replied Jack Carleton, taking the hand of the youthful warrior; "a little more haste and both of us would have broken our necks."

"Don't say so," added Otto, emphatically; "I sat down on this log to think if I couldn't run faster but I couldn't. What for you keep whooping all the time like a crazy person?"

"Deerfoot wished to see his brothers run, for the red men are looking for them."

"I've no doubt of that, and the wonder to me is how you managed to give them such a scare that they scattered and left us a chance to dig out."

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth," was the apt quotation of the extraordinary youth, who was so fond of studying his Bible. "But their fright will not last long."

"Such being the case we must not tarry."

The Shawanoe acted as though he did not intend to enter the canoe with them, seemingly having some object in remaining on the Kentucky side; but he changed his mind, probably concluding that his services were still needed by his friends.

He motioned to Jack, who stepped into the boat and picked up one of

the paddles, Otto having done the same. Deerfoot leaped lightly after them, the impulse carrying the craft fully a rod from shore. He laid down his gun and bow, and, seizing the third paddle, made such a powerful sweep through the water that the others almost lost their balance. They essayed to help him, but he asked them with a smile to cease and leave the management of the boat entirely to him.

"We might as well," said Jack, "for we shall only hinder you."

"Dot ish de same as I doesn't dinks."

A few strokes sent the canoe well out from the land, and the Shawanoe still plied the paddle with extraordinary skill; but, as he left the shore, he knew that in one respect the danger of himself and companions was increased. If their enemies were anywhere along the Mississippi, with a suspicion of the truth, they could not fail to detect them.

It proved as he suspected. Several whoops echoed from a point a short distance below, and the quick eye of the leader caught sight of the Miamis and Shawanoes on the bank.

"Down! Down!" he said, excitedly; "let my brothers lower their heads or they will be killed."

Both Jack and Otto extended themselves flat on the bottom of the boat, but Deerfoot remained upright, plying the paddle with might and main. He headed out in the stream, and used every effort to get beyond reach of the rifles of his enemies.

"Why don't you duck your head, too?" demanded the alarmed Jack; "they can hit you as easily as us."

But Deerfoot had his eyes on the party and did not mean to throw away his life. He saw there were four red men who stood together on the very edge of the wood. When two of them raised their guns and sighted at him, he dropped like the loon, which dodges the bullet of the hunter by the flash of his gun.

A couple of reports sounded like one, and the three on the bottom of the canoe heard the bark fly. Both balls had pierced it, entering one side and passing out on the other. The weight of the occupants caused the boat to sink sufficiently to protect them, so long as they remained flat on the bottom. One of the bullets was aimed so low that it struck the water, ricocheting through the bark and bounding off in space. The other went within an inch of Deerfoot's figure, he being slightly higher than either of the others.

The echoes of the guns were ringing through the wood, when the Shawanoe straightened up and dipped the paddle into the waters again; but he had time for only one sweeping stroke when down he went once more, barely in time to escape the third shot.

Before using the paddles, he raised his head just enough to peep over the gunwale. He saw the three warriors deliberately reloading their weapons, while the other was waiting for his target to present itself. There were two others, who had been drawn thither by the calls of the first party.

"I dinks maybe I can does somedings to help," said Otto, timidly looking over the side of the craft; "mebbe I sees--mine gracious!"

The gun which was fired just then sent the bullet, as may be said, directly under the nose of the German, who lowered his face with such quickness that the whole boat jarred from the bump against the bottom.

"Deerfoot, won't it be a good thing to send a shot at them?" asked Jack; "it seems to me they would not be quite so ready with their guns."

The Shawanoe was evidently of the same mind. He had the choice of two weapons, and need it be said which was the one selected?

Standing erect in the canoe, he fitted an arrow to the string with incredible dexterity and launched it with a speed that rendered it almost invisible. The distance caused him to elevate the missile slightly, but the aim of Simon Kenton or Daniel Boone, with his long, trusty rifle, could not have been more unerring.

The red men on shore were well aware of his amazing skill, and they lost no time in adopting the dodging tactics. The instant the form of the graceful young warrior was thrown in relief against the sky and wooded shore, they bounded behind the nearest trees, peering forth like frightened children.

The movement saved one life at least, for the winged missile which, a second later, whizzed over the spot where they had been standing, was driven with a force that would have caused it to plunge clean through the body of any one in its path.

Deerfoot remained erect in the canoe until the shaft had landed, when he gave utterance to a defiant shout; sat down, and deliberately took up the paddle again.

It will be borne in mind that the yellow current of the Mississippi was swollen by freshets near its headwaters, and the canoe not only danced about a great deal, but was borne swiftly downward, seeing which the Indians hastened in a parallel course, with the purpose of holding it within range. Furthermore, other red men continually appeared at a lower point. It is within bounds to say that there was not one who did not understand the stratagem by which the young Shawanoe had outwitted them, and there was no means within their reach which they would not have put forth to revenge themselves upon him.

Within a brief space of time the guns of the warriors began popping from so many different points that Deerfoot dare not attempt to use the paddle. The blue puffs of smoke were so near that it would have been fatal to expose himself to the aim of his enemies, but, unless the canoe could be propelled still further from them, it was likely to be riddled by the converging fires.

"Things are in a bad shape," remarked Jack Carleton, afraid to raise his head a single inch, for the boat rode most uncomfortably high; "we must do something, and yet what can we do?"

Deerfoot made no answer; his fertile brain had extricated other

parties from more critical situations than the one in which he was now placed, and he was quick to decide upon an expedient for doing the same in the present instance.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LOUISIANA SHORE

Deerfoot threw himself over the side of the canoe into the river, holding fast to the gunwale with one hand and keeping the boat between him and the Indians on shore. With the arm which was free, he swam toward the Louisiana side, towing the craft after him.

While it seemed absolutely necessary that something of the kind should be done, yet the reader will perceive that the course of the Shawanoe was extremely perilous, not only for himself, but for his friends whom he was so anxious to benefit. His removal from the canoe caused it to ride higher, and thereby exposed them to the bullets that were continually skipping about it. Deerfoot himself was forced to keep his shoulders at such an elevation that he was liable to be perforated by some flying missiles, but he increased the distance between himself and enemies with greater speed than would be supposed.

"I dinks dis ish good style," said Otto to Jack, who moved his head so as to see what he was doing. The sagacious German had gathered the three paddles so they were added to that side of the craft which served as a partial shield against the shots from the shore. The implements were so arranged that the lad felt safe against harm, unless the boat should turn half way round before he could accommodate himself to the changed condition of things.

"It is a good idea," said Jack, admiringly, as he hastened to avail himself of the defense; "I don't believe one of their bullets can pierce our shield."

Something cold made itself felt through the clothing of the young Kentuckian, where his hip pressed the bottom of the canoe. Groping with his hand he found it was water, which he saw bubbling through a bullet-hole that was forced below the surface by the vigor of Deerfoot's arm. The opposite side of the boat was lifted correspondingly high, so that the sunlight shone through.

It will be understood that the conditions prevented the Shawanoe from towing the boat directly across the Mississippi. The swift current rendered a diagonal course necessary, and even that could not be pushed with enough power to prevent the party drifting down stream.

The red men kept up a desultory fire, but it was less frequent and manifestly less hopeful than at first. They could not but see that the craft was steadily passing beyond range, and the chances of inflicting injury grew less every moment. Soon the firing ceased altogether.

A moment later, the dripping form of Deerfoot flipped over the gunwale again, diffusing moisture in every direction. Without a word, he seized the paddle and plied it with his old-time skill and vigor. He looked keenly toward Kentucky, but saw nothing of his enemies: they must have concluded to withdraw and bestow their attention elsewhere.

But, convinced that they were still watching the course of the canoe, he again rose to his feet, and, circling the paddle over his head, gave utterance to a number of tantalizing whoops. His enemies had been outwitted with such cleverness that the youth could not deny himself the pleasure of expressing his exultation in that characteristic fashion.

When Jack Carleton discovered the water bubbling through the bullet-hole in the side of the canoe, as though it was a tiny spring that had just burst forth, he was afraid it would sink the craft. He inserted the end of his finger to check, in some measure, the flow; but Deerfoot, observing the act, shook his head to signify it was unnecessary.

"My brothers shall reach land," he said.

"I have no doubt we shall, since you are using the paddle again, but a little while ago it looked as though the land we were going to reach was at the bottom of the river. Deerfoot," added Jack, with a smile, "they have punctured this boat pretty thoroughly. I cannot understand how it was we all escaped when the bullets seemed to be everywhere."

"The Great Spirit turned aside the bullets," said the Shawanoe.

"No he didn't," was the sturdy response of Jack; "I acknowledge His mercies, which have followed us all the days of our lives, but that is not the way He works. You know as well as do I, that if you get in the way of a Shawanoe or Miami rifle, you will be hit unless you are very quick to get out of the way again; but for all that," the Kentuckian hastened to add, noticing a reproving expression on the countenance of his dusky friend, "my heart overflows with gratitude because we have been saved, when there seemed not the first ray of hope for us. The bullets came near, but none touched us."

"I dinks different," was the unexpected remark of Otto, who, assuming the sitting position, took off his cap, and, after fumbling awhile through his shock of yellow hair, actually found a ball, which he held up between his fingers.

"Vot don't you dinks ob him, eh?" he asked, triumphantly.

The amazed Jack took the object and examined it. No need was there of doing so; it was a rifle ball beyond question.

"How in the name of all that's wonderful did that get into your hair?" asked his friend.

"I 'spose he was shot dere, and my head was too hard for it to pass through, so he stops, don't it?"

The canoe was so close to shore that Deerfoot stopped paddling for

the moment and extended his hand for the missile. He simply held it up, glanced at it, and then tossed it back to Otto with the remark:

"The head of my brother is thick like the rock, but the ball was not fired from a gun."

With a bewildered expression, as though some forgotten fact was beginning to dawn upon him, Otto laid his cap in his lap and began searching through his hair with both hands. A moment later, his face beamed with one of his most expansive smiles, and he showed two more rifle-bullets that had been fished from the capillary depths.

"Yaw, I forgots him; I puts dem pullets in mine hat yesterday and I dinks dey was lost; dat is looky, ain't it?"

"I don't see anything particularly lucky about it," said Jack, who suspected that much of the lad's stupidity was assumed. A healthy youngster never fails to have the organ of mirth well forward in development, and the promptings of Otto's innate love of fun seemed to have little regard for time, place or circumstances.

The American Indian is probably the most melancholy of the five races of men; but even he is not lacking in the element of mirth which it is maintained is often displayed by dumb animals.

When Deerfoot heard the explanation of Otto, he did not smile, but with a grave expression of countenance gave his entire attention to the paddle in his hand. The German sat with his back toward the front of the canoe, the other two facing him, the Shawanoe being at the rear. The shore was only a few rods away, the Mississippi being much less agitated at the side than in the middle.

Without any display of effort, the warrior used the long paddle with all the power he could put forth. Very soon the craft attained a speed greater than either of the pale faces suspected.

"No," repeated Jack Carleton, "I can't see where there is any special luck in finding the bullets in your hair; I shouldn't be surprised if they had been there for a week. You must use a very coarse-toothed comb."

"My brother uses no comb at all," suggested Deerfoot, in a solemn voice, from the rear of the boat, which was speeding like an arrow over the water.

"Now you have struck the truth," laughed Jack.

Otto rose to a stooping position, steadying himself as best he could, and extended his hand to shake that of the Shawanoe, as proof that he indorsed his remark. He placed a hand on the shoulder of the Kentuckian to steady himself, for he knew that it is a difficult matter for one to keep his balance in such a delicate structure as an Indian canoe.

"Deerfoot ish not such a pig fool as he don't look to be, somedimes I dinks he knows more nodins dan nopody; den van he h'ists sail in his canoe and sails off mitout saying nodings to nopody, den I don't dinks."

Otto Relstaub had reached that point in his remark, when the bow of the canoe arrived in Louisiana. It struck the shore with a violence that started the seams through the entire structure. The author of all this of course kept his seat, for he had braced himself for the shock. At the same time he caught the shoulder of Jack Carleton, as if to hold him quiet, but it was all pretense on his part. There was no "grip" to his fingers, and Jack immediately plunged forward, his head bumping the bottom of the boat with a crash.

As for Otto Relstaub, the consequences took away his breath. As he was trying to stand on his feet, he had a great deal more of falling to do it than his friend. He did it most thoroughly, sitting down with such emphasis that the side of the canoe gave way, and he continued the act on dry land, being stopped by a small sapling in his path.

Otto whirled over on his face, and scrambling to his feet, stared around to learn the extent of the calamity. He gathered up his gun and hat, and then, stooping, passed his hands over the bark and attentively examined it.

"I dinks it ish split a good deal mit my head," he remarked, with a grave countenance.

Meanwhile, Jack Carleton had regained his upright position and shaken himself together. When he saw Otto in an inverted position, he broke into hearty laughter, hastened, no doubt, by the fact that Deerfoot was shaking from head to foot with mirth. His black eyes glistened with tears, caused by his amusement over the performance of the German. He was laughing all over, though he gave out not the slightest sound.

As for Jack Carleton, he chuckled and gurgled with a noise like that of water running out of a bottle, while the main victim of all this merriment was as solemn as an owl. After rubbing and adjusting himself, as may be said, he turned slowly about and gazed inquiringly at his friends in the boat, as if puzzled to understand the cause of their emotions.

"Vot ish dot you seem to laugh mit?" he demanded, in an injured voice; "I see nodings."

When the others had somewhat recovered from their mirth, Otto began laughing with scarcely less heartiness than they showed. The absurd occurrence seemed slow to impress itself upon his consciousness.

Deerfoot did not allow himself to remain idle many minutes. The fractured front of the craft being immovably fixed in the bank, he leaned his head over the side and washed the paint from his face. He disliked to disfigure himself in that fashion, though he always carried the stuff with him, to be used in such an emergency as has been described.

The blanket stolen from him had been carried away by one of the warriors, so that Deerfoot held only the rifle and ammunition in the way of a reprisal; but they were more than sufficient to replace the property he had lost, and he had no cause for complaint.

Stepping on solid land again, with the water dripping from his

clothing, the handsome warrior stood erect, and looked at Kentucky across the "Father of Waters." Instead of the villages and towns which now grace the locality, he saw only the lonely woods stretching north and south until lost to view.

But he knew enemies were there, and the keen vision of the youth was searching for them. They must have become discouraged over what had taken place, for not the first sign of the red men could be discerned. They seemed to have "folded their tents," and stolen off as silently as the Arabs.

But far down the Mississippi, a canoe put out from the Kentucky side and approached the opposite bank. It kept out of sight until Deerfoot the Shawanoe had withdrawn, and then it advanced with the care and stealth of the trained Indian on the war-path.

The craft was full of Miamis and Shawanoes, armed to the teeth, and impelled by the greatest incentive that can inflame the passions of the American Indian--revenge.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE LOUISIANA SHORE

At last the little party were across the Mississippi. The Indian canoe, so injured that it was useless until repaired, was pushed back into the turbid current and went spinning down the river, sometimes bumping against the bank and then dancing further from shore, until striking broadside against a nodding "sawyer," it overturned, and thereafter resembled an ordinary log, on its way toward the Gulf.

It was the first time that Jack Carleton had placed foot on Louisiana soil, and he stood for a moment gazing backward at Kentucky, amid whose confines he was born and beyond which he never strayed, except when on an occasional hunting excursion into Ohio.

"I wonder whether I shall ever tread those forests again," he said to himself; "I can't say that I'm anxious to do so, for there have always been too many Indians for comfort. They killed my father and broke the heart of my mother. No, Kentucky, good bye," he added, turning his face toward the west, with a feeling that in that direction lay his future home.

Meanwhile Deerfoot and Otto took but a few minutes to prepare for their journey. The Indian having lost his blanket, held only the rifle and ammunition by way of superfluous luggage, and it could not be said that his companions were unduly burdened, since the runaway colt had relieved them in that respect.

Deerfoot slung his long bow back of his shoulders, as he was accustomed to do when he wished the unrestrained use of both arms, and carried the rifle as the others did theirs.

The belief obtained with all three that in leaving Kentucky they

bade good-bye to most of the personal peril to which they had been subjected. The reader knows that that section was ravaged by the fierce Shawanoes, Miamis, Hurons and other tribes who were implacable in their hostility to the white men, and who did so much to give it the name of the Dark and Bloody Ground by which it was so long known. There were thousands of red men ranging through the immense province known as Louisiana, and the crack of the hostile rifle, the war-cry of the dusky chieftain, and the shock, of mortal combat marked the meeting of the races, whether on the clearing, in the forest, or in the lonely defile in the mountain.

In that section to which I have referred more than once, as now bearing the name of Missouri, the fighting between the whites and Indians was much less than on the eastern bank of the Mississippi. It will be understood, therefore, why, when the little company of friends stood on the western shore, they felt much less concern than while on the other side.

Less than two days' tramp to the westward lay the young settlement where dwelt the mother of Jack Carleton, the parents of Otto Relstaub and a dozen other families who had emigrated thither from Kentucky. Far beyond and to the southward among the wildest fastnesses of the Ozark mountains the young Shawanoe had taken refuge, where he felt secure against those of his race who hated him with irrestrainable ferocity.

As it would require no great digression on the part of Deerfoot, and as it was not to be supposed that time was very valuable to him, Jack and Otto supposed he would go with them the entire distance to the log cabin of Jacob Relstaub. To their surprise, however, he quietly said he could keep them company only a short time longer.

"I had no doubt you would be with us to the end," said the disappointed Jack.

"It would make the heart of Deerfoot glad if he could go with his brothers whom he loves; but he cannot."

"Vot ain't de reason?" asked Otto, unrestrained by the sense of propriety which held the tongue of Jack silent.

"Deerfoot is called yonder," was the reply, pointing south of the path which lay before the others.

They were silent a minute or so, in the hope that, he would explain his meaning, but he did not, and even Otto saw that he had no right to question him further.

Aware that his friends were waiting for him to add something, Deerfoot continued:

"The path of my brothers is straight, and they will not get down on their knees to look for the trail. There are no Shawanoes among the trees to fire when they are not looking, and Deerfoot can may no words that will do good."

"It is not that which causes us to hope for your company," replied Jack, who was standing several feet away from the youthful warrior and looking in his serious countenance; "but it is because we like

you, not only for what we have heard from others, but for what we have seen with our own eyes, and for what you have done for us, that we are loath to part with you."

"Deerfoot will go part of the way," the Indian hastened to say, perceiving the feeling of his friends, "but it cannot be long."

"Far be it from me to question what you do; no right belongs to me, but I could not let you go without telling bow much we appreciate what you have done for us, and how much we admire your noble character."

It was one of the peculiarities of Deerfoot that he never accepted the most pointed compliment. When forced to reply to a direct one, he turned it aside with an indifference which showed he placed no value upon it. As Jack Carleton remarked later on, praise ran from Deerfoot like water from a duck's back.

But another matter forced itself upon the attention of the boys, who were on their way to the settlement. It has been stated already that the father of Otto Relstaub was penurious, miserly, and cruel. The colt on which the boy had ridden to Coatesville, Kentucky, and part of the way back again, was the better of the two horses owned by him. Its loss was certain to throw him into a great rage, and doubtless would bring down the severest punishment on the back and shoulders of the son.

Jack Carleton understood this prospect as well as did Otto himself, and he was of the belief that a resolute effort should be put forth to recover the horse. When the matter was stated to Deerfoot, his own knowledge of the ill-tempered German caused him to urge the attempt. In fact he would have done so, had the case been otherwise, for the value of the animal was considerable. Furthermore, Deerfoot was of the opinion that the colt could be regained without serious difficulty, and he told them they had little to fear from hostile Indians.

Had the Shawanoe seen the canoe, loaded to the gunwales with red men in their war paint, which at that very moment was stealing close under the Louisiana shore, he would have modified his remarks to a very considerable extent.

The peculiarly original manner in which the boys crossed the Mississippi had resulted in carrying them some distance below the trail that trended to the westward. As the runaway horse had undergone the same experience, and as Otto had descried him when he emerged from the river, it was easy to locate quite closely the point where he entered Louisiana.

"It ish below vere we don't stands not dis moment," he said, when they were ready to move off.

"My gracious, Otto," exclaimed Jack, "can't you handle English a little better than that? I thought your father was the crookedest of speech of any person I ever heard, but he can't be any worse than you."

"Yaw-don't it?" grinned Otto.

"Try to improve yourself! You ain't much of a fool on other matters, and you may as well learn to talk like a civilized being. I have seen Deerfoot shocked more than once at the horrible style in which you mangle the king's English. I want you to promise to make an effort to do better; will you?"

"Yaw; I dinks not efery dimes dot I does much better as nefer vos; vot doesn't you dinks not apout it, eh-don't it? Yaw!"

Deerfoot had taken a couple of steps along the bank with the purpose of hunting the hoof-prints of the missing horse, but he paused and half turned about, looking with an amused expression at his friends who were holding their characteristic conversation.

There was something noteworthy in the fact that while Otto had heard the English tongue spoken quite correctly, from the hour he was able to toddle out doors, he could not compare in his lingual skill to Deerfoot, who had never attempted a word of the language until wounded and taken prisoner by the whites. What caused all this difference?

The same thing which distinguishes one man from another, and crowns failure with success, or reverses it, as the case may be--brains.

The three youths moved down the bank in an irregular Indian file, for no one saw the need of extra precaution. Deerfoot was about a rod in advance, walking with a brisk step, for his searching eyes took in everything in the field of vision, and the trail for which he was searching was sure to be marked with a distinctness that could permit no mistake.

It was the same apparently endless forest which met their eyes when they looked across from Kentucky, and which seemed to encroach on the borders of the river itself, as though envious of its space. There was little undergrowth, and they advanced without difficulty.

"I dinks be ish close to vere de colt goomes owet", said Otto, his words uttered with such deliberation that it was manifest he was doing his best to heed the appeal of the young Kentuckian.

"That is a decided improvement," Jack hastened to say, with an approving smile. "You don't pronounce very well, but you built up that sentence better than usual."

"Dot's vot I dinks no times, yaw--I means dot ish vot I dinks mine Belf."

"Good!" said Jack, reaching out and patting his shoulder; "if you will devote a few minutes to hard thought before speaking a single word, you will improve until one of these days you will be able to speak as well as Deerfoot."

"Yaw, dot ish nodings--yaw, holds on I dinks hard!" exclaimed Otto, resolutely checking himself until he could gain time to frame the expression he had in mind. But before he succeeded, a slight exclamation from Deerfoot made own his discovery of the trail for which they were hunting.

The others hastened to his side, and looking at the ground, saw the

hoof-prints of the horse that had run away with Otto Relstaub. As the animal was well shod, there could be no mistaking the trail, differing from that of the Indian ponies, which, as a matter of course, were without such protection for their feet.

"Yaw, dot ish him," remarked the German, his effort being to surprise Deerfoot as well as to please Jack Carleton by the correctness of his diction.

A brief examination of the foot-prints showed that the colt had taken matters leisurely after emerging from the Mississippi. Instead of breaking into a gallop and plunging straight into the woods, he had halted long enough to eat what little grass grew within reach, after which he wandered off for more.

The trail was followed several hundred yards, until a rising ground was reached. It was observed that for the distance named, the colt was following a course slightly north of west-the very one which, if persevered in long enough, would take him to the log cabin of his owner.

Deerfoot said it was likely that the animal had set out of his own accord to go home, and, provided he was not secured by some wandering Indians, it was more than likely he would arrive at that point in advance of the boys themselves.

Jack Carleton held the same views, and Otto, after taking a full minute to shape up his ideas, said with great impressiveness:

"Dot ish vot I dinks as--yaw, I dinks dot."

"Hold on," interrupted Jack, raising his hand with a laugh; "you have it straight now; don't spoil it by trying to improve it."

Otto nodded his head and held his peace. He was wise when he did so.

Deerfoot was on the point of adding an encouraging remark, when his keen vision detected something a short distance in advance which claimed his attention. Without a word, he motioned for them to hold their peace, and then ran rapidly several paces toward that which had caught his eye.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SMOKE OF A CAMPFIRE

Deerfoot identified the object before reaching it. His friends followed him doubtingly, and while a rod to the rear, saw him gather it up and hold it aloft.

"It is your blanket," said Jack Carleton to his companion.

"Dot ish what it be."

It was easy to understand why the piece of coarse cloth lay on the ground. Instead of rolling it up with the smaller one belonging to Jack Carleton, Otto had made a separate bundle and strapped it behind the other effects on the back of the horse. The latter in moving among the trees had displaced it.

It was saturated with water, which dripped from the folds when raised from the ground. Jack and Otto twisted it between them until all the moisture it was possible to wring out left it in a dozen tiny rills. "Deerfoot," said the German, wheeling about, "dot ish de blanket vot--vot I don't--vot I put on your shoulders ven it rained."

The Shawanoe bowed his head, smiled and said:

"Deerfoot knows his brother speaks truth."

"I gives him to you--be ish yours."

The Indian made no move to take it, and Jack added:

"We shall soon find the colt and with him my blanket and the other articles he has with him. We do not need this; you have none, and you have many miles to traverse before you reach your home; we shall be glad if you will take it from us."

Deerfoot partly raised his hand to accept the gift, but stepped back with a shake of his head.

"When my brother goes to the cabin of his father, and, he asks him for the blanket, what will he say?"

"I vill tells him dot I gives him mit you."

"Then the father of my brother will strike him."

"I dinks dot ish so," said Otto with a grin and shrug of his shoulders, "but I be glad to take a flogging for him dot does so much for me--don't it?"

The youth compressed his thin lips and made a single shake of his head, so positive in its character that nothing more was needed.

"But," added Jack Carleton, convinced from the hesitancy shown at first by Deerfoot, that he really wished the blanket, "if you are so desirous of saving Otto from a flogging, it can be easily done. When we take back the colt and Mr. Relstaub asks for the blanket, we can tell him that an Indian took it before we found the horse. That will be the truth."

Deerfoot looked straight in the face of the young Kentuckian, and his lips parted as if on the point of speaking, but he refrained, and with his shadowy smile, again shook his head. The gesture said as plainly as the words could have done:

"What you propose is as much a falsehood as anything can be."

"But I will give Otto my blanket," persisted Jack Carleton, determined to overcome the scruples of the remarkable Indian, "that will make

things right."

"Where is my brother's blanket?" asked Deerfoot with a grave countenance.

"I shall soon find it: the horse can't be far off."

"Deerfoot will wait till my brother finds it."

"Well! well", said Jack, with a wondering sigh, "you are the strangest person I ever saw. It isn't worth while to argue any question with you. So we'll let it pass."

Such seemed to be the wish of Deerfoot, for, with his silent step, he moved along the elevated ground, until he arrived at a spot where the trees were so few and stunted that an extended view was obtained. There the three halted side by side, and spent several minutes gazing over the surrounding country.

Looking toward Kentucky, the majestic Mississippi was in plain sight as it swept southward, while beyond stretched the undulating forest, until it met the dim horizon in the distance. Far to the southward was seen the smoke of a campfire. It was unusually murky, and, as it ascended in a wavy line through the clear atmosphere, it looked as if the soiled finger of some great ogre had been drawn against the clear blue sky.

But it was a sight which every one of the party had seen before, and it excited little interest. It was no concern of theirs what took place in Kentucky, and Jack and Otto turned to survey the "promised land," which opened out to the westward.

Woods, patches of natural clearing, hills and misty mountains many miles away: these were the general features of the immense area which expanded before their sight. Ordinarily there was nothing among these of special account, but the eye of Deerfoot, which never seemed to lose anything, detected almost instantly a "sign" that signified a great deal to him and his companions.

In a depression, no more than a furlong distant, could be observed the faintest possible tinge of smoke, slowly ascending from a mass of dense forest. It was so faint, in fact, that neither Jack nor Otto noticed it, until Deerfoot pointed his finger in that direction, and said "The camp of red men!"

The vapor was of a light blue, just above the tree-top's, and it rose only a few feet more, when it dissolved in the clear atmosphere. But it showed that a camp-fire was burning beneath, though it may have been kindled many hours before, and those who started it possibly were miles away in the depths of the forest.

"Suppose they are Shawanoes or Miamis?" remarked Jack.

"They are not Shawanoes," said Deerfoot quietly.

"Miamis then?"

"Deerfoot thinks they are not Miamis, but he cannot be sure till he sees the camp."

And without further remark, he went down the slope with a rapid step, which, it is hardly necessary to say, gave out no noise at all. Jack concluded he could not feel much misgiving or he would not have allowed him and Otto to follow so close on his heels. But they were some distance off, when he turned about and motioned them to halt.

"Let my brothers wait for Deerfoot," he said softly.

Knowing he would be obeyed without question, Deerfoot continued his advance, speedily disappearing from sight among the trees and undergrowth, while the others did as he requested.

The discovery of the camp-fire not only caused some misgivings about the personal safety of the little company, but it suggested that the missing horse was lost beyond recovery. Horse-flesh is the most "sensitive capital" on the frontier, and he who pilfers it runs more danger of lynching than does the man who takes the life of a fellow being. To the Indian, the noble animal is as indispensable as to the settler, and, if the party who had made the halt in that neighborhood learned that an unusually fine steed was wandering near them, they would lose no time in making him captive.

But from the moment our young friends left their elevated position, they followed a different route from that of the colt.

"Mine gracious!" whispered the disturbed German lad: "I dinks dot if they don't got de golt then the golt don't got dem, and fader he won't be as bleased as nefer vos."

"There isn't any hurry, Otto, in putting your words together, and it is a good time for you to try to string them so they will make a little sense."

"Yaw; I vill tries."

"Sh! There comes some one!"

It was Deerfoot, who appeared a moment later, and beckoned his friends to join him. His manner, while not careless, was so manifestly free from solicitude, that Jack knew there was no ground for alarm. He and Otto overtook the Shawanoe at the moment he stepped into the open space where a camp-fire had been burning some time before.

In fact it was still burning, else the smoke would not have caught the eye of the Indian youth; but it must have been smoldering for hours, judging from the thinness of the vapor, and the fact that little more than a pile of ashes and decaying embers met the sight.

There is naught to be said in the way of description. The fire, when kindled, had been a large one, and all the burning sticks were in one pile instead of two or three, as is often the case. The charred ends protruded irregularly from the white, feathery ashes, and one solitary brand, smothered almost from sight, sent up the faint bluish vapor which, creeping through the foliage overhead, told the vigilant Shawanoe where to look for the camp of his enemies.

"How long have they been gone?" asked Jack, gazing carefully around and assuring himself that no strangers were near.

"They went away when the sun first came up from the woods; many hours have passed since they left."

"Which course did they take?"

Deerfoot pointed toward the south.

"Were you right in saying they were not Shawanoes?"

"They did not belong to my tribe."

"Ah, then they were Miamis. I made up my mind to that."

"My brother is wrong," replied Deerfoot, with a flitting smile; "they were Osage Indians."

"How don't you know dot?"

"My other brother is wrong: Deerfoot said not he did not know it; he does know they were Osages."

Jack Carleton poked Otto in the side.

"Even Deerfoot corrects your language."

"All rights," said Otto, bristling up; "I'ven I don't haf a mind to, I talks mebber better nor you does; but ven I does, den I don't; so I shets up my mouth up, mebber--don't it?"

Deerfoot stepped to a fallen tree, which no doubt had served as a seat for most of the party, and picked up a strip of blanket, hardly a foot long and no more than an inch wide. It was not only cunningly woven, but showed brilliant blue and yellow colors on a background of black.

"This was the blanket of an Osage warrior," said the Shawanoe, flinging it to Otto, who turned it over several times in silence, Jack looking over his shoulder.

"I suppose he caught sight of that before we came up and learned the truth; don't you think so?"

"I don't dink nodings more," replied Otto, still pouting from the offence given a few minutes previous.

Bending over, Deerfoot carefully drew some leaves aside and revealed the upper bone of a deer's foreleg, to which a good quantity of partially broiled venison was clinging. Judging from this discovery and the number of bones scattered about, the Osages had more food than they needed.

"We--that is, you and I, Deerfoot--are hungry. Is the meat in shape for us to eat?"

The Shawanoe had satisfied himself by examination that it was ready

for the palate, and he so expressed himself.

"That is good; there is just enough to make as a good dinner. Otto doesn't look as though he cared about any, and he can wait till tomorrow."

This statement of the situation quickly loosened the tongue of the sturdy German, whose hunger had reached a ravenous point.

"I speaks mit myself luf ven I vishes," he hastened to say; "I vos as hungry as nefer could be, and what for you dinks I ain't, eh?"

Jack laughed, and, sitting on the same tree which had served the red men, all three used their keen hunting-knives upon the rarely-cooked meat. They could have enjoyed much more had it been at their disposal; but as it was, they made a substantial meal, receiving enough nourishment to last them till the morrow.

"How many warriors were here?" asked Jack of their leader.

"Seven," was the prompt reply.

"What brought them to this place?"

"They were hunting; an Osage village is not many miles off yonder," said Deerfoot, pointing to the southwest; "and they have gone there. They spent the night here."

"Did they get my horse?" asked Otto, whose face was aglow with good nature and grease.

"My brother shall soon know."

CHAPTER XX

"GOOD-BYE!"

Deerfoot directed his course toward the elevation where he and his friends stood when they first caught sight of the smoke of the camp-fire. It was an easy matter to determine, whether the Osages had discovered the horse while in that section. If they had not done so, the probabilities were against their finding him at all.

An interesting question had already been answered by Deerfoot, respecting the degree of hostility of the Osage Indians. There was comfort in the thought that they were not active and malignant in their enmity. They were not likely to trail a white man for the sake of taking his life, as their fierce brethren across the Mississippi loved to do, nor did they possess the courage of the warlike Shawanoes, whose encounters with the early pioneers of the West form the most thrilling episodes in its history.

But, like the vagabond red men of to-day, the Osages were of that character that a white man would much prefer not to meet them in a lonely place, unless help was present or within call. If they

should come across the two boys, their treatment of them would depend very much on the mood in which they happened to be. They would be inclined to rob them of everything worth taking, and might end the matter by shooting both or turning them adrift without guns or ammunition.

Had Deerfoot been alone, he would have given them no thought. He had visited their villages more than once, and though the questions of several of their warriors showed that they regarded him with suspicion, they offered no indignity, and made no objection to his departure.

Had the Osages found the wandering they would refuse to give him up on the demand of the owner. In that case, as in one already related, he could be regained only by strategy, in which the boys were sure to need the help of Deerfoot.

But all this speculation speedily ended. An examination revealed the fact that the trail of the steed and that of the warriors crossed, but the latter was fully two hours older than the former, and from the point of intersection they diverged. Thus it was proven that the colt had been grazing for a considerable time close to the Indians without them suspecting it.

The Osages had continued traveling in a southwesterly direction, while the stray horse had kept on in a course slightly to the north of west. There could be no doubt that the warriors were making their way homeward, while the animal seemed guided by an instinct that promised to place him in the possession of his owner, without any assistance from the son.

The discovery was most gratifying to all parties, Deerfoot expressing his pleasure that Otto was not likely to suffer at the hands of his irate parent for the disaster which was unavoidable on his part.

"Good fortune awaits my brother," said he; "he may not meet any red men on his way home, where Deerfoot hopes the horse will greet him when he arrives."

"Did you see any Indians on this side the Mississippi when you were riding him?" asked Jack.

Otto shook his head, as he was sure that style of answer could not be criticized by either of his companions.

"The outlook is a good one indeed," said Jack, heartily; "and what you have done, Deerfoot, is more than we can ever repay. You need not be told that if it ever comes within our power to give you help, it will not be denied."

To their surprise the young Shawanoe extended his hand to Otto.

"Good-bye, brother."

The lad shook it warmly, and said:

"Ish you going not--I means, will you leave us?"

"Deerfoot must go; good-bye, brother."

The second farewell was addressed to Jack Carleton, who fervently pressed the soft hand, and said with much feeling:

"Sorry are we to part company, but you your own master. I hope we shall soon meet again!"

"We shall," was all that the Shawanoe said as he released his hand and moved off, vanishing almost instantly among the trees.

The boys stood several minutes, silent and thoughtful, looking toward the point where the Shawanoe was last seen, as though they expected him to return; but the silence around them continued as profound as at "creation's morn." They knew that when the young warrior took such a step, he was in earnest.

He would have been glad to keep them company, but some good reason took him in another direction.

"We shall meet him again," said Jack Carleton, with a slight sigh of regret, recalling the last words of Deerfoot; "from all that was told me about him in Kentucky, he is such a friend to the whites that he was never away from their settlements for a very long time. I have been anxious to know him."

"They used to tell von great stories about him," said Otto, speaking with great care.

"And I never believed one half of them. The idea of a young Shawanoe reading his Bible every day, and being able to write the prettiest kind of a hand, was something that made us laugh, but every word of it was true, as he proved to us."

"Den vot pig dings be doos in de woods!"

"I should say so. Just think of it, Otto! There we were among a pile of logs, surrounded as you may say by Indian warriors, bent on having our scalps, and yet he delivered a letter to us, explaining the plan he had formed, and then alone scared away the whole lot, so we could out. When you get back home and tell parents this story, what will they say?"

"Mine fader will say nodings, but he vill cut pig stick and bang me as bard as nefer vos lying."

"And I can't wonder much at it," said Jack with a laugh, "but it will be truth, nevertheless, and it is no more wonderful than many things he has done."

"Vy doesn't dey calls him Deerfoot--dot ish, why does dey?"

"On account of his fleetness; he is the swiftest runner ever known in Kentucky. A year or two ago, he was captured by the Wyandots, who hate him worse than poison. He pretended he was lame, which put the idea in the head of his capture to have some fun with him. They took him out on a long clearing and placed him in front of the swiftest warriors, and then told him to run for his life. Well, he ran."

"Did they cotch him and kill him, or didn't he get away?"

"Those Indians," said Jack, ignoring the absurdity of Otto's question, "saw such running as they never looked upon before. Deerfoot just scooted away from them, as though he had wings. One of the Hurons had treated him very bad and Deerfoot paid him."

"How vosn't dot?"

"He drove his tomahawk through his skull."

"Yaw; I dinks he doesn't bodder Deerfoot not much more."

"I never heard that he did, but you can't understand why the Indians hate him as they do. I've heard that Tecumseh offered a dozen horses, and I don't know how much wampum and other presents, to the warrior who would bring back his scalp. But I've no doubt he had to send out a proclamation taking back the offer."

"Vy vosn't dot?"

"I've been told that the rule was when a Huron or Shawanoe went out to hunt for Deerfoot, that was the last heard of him. He never came back, and you see that Deerfoot still wears his scalp."

"Vere didn't them goes to vot didn't comes back?"

"To their happy hunting-grounds. Sometimes, their bodies were found moldering in the woods. And sometimes no one ever knew where they perished. Deerfoot is a Christian (and, Otto, made me feel ashamed of myself), but he isn't the kind to sit down and allow any one to walk off with his scalp. Tecumseh is a young chief, who's is ambitious to make war upon the whites. He must have concluded that if he didn't stop his warriors hunting Deerfoot there would be none left for him! I can't understand, Otto, how it was your father turned him away from

his door, when he stopped there at night in a storm."

"Ah, Jack, you doesn't know how mean mine fader ish," said the German with a grin though proud of his parent.

"He couldn't have known that it was Deerfoot," said Jack, reflectively.

"Dot wouldn't make no difference; he treat all Indians de same. One dimes they stole a pig vot didn't pelongs to him and he whipped me as hard as nefer vos, and he hates all Indians for dot."

"It is a great mistake," added Jack thoughtfully, "for you know how revengeful they are, and one of these days some trumping redskin that he has abused will steal up to his house and shoot him dead."

"Dot is vot I tolds him," said Otto; "and he will be as sorry as dunderation ven it afift too late."

"Well," added Jack, looking around him, "it isn't worth while to stand here, when we have such a long ways to travel, and there is no certainty the colt hasn't changed his course and gone away from the

settlement instead of toward it."

Otto agreed with his friend, and, picking up his damp blanket, he threw it over his shoulder, and each with his gun in his hand, resumed the pursuit of the stray, which they hoped was at no great distance.

The hoof-prints showed that the horse continued to take matters very philosophically. His fastest gait was a leisurely walk, and often he stood still and nibbled the buds of the vegetation not yet fully developed.

It was gratifying to find that in spite of an occasional digression, his general course was as named. It is pleasant to discover that the missing wanderer is steadily making his way, even though he is a long time in arriving at his destination.

It was comparatively early in the afternoon when Deerfoot the Shawanoe bade them good-bye, and for two hours the route underwent little change; but at time, Jack Carleton was forced to admit that the course they were following was not the one to take them to the settlement.

Shortly after the departure of their friend, they crossed the trail over which Otto had ridden some days before, and then the hoof-prints tended more to the north, so that, in a general way, the boys took the direction of the Mississippi itself. It could not be expected that while keeping a considerable distance from water, would follow its amazing tortuosity, probably surpasses that of any river on the globe. Thus it came about that sometimes Jack and Otto found themselves close to the immense stream and then again they were a long way inland.

"It seems to me," said Jack, when the afternoon was drawing to a close, "that we ought be quite near the colt; we have gone steadily forward, while he has often stopped, and as yet has not traveled faster than a walk."

"But he starts a long time before we starts," said Otto.

"Not so very long. There's one thing quite certain: he doesn't care whether he finds his way to the settlement or not, for he isn't trying to do so."

"He changes again, don't he?"

"Likely enough, and he may turn still further off from the right course. It is getting so late that we shall have hard work to reach home with him to-morrow."

"When we find him we get on him and make him go like he never goes with before."

"We won't be able to travel fast until we get him back to the regular path, where the trees and limbs won't interfere with us."

"If Deerfoot tells us how close he is to us," said Otto, alluding to the skill of the Shawanoe in interpreting the age of a trail.

"He would do so at a glance. Helloa!"

Just then Jack, who was slightly in advance of his friend, caught sight of a bundle similar that which the Shawanoe found several hours before.

Hurrying forward, it was seen to be the blanket of Jack Carleton, which, like the other, had come displaced and fallen from the back of the wandering horse. Like that, too, it was saturated with Mississippi water, which, as far as could, the boys wrung from it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NEIGH OF A HORSE

The stray horse appeared to be distributing the property of the boys in a promiscuous fashion. So far as they knew, he still retained his equipments and a roll of personal effects, fastened in front of the saddle instead of behind it, as was the case with the blankets.

"Seems to me," remarked Otto, who began to feel some weariness and impatience, "dot the animal ish not a good vile getting tired so as he vants to sot down and rest."

"He is likely to do so when it begins to grow dark, which will be before long," added Jack Carleton, noting the closing day.

The friends had been hopeful from the first that they would overtake the missing horse before sunset. They had been cheered by the belief that they were not far behind him at the start, and it was certain they had made much better progress than he, but it now looked as if they were to be disappointed.

When they arrived on the edge of a natural clearing, several acres in extent and covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, they were sure the horse was there, but a careful scrutiny showed no signs of him, though his tracks indicated that he had cropped some of the grass before passing on.

It was comparatively easy traveling for the boys, the woods being notably clear of the vines and undergrowth, which often added to the labor of journeying through them. They had not yet seen bird, animal or living person after parting company with Deerfoot, and Jack was conscious more than once of a strange feeling of loneliness, such as comes over the traveler when wandering in a vast and desolate land.

"Is this so different from Ohio and Kentucky?" he asked himself; "are there no Shawanoes because there is no game for them to hunt?"

He smiled when he asked himself the latter question, for his own knowledge rendered it pointless. He knew that the game was as limitless on one side of the Mississippi as on the other.

The sun-had gone down behind the rim of forest, when they found themselves on the edge of a clearing more extensive than the former, and intersected by a small, winding stream of water.

"Here, we will camp," said Jack, throwing down his moist bundle and leaning his rifle against a tree; "it will soon be so dark that we can't see the tracks of the horse, and, if we push on, we'll only have to do our work over again."

"Dot ish vot I dinks," said Otto, imitating the action. It must not be forgotten that the German, since the reproof received from the young Shawanoe, had resolved to improve his manner of expressing himself. He was of the age that he could do so rapidly, and he had (what he never possessed before) an earnest wish to succeed.

Something in the way of food would have been appreciated by both the sturdy youths, but nothing of the kind presented itself, and it was no great hardship for them to wait until the morrow.

"Vill a fire we kindle?" asked Otto.

"We may as well do so, for we shall need it to help dry our blankets, which have enough moisture, even after wringing them, to last a week."

The night was more chilly than the preceding one, and the warmth of the blankets would have been pleasant to both. As it was, their only resource was the extra fire, for which they began preparations.

They were plentifully supplied in the way of fuel, which they gathered, throwing it down in a pile near where they intended to start the blaze. The stream was small, but the water was clear, cool and refreshing. Whoever has been burned with consuming fever, or tormented by a torturing thirst, can never forget the ecstasy which thrilled every nerve, when he quaffed his full of the colorless, odorless and tasteless fluid, more exquisite in the delight it imparted than can be the "nectar of the gods."

"Ali!" said Otto, with a long-drawn sigh of happiness, "I could live on dot."

"It's certain you couldn't live very long without it," remarked his friend, as he drew down another armful of dry and decayed wood. "I don't think there is much to fear in the way of thirst in this part of the world. There may be deserts further west toward the Pacific, such as they have in other parts of the world, but I don't believe we can reach them in a week's journey."

"Ish not looking for them," said Otto, with a grin, "'cause I does not see vot I does with them ven I finds 'em."

"Our country is too rich in its natural resources to make it probable that it has much in the way of waste land--"

"Mine gracious!" exclaimed Otto, with a start, "didn't you hear dot?"

"Of course I did," replied Jack, turning his head like a flash and

gazing across the clearing.

Indeed it would have been impossible for either to avoid noting the sound, which was the unmistakable neigh of a horse at no great distance from them.

"Dot vos de golt," said Otto, with a beaming countenance. "He vos near by and not far off."

Night was closing in so rapidly that the vision of the two was necessarily shortened. They could not see entirely across the clearing or opening, but in the dim, uncertain light, Otto Relstaub was positive he detected the animal they were so anxious to find.

"Dot ish he," he insisted, leveling his arm with the extended finger pointed at a certain spot. "He ish looking mit dis way; he has seen us and he dinks he don't know us, and he sings out mit dot way to ax us who we ain't; dot ish his style."

Jack Carleton was naturally strong of vision, and he believed his companion was right. He was able to discern some object, which, through the gloom, resembled a horse that seemed to have become aware of the presence of strangers, and, throwing up his head, had challenged them in the manner named.

"I think you are right," said Jack, still going across the intervening space, "though we can't make sure without getting closer to him. It is barely possible that he may be a horse of another color."

Otto shook his head by way of dissent. He could not be convinced he was not looking upon the very animal for which they had been hunting ever since they reached the western bank of the Mississippi.

The only way to settle the doubt was at their command. Nothing was to prevent a closer inspection of the quadruped that had awakened such interest.

They felt the necessity of great care. The horse was high-spirited and wild, and the taste gained of freedom had undoubtedly increased the difficulty of his capture. Great caution would be necessary to avoid scaring him away altogether.

It will be seen also that if they frightened the colt into dashing into the woods, it would be hard, under any circumstances, to secure him. He would run a good distance, and the morrow would compel another long and laborious search.

A simple plan suggested itself: one would make a cautious advance across the clearing, while the other worked his way around to the other side, so that the two would close in upon the animal, as may be said, and if he fled from the first he would run into the custody of the second.

As Jack was quicker in his movements, beside being a better horseman, than Otto, it was agreed that he should pass through the woods until beyond the animal; when he arrived at the proper point he was to notify Otto by means of the whistle which had served them so often as a signal. Then the young German would use the most

seductive methods of which he was master soothe the colt into submission.

What was to be feared was that in the gloom the animal would fail to recognize his master and would be unusually timid on that account. The moon would shed no light on the scene for an hour or two, and from what has been said it will be admitted that the friends had undertaken a delicate and difficult task.

But the anxiety of both to obtain the animal was too great for them to throw away an opportunity, however slight. Jack, therefore, passed the few paces necessary to reach the cover of the wood, and with the promise that he should soon be heard from, disappeared.

The fire had not yet been started, and Otto, stood leaning on his gun and looking off in the gloom toward the colt that had led him on such a long chase. The darkness had increased since the first sight of the animal, so that he was no longer visible; but the lad was confident he had not changed his position, nor was he likely to do so for some time to come. The trail showed that he had been on the move almost continuously since morning, and he must feel a certain degree of fatigue that would make such a rest acceptable.

Otto held his position until Jack had time to reach a point beyond the colt, when he laid down his gun and began his cautious advance. He walked straight across the clearing, until once more he was able to trace the outlines that caught his eye some time before.

"I doesn't knows vot he don't change mit, he stands where he stood a few minutes after awhile," said Otto to himself, relapsing into his old unintelligible style of expression, now that no one was at his elbow to criticize him. "Mebbe he don't do dot and mebbe he does, don't it?"

What the lad meant to express was his doubt whether the colt had moved during the preceding few minutes. If he had done so, it was to so slight extent, that it was hardly noticeable.

So soon as the boy's eyes rested on him again he was satisfied the colt was asleep in the standing position. His head was down, and his whole demeanor was that of rest, and consequently ignorance of what was going on near him.

"Dot ish goot," was the thought of Otto, "for he don't hear me ven I creeps up to him, and perfore he don't knows it he don't know nodings and I have him."

There was promise of such an issue of the attempt be proposed to make, provided he should succeed in stealing up to the animal without detection.

Otto stood motionless a moment, hoping to hear some signal from Jack Carleton, but none came, and it was only simple prudence on his part to move forward without delay.

"I dinks I does it," he muttered, hopefully, when he found himself within a couple of rods of the colt without having disturbed it in the slightest degree. "It ish as easy as nefer vos, and I will grab him in one two dree minute, and den I whips him 'cause he runs mit

away, and den--mine gracious!"

It seems as if the vines which had tormented him so much during the day were not yet through with the honest German. Even on the tract of open-forest or clearing they intruded themselves, and he suddenly felt the familiar rasping vegetable wire twisting about his ankles. Impatient that such an obstruction should be encountered, he made a spiteful kick of the foot, meant to snap the vine asunder and to free himself; but he miscalculated the strength of the resistant.

His foot was more inextricably entangled than before, and a second fierce effort sent him forward on his hands and knees. Had his rifle been in hand it is more than likely it would have been discharged.

Otto was angered, because he was sure he had frightened the colt into dashing off at full speed. He sprang to his feet and made for the horse, resolved to secure him at all hazards.

He was spurred on by observing that the animal was slumbering so soundly that he had not yet taken the alarm. The distance was short, and he was very hopeful.

"Whoa, whoa dere," called out Otto, in a soothing voice, "don't you runs away agin dimes more, or py gracious I vill whip you so dot you vill want to die--"

While uttering the words he was advancing with the utmost haste. Feeling himself nigh enough to make the leap, he did so, and threw both arms around what he supposed to be he head of his colt. And as he did so he discovered that it was not the colt at all!

CHAPTER XXII

A STRANGER

No boy could feel more chagrin and humiliation than did Otto Relstaub, when he sprang forward, and, seizing what he supposed to be the stray colt, found instead that he had grasped the stump of a tree.

He was speechless for a full minute, and could only stand still and wonder how it was possible for him to make such a blunder. A tree close to the edge of the clearing had been stricken by lightning, and partly breaking off some three or four feet above ground, a couple of yards of length lay with the top on the earth. In the gloom of the evening it could be readily mistaken for a different object, though Otto might well wonder where the resemblance to a horse could be figured out. But for the neigh which reached the ears of the young pioneers, they never would have made the mistake.

Still the fact remained that a short time before a horse was within call, and Otto was quite sure it was the one he was seeking. Night, however, had fully descended, and it was useless to hunt further before the morrow.

"Dot ish too bad," he said to himself, "but isn't I glad dot Jack didn't come up and sees me, for he would laugh till he went dead-- mine gracious!"

It seemed indeed as if the youth had arrived in a strange latitude, for while he remained communing with himself, he caught the unmistakable odor of tobacco-smoke in the air. Some one was smoking a pipe whose fumes were too rank to permit any mistake on his part.

The discovery was startling enough to cause a shiver of fear, for it was manifest he was close to a stranger, since Jack Carleton did not use the noxious weed in any form. Otto bitterly reproached himself for leaving his rifle beyond reach, for his was the situation of the individual who may not have needed such a weapon often, but when he did, he wanted it with an emphasis beyond question.

"Dis ish de spot where I doesn't vant to be," was his truthful conclusion, "so I dinks I goes somewhere else."

He felt a strong yearning to break into a run, but dared not do so. Though filled with fear, his right policy was to conceal all evidence of it. He therefore turned about with the purpose of walking off with a dignified air; but he had taken only the first step, when a shock like that from an electric battery went through him, caused by the single exclamation:

"Oof!"

It was the hail of an Indian. Otto was riveted to the spot by the sight of a brawny savage striding toward him. He came from the darkness of the wood, and, when he moved into the clearing, was just in time to catch the first beams of the moon rising above the forest.

The warrior was large, and his size was magnified by the blanket, which, wrapped like a shawl about him, reached below his knees. The long, black hair dangling around his shoulders, was ornamented at the crown by a number of eagle feathers; but the countenance, when shown by the moonlight, was devoid of paint, which, it may be said, was not needed to add to its ugliness.

His forehead was low and broad, the eyes small, black and restless, while the cheek-bones were not only protuberant, but were unusually far apart. Instead of the aquiline nose, which is so often a feature of the American Indian, his was as broad as that of the African, badly disfigured by a scar across the bridge, probably made by a knife or tomahawk.

When it is stated that his mouth was wider than that of Otto, enough has been said on that score. In one corner, the warrior held a pipe made of red clay, whose stem was a foot in length. He must have stood placidly puffing this during the entire time the boy was stealing upon the supposed horse. In the increasing moonlight, the strong vapor rose in blue puffs from both sides of his face and poisoned the air above and around him.

The position of the Indian was such that the blanket covered both arms, and Otto could not see whether or not he grasped a rifle

beneath.

The entire manner of the red man showed that he knew he was master of the situation. He could not have felt otherwise, when he saw a partly grown boy standing before him, without any firearms with which to defend himself.

"Howdy, brudder?" he asked, in a gruff, guttural voice, extending his huge hand to Otto, who dared not refuse it.

"I isb--ish--dot be--ish well," stammered the poor fellow, vainly trying to speak in a steady voice.

The Indian gave a fervency to his grip of Otto's fingers which made him wince with pain, though he dared utter no protest.

The act of the warrior in advancing and saluting, caused his blanket to open in front, so as to disclose an untidy sash around his waist. The view was not clear, as the rays of the moon came over his shoulder, but the lad saw enough to satisfy him that the Indian carried a tomahawk and hunting-knife. However, as the other hand removed the pipe from between the leathern lips and held it, there was no instant intention of using either weapon.

It is only justice to the young German to say that, had he possessed his gun, he would not have permitted the Indian to take his hand. He knew the treacherous character of the race too well to give them the least advantage; but his belief was that the best, and indeed the only thing to do, was to avoid, so far as he could, giving any offence to his captor.

"Ven he don't be looking at me," was Otto's thought, "then I gives him the slip, and runs and gots mine gun, and shoots him afore heban do nodings."

The programme was a good one, provided it could be carried out, but it cannot be admitted that it offered much chance of success. Otto was never fleet of foot, and as his rifle was fully a hundred yards distant, there was no way of recovering it except by permission of the red man.

"Where brudder's home?" was the query, as he allowed the hand of the lad to fall from his grasp.

Otto felt authorized to answer that question at least truthfully.

"Good ways from dish place--a way off yonder."

The boy meant to locate his home correctly, but when he pointed toward the north, he unconsciously made a great error. However, it was unimportant.

The Indian slowly shoved the stem of the pipe in the comer of his immense mouth, sent out several pungent puffs towards the face of Otto, who, accustomed as he was to the sickening odor of his father's tobacco, was forced to recoil a step and cough the strangling vapor from him.

Then the warrior solemnly turned his head and looked behind in the

gloomy depths of the wood, as though he expected to see the home of the boy. It isn't necessary to say that, if such was his expectation, he was disappointed.

When Otto observed the face of his dreaded captor turned away, he was thrilled by the sudden belief that the chance for which he had been praying had come at last. This was his time to make a sudden dash, regain his gun, and become master of the situation.

Was it possible? Beyond question, it was literally life or death with the lad. The red man would pursue and show him no mercy. If Otto failed to reach his rifle in time, a second trial would never be given him.

Absurd! he saw there was not an earthly chance of success; he could only wait and hope.

Failing to discern the log cabin in which Otto made his home, the Indian turned back his head, swinging it as on a pivot, so that the end of the pipe-stem, which, for the moment, he had been holding stationary in his hand, resumed its former place in the corner of his mouth.

"Where brudder's gun?"

"I--I don't not have him mit me," was the awkward reply of Otto, nervously anxious to escape saying anything which would give his captor a clue to his property.

The warrior did not press the question, as he might easily have done, but he smoked his pipe another minute in dignified silence, while Otto stood trembling and wondering how many more breathe he would be permitted to draw before the savage would leap upon him with upraised knife.

"Brudder go with Osage chief--he big warrior--oof!"

This was the first announcement the Indian made of his tribe, and the declaration that he was a chief astonished Otto Relstaub, who held no suspicion that he was in the presence of such a dignitary.

But he had been commanded to go with him, and the youth could only await more pointed instructions. The Osage motioned him to turn about and he did so, hopeful that his captor meant to drive him across the clearing toward the spot he and Jack Carleton had fixed upon for their camp. If such was the intention of the chief, it would be extremely favorable to the lad, but, unfortunately, the opposite course was the one fixed upon.

While Otto's face was away from his master, the latter stalked around in his front, where, taking the pipe from his dusky lips, he repeated his order, by means of gesture.

"I vonder if he don't make a top mit me," muttered Otto; "vy don't he tie von string round me and spin me dot way?"

But the boy was not in a situation to refuse, and, when ordered to walk, he did so. While seeking to obey the Osage, Otto unwittingly turned too far to the right.

"Oof! Dog!" grunted the Indian, catching him by the shoulder and wrenching him part way around; "go--go--go!"

The lad was startled, for the grip was of that violent nature that it pained him severely. It effectually dissipated his purpose of making a break for liberty, at least until a much more promising opening presented itself.

He began timidly feeling his way through the darkness, dreading every moment that he would take a misstep, that would bring down the anger of the Indian in a more dangerous form than before. He was enveloped in gloom, so that he kept both hands extended in front to protect his face.

"I goes as right as I can," he observed, seeking to avert the wrath of the terrible being that was at his heels: "when I doesn't goes right dot ish, 'cause I goes wrong--mine gracious!"

It was only a twig which just then collided with his eye. It inflicted no injury, and he still pushed forward as obediently as if it was his father who was driving him. The Indian said nothing, but he rustled the leaves with his moccasins, as if to prevent the lad forgetting his presence.

Here and there the arrowy moonlight pierced the foliage and afforded Otto a glimpse of his surroundings, but most of the time the gloom was so dense as to be absolutely impenetrable. Passing across a dimly-lit space, he could not avoid turning his head and looking back at the Osage chief as he stepped into the feeble light.

The figure of the Indian was striking. He was striding slowly along, as if impressed with his own importance, his arms folded beneath the blanket in front, so as to hold it together and keep them out of sight. His teeth were still closed on the red pipe-stem, and the blue puffs passed over his head as if it were steam which was working the machinery of his legs.

The thought which constantly remained with Otto Relstaub, and which caused him the keenest suffering, was that the Indian was likely at any moment to leap upon him with uplifted knife. It is a characteristic of the American race that its representatives often add to the distress of their captives by toying with them as a cat does with a mouse before crunching it in its jaws.

The lad was almost certain his captor meant to slay him, after first torturing him in this manner, but the poor boy could see no possible way in which to help himself. If the savage should spring upon him, it would be like the leap of the panther-quick, crushing, and resistless in its fury.

With a faint hope that he might be able to do something for himself when the worst should come, Otto stealthily drew out his hunting-knife, and held it tightly grasped. One thing was certain, that, weak and almost helpless as he was, he would not submit without making a good fight for himself.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ABORIGINAL HOME

The terrifying walk of Otto Relstaub ended sooner and more agreeably than he anticipated. He had in fact gone but a short way when he became aware that the Osage had a definite destination before him. A light flashed out from the gloom in front, vanishing before the boy could locate it. A few steps further and it reappeared, again dropping from sight.

Otto was walking slowly, intently peering in the direction and naturally wondering what it all meant, when, as he moved slightly to the left, it once more came to view. This showed that it was visible only when approached along a certain line. It was not an ordinary camp-fire, but the light flitted in and out of sight, on account of the objects intervening between it and the spectator; there was absolutely but a single line of advance which would keep it in view.

The Indian gave no expression to his views, but the rustling leaves told that he was still treading on the heels of the lad, who knew that so long as he walked straight toward the light, he was following the wishes of his master.

Suddenly something flitted in front of the blaze, as though a person had stepped quickly past. But Otto had secured the range, so to speak, and so far as the trees and undergrowth permit, he advanced in a direct line. The distance being short, the whole thing speedily became clear to him.

The fire was burning within and at the further side of a wigwam, and was first seen through the opening which served as an entrance. Thus it was that when he diverged to the right or left it was shut from sight.

"It ish, de vigvam of him," thought Otto, "ish going to takes me mit dere, and pieces to makes de childrens laugh."

The boy softly returned the knife to its place, for he was anxious that the chieftain should see no signs of fear on his part. A few steps further and he stopped in front of the door of the lodge, afraid to enter until something more was said by his master.

The entrance of Otto into the aboriginal home was anything but dignified. The proprietor observing that he had halted, gave him such a powerful shove that he sprawled headlong in the middle of the "apartment."

"Oof!" grunted the sachem, bending his head so as to push his body through the opening, which was not closed after him; "lazy dog!"

Otto did not think it wise to dispute the question. He was not hurt by the fall, and rising, stepped back against the side of the lodge and took a good view of his surroundings.

The wigwam of the Osage chieftain was similar to those which may be found to-day on the slopes of the Rocky Mountains, in the depths of the wilderness along the Assiniboine, on the shores of Athabasca Lake in the far North, and beyond the Llano Estacado of the South. It was modeled in the same style that was fashionable when Columbus saw the lights of the New World twinkling through the gloom of the night across the unknown sea, and which will prevail so long as the American Indian roams the woods and wields the tomahawk.

A half dozen poles were pushed into the ground in a rude circle, so as to include a space between four and five yards in diameter. The tops of the poles joined, as do the bayonets of muskets when stacked. This framework was covered with the skins of bison and deer, sewed together with the sinews of the latter. At the peak of the roof was an opening a foot in diameter, partly filled by the network of poles there locked together. This answered for a chimney to the fire kindled at one side of the lodge.

Directly opposite the fireplace (if it may be called that), was the opening which served as a door, there being no other outlet except the one named. The deer-skin could be flung back or allowed to hang down. If the wind set it to flapping, it was pinned fast with a knife or sharp stick.

The ground in most places was covered with bison-skins, so that in moderately cold weather they were comfortable and pleasant to sit and recline upon. The skins composing the sides of the wigwam were soiled with smoke, grease and dirt for alas! nearly all the romance and charm enveloping the American Indian is dissipated at first sight by his frightful lack of cleanliness.

But Otto Relstaub had viewed the interior of Indian wigwams before, and his interest was fixed upon the occupants, of whom there were three beside himself. The squaw or wife of the chief was at the further end, or rather the side opposite the door, busy broiling two slices of venison on the coals. She had no kettle, pan, knife or fork in the lodge, her sole implement being a sharpened stick, scarcely a foot in length, which she used in turning and handling the meat.

When Otto came tumbling through the door, the mistress was in the act of lifting one of the slices from the coals. She was on her knees, and paused for a second with the meat in air, while she glanced around to see whether her lord and master had been imbibing too much fire-water. One glance was enough, and she turned back and gave her attention to the culinary operations.

She wore moccasins, leggings, and a species of loose hunting-shirt, tied with a cord about the waist, and which protected her-body quite well, though the deer-skin composing it looked as if it had served as a part of the wigwam for a number of years. Her long, black hair dangled about her shoulders, as did that of her husband, and she was no more cleanly in her person than was he.

Perhaps the most interesting object in the place was an Indian infant, less than a year old, which lay on a bison-robe not far from the fire. It was a male, too young to walk, though it had been freed from the coffin-like cradle in which the aboriginal babies are strapped and carried on the backs of their mothers.

The little fellow was covered to his arm-pits, the bare arms lying outside on the bison-robe. He kept these going in an awkward, spasmodic fashion, which caused the infantile fist now and then to land in his eye. On such occasions the organ winked very suddenly, and the boy seemed to start with a gasp of surprise, but he did not cry. Young as he was, he had been trained in the iron school which makes the American Indian indifferent to suffering and torture.

This aboriginal youth showed more interest in the new arrival than did any one else. His fists became motionless, his head flapped over on one side, and the twinkling black eyes were fixed upon Otto as though they would read him through. If we could recall the fancies that flitted through our brains at that early stage of existence, what a wonderful kaleidoscope it would present!

The limits of the wigwam were so moderate that the sachem was compelled to lay aside most of his dignity. Seating himself on a robe, just across from their guest, he said something to his squaw, and then, leaning back, with his legs crossed and his arms folded, he placidly smoked his pipe and awaited supper. The wife answered with what sounded like a half dozen grunts, but did not look around or cease giving her full attention to the broiling venison.

The prisoner observed a long, fine-looking rifle leaning against one side of the wigwam, the powder-horn and bullet-pouch on the ground near the stock. Beside them, a bow as long and powerful as that of Deerfoot; and a quiver half full of arrows also lay on the earth. Like the Shawanoe, the Osage was an adept in the use of both weapons.

In addition to the furniture referred to, a few cast-off garments of the owners were flung on one side, while some additional pieces of venison lay upon, or rather among, a mass of leaves, where they could be found when needed. The smoke from the fire found its way through the opening in the roof, and the vapor from the pipe of the Osage, after slowly winding above his head, seemed to lean off to one side and grope its way toward the same vent. A partial draught was created through the door of the wigwam, by which the impure air was carried away, and the interior rendered much more pleasant than would be supposed.

Like a true native American gentleman, the chieftain sat calmly enjoying his pipe, while his wife did the work of the household, and she, in accordance with universal law, accepted the drudgery as one of the necessities of existence.

There were some facts respecting the Indian wigwam and its owner which may as well be stated in this place. The red man had been a chief of the Osage tribe, but a violent quarrel with his people caused him to withdraw, and he was living entirely alone in the woods with his family. The village where he had reigned so long was miles distant. He had a number of partisans who occasionally called at his "residence" to see and urge him to return, but he continued sulking in his tent, smoked his awful pipe, and shook his head to all their appeals.

The wigwam, while similar in shape to the hundreds still to be found in the wilderness of the North American continent differed in some

respects, while retaining the same general form. Many a lodge contains but the single ridge-pole, standing in the centre of the structure, which, in the shape of a cone, is gathered at the top and spreads out at the bottom, where it is fastened in place by pegs, similar to those of the ordinary army tent.

Otto Relstaub, being relieved from his fear of instant death, became sensitive to the appetizing odor of the broiling deer-steaks, and looked longingly toward the unattractive cook, whose only redeeming feature was the beauty of her teeth, which were as regular and almost as white as those of Deerfoot.

When, a few minutes later, the slices of meat were ready, the squaw flung one to her master, who dextrously caught it with his right hand while he removed the pipe with the other. Laying the latter on the ground beside him, he began eating his supper, using both hands, much as a bear employs his paws.

The wife devoured her share in the same manner, the two forming a striking, but by no means attractive, picture. The meat was obviously tough, but their teeth were equal to the work, and plates, knives and forks would have been only an encumbrance.

While the mother was thus occupied, she kept looking across at her baby, who seemed to be watching her with comical wishfulness. By-and-by, the parent gave a flirt of her hand, and a piece of the venison, which she had bitten off, went flying toward the head of the youngster. He made an awkward grab with both hands, but it landed on his pug nose. He quickly found it, and shoving it between his lips, began fiercely sucking and tugging, as though it afforded the most delicious nourishment, which undoubtedly was fact.

"I dinks they have forgot me," Otto said himself, with a sigh; "I wish dot she would fro me a piece of dot, and see whedder she could hit mine nose; yaw--Id just open mine mouth and cotch him on de fly."

The lad had seated himself with his back against the side of the wigwam, and no one could have looked at his face and failed to know he was as hungry as one of his years could well be. Had the people possessed more food than they wished, and had it been cooked, it is possible they would have tossed him a piece, but, as it was, they had no intention of doing anything of the kind, as Otto plainly saw.

"They am pigs," he said, taking care that the huge chief did not overhear his muttered words; "if I starve, dey will sot dere and laugh at me till they dies."

The meat soon vanished, and then the squaw began fumbling among the leaves where the uncooked venison lay. Otto's eyes sparkled with hope.

"She is going to cook mit a piece for meawh!"

Instead of food, she fished out a pipe, similar to that of her master. Walking to him she held out her hand, and he passed over a pouch of tobacco, from which she filled the bowl of her pipe, punching in and compressing the stuff with her forefinger. Then it was lighted, with a coal of fire which she deftly scooped up, and

sitting, so that she faced her guest, she crossed her feet, and leaning her elbows on her knees, stared at him, the picture of enjoyment, as she puffed her pipe. At the same time, the baby eagerly sucked and chewed his bit of meat, and, no doubt, was as happy as its parents.

But this had continued only a few minutes, when all the adults started, for footsteps on the outside showed that some one was approaching the wigwam.

CHAPTER XXIV

DEERFOOT

When Deerfoot the Shawanoe bade good-by to Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub, it was with the declaration that they would soon see each other again. Precisely what he meant would be hard to say; but probably it implied that he would take pains in the near future to make them a visit when they should be settled in their own log-cabins at home.

He left them, as has been intimated, because he believed there was no further need of bearing them company, and because business of great importance to himself demanded that he should take another course, and travel many long miles toward that wild region in the southern part of Missouri, which is broken and crossed by the Ozark range of mountains.

For fully an hour after he turned away from his friends he pushed through the forest in a south-western direction. He advanced at a leisurely pace, for there was no call for haste, and he loved to be alone in the vast solitude, where he often held sweet communion with the Great Spirit, whom he worshiped and adored with a fervency of devotion scarcely known except by those who have died for His sake.

The sun had descended but a brief way in the western sky when the youthful warrior found himself steadily climbing an elevation of several hundred feet. He had been over the ground before, and he knew that, after passing the ridge, the surface sloped downward for many miles, shutting the Mississippi out of sight altogether.

For some time a suspicion had been steadily taking shape in the mind of Deerfoot, and it was that which led him to hasten his footsteps until he reached the crest of the elevation, where he paused to make an investigation.

The thought which ran through his mind was the probability that all danger from the Miamis and Shawanoes (especially the latter) was not yet at an end. He reasoned from well established facts; they knew beyond question that it was he who had outwitted them in his efforts to save the boys when they were placed in such extreme peril. The Shawanoes hated him with an intensity beyond description, and, despite the repeated disasters which had overtaken those who sought, his ruin, they would strive by every means to revenge themselves upon him.

What more likely, therefore, than that they had crossed the Mississippi in pursuit? The certainty that they had done so would have caused Deerfoot no misgiving, so far as he was concerned, but his fear was for the boys. He reasoned that the Shawanoes would follow the trail of the three, including also that of the stray horse. When they reached the point where Deerfoot left them they would read its meaning at a glance. They would know the whites were following the animal, while the Shawanoe had gone about his own business.

Deprived of his matchless guidance and skill, the destruction of Jack and Otto would seem so easy that two or three would hasten after them. The action of their guide would naturally imply that he had no thought of any such attempt on the part of his enemies, who, therefore, would be the more strongly tempted to go in quest of his scalp.

As I have said, Deerfoot could laugh at all such strategy when directed against himself, but he was uneasy about the others, who would never think of their danger until too late. Ordinarily they were not likely to encounter any red men, except the half friendly Osages, and would be without protection against a stealthy shot from the woods behind them.

If such an issue threatened, Deerfoot felt that his duty was clear: he must spare no effort to protect the boys to the last extremity, and it was the hope that he would be able to catch sight of some almost invisible sign which would tell the truth that led him to halt on the crest of the elevation and gaze long and searchingly toward the Dark and Bloody Ground, which had been the scene of so many fearful encounters between the pioneers and untamable red men.

The great river was several miles distant, the almost unbroken forest stretching between. Deerfoot narrowly scrutinized the yellow surface as far as the eye could follow the winding course, but not the first evidence of life was to be seen. Not a solitary canoe or wild animal breasted the swift current which is now laden with thousands of crafts of almost every description.

The searcher after truth hardly expected to discover anything on the river itself, for if the Shawanoes were hunting for him they had crossed long before; but away beyond, in the solemn depths of the Kentucky wilderness, burned a camp-fire, whose faint smoke could be traced as it rose above the tree-tops. A careful study of the vapor led Deerfoot to suspect that it had served as a signal, but it was beyond his ken to determine its nature.

There was nothing on the other side of the Mississippi which could afford the faintest clew, and he began the study of Louisiana, so far as it was open to his vision. His altitude gave him an extended survey toward every point of the compass. As it was impossible that any of his enemies should be to the west of him, he did not bestow so much as a glance in that direction.

Again and again the keen eyes roved over the space between him and the great stream, but nothing rewarded the visual search. It was not to be expected that if the Shawanoes were stealing along his trail they would stop to build a fire--at least not before night

closed in. The only circumstances under which they would attempt anything of the kind would be in the event of their wishing to signal some message to those left on the other shore. Possibly they wanted reinforcements, or wished those who were in waiting to make some movement of their own, and, if so they would be sure to telegraph.

If such was the case, the telegrams had been sent and the instrument--that is, the camp-fire had been destroyed. Nothing of the sort was now to be seen.

But Deerfoot did discover something to the northward. A long distance away could be detected another column of vapor--slight, but dark, and with a wavy, shuddering motion, such as is observed when the first smoke from the fire under an engine rises through the tall, brick chimney.

He watched it fixedly for several minute and then smiled, for he rightly interpreted its meaning.

"There is the wigwam of the Osage chief, Wish-o-wa-tum, the Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder, who lives alone with his family in the woods, and smokes his pipe. He cares not for Miami or Huron or Shawanoe, but smokes in peace."

Inasmuch, as no other vapor met the eye, the sagacious Shawanoe adopted a very different line of investigation, or rather research. He was able to tell where the lesser elevation stood, on which he had bidden good-by to the boys, and could form a tolerably correct idea of the line he had followed since then.

If the Shawanoes were pushing the search for him, several must be somewhere along that line. Most of the time they would be effectually hidden from sight by the foliage of the trees, but there were open places here and there (very slight in extent), where they would be visible for the moment to one who fixed his eyes on that particular spot. On the site of the encampment, where the little party had eaten their meal, and where not the slightest ember remained, the pursuers would halt for a brief consultation. If they divided into two companies of pursuit, it was there the division had taken or would take place.

Unfortunately the vegetation was so abundant just there, that he could not hope to catch sight of any of his enemies, until after they should reach a point a considerable distance away. It would therefore seem impossible for him to tell whether a portion of the war party turned to the northward in quest of the boys, or whether they all concentrated in the search for Deerfoot himself.

It would appear beyond his power, I say, for the extraordinary youth to settle the question, while standing carefully hidden behind the trunk of a tree, but a single slight chance presented itself, and to that he appealed.

He knew the general direction of the horse's trail after it had left the spot where Deerfoot parted company with his friends. Unless it turned abruptly to the right or left, it led across an open space, which was in plain view of the Shawanoe, and provided the crossing had not already been made, he would be able to observe it.

He therefore watched this opening with a keenness which would permit nothing to elude it. His brain had handled the problem with the certainty of intuition. Following a process of reasoning which cannot be fully explained, he convinced himself that the redskins had not yet fled across the narrow space. Whether they were to do so or not would be determined in a brief while.

If the savages hunting Jack and Otto had gone beyond the point named, before Deerfoot fixed his attention on it, then it followed of necessity that those who were so eager to suspend the scalp of the youth from the ridge-pole of their wigwams were at that moment close upon him. In any event, he was morally certain the whole question would be settled within the coming hour, for, if no sign appeared, it would be a sign of itself that nothing was to be feared.

Fully aware of the woodcraft of his own people, Deerfoot threw away no chances. He kept closely hidden behind the tree which served as a screen, as though an enemy was in ambush within bowshot.

He waited a briefer time than he anticipated. His eyes were flitting hither and thither, when a couple of warriors deliberately walked across the opening on which his attention was fixed. Though only two, they moved in Indian file, one directly behind the other.

There could be no doubt they were after the scalps of Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub.

It was equally certain that a larger number were hunting for Deerfoot. The fact would not have caused him an additional throb of the pulse, could he have been assured that no harm, would befall his friends. True, they had displayed much courage and brilliancy a few hours before in their contest on the other side of the Mississippi, and it would seem that, with their training from earliest youth, they ought to be able to protect themselves against an equal number of red men. But, reason on the matter as he chose, Deerfoot could not drive away the feeling that it was his duty to go to their help.

"The Great Spirit wills that Deerfoot shall be the friend of the white people who are his friends. The Shawanoes and Miamis have no right on these hunting-grounds," he added, with a dangerous flash of his black eyes; "if they follow Deerfoot here, he will teach them they do wrong."

Clearly it would not do for him to take the back trail and retrace his steps, for that would insure a collision with those who were so anxious to meet him. Much as he detested them, and little as he feared the issue of such a meeting, it would be certain to delay his good offices for those who caused him so much anxiety, and such delay was dangerous.

His purpose was to "cut across lots," that is, to hasten by the nearest route to a point which would place him in advance of the couple that were giving their attention to Jack and Otto, and to carry out that plan necessitated his making no mistake in his judgment as to the trail of his friends.

"The warriors will have to walk until the sun goes down," he said to

himself, "before they will come up with them; if they run, or if my friends have paused to rest, then they will find them sooner. Deerfoot must not wait, for he is needed."

He had not yet left his place behind the tree, for he was convinced that some of the Shawanoes were close to him, even though he had received no proof that such was the fact, but that proof came within the following few minutes and before he had yet stirred from his position.

CHAPTER XXV

AT BAY

The "old Indian" asserted itself in Deerfoot the Shawanoe. While every act, and in deed every thought, of the wonderful young warrior was prompted by conscience, yet his views of duty under certain circumstances, were fitted to bring a smile to the face of an impartial judge.

While standing behind the tree on the crest of the elevation, he was sure of two things: he had little time to lose in going to the help of Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub, and the Shawanoes who were trailing him were close at hand. He settled the dispute by deciding to stay where he was a few minutes longer. If his enemies did not appear within that brief period, he would hasten from the spot.

This conclusion on the part of the young Shawanoe presaged a desperate encounter between him and his foes, and he made preparation for it. He set his rifle on the ground, with the muzzle leaning against the tree which served to screen his body, and brought his long bow to the front. Drawing an arrow from its quiver, he glanced at it as if looking for some defect, but he knew none was there, nor was a single shaft of the score and a half in the quiver imperfect in any respect. The youth always made his own weapons. He glued on the feather which guided and steadied the missile in its flight, and he fastened the heads with metal obtained from the whites. Every one of his possessions had been tested and proven.

Deerfoot grasped the bow loosely in the centre, one finger of the same band also holding the arrow in place, with the notch against the deer sinew, not yet drawn backward. The amateur archer will understand that he was in form to bring the shaft to a head on the instant it should become necessary.

It was some five minutes after he had assumed this position, and while looking back over his own trail, that two Shawanoe warriors silently emerged from the bushes fifty yards off, and stealthily approached him. They moved absolutely without noise, for their woodcraft told them they were close upon the most dangerous being they had ever undertaken to hunt.

The foremost lifted his foot just clear of the ground and placed it squarely down again. His head and shoulders were thrown forward, so that most of his long, coarse, black hair dangled on both sides of

his neck and over his chest. It hung in front of his face also, and, as his forehead was very low, he had the appearance, while continually glancing from side to side and in front, of a wild beast glaring from behind a hedge. He trailed his rifle in his right hand, the left resting on the handle of a knife, which, with that of a tomahawk, protruded from his girdle. He wore the usual hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins, his body and limbs being well protected. His blanket would have been only an encumbrance, and while he was engaged in such delicate business, it was left with the canoe on the bank of the Mississippi. The ears when visible through the dangling hair, were seen to hold enormous rings of bone, while the nose hooked over and dipped in a fashion that showed that the organ had at some time held a pendant in the way of an ornament.

The countenance was blackened and disfigured with paint, in the style already made familiar to the reader, and the protuberant nose was rendered more striking by the retreating chin. The Shawanoe was crafty, cunning, treacherous and revengeful, which characteristics it may be said belong to the entire American race.

The second warrior, with the exception of his features, was the counterpart of the leader. Dress, paint, and ornaments, even to the strings of wampum around the neck, were similar. He carried his rifle in the same style, and his left hand rested on the weapons in his girdle. Both were strong and sinewy, and their sight lost not the slightest object in their field of vision.

It was this precaution which apprised them, at the same instant, that they were confronted by the most terrifying picture on which their eyes had ever rested. They halted as if transfixed by a lightning stroke.

Deerfoot the Shawanoe stood behind the trunk of an oak, a foot in diameter, with his arrow drawn to a head and pointed at the heart of the foremost warrior. The matchless youth was at bay, and in the exact posture for launching his deadly weapon--right foot forward, bow grasped in the centre, arrow held by the fingers of the left hand, which were drawn backward of the shoulder, while the bow itself, on account of its great length, was held diagonally in front.

The two Shawanoes who suddenly became aware of their danger, did not see all that has been described, for Deerfoot utilized the shelter so far as he could. Most of his body was carefully protected, and, though the bow was slanted, the lowermost point scarcely showed on the opposite side of the tree from the top of the weapon.

The warriors saw the head, left shoulder and hands of Deerfoot and the upper part of the bow, whose arrow was on the very point of speeding toward them. Directly over the shaft, with head slightly inclined, like that of a hunter sighting over his gun, were the gleaming eyes and face of the young Shawanoe. It looked as if he had turned his head to one side that he might catch the music made by the twang of the string when it should dart forward with the speed of the rattlesnake striking from its coil.

No more startling sight can be imagined than that of a gun aimed straight at us, with the finger of the marksman pressing the trigger. The first proof the pursuers received that they were

within sight of the youth they were seeking was of that nature. Both stood for a second or more unable to stir. But their training prevented the spell lasting more than the briefest while.

The second warrior made a tremendous bound directly backward, dropping to a squatting posture as he landed, and then scrambling to cover with a quickness the eye could hardly follow. While employed in doing so, his companion emitted an ear-splitting screech which made the woods echo. He caught a shadowy glimpse of him as he leaped high in the air and fell backward, carrying with him the arrow of the marvelous archer, which had gone clear and clean through his body, and remained projecting both from the breast and back. A defiant shout rang from the elevation, and, peeping timidly forth, the crouching red man saw Deerfoot holding his bow aloft with one hand, while he swung the gun with the other and strode off, his face toward his pursuers.

"Where are the Shawanoes? Do they love to follow Deerfoot across the great river? His heart was sad for them because so many bowed to his bow and arrow--so he left them that his eyes might not look on their warriors who fell by his hand; the Shawanoes are fools, because they follow Deerfoot. They cannot harm him, for he is the friend of the white man, and the Great Spirit gives him his care; let the Shawanoes send Tecumseh and the Hurons send Waughtauk; Deerfoot stayed his hand when the time had come for Waughtauk to sing his death-song, but if the chief trails him across the great river, Deerfoot will not spare him."

The young warrior doubtless would have indulged in further annoying remarks, had he not kept moving all the time, so that his last words were uttered while he was beyond sight of the terrified Shawanoe crouching on the ground; but the voice of Deerfoot was raised to a key which prevented any observation being lost.

The declaration, following the act of the youth, showed that in his mind his relations toward his enemies changed when they followed him beyond the Mississippi. In Kentucky all stood on the same footing, and he often showed mercy, but if they pursued him into Louisiana they became his persecutors, and whoever crossed his path or sought to molest him, did so at his peril. He had voluntarily withdrawn from their chosen hunting-grounds, and they would be wise if they left him alone. He would not flee from them like a hunted deer, but would teach them severer lessons than they had ever yet learned.

The death-yell of the stricken Shawanoe was certain to bring others to the spot, but Deerfoot cared nothing for that. It mattered not if there were a score, for, if he chose to flee, he could out-speed the swiftest runner on either side the Mississippi. With the thousands upon thousands of miles of mountain, prairie, river, and wilderness at his back, he could laugh to scorn the rage of his enemies.

Though he had lived several months in this section, it was the first time his deadly foes had attempted to molest him. Self-defense demanded that they should be shown it would not pay to repeat the attempt.

Still retaining gun and bow, he passed rapidly down the slope, and, having previously fixed in his mind the course to pursue, pushed

forward at an easy pace, which was much swifter than would be supposed.

Fast as he journeyed, he had not gone far when five Shawanoes (including him who had so narrowly escaped his bow), hurried to the spot where the smitten warrior lay. They had heard agonized cry in battle and knew what it meant. The second survivor was given but a minute to flee, when he encountered the others rushing thither, and he turned about and joined them. They would have been less arduous had they not known that the terrible Deerfoot was gone, as was shown by his defiant shout, which came from distant point in the woods.

Precisely eight Shawanoes (not a Miami among them) paddled over the Mississippi to hunt the youth: the only two absent from this party were pursuing Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub, while they journeyed toward the northwest, after the stray horse. The occasion, therefore, was a fitting one in which to consult as to the line of policy to be followed.

It may seem incredible, but it is an unquestioned fact, that five of the best warriors of the most formidable tribe in the West decided to give up the attempt to capture or kill a single one of their race whose years were considerably less than those of the youngest member of the party, and that, too, on the ground that the undertaking was too dangerous. One of those five Shawanoes, became converted to Christianity after the war of 1812, and settled in Kentucky, near the home of Ned Preston, to whom he gave the particulars of the council held by him and his comrades more than twenty years before.

Of course no one of the five admitted that personally he was afraid of Deerfoot. All expressed the greatest eagerness to meet him, where a chance to engage in fatal combat could be gained. Apparently no greater boon could befall them than such extreme good fortune.

But they could not shut their eyes to one or two discouraging facts: they had entered a country entirely strange to them, but which was familiar in a great measure to the fleet-footed traitor, who could never find himself lacking for some hole in which to hide himself. It was very much like hunting in an endless forest for the fawn that leaves no scent for the dog to follow.

But worse than all, the Shawanoes could not doubt that the execrated Deerfoot had formed alliance with the Osages, who would give him help whenever wanted. Such being their theory followed that they were not fleeing from a despised foe, but from a whole tribe of Indians. For five warriors to withdraw in the face of such overwhelming odds, could not be construed as cowardice, but only as wise discretion.

Such were the grounds on which the party based their decision, which was accompanied fierce lamentations that the fates had interposed to save Deerfoot from their vengeance.

"We talk that way," said the old Indian, long years afterward, while telling the story in broken English, "and," he added with a laugh twinkle in his dark eyes, "we much brave--we want to meet Deerfoot but we looked to see he did not come; if he came, then we wouldn't be so much brave; we turn, and run like buffalo, we much afraid of

Deerfoot; we no want to see him."

CHAPTER XXVI

AN UNEXPECTED INTERVIEW

Having turned his back on his pursuers, Deerfoot gave them no further attention. His purpose now was to defend Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub from the two red men in pursuit.

It will be remembered that the youthful warrior had fixed in his own mind the course taken by the others, and he hastened to a point where he was hopeful of finding the trail. But the calculation which led him thither was drawn too fine. Like the detective who spins a theory, perfect in every part and bristling with proof, he found that a slight hitch at the beginning destroyed it all. Neither the pursuers nor pursued had crossed the spot where he was so certain he would discover their footprints.

This was a disappointment to Deerfoot, who stood several minutes debating what to do. It would require considerable time to return point where he separated from the boys follow them thence, beside placing him well to the rear of the red men from whom the harm was dreaded. It was this fact which disturbed Deerfoot, but there seemed no other course open. He could easily speculate as to the routes by which to head off the warriors, but the mistake just made warned him that he had no time guesses of that character.

Clearly the only thing to do was to follow the course named, and with his usual promptitude, he moved through the wood toward the point where he was more than likely to come into collision with the larger party of Shawanoes. He turned aside from his own trail, as he invariably did under circumstances, but had not gone far when he found that which was lost.

The Shawanoe halted and looked at the ground with a grim smile, for he saw the print of the horse's hoof, the tracks made by Jack and Otto, and the lighter impressions of two pair of moccasins.

Having caught sight of the warriors not long previous, he knew they were at no great distance. They were walking at such a leisurely pace that unless it was increased, they were not likely to overtake the unconscious fugitives before they halted for the night.

The Shawanoe wheeled and hurried along the trail, with the loping, noiseless trot which could be maintained without distress from rise of morn till set of sun. He did not scrutinize the earth directly at his feet, but glanced several rods in front. He could readily detect the trail that far, and was thus enabled to keep keen watch of his surroundings, without retarding his own gait.

He occasionally flung a glance over his shoulder, but he was well satisfied that none of the larger party was after him: they had become impressed with the fact that it wouldn't pay.

A quarter of a mile off and he leaped lightly over a small stream, which crossed his path. He paused long enough to learn that the horse had stopped to drink, doing so with some difficulty, for the water was so shallow that his lips must have stirred the mud on the bottom.

The boys did not halt, but one of the warriors had got down on his knees and hands, the latter spread apart like the fore legs of a camelopard, as to touch his dusky lips to the water, of which he drank his fill. All this Deerfoot noted, with only a few moments' pause, then he was off again.

But he had gone only a little way, when he observed other facts that were more disquieting. The Shawanoes had changed pace similar to his own, and beyond question were gaining upon the boys, who could not know peril. Deerfoot was convinced that the red men had hastened through fear of losing the trail in the coming darkness. It followed, therefore, that he himself must advance faster or lose the scent.

While able to follow the tracks of a horse, entirely by the sense of feeling, the progress must necessarily be too slow to be effective under circumstances like those which now confronted him.

The youth made a tremendous bound and struck a gait which rendered it unnecessary to look behind him, for no pursuer could equal his speed. He watched only the forest in front, through which he was hurrying with a velocity that raised a gale about his ears and kept him dodging and ducking his head to avoid unpleasant consequences.

All at once, he leaped sideways behind the nearest large tree, set down his rifle and bow and drew his tomahawk. He had discovered through the gathering twilight one of the Shawanoes returning over the trail. It was a fortunate accident which prevented him detecting his pursuer, since he was on the watch against that very danger, but Deerfoot was an instant quicker, and awaited him as grimly as he confronted the two warriors who followed him to the base of the hill, where one was pierced by his unerring arrow.

Deerfoot at first believed both were coming back, having been summoned thither perhaps by some signal from the larger party, but he saw there was only one. The youth could have picked him off without difficulty, but he was too chivalrous to do so, inasmuch as the red man was actually retreating instead of advancing, and had not as yet made the first move against him.

A guarded peep from his hiding-place showed the warrior approaching on a loping trot, similar to his own, his long rifle in his right hand, while a glimpse was obtained of his blanket rolled and strapped like a knapsack behind his shoulders.

He held his head well forward, his restless eyes scanning the wood as it opened before him, but evidently with no thought of the danger which really menaced him. All at once, the figure of Deerfoot glided softly from behind the tree and confronted him with his tomahawk drawn back and ready to throw.

The Indian checked himself as abruptly as if an unfathomable chasm had opened at his feet, but quick as he was, Deerfoot was so close

that the latter could have touched him with his extended bow.

The warrior, old enough to be the father of the other, saw that he was helpless. He was without the power to raise a finger to save himself, even though he held a loaded rifle in one hand and carried the regulation knife and tomahawk in his girdle. Had he made the first motion toward using his weapons, the upraised tomahawk would have left the grasp of Deerfoot with the swiftness of lightning, and the skull of his foe would have been cloven as though made of tissue paper.

"Let the Shawanoe obey the words of Deerfoot," said the youth, "and he shall not be harmed."

The other made no answer, but his frightened looks showed he was ready to follow any orders received from such high authority.

"He carries a blanket on his back which Deerfoot would love to have, that he may sleep upon it when the night is cold and he has no camp-fire to warm him."

The elder Shawanoe dropped his gun to the ground beside him, that he might use both hands more readily to unfasten the bundle for his master. Flinging it at his feet, he looked inquiringly up and awaited the next command.

Deerfoot did not stoop to take the article, for that would have invited a treacherous attack. He merely glanced downward and then asked, "Whither is my brother going?"

"He seeks those who sent him here; they are not far and we heard the shout of one of our warriors, which we did not understand."

"'Twas his cry when the arrow of Deerfoot pierced his heart," said the youth with flashing eye. "Deerfoot has crossed the great river and means never to visit the other shore; he has left Kentucky and Ohio, and the Shawanoes must look for his footprints on this side. They cannot find him, and he will shoot them from behind the trees and rocks. He will flee from them no more."

The red man to whom these words were addressed could not fail to understand their meaning. They gave distinct notice that the youth would strike back, whenever harm was offered him, while west of the Mississippi. He had located there for life and was prepared to defend himself against one and all of his enemies.

Beyond question, the elder Indian would have given much could he have been in Kentucky at that moment. He was watching for some chance to turn with panther-like quickness on his youthful conqueror, but the latter took care that no such opportunity was given him.

Deerfoot could not know that the group whom he left behind had resolved to withdraw from the dangerous country, and while their agreement would have been interesting and possibly gratifying news to him, yet he was not particularly concerned, since he was determined to force them sooner or later to that conclusion.

"Deerfoot took a gun that belonged to one of those who stole his

blanket and broke his canoe; his blanket has been restored to him and he will now give the gun to his brother."

This statement was not understood by the other, which fact is not to be wondered at, since it was not only in violation of what may be called common sense, but the gun itself was not in sight.

It was within reach, however, and the youth had but to take a single step backward, when he grasped it with his right hand and proffered it to the other, whose very amazement caused him to take it with much awkwardness. Thus it came about that Deerfoot allowed the warrior to have two rifles, both loaded, while he stood guard over himself, with only his tomahawk in hand.

The transfer being made, the elder was at liberty to go, so soon as he answered a few questions. He knew much of Deerfoot from reputation, and, therefore, was not so dumfounded as otherwise he would have been, when informed that no harm would be done him.

"When my brother left his comrades, he took a warrior with him," said Deerfoot in his native tongue. "Where is he?"

Daring as the young Shawanoe was, he was guarded to give up the gun, until satisfied the second foe was not likely to appear on the scene. While he would have made his usual brilliant stand against two of his enemies, he would have needed all the means which he possessed to combat them.

"My brother waits my return; he sits on fallen tree and listens for my footsteps that may learn what ill has befallen our brothers nearer the great river."

"When my brother has learned and tells them what then will they do?"

"They will hasten across the great river and never come back."

Deerfoot smiled faintly, for he saw the purpose of this remark; the warrior was seeking to propitiate his conqueror. The latter might well have added that, inasmuch as he had already given him the fact, the elder was in duty bound to turn about and hasten to his waiting friend with the news; but it was too much to ask him to accept the word of an enemy, and the youth preferred that he should make the slight journey and ascertain the truth for himself.

What followed was unique and curious. Deerfoot stepped aside, just enough to allow the other to pass. The elder held a gun in each hand and stood motionless a moment, as if uncertain what to do; but his conqueror was waiting, and he, therefore, advanced three steps, enough to bring him opposite Deerfoot, while the fourth carried him beyond. It was at that juncture he caught sight of the long bow leaning against the tree where the gun had been standing. He longed to seize it, but he knew instant death would follow the attempt.

Without turning to the right or left, the released Shawanoe strode by with deliberate and dignified step. He held his own gun in his right hand, and with no evidence of what he was doing, he stealthily drew back the hammer which clasped the flint. He then noted carefully the number of paces he took.

When he had counted nearly fifty, he felt safe from the crash of the tomahawk. Dropping the strange rifle to the ground, he wheeled like a flash and sighted quickly at the spot where he last saw his conqueror, but he had vanished.

CHAPTER XXVII

A FAILURE

The task which Jack Carleton took upon himself, when he parted company with Otto Relstaub on the clearing, was of the simplest nature, and one which he was confident could be accomplished without trouble; it was to reach by a circuitous course a point directly opposite to his friend, and on a line with the horse, so that if the latter fled from one, he could be secured by the other.

The experience of the young Kentuckian averted some mistakes into which others might have fallen. One of the hardest things for a hunter to do, while tramping the forest, is to keep his bearings. There are few who have shouldered a gun that have not learned this fact, and, without a compass, landmarks, the bark of trees, or some other artificial aid, it may be set down as impossible for any one to escape bewilderment. If his wanderings are extended he will find himself traveling in a circle, and instances are known in which a person has followed his own trail for hours, without suspecting the grotesque truth.

Jack Carleton therefore took every precaution against going astray. He had in fact but one landmark, so to speak, and that was the moon, then well up in the sky. He located the luminary with such exactness, that he knew it would be directly over his right shoulder when he arrived at a point precisely opposite his friend, and, as he hoped, in a straight line with the colt between them.

"That means good luck," said he to himself, with a smile; "I always like to see the moon over my right shoulder, though it can't mean anything after all, as mother has told me many a time. She said that she and father, a few nights before he was killed by the Shawanoes, watched the new moon, which shone through the window, over his right shoulder and on my bare head. Father was in good spirits, for he believed in signs, and I think mother, though she chided him, had a sly belief in them, too; but," added the boy with a sigh, "she shudders now at the mere mention of such a thing."

While Jack was indulging in this sad reminiscence, he was carefully picking his way among the trees, making sure that he did not get the points of the compass confused. There was no call for haste, and it may be said he felt every step of the way.

"Otto is an odd fellow," he muttered, allowing his fancy to stray whither it chose, "and I hope he won't become bewildered. He is so anxious to get the colt, that he will run into trouble if there's any into which he can run. He is shrewd, brave, and somewhat stupid, and it is never certain what he will do or say. Let me see."

He stood still, and, peeping at the moon, as best he could through the foliage overhead, studied its position in the heavens, with particular reference to his own.

"I haven't reached the right spot yet; it must be a hundred yards further."

His aim was to halt some twenty or thirty rods beyond the clearing. Then, when assured he had gone far enough, he would walk directly toward Otto, the two keeping the horse between them.

"I do so hope we will get him," muttered Jack, beginning to feel a misgiving now that the decisive moment was at hand, "for if we fail it will end the business. If he goes home without the colt, his father will beat him, and more than likely will drive him into the woods and forbid him to come back till he brings the horse with him. He is such a hard-hearted, miserly old fellow, that he will accept no excuse from Otto, and his mother doesn't seem to be much better."

After a time Jack reached the point where he found the moonlight streaming over his right shoulder. Of course, he could have secured that lucky omen at any time, but it resulted now from the systematic course he had followed, and he was sure no mistake had been made.

He had no more than formed the conclusion that everything was as it should be, when he was surprised to hear the neigh of a horse within bowshot of where he stood. As it came from the direction of the clearing, no doubt remained that it was the animal for which he was hunting.

"It looks as if it is to be my fortune after all to recover the colt," thought the pleased lad. "It will be a surprise to Otto, but I hope we shall not have to wait any longer, for we have lost a good deal of time."

He moved through the wood, stepping softly, so as not to frighten the animal, which probably had had enough of liberty to be unwilling to go back to bondage.

A brief distance was passed, when the young Kentuckian caught sight of the stray steed. In an opening, less than a tenth of an acre, where there was an abundance of grass, stood the identical colt which ran away the day before. Saddle and bridle were still in place, though even the moonlight was sufficient to show they had suffered much from the journey of the horse. The latter, evidently was suspicious that something was amiss. He was cropping the grass, when the sound of Jack's footsteps alarmed him. He stood with his head up, the grass dripping like water from his mouth, while he listened for the cause of alarm.

Jack Carleton was well aware of the difficulty that faced him when on the very threshold of success. Though he was close to the animal, he was not yet secured.

"Ah! If Deerfoot was here," sighed the boy, "then there would be no doubt of the result, for he would dart forward and catch him. If the horse wanted to run away, he would let him do it, and then the Shawanoe would chase him down, just as easily as he would me or

Otto; but it is going to be hard work for me."

It was difficult to decide on the best course of procedure. The sagacious creature would not only be quick to recognize Jack, but equally quick to understand his purpose in approaching him. It was too much to expect him to submit quietly to recapture.

Jack softly plucked a handful of grass, and, stepping out from the cover of the woods began moving gently toward the colt. The latter turned his head and uttered a sniff of inquiry, at the same time showing an inclination to whirl about and gallop off. The boy stood still and, holding out the grass, deftly manipulated it so that a part dropped loosely to the ground: this insured its notice by his victim. Jack also addressed him in his most soothing tones. He called him all the pet names at his command, and, as the steed still held his ground, the youth resumed his stealthy advance.

Jack Carleton's heart throbbed with hope. The animal threw his head higher, snuffed louder, and manifestly was hesitating whether to permit a closer approach before fleeing, or whether to turn his face at once from temptation.

"A few steps more and he is mine," was the thought of Jack, who repeated the pet names with greater ardor, interspersing them with a variation of cluckings and chirpings that would have charmed a prattling baby. He increased his pace, for he was almost within reach, while the beast snorted with excitement.

All at once Jack dropped the gun in his other hand, and made a desperate plunge, meaning to grasp the forelock of the horse. It may be said that he succeeded, for he felt the coarse, cool hair as it was swept through his fingers by the flirt of the animal's head. Jack missed success, by what may be truly said to have been a hair's breadth.

"Whoa! confound you!"

This command was uttered in a very different tone from that in which he had been addressing the colt a minute before. There was nothing soothing in it, and the animal showed his contempt by whirling about, kicking up his heels and dashing into the woods.

Jack snatched his gun from the ground and bounded after him at the imminent risk of breaking his neck. He was too far from Otto and his captor to attract attention, but the noise may have reached the ears of the Indian. The angered pursuer did not coax or order the colt, for what he had done in that line was sufficient to show the effort was thrown away.

He listened: the animal was still going at a rate which showed he believed the danger was at his heels. The sound he made, while galloping over the leaves and through the bushes, grew fainter and fainter until it died out altogether.

"I suppose he will keep it up for several hours. If he faces toward the settlement, he will reach it to-morrow, but if he veers to the right or left, Otto may as well give up the job."

Jack was keenly disappointed, for he had been confident of success,

and now he was forced to admit there was scarcely a hope of ever seeing the colt again.

"It's a bad go," he said, turning about and moving toward the clearing, where he had left his friend; "we'll keep up the hunt to-morrow, but if he isn't caught before sundown, I shall insist that we go home. Mother's anxious to see me," he added, in a softer voice, "but no more than I am to see her. It has been weeks since we parted, and if anything should happen to her while I am loitering by the way, I can never forgive myself."

He did not reflect that he was exposed to tenfold more harm than his parent. He reproached himself that he had tarried in Coatesville until Otto came for him. He was ready and waiting several days, during which he could have made the journey on foot, without the guidance of his friend.

However, it was too late now for regrets, and he tried to take matters philosophically.

The young Kentuckian made certain he was steadily pursuing the right course, and, when he thought he had advanced far enough, he emitted the whistle agreed upon. Of course no reply came back, for, as the reader knows, the young Teuton for whom the signal was meant was not in a situation to make suitable answer. In fact it did not reach his ears at all.

Without losing any more minutes, Jack Carleton pushed forward, until he was brought to a stand-still by catching the unmistakable glimmer of a light a short distance ahead among the trees.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE EAVESDROPPER

Naturally the first impression of Jack Carleton, on seeing the light, was that it proceeded from the fire kindled by Otto. It struck him as curious that he should do so before he could be certain the horse was captured; but, in accordance with his training, Jack took nothing for granted. A few guarded steps, and he discovered the truth; the light was much closer than he suspected, and came through a slight rent in the side of an Indian wigwam.

The young Kentuckian was astounded, for he had never dreamed of anything of the kind. He concluded he must be on the confines of an Indian village, and made a further investigation; but it did not take long to learn that the lodge stood alone in the great forest.

"I suppose some chieftain or warrior has quarreled with his people and lives by himself," was the remarkably accurate guess of the boy; "I don't know how he feels toward white folks, but I'll take a little further look and then hunt up Otto."

He could not fail to note that the lodge stood close to the clearing

where he had agreed to meet his friend, and he was unable to free himself of a dread, while stealing forward for the purpose of peeping through the rent in the side of the aboriginal structure. Otto must have seen the wigwam before reaching it, though the proprietor might have been quicker in detecting the approach of a stranger.

Fully sensible of the care required, Jack advanced slowly, without noise, feeling every inch of the way. At last he was able to bend forward and peep through the slight opening, which first told him of the location of the wigwam. It required some delicate maneuvering to gain a good view of the interior, and it need not be said that the result was of the most interesting nature.

His eyes, or rather eye (inasmuch as he used only one), first rested on the dusky baby, that had managed to kick off the blanket, and was fiercely tugging at the piece of cooked venison which his dusky mother had tossed him. He held it between his scant teeth, grasping it with his chubby hands, while his feet beat the air, occasionally catching under his chin, as though he was using hands and feet to force the meat apart. He worked his legs with such a vigor that at times he seemed in danger of making a back somersault and bumping through the side of the lodge.

Under other circumstances Jack Carleton would have laughed outright at the comical figure of the bright-eyed infant; but the sight of Otto Relstaub checked all such feeling, and deepened the alarm which came with the first sight of the wigwam.

It so happened that Jack was much closer to his friend than he was to any of the other three figures. No more than two feet separated the boys, and in peering into the lodge, the eavesdropper looked directly over the head and shoulders of Otto. The familiar peaked hat, which had not been removed, the rather long, curling hair, the round, rosy cheek, broad shoulders, the tip of the pug nose, the plump chin, the feet, and the arms resting idly on the drawn-up knees--all these made the young German look like an exaggerated fairy, that had dropped in on some superstitious mortals and was regaling them with tales of wonderland. But Otto was not discoursing to listeners; he was looking from one to the other, sometimes smiling at the snuffing, kicking, clawing infant, and then assuming an anxious expression, when his eyes rested on the face of the others who shared the lodge with him.

The squaw was slowly drawing in and exhaling the vapor from her pipe, with the deliberate enjoyment of an old smoker. With her elbows on her knees, she stared fixedly at Otto, who must have been annoyed by her persistency.

Wish-o-wa-tum, the Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder, occupied his throne of bison skin on the other side of the wigwam, and, having tired of sitting erect as became a monarch, was lounging on his right elbow, leaving his left hand free to manipulate his pipe, which was occasionally taken from his lips, after the cheeks were filled to overflowing with pungent vapor. Then, forming his immense mouth into a contracted circle, he ejected the smoke with his doubled tongue, sending forth ring after ring, in any direction he chose. Looking up at the opening in the top of the lodge, he started a regular procession of blue circles, twisting inward and slowly

expanding as they climbed toward the fresh air, where they were suddenly caught and whirled into nothingness.

Jack had the best view of the chieftain he could wish, and fearful of being detected, drew his head back a few inches so as to be in entire darkness, and studied the ugly countenance. He observed the small, piggish eyes far apart, the big cheek bones, the disfigured nose, the enormous mouth, the slouchy, untidy dress, and even the half dozen straggling hairs that sprouted here and there over his massive chin.

He noticed the flitting glances of the black eyes, and knew that the unattractive Indian had, in some way or other, made a prisoner of Otto Relstaub, whose rifle was missing. Standing on the outside with his loaded gun in hand, the young Kentuckian could have done as he pleased with the red man, who had no suspicions of danger; but the thought of shooting him was unspeakably shocking to Jack, who could not have been persuaded to the step unless forced to do so, in order to save the life of Otto or himself.

Cruel indeed must any one be who could look on the picture of domestic happiness, the stolid father, the contented mother, and the lusty youngster, without feeling his heart stirred by that deep, inborn sympathy which makes the whole world akin.

"He isn't a Shawanoe or Miami," was the conclusion of Jack, after a careful study of the warrior's face and general appearance; "I have never seen an Osage, but have heard much of them, and I'm quite sure he is one. If that is so, he isn't as fierce as his race on the other side the Mississippi, and I think we can get Otto out of there without harm to any one. If we are going to live in this part of the world, we must keep on good terms with the Indians. Helloa! what is the old fellow going to do?"

Jack noticed that the head of the family had stopped glancing from one part of the lodge to another, and was looking steadily at Otto, as if he meditated some design against him.

And so he did. Drawing in an enormous quantity of smoke, he removed the stem from his leathern lips, contracted them into another O, and suddenly shot out a vapory ring, followed instantly by a second, third and fourth, and then by so many that they stumbled over each other's heels, as may be said. Indeed, the mouth of Wish-a-wa-tum seemed to have become a mitrailleue for the moment, that sent a continuous volley across the wigwam.

When the bombardment opened, Otto was looking thoughtfully at the ground in the middle of the lodge, so that his face was turned toward the chieftain. The latter aimed with such skill that, as he intended, the first ring passed directly over the end of Otto's pug nose, which for the instant looked as though some painter had enclosed the organ in a delicately tinted circle.

The latter was no more than in place, when it was followed by several others. The series, however, was blown into nothingness by a resounding sneeze from Otto, which started the vapor toward the opening above, that seemed to exert a greater power as the distance from the ground increased. When within a few inches of the outlet, the smoke flew apart, spun around and whisked out of sight, with the

current that was borne upward from every part of the lodge.

"Donderation!" exclaimed Otto as best he could, through the strangling vapor; "what for you don't do dot? Don't you wants to kill somepody mit your smoke--don't it? Yaw I oogh!"

Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder did not stir. Still holding his pipe suspended in his left hand, he looked at the discomfited youth and smiled.

The smile was the most prodigious on which Jack Carleton had ever looked. He saw the corners of the mouth move back on the cheeks until it seemed they must touch the ears. Perhaps the chief smiled so seldom that the few served to bring up the "general average" of those that were lacking.

Wish-o-wa-tum could have added to the distress of Otto by continuing his vapory cannonade, but he refrained, and amused himself by sending the rings once more toward the chimney.

While this little episode was going on, the squaw, with her chin on her hands and her elbows on her knees, continued to stare at Otto; but she showed no disposition to smile even in the slightest degree. In her the element of mirth appeared to be totally lacking.

It is more than probable that she had not acquired the art of ejecting the circles of smoke, or she would have followed up the exhibition of her husband with a similar one, inspired thereto by the innate ugliness of her nature.

The incident described did much to dissipate the alarm of Jack Carleton for his friend. The overwhelming smile on the countenance of the chieftain made it attractive, for it was free from the disfigurement of hate.

"Yes, he is an Osage, with his wife and little one. He may not be a pleasant neighbor, but he would not dare to live away from his tribe, if he was as cruel as the Shawanoes or Hurons. Some of the settlers would shoot him and his squaw and papoose."

This theory was reasonable, but from the nature of the case it could not be complete in the assurance it brought to the mind of the young Kentuckian, inasmuch as it failed to explain several alarming facts.

In the first place, Otto, manifestly, was a prisoner in the lodge. He had no gun with which to defend himself, nor could the guarded peeping of the eavesdropper discover the weapon within the wigwam. In what manner the German had fallen into the power of the Osage was beyond conjecture, nor could Jack guess the ultimate intentions of the captor.

"I have my loaded gun," was the thought of the youth, "and I ought to be able to get Otto out of this scrape. I shall be sorry, indeed, to harm any one in the wigwam, and so long as it is possible to avoid it, I will. If the warrior receives injury it will be his own fault."

At such times, the most curious fancies often take possession of a person. Jack Carleton had convinced himself that the Indian, wigwam was the only one in the neighborhood; but he had scarcely decided

what his course should be, when he began to fear he had made a mistake. It seemed unlikely that a single Osage should dwell apart from his tribe in that fashion.

"There must be other lodges near me," he thought, stepping softly back and peering around in the gloom.

It mattered not that he saw no lights from any of them, for he reasoned that they might be hidden by the intervening trees. So strong was the feeling, that he moved further off and repeated the very reconnaissance made a short time previous.

He would not have done so, had he not known that Otto was in no immediate danger from his captor. Had the latter offered him harm, the struggle would have been heard in the stillness of the night, and Jack would have rushed to the relief of his friend.

Finally, the eavesdropper became satisfied that whatever the issue of the strange situation, he had but the single family to face. Then he was distressed by the doubt as to what the squaw would do, if he carried out his scheme. It is well known that the Indian women are as brave, and frequently more cruel, toward their captives than are the warriors themselves. If the one before him became violent, Jack would be likely to find he had undertaken a task beyond his power.

His determination was to walk directly into the lodge and act as if he believed the occupants were his friends. He therefore strode forward toward the entrance, purposely kicking the leaves with his feet; and it was that noise which apprised those within of his approach.

CHAPTER XXIX

WITHIN THE WIGWAM

Jack Carleton walked to the flapping deerskin which closed the entrance to the wigwam, flung it aside, and, stooping slightly, stepped within. Looking into the face of Wish-o-wa-tum, he made a half military salute and, straightening up, called out:

"How do you do, brother?"

The etiquette of the visitor required him to advance and offer his hand, but he was afraid to do so while in doubt as to the sentiments of the chief. The young Kentuckian recalled an instance somewhat similar to the present, wherein a Huron warrior, grasping the hand of the white man who offered it, suddenly drew him forward and plunged his hunting-knife into his side.

The unexpected visit of Jack produced a sensation amounting, for the moment, almost to consternation. For the first time the squaw showed genuine surprise. Snapping the pipe from her mouth, she threw up her head with a grunt, and stared at the athletic youth. The kicking baby on the hearth appeared to understand that something unusual was going

on, and held arms and legs still, while he stared, with his round black eyes, toward the figure at the other end of the lodge.

Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder turned his head, holding his pipe in hand, and looked inquiringly at the visitor. He showed no signs of fear, but, manifestly, he was astonished. His fragmentary conversation with the other boy had given him no cause to look for such a call, though he saw at a glance that the two were friends.

Otto Relstaub beamed with delight. With an expanse of smile second only to that of which the sachem was capable, he rose partly to his feet and, looking at Jack, called out:

"Mine gracious! Jack, I didn't look for nodings of you pefore, as dot ish--"

"Hold on!" interposed the lad at the door, with a laugh and wave of the hand, "sit down and compose yourself till you can talk straighter than that."

"I dinks I does--yaw," muttered the happy fellow, willing to do anything suggested by his companion; "but come in and sot down."

While addressing Otto, Jack kept his eyes on Wish-o-wa-tum, for it may be said he was the key of the situation. If he showed hostility, trouble was sure to follow. Jack half expected to see him make a leap for his bow or rifle, or attempt to draw his tomahawk.

If he does thought the boy, "I'll raise my gun first, and he will understand what that means."

But the looks and manner of the host (if such he may be called) were neither hostile nor friendly; they were indifferent, as though the whole business possessed no interest to him. After his first surprised stare, he swung his head back to its former position and slowly smoked his pipe as before.

Jack Carleton made up his mind on the moment that his true course was to carry out his first idea that is, to act as though there was no doubt of the friendship of the Osage.

Stepping to the left, he set his gun on the ground with the muzzle leaning against the side of the lodge. No more expressive sign of comity could have been given than this simple act. He then advanced to the beefy, stolid chieftain, to whom he offered his hand, repeating the words:

"How do you do, brother?"

Wish-o-wa-tum took the fingers in his own immense palm, and gave them a moderate pressure. Though it might have been called a warm salute, it sent a shiver through the youth, who unconsciously braced himself against any sudden pull of the savage, his other hand, at the same time, vaguely seeking the handle of his knife.

But, whatever thoughts or intentions may have stirred the massive chieftain, they gave no evidence of their nature in his face. He looked up at the boy, and, as he slightly wobbled the hand within his own, said:

"How do, brudder?"

Jack then turned about and greeted Otto, who could scarcely contain himself. The movement, it will be noticed, placed the back of the former toward the chief, and he was conscious of another chill running up and down his spine; for no better opportunity could be given the Indian to strike one of those treacherous, lightning-like blows peculiar to the savage races.

"Keep your eye on him," said Jack, in an undertone, while shaking the hand of Otto, and both were talking loud and effusively.

Otto nodded his head and winked, to signify he caught on, and did not check, for a single moment, his rattling flow of talk. Jack, in the most natural manner, shifted his position to one side, so he was able to look upon every one in the wigwam without the appearance of any special object in doing so.

The great point with the callers was to secure the good-will of the savages. It may seem shrewd on their part, but any boy, no matter what his age, knows that the surest way to win the friendship of a household is to magnify the importance of the baby.

The thought occurred to Otto long before, and more than once he explored his garments in search of some present for the youngster; but he possessed nothing that would answer. His pockets were empty of anything in the shape of coin, bright medals, buttons, or playthings of any sort likely to attract the eye of the aboriginal American infant.

He might have handed his hunting-knife to him, but more than likely, in his blind striking and kicking, he would gouge out an eye or attempt to scalp himself, and then the mother would turn upon the donor in her wrath. Otto considered the project of borrowing the tomahawk of the chief and passing it over to the heir, but feared he would knock out his own brains or do something desperate, by which retribution would be visited on the head of Otto.

But Jack Carleton was more fortunate, for in the pocket of his trousers was an English shilling, worn smooth and shining with the friction to which it had been long subjected. It was just the thing to catch the eye of any baby, no matter what its nativity, and he stepped hastily forward and handed it to the one before him.

The movement interested the parents scarcely less than the child. They watched Jack closely. The little fellow snatched the bright coin in his snuffling, awkward fashion, and, when it was clutched in his fingers, made a furious shove, intending to drive it into his mouth.

"Hold on," called Jack, in alarm; "I didn't give it to you to eat; I don't believe you can digest it."

Just then the little fellow began to kick, cough, and fling himself harder than ever. The mother sprang forward with an exclamation in her native tongue, and, catching her baby in her arms, began manipulating him in the most original fashion. Standing upright in

the middle of the wigwam, she inverted him, and, holding him by the heels, worked him up and down, as though he were the dasher of a chum.

"If she don't do dot a leedle harder his head vill bounce off," remarked Otto.

The shilling flew from the throat of the baby, and Jack, thinking it had done enough harm, scooped over to pick it up; but, before he could lay hands on it, the mother snatched it from the ground and shoved it into one of the capacious receptacles of her dress. Evidently she identified the coin and knew its value.

"All right," laughed Jack; "I'll be glad to have you keep it, if it will help to buy your friendship for us."

During this stirring episode, and when the boys feared the heir of the wigwam was likely to choke himself to death, the father never ceased smoking, his pipe. His piggish eyes were turned sideways, as though he thought the performance worth looking at; but, beyond that, he did not disturb himself.

The infant, after his unpleasant experience, seemed to be as well as ever, and being tumbled back on the bison skin resumed his kicking and, crowing, as though seeking to make up for lost time.

The occurrence produced an effect on Jack Carleton similar to that caused by the sight of the expansive smile of the Osage chieftain: he felt that no dangerous ill-will could exist wigwam which was the scene of the incident.

The boys resumed their seats beside each other, where the other occupants of the lodge were in sight all the time, and then spoke with freedom.

"I don't think they will, offer any harm," Jack, alluding, of course, to the squaw and the warrior. I suspect he is an Osage."

"Yaw--dot ish vot he tolds me," said Otto carefully weighing his words.

"What else did he tell you? But, first of all, let me know how you came to be his guest."

Thereupon the German related, in his own fashion, the story which long since became familiar to the reader. Jack Carleton listened with much interest, glancing from the husband to the wife and back again, with an occasional look at the baby, that had become so motionless as to show that he was asleep.

"So you didn't get anything to eat?" remarked the young Kentuckian; "when I first saw you here I thought you were after food. I am hungry, but I think the best thing we can do is to leave the lodge."

"Vy not stays till mornings?"

"It might do; but I'm a little too nervous to sleep, for there can be no certainty about them. I hunted around for other lodges, but found none, and yet there may be plenty not far off. He may have

visitors, and, if they find us here, there's no telling what they will do."

"What for you leave your gun ober dere just as I does mit mine?"

"It struck me that that was the best way to show the old fellow that not only was I friendly myself, but that I took him to be a friend."

"Dot ish so; but it would be as nice as nefet vos if bofe of our guns had us."

"I will get mine."

"Mebbe he won't lets you."

"I'm almost as close to it as he; I can take a step or two before he will see what I mean to do, and then, if he undertakes to stop me, he will be too late."

"Vot musn't I does?"

"Attend to the squaw: if she makes a dive after me, you grab and hold her."

"Yaw," was the hesitating response of Otto, who saw what unpleasant phases the situation was likely to assume.

Before Jack Carleton rose to his feet, he discovered that something extraordinary was going on in the lodge. Although the chief was sitting in his lazy attitude, yet his senses were on the alert and some sort of telegraphy was passing between him and his wife. Both continued smoking their pipes and did not speak nor move their bodies. Any one unable to see their faces would not suspect they were looking at each other.

But they were not only doing so, but, singular as it may seem, were sending messages mainly by means of the smoke issuing from their dusky lips. It was puffed forth, in every variety of manner, sometimes with little short jets, then with longer ones, then from one corner of the mouth and again from the other, all being accompanied by a contortion of the flexible lips which doubtless suggested some of the words in the minds of the two.

"That's very strange," said Jack, in an undertone, after he and Otto had watched the performance several minutes.

"Yaw, dot ish vot I dinks."

"Why do they affect all that mystery? If they want to say anything to each other, why not speak in their own tongue? Neither of us can understand the first word."

"But they doesn't knows dot."

"They ought to know it. However, we can't guess what they're talking about, though I would give much to know."

Husband and wife were quick to observe they were under scrutiny, but they continued the curious interchange of thoughts for some time

longer. By and by they ceased and seemed be doing nothing beside smoking; Carleton was right in his belief that the sachem had heard something on the outside wigwam which greatly interested them.

CHAPTER XXX

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

Both Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub were disturbed by the singular behavior of the squaw and chief.

"They're talking about something outdoors," whispered Jack; "keep quiet and listen."

The faint rustling of the leaves, the gentle breathing of the sleeping infant, and the soft purring of the fire (caused by the sudden flaring up of one of the brands), were the only sounds that came to their ears. Wish-o-wa-tum held the stem of his pipe between his lips, without ejecting any smoke, while his eyes were fixed on the ground in front of his feet, with that absent expression which showed he was listening intently to something not visible to the eye. The attitude of the wife was similar, except that she looked steadily in the face of Jack Carleton, as though seeking to read his thoughts.

Hark! both the boys caught a stirring of the leaves, precisely as if made by the foot of an animal prowling around the wigwam.

"Sh!" warned Jack; "it's a man or beast!"

The words had no more than left his lips, when the flapping deerskin was silently drawn backward and an Indian warrior entered.

He was powerful and well formed in his war paint, and with his long rifle in his right hand. He had no blanket thrown over his shoulders, but he was fully dressed in other respects, with knife and tomahawk thrust in the girdle around his waist.

The first glance showed that he not only belonged to the Shawanoe tribe, but he was one of the most dreaded members of the same. Both Otto and Jack had seen him before, his forehead and cheeks being so curiously marked as to identify him wherever no one else was similarly ornamented.

When the boys were making their desperate run for the shelter of the logs on the other side, of the Mississippi, Otto threw back an affrighted look, which gave him such a vivid picture of that particular savage that he felt the memory would remain with him through life. A few minutes after, as my reader will recall, Jack deliberately held fast to the upper edge of the rude fort and looked over upon the fierce warriors outside. The one who particularly impressed him was the Shawanoe with the hideously painted countenance. It was this same Indian that flung the bear skin about his shoulders and, creeping up the inclined tree trunk, surveyed the astonished youths below, and it was he who now entered the lodge of

Wish-o-wa-tum and confronted the inmates.

The truth flashed upon the boys: he was one of a party that had followed them across the Mississippi, and had traced them to this lodge. It was natural the youths should believe that others were not far off.

It will be remembered that Otto had left his gun on the edge of the clearing some distance away, while the weapon of Jack stood near the entrance of the lodge. The instant the Shawanoe stepped inside, his eye rested on it, and, as if divining the truth, he extended his hand and picked it up. The act gave him two guns, while neither of the boys possessed a fire-arm.

Having performed this clever exploit, the Shawanoe, still standing erect, just within the lodge, turned to the chief and addressed him in what may be termed a mixture of the Shawanoe and Osage tongues. He paid no attention to the squaw at the other end of the wigwam, for to an American Indian the native woman is of little account under any circumstances.

Nor did his face indicate that he was aware of the presence of the boys, who looked at him with dismay; but it was morally certain that the conversation which opened immediately related almost solely to them.

"My gracious!" said Jack, when able to recover himself, "this is bad for us. I never dreamed of anything of the kind."

He spoke very guardedly, with his head close to his friend's though both narrowly watched the warriors, while giving expression to their own fears.

"Vie didn't we start sooner don he comes?" whispered Otto, his jaw trembling with fear; "I don't see vot we doted does."

An absurd scheme of escape suggested itself to Jack.

"I wonder whether we can't dash through the side of the lodge and get away."

"Wait till I sees."

Otto carefully leaned back with a view of learning bow much resistance the deerskins would offer. While they were quite strong, they were not taut, and yielded so much that the boy tipped over backwards, with his feet in the air, somewhat after the style of the baby when frolicking on the blanket.

The two warriors, including the squaw, looked stolidly at him, and there was not the trace of a smile on any countenance. Agitated as was Jack, he could not repress a slight laugh when he witnessed the discomfiture of his companion.

"Mine gracious!" muttered Otto, clambering to the sitting position again; "I dinks dot some one have pulls de lodge away van I don't leans against him."

Jack shook his head.

"There's no use of trying that; before we could get through they could catch us both. If they attack us, we'll have to make the best fight we can."

"And dot won't be good for nodding," was the truthful remark of Otto, who looked toward the two warriors again.

The Shawanoe must have felt he was entire master of the situation. As if to remove any doubt on that point in the minds of the youths, he now set down the gun he had picked up, leaned his own against the side of the lodge, close to it, and then seated himself about half way between the door and the sleeping baby. This placed him opposite Wish-o-wa-tum and closer to the entrance where were Otto and Jack. For the latter to pass out, they must rush by both warriors, a feat utterly impossible, should the Indians object. It was equally beyond their power to secure the guns, which would have proven potent factors in settling the question.

"I believe he has left the rifles there on purpose to tempt us to make a dash for them," said Jack, half inclined to accept the challenge, hopeless as it was.

"Dot ish vot they does him for," assented Otto.

Jack was strongly of the belief that other Shawanoes were near. It was unreasonable to suppose that a single warrior would have crossed the Mississippi alone, when a dozen of them had proven unable to bring the boys to terms.

"They have found we are in here," was the thought of the boy, "and becoming tired of waiting for us, have sent this one to talk with the Osage and to hurry us out. Ah, why did Deerfoot leave us so soon? If we ever needed him, now is the time."

The name of the wonderful youth gave a new turn to the thoughts of the lad. He asked himself whether it was probable that the Shawanoes and Miamis had sent a party over to pursue the boys alone, or to revenge themselves upon Deerfoot. Their enmity against the latter must be tenfold greater than it could be against any one else.

The most natural decision to which the lad could come was that the hostiles were numerous enough to divide and follow both trails. At any rate it was improbable, as has already been said, that the task of running the youths to earth was entrusted to a single warrior.

While Wish-o-wa-tum and his latest visitor were talking in their odd, granting fashion, the boys carefully studied their countenances, in the vain effort to read the meaning of the words that passed their lips. They occasionally glanced at the squaw, who manifested more interest than was expected. Sometimes she held the pipe for a minute or two motionless, her eyes on the warriors, as if anxious to catch every word. Then she would give a snuff or grunt, lean forward and stir the fire and smoke with great vigor.

To the amazement of the listening boys, the red men all at once changed their language to the English--or rather they attempted to do so, for they made sorry work of it.

"Dog Deerfoot--he dog," was the somewhat obscure remark of the latest arrival.

"Him so," nodded Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder, who probably had never beard of the individual until within the last few minutes.

"Deerfoot dog--coward--shoot Injin no more."

Wish-o-wa-tum started a reply in English, but the difficulty was such that he slid back into his own lingo. Consequently, the purport of what he said was lost upon the youths. Jack Carleton, however, was quick enough to suspect the meaning, of the proceeding which troubled him so much at first. The words in broken English were intended for the friends of Deerfoot. It was characteristic of the Shawanoe visitor that he should attempt to play upon the feelings of the hapless boys.

"Deerfoot dead," he added, with a sidelong glance toward the latter, which confirmed the suspicion of the young Kentuckian.

Otto started on hearing the words, but whispered, as he hitched closer to his friend:

"I don't dinks so."

"Nor do I--hark!"

"How die?" asked Wish-o-wa-tum again struggling with the tongue to which he was a subject rather than of which he was master.

"Arorara threw him down," replied the visitor, striking his fist against his breast to signify the name was his own; "jump on him--take scalp. Deerfoot dog!"

"I know how deceitful the Indians are," said Jack in the same low tone, "but that fellow don't know bow to lie in English. I should like to see the warrior that can throw Deerfoot down and take his scalp."

The Shawanoe seemed to have overheard the expression, or at least suspected its meaning, guarded though the words were in their utterance, for he leaped to his feet and again striking his fist against his chest, exclaimed in hot anger:

"Deerfoot dog--Deerfoot dead! Arorara take scalp."

To the amazement of Jack Carleton, Otto also sprang to his feet, and struck his chest a resounding thump.

"Arorara ish one pig liar!" he shouted; "he is a liar as never vos! He says dot Deerfoot is dead, and dere stands Deerfoot now!"

And as the German lad thundered the words, he pointed toward the deerskin, which had been flung back once more.

CHAPTER XXXI

PURSUER AND PURSUED

When Deerfoot the Shawanoe encountered his enemy in the path and turned over the rifle to him, he knew that his leniency toward his implacable foe had not softened his heart in the least. He only awaited the opportunity to turn like a rattlesnake on his magnanimous master, and the youth therefore took particular care that such opportunity should not be given him.

Deerfoot held his tomahawk tightly grasped and poised, determined to hurl it with resistless and unerring aim on the very first move of the warrior against him. He remained as rigid as bronze until the other was a couple of rods distant. Then he noiselessly shoved back the tomahawk in his girdle, picked up his bow and vanished like a shadow. When the warrior turned, as the reader will recall, he saw no one.

Deerfoot was confident that after such a meeting, the one whom he had spared would not follow him. He would be glad enough to escape altogether without arousing the wrath of him who would not show mercy a second time. Nevertheless, the matchless youth sped along the path in the gathering gloom, with that swiftness which earned him his expressive name while he was yet a mere boy. No man, American or Caucasian, could hold his own against him in his phenomenal fleetness. He swept through the forest, never pausing, but darting forward like a bird on the wing, that eludes by the marvelous quickness of eye the labyrinth of limbs and obstructions which interpose almost every second across his line of flight.

Not until he had sped fully a half mile did slacken in the slightest his astonishing pace, and then there was not the least quickening of the pulse or hastening of the gentle breath. Had chose, he could have maintained the same for hours without discomfort or fatigue.

While, in one sense, Deerfoot was fleeing a Shawanoe, he was, in the same sense, pursue another, in whom his chief interest centered. The night deepened, and the moon, climbing above the tree tops, penetrated the gloomy recesses in few places with its silvery beams. When a mile had been passed, the young warrior paused and listened.

"He cannot follow me when his eyes see no trail," he said to himself, alluding to the Shawanoe whom he had spared.

It followed as a corollary that the same difficulty confronted him in pursuing his friends and the enemy who clung so close to their footprints. He stopped and softly passed his hand over the leafy ground. Not the slightest artificial depression was there; he had lost the trail of the party.

As it was utterly out of the question to learn how far he had diverged from the path, it was also beyond his power to return to it--that is, so long as the night lasted. The hoof-prints of the horse were cut so deep in the yielding earth that, with considerable trouble, he could have traced them among the trees; but even then he would lack the great help which the scout is generally able to command. In following a trail at night, he needs to possess a

thorough knowledge of the country, so as to reason out the probable destination of his enemies, and consequently the general route they will take. More than likely they will aim for some crossing or camping ground, many miles in advance. The knowledge of the hunter may enable him to take a shorter course and, by putting his horse to his best, reach of them. About all he does, when engaged in this hot chase, is to take his observations at widely separated points, with a view of learning he is going astray.

It was precisely in this manner that the greatest scout of modern days, Kit Carson, led a party on the heels of a party of Mexican horse-thieves, with his steeds on a fall gallop the night thoroughly overtook the criminals at daylight, chastised them and recaptured the stolen property.

Deerfoot was lacking in that one requisite--familiarity with the country. He had journeyed up and down the shores of the Mississippi, had visited the settlement further west, and had gain much knowledge of the southwestern portion of the present State of Missouri; but this member of our Union occupies an immense area, and years would be needed to enable him to act as guide through every section of it. He had never traveled in many parts, and it will be perceived, therefore, that it was out of his power to theorize in the wonderfully brilliant manner which often made his successes due to an intuitive inspiration that at times seemed to hover on the verge of the unknowable sixth sense.

But strange must be the occasion in which Deerfoot would feel compelled to fold his arms and say, "I can do no more."

He had stood less than three minutes in the attitude of deep attention, when he emitted a peculiar fluttering whistle, such as a timid night bird sometimes makes from its perch in the up most branches, while calling to its mate. It was still trembling on the air, when a response came from a point not far away and to the right. Could any one have seen the face of the youthful Shawanoe, he would have observed a faint but grim smile playing around his mouth.

He had uttered the signal which the Shawanoes rarely used. When members of their scouts became temporarily lost from each other, while in the immediate neighborhood of an enemy, and it was necessary they should locate themselves, they did so by means of the signal described. They refrained from appealing to it except in cases of the utmost urgency, for if used too often it was likely to become known to their enemies and its usefulness thus destroyed.

Deerfoot had secured a reply from the Shawanoe for whom he was hunting, and thus learned his precise whereabouts. He instantly began stealing his way toward him.

The usage among this remarkable tribe of Indians required him to repeat the peculiar cry after hearing it, and the party of the second should respond similarly. When the call had been wafted back and forth in this fashion, Shawanoe law forbade its repetition, except after a considerable interval, and then only under the most urgent necessity.

Deerfoot held his peace, though he knew warrior was awaiting his

answer. Failing to call the response, the other would conclude that the signal was in truth the call of a bird; but to guard against any error, he repeated the tremulous whistle, when the stealthy Deerfoot was within a few rods.

The latter could have taken his life with suddenness almost of the lightning bolt, but he had no wish to do so. If Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub were in danger it would be from this warrior alone, and so long as Deerfoot could keep him "in hand" no such danger existed.

In the open forest, where the moonlight penetrated, a shadowy figure assumed shape, and the pursuer recognized it as that of the Indian whom he was so anxious to find. He had concluded to wait no longer, and was advancing in a blind way along the trail of the lads.

Deerfoot stooped and passed his hand over the ground. One sweep was enough to, identify the prints of the horse's hoofs, and the more delicate impressions made by shoes and moccasins. The young Shawanoe, by a careful examination of the trail, did that which will scarcely be believed: he ascertained that one pair of moccasins went forward and the other took the opposite course. Consequently, the Shawanoes had parted company at a point slightly in advance (it could not be far), and the warrior whom he saw must have waited where he was while the night was closing in.

A few rods further and a second examination revealed the trail of a single pair of moccasins, the line of demarcation had been passed.

All this time the elder was pushing among trees, Deerfoot catching a glimpse of him now and then, so as to be able to regulate his own pace that of his enemy. It was needful also that much circumspection should be used, for when one person can trace the movements of another, it follows that the possibilities are reciprocal and the law vice versa obtains. The youth therefore held resolutely back, and so guarded his movements that he was assured against detection by any glance the warrior might cast behind him.

The trees in front diminished in number and soon ceased altogether. The Shawanoe had reached the edge of a natural opening or clearing. Pausing a moment, he stepped out where the moon shone full upon him, and then halted again. Having the advantage of cover, Deerfoot slipped carefully forward, until he stood within a few yards of the red man, who little dreamed of the dreaded one that was within the throw of a tomahawk.

The elder Indian seemed to be speculating the probable course of the unconscious fugitives. It could not be supposed that he was familiar with the country (since his home was on the other side of the Mississippi), but like the majority of mankind when in difficulty, he was able to form a theory, but unlike that majority, he proved his faith in it by his works. Instead of following the footprints, he diverged to the right and coursed along the edge of the clearing, where he was almost entirely concealed by the shadow of the trees.

He had not gone far, when Deerfoot silently emerged from the wood. His keen eye revealed what must have been noticed by the other: on that spot the boys had stopped with the intention of encamping for the night. Had they remained, beyond all doubt one or both would

have been slain, but from some cause (long since explained to the reader) they passed on.

Deerfoot hurried on with a speed that was almost reckless, for that marvelous intuition seemed to whisper that the crisis was near. His friends could not be far off, and the question of safety or danger must be speedily settled.

Just beyond the clearing, while hastening forward, he caught, the glow of the fire shining through the rents and crevices of the shabby skin of the Osage wigwam. He heard the of voices within, and a few seconds later he was peeping through the same orifice that had a similar purpose for Jack Carleton when played the part of eavesdropper.

CHAPTER XXXII

TURNING THE TABLES

Although Jack Carleton and Otto Relstaub understood nothing of the conversation (excepting the few words of mangled English) between Wish-o-wa-tum, the Osage chieftain, and the Shawanoe who entered his lodge, little was lost upon Deerfoot.

Without quoting the language, it may be said that Arorara declared the two boys to be thieves and wretches of the worst imaginable degree. They had stolen the horses of the Shawanoes and Miamis, and had treacherously shot, not only the warriors, but the squaws and papooses, when they lay asleep by their camp-fires.

Arorara said he had been sent by his people to follow across the river, and punish them for their many crimes. His purpose in placing the guns as he had done, near the entrance of the lodge, was to tempt the boys to make a rush to escape.

When they did so, Arorara proposed that he and Wish-o-wa-tum should leap upon them with knives.

When this plan was fully explained to the chief, he nodded his head and signified that he would willingly lend his hand. It was a matter of indifference to him, and, but for the coming of the Shawanoe, he probably would have allowed the boys to depart without harm. With Wish-o-wa-tum the whole question resolved itself into one of policy. He lived alone and had never been disturbed by the white settlers, who were locating in different parts of the territory. If he should help in the taking off of youngsters, their friends would not be likely to suspect him, and there was little probability of the truth ever reaching their ears.

But, if he refused the request of the guest, the fierce tribe to which he belonged would be sure to go out of their way to punish him. He therefore gave his assent, and added that he was ready to do his part whenever Arorara wished.

It was at that juncture that the two red men essayed expression in English, and Deerfoot saw that he must interfere at once. While

moving to the front of the lodge, he scanned his immediate surroundings, so far as he could, but neither saw nor heard anything of the other Shawanoe. In short, from what has already been told, it will be seen that it was impossible for him to be in that vicinity.

Throwing back the deerskin, the youthful warrior stepped quickly within the wigwam. His bow was flung over his back, and, being perfectly familiar with the interior, he extended his hand and caught up the weapon nearest him, standing erect and facing all the occupants as did Arorara a short time before. This movement and the entrance itself were made with such deftness that no one observed his presence, with the exception of Otto Relstaub, who by accident happened to look toward him just as he entered.

But the startling words of the German lad, accompanied by the extension of his arm and finger toward the door, turned every eye like a flash in that direction. They were just in time to catch a glimpse of the arms of Deerfoot, as they were raised like the flitting of the wings of a bird, and almost in the same breath the youth was seen to be looking along the gleaming barrel pointed the breast of the astounded warrior.

"Dog of a Shawanoe!" exclaimed Deerfoot, his voice as firm and unwavering as his nerves; "coward! Serpent that creeps in the grass and strikes the heel of the hunter; Arorara speaks with a double tongue; he says he took the scalp of Deerfoot, but the scalp of Deerfoot is here, and he dares Arorara and Waughtauk and Tecumseh and all the chiefs and sachems and warriors of the Shawanoes, to take it!"

The rifle, with the hammer drawn back, was flung to the ground, and whipping out his hunting knife, the youth grasped the handle with fingers of steel and assumed a defiant attitude. His face was aflame with passion, and his breast became a raging volcano of wrath.

In truth, Deerfoot had lost control of himself for the moment. An overwhelming sense of his persecution caused his nature to revolt, and he longed for the excuse to leap upon the Shawanoe who had followed him across the Mississippi. There was a single moment when he gathered his muscles for a tiger-like bound at his enemy, he was restrained only by the pitiful expression on the terrified countenance.

The youth addressed his words to Arorara and his blazing eyes were fixed on him. He had no quarrel with Wish-o-wa-tum and understood his position, but he would not have shrunk from an attack by both. Deerfoot knew that either was more powerful than he, but in cat-like agility there could be no comparison between them.

Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder, however, showed very plainly that he held the invader of his lodge in great fear. He displayed visible emotion, when listening to the ringing words of defiance; but he possessed sense enough to perceive they were not addressed to him, and he continued to smoke his pipe in silence.

The squaw at the further end of the wigwam started, and with the pipe in her grasp, stared with a dazed expression at the daring intruder; then, like the true mother the world over, she leaned forward, caught up her sleeping infant and held him to her breast,

ready to defend him with her life.

Arorara looked in turn straight into the burning countenance of Deerfoot. The elder warrior had unconsciously assumed an admirable pose, his left foot forward, his hand resting on the handle of his tomahawk, his whole position that of a gathering his strength for a tremendous leap. But though his fingers toyed with the weapon at his waist, they did not draw it forth; it was for that precise signal the youth was waiting.

While in this attitude, which might have been accepted as indicating the most heroic courage, Deerfoot saw the lump or Adam's apple rise sink in his throat, precisely as if he were to swallow something. It was done twice, and was a sign of weakness on the part of Arorara.

The consuming anger of Deerfoot burned out like a flash of powder. Hatred became contempt; enmity turned to scorn, and the mortal peril of the warrior vanished.

"Who now is the dog?" asked Deerfoot in English, with a curl of his lip. "Arorara is brave when he stands before the youths who have no weapons; he then speaks with the double tongue; he cannot utter the truth. Arorara has his tomahawk and knife, Deerfoot has his; let them fight and see whose scalp shall remain."

"Don't you do dot, old Roarer," exclaimed Otto Relstaub, stepping forward in much excitement; "if you does, den you won't be old Roarer not any more, as nefer vose-yaw! Dunderation!"

"Let them alone," commanded Jack Carleton, catching his arm and drawing him back; "don't interfere."

"Don't you sees?" asked Otto, turning his head and speaking in a whisper; "I want to scare old Roarer."

"There's no call for doing that, for he's so seared now he can't speak; he won't fight Deerfoot."

Arorara possessed less courage than Tecumseh, who, when challenged by Deerfoot in almost the same manner, would have fought him to the death had not others interposed. The Shawanoe was now in mortal terror of such an encounter.

"Deerfoot and Arorara are brothers," said he, swallowing again the lump that rose in his throat; "they belong to the same totem; they are Shawanoes; the Great Spirit would frown to see them harm each other."

The words were spoken in Shawanoe, but Jack and Otto saw, from the looks and manner of the elder warrior, that he was subdued and could not be forced into a struggle with the lithe and willowy youth.

It was not flattering to the pride of the young Kentuckian and his companion that while Arorara felt no fear of them jointly, he was terrified by the bearing of Deerfoot, who voluntarily relinquished the advantage he possessed in the hope that it would induce the other to fight.

The abject words of Arorara caused a reaction in the feelings of Deerfoot. His conscience condemned him for his outburst of passion, and had the situation permitted, he would have prostrated himself in prayer and begged the forgiveness of the Great Spirit whom he had offended.

But nothing in his face or voice or manner betrayed the change.

He remained standing in front of the deerskin, which was thrown back, so that the light from the camp-fire shone against the gloom beyond; his left hand held the knife with the same rigid grasp, and the limbs, which in the American Indian rarely show much muscular development, were as drawn as steel.

The squaw clasped the sleeping infant to her husky bosom and glared at Deerfoot, like a lioness at bay. Had he advanced to do harm to her offspring, she would have sprang upon him with the fierceness of that beast and defended the little one to the death. Had the youth assailed Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder, probably she would have sat an interested spectator of the scene until it became clear which way it was going, when she might have wrapped her baby in bison-skin, placed him carefully away, and taken a part in the struggle.

The Osage resumed the deliberate puffing of his pipe, but glanced from one face to the other of the two Shawanoes. Stolid and lazy as he was, by nature and training, he could not help feeling stirred by the curious scene.

Jack Carleton and Otto were on their feet, studying the two countenances with equal intentness. Both were cheered by the consciousness that danger no longer threatened them, and that whatever followed must accord with the fact that Deerfoot the Shawanoe was master of the situation.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONCLUSION

"My brother speaks with a single tongue," said Deerfoot, replying to the cringing words of Arorara: "the Great Spirit will frown when he sees two brothers fighting each other. Deerfoot has slain more than one Shawanoe and has spared others; he will spare Arorara; he may sit down beside the Osage warrior and smoke pipe with him."

Immediately the youth shoved his knife in place, and for the first time seemed to become aware that he stood in the presence of others. He bestowed no attention on Wish-o-wa-tum or his squaw, but addressed his young friends.

"Let my brothers go from this lodge and make their way homeward; Arorara will not pursue them."

"Arorara will do them no harm," said the individual in as cringing manner as before.

"No, he will not, for Deerfoot will watch and slay Arorara if he seeks to do so," quietly remarked the youth, who, in every sense of the word, continued master of the situation.

"Let us do vot he tells us," suggested Otto, moving awkwardly toward the door.

Deerfoot stepped slightly aside, to make room for them, and Jack accepted the movement as an invitation for them to pass out. Otto held back so as to permit the other to go first, and he followed close behind him. Otto did not glance at or speak to either. He had his misgivings concerning not only Arorara, but the Osage, who might resent this invasion of his castle. Like the finely trained Indian, he "took no chances."

Jack and Otto were intensely interested in the situation, but they did not forget themselves. The former, as he passed out, picked up his own rifle, while Otto took the one belonging to the Indian, who was left at liberty to hunt the gun left on the clearing by the German lad when he prepared to start his camp-fire for the evening. Thus each boy was furnished with the weapon which is indispensable to the ranger of the woods.

Every one can understand the reluctance of the two to walk from the lodge with their turned upon their foe. With all their confidence in the prowess of Deerfoot, they felt a misgiving which was sure to distress them, so long as the enemies were in sight. On reaching the outside, therefore, they turned about, walked slowly backwards, and watched the wigwam.

The deerskin being drawn aside, they could see the figure of the young Shawanoe, who had stepped back in front of it. Just beyond was partly visible the subdued Shawanoe, he and his conqueror obscuring the squaw, still further away, while Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder was out of range.

"I think that little place saw more surprises, this evening than it will ever see again," said Jack Carleton, bending his head with the purpose of gaining a better view; "in fact it has been a series of surprise parties from the beginning."

"Yaw, dot ish vot I dinks all a'while, but mine gracious!"

Hitherto it had been the running vines, growing close to the ground, which caused overturnings of Otto, but now it was another obstruction in the shape of a tree trunk, over which Jack stepped, taking care however, to say nothing to his companion concerning it. The smaller sticks lying near made it look as if the trunk served to help the squaw of Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder, when she was breaking or cutting wood for the wigwam.

Be that as it may, the heels of Otto struck it and he went over on his back, with hat and gun flying and shoes pointed upward.

"I dinks dot vos a pig vine," he said, clambering to his feet and shaking himself together again.

"You're getting to be the best fellow at tumbling I ever saw," said Jack, suppressing, as well as he could, his laughter.

"Dot ish so," assented the victim, too good-natured to find fault after his fortunate escape.

By this time, they were so far from the Osage lodge that very little could be seen of the interior, and they turned round and walked side by side.

"It seems like a dream," remarked the young Kentuckian; "a few minutes ago, there was no escape for us, and now I cannot think we are in the least danger."

"Who dinks dot de Shawanoes comes over der river after us?" asked Otto.

"Nobody besides Deerfoot: there isn't anything that he doesn't think of that is worth thinking about."

"Den vy he leaves us, when we leaves him?"

"I've asked myself that question, Otto; it must be that, after we parted, he learned something which told him the Shawanoes had crossed the Mississippi after us. He changed his course and came to our help, and it's mighty fortunate he did so."

"I guess dot ish so; we will asks him when we don't see him."

"I have my doubt about seeing him again."

"How ish dot?"

"You remember he said more than once he had reason to take another course, and he did do so. He could not have been blamed for believing we were able to get along without him, after entering Louisiana. At any rate, he will think so now."

This was a reasonable conclusion, and Otto agreed with his friend that they were not likely to meet the extraordinary youth for some time to come. He would probably take another direction, for, after the threat he uttered to Arorara, and the panic into which he had thrown him, that warrior would be glad to hasten back to his friends, who were equally eager to reach Kentucky without loss of time.

The moon was high in the heavens and the woods open. Much to the relief of Otto, the vines gave him no further trouble, and they progressed without difficulty. The neighborhood was strange to them, but they had tramped the wilderness too often to care. They were sure of the general direction they were following, and were confident now of reaching home, which could be no great distance away.

Such a buoyancy of spirits came over the boys that it was hard to restrain themselves from shouting and leaping with joy. But for the mishaps attending such sport they would have run at full speed and flung their hats in air. Several miles were passed before they became thoughtful and quiet.

"Mine gracious!" abruptly exclaimed Otto, stopping short and

striking his knee a resounding whack; "vere ain't dot hoss?"

"Had you forgotten about him?" asked companion with a smile.

"I nefer dinks apout him since we comes the lodge."

"I have, more than once; I made up my mind, when I found you in the wigwam, that if you got out alive, I would insist that we go straight home and think no more about the animal; but matters are in a better shape, and we'll wait till to-morrow before we decide."

"Dot suits me," assented Otto, nodding his head several times.

As nearly as they could conjecture, they were some six miles from the residence of Wish-o-wa-tum or Man-not-Afraid-of-Thunder, when they decided to stop for the night. They were fully warranted in believing that all danger from red men was ended; and, as they had no means of finding a good camping site, they stopped at once and began gathering fuel. The task was soon over, and the flint and steel gave the speedily grew into a roaring blaze, the boys sat and looked in each other's face.

The night was cool, but pleasant. Clouds, however, were continually drifting across the face of the moon, and a certain restlessness of feeling, of which even the rugged youngsters were sensible, told that a change was coming.

The hour spent in the Osage wigwam was redolent of smoking venison, and the boys smacked their lips and shook their heads, after the manner of youngsters, with healthful appetites but there was no way of procuring food, and they philosophically accepted the situation, refraining from reference to eatables until there was a prospect of obtaining them.

Through all the eventful experience of the evening, Jack and Otto had retained their blankets. The circumstances were such that neither of the Indians with whom they were brought in contact cared to secure them, though it may be suspected that, Wish-o-wa-tum would have laid claim to that of the German, except for the visit of Arorara and Deerfoot.

Seated by the cheerful fire, the friends talked in rambling fashion until drowsy, when they wrapped their blankets around them and lay down to sleep. Some risk was involved in the proceeding, inasmuch as the fire was likely to attract wild animals to the spot, but providentially none disturbed the young pioneers, who slept quiet and security until the sun was in the sky.

The first step was a hunt for breakfast, for Jack and Otto were in a state of ravenous hunger. They separated and were gone a half hour, when the rifle of the young Kentuckian rang out and he soon reappeared by the renewed camp-fire with a fine wild turkey, which, it need not be said, afforded a nourishing and delightful meal for them both.

"Otto," said Jack, springing to his feet like a refreshed giant, "we must hunt again for the horse."

"Dot ishn't vot I don't dinks too--dot ish I does dinks so."

"And you must now try to straighten out your English, so that Deerfoot and I may not be ashamed of you."

Otto nodded his head by way of assent, while he thought hard about the proper manner of expressing himself.

But an almost insurmountable difficulty confronted the boys from the first. It was impossible to make search for the missing animal until his footprints should be found, and the only way in which that could be done was by retracing, to a considerable extent, their own footsteps. Though somewhat disappointed, Jack Carleton was not surprised, when taking his bearings by the sun, he learned they had wandered from the proper path. They had turned to the left, until the course was south of southwest. They had gone far astray indeed.

The weather became more threatening. The sun had been above the horizon less than an hour when its light was obscured by clouds, and the windows of heaven were certain to be opened long before the orb should sink in the west.

Two miles were traveled, when the boys found themselves so close to a large clearing, that they wondered how it escaped their notice the preceding night. It covered more than an acre, and at one time was the site of an Indian village. As a matter of course a small stream ran near, and the red men who at no remote day made their dwelling places there must have numbered fully a hundred.

While wandering over the tract and looking about them, their eyes rested on an elevation no more than a third of a mile distant. It was thickly wooded, but a prodigious rock near the crest resembled a spot that had been burned clear.

"Helloa!" suddenly called out Jack Carleton, while gazing in the direction, "there's someone on that rock."

"I guess it ish a crow or bear--no, it isn't."

"My gracious! it's Deerfoot."

A moment's scrutiny proved that the individual, beyond all question was an Indian. Furthermore, he was making signals, probably having descried them before they saw him.

"I guess he only means to salute us," said Jack.

Such seemed to be the case. The red man who was Deerfoot, waved his hand in friendly salutation several minutes, then leaped from the rock and vanished. It looked as if he had taken several hours to assure himself the boys were in no danger from the Shawanoes; and, having done so, he now bade them good-bye in his characteristic fashion, giving his whole thought and energy to the business which carried him far into the southwestern portion of the present State of Missouri.

Jack and Otto gazed in the direction of the rock a considerable while, hoping their friend would reappear, or that he had started to join them; but they were compelled to believe he had left, and for a time at least, would be seen no more.

The boys followed the back trail some distance further, when to their delight they came upon the footprints of the missing horse, marked so distinctly in the yielding earth that there could be no mistake as to their identity.

"Now, that's what I call good luck," exclaimed Jack, slapping his friend on the back.

"Dot ish vot I dinks--how ish dot?" asked Otto with a beaming face, alluding to his own diction.

"Capital!--think twice before you speak once, and before long you won't be the worst bungler with your tongue that lives west of the Alleghenies."

The German gazed at his companion as if on the point of reproving him, but concluded to take time to put his words in proper shape.

An interesting fact was noticed by both: the trail verged toward the elevation where they last saw Deerfoot. Jack Carleton was set to thinking and speculating over the situation. He asked himself whether, when Deerfoot was about to pass out of their sight, his gesticulations did not signify more than his friends supposed.

"I wonder if he did not mean to tell us the horse was not far off: I believe he did."

"I--dinks--ot--ish-likely--vot--he--does," assented Otto, speaking with such deliberation that Jack looked in his face, laughed and nodded his head, approvingly.

"We shall soon find out, for the trail is plain and must be new."

But an unpleasant truth forced itself on their notice. Rain drops were pattering upon the leaves, and the darkening sky presaged a storm.

As the best and indeed the only way to protect themselves against a good drenching, the boys selected a tree whose foliage was particularly abundant, and seated themselves on the ground with their backs against it. Then the blankets were gathered over their heads and around their shoulders, and they felt as secure as if in their own log cabins, miles distant.

The rain fell steadily for nearly two hours, when it gradually ceased, and Jack and Otto quickly made ready to resume their journey. The leaves, twigs and limbs were dripping with moisture, so that, with the utmost care, it was impossible to advance far without their garments becoming saturated. That, however, was not a serious matter, and caused little remark.

For some rods the hoof-prints of the horse were followed, but then came the trouble. The rain had beaten down the leaves on the ground with such force that even the keen eyes of the young Kentuckian began to doubt. Finally the two paused, and Otto, having carefully prepared himself, said:

"I dinks dot ish no use for us to hunt the horse."

"I am sorry to give it up and own we are beaten, but that is what we shall have to do."

"Vy do we does dot?"

"We are trying to follow a Lost Trail."

"If we does dot den we gots lost ourselves."

"More than likely we shall, but I am afraid that if we go home without the colt, your father will punish you."

Otto shrugged his shoulders.

"It vill not be the first times dot he does dot. I can stand it, I dinks."

"It will be a great pity, nevertheless, and shall do my best to shame him if he should be mean enough to hold any such purpose."

"Mebbe after we gots home and stays one while, we start out agin some times more and look for the golt."

"I have been thinking of the same thing," said Jack, who now changed their course with the view of reaching home with the least possible delay.

The boys pushed forward with so much energy that on the next day, before the sun had reached the meridian, they arrived home, where for present we must bid them good-bye.

But what befell them and Deerfoot in the eventful journey which they speedily ventured upon in search of the LOST TRAIL, will be told in Number Two of the Log Cabin Series, entitled "CAMP-FIRE AND WIGWAM."

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