ALTSHELER JOSEPH ALEXANDER

THE SCOUTS OF THE VALLEY

Joseph Altsheler

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Altsheler J.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. THE LONE CANOE

A light canoe of bark, containing a single human figure, moved swiftly up one of the twin streams that form the Ohio. The water, clear and deep, coming through rocky soil, babbled gently at the edges, where it lapped the land, but in the center the full current flowed steadily and without noise.

The thin shadows of early dusk were falling, casting a pallid tint over the world, a tint touched here and there with living fire from the sun, which was gone, though leaving burning embers behind. One glowing shaft, piercing straight through the heavy forest that clothed either bank, fell directly upon the figure in the boat, as a hidden light illuminates a great picture, while the rest is left in shadow. It was no common forest runner who sat in the middle of the red beam. Yet a boy, in nothing but years, he swung the great paddle with an ease and vigor that the strongest man in the West might have envied. His rifle, with the stock carved beautifully, and the long, slender blue barrel of the border, lay by his side. He could bring the paddle into the boat, grasp the rifle, and carry it to his shoulder with a single, continuous movement.

His most remarkable aspect, one that the casual observer even would have noticed, was an extraordinary vitality. He created in the minds of those who saw him a feeling that he lived intensely every moment of his life. Born and-bred in the forest, he was essentially its child, a perfect physical being, trained by the utmost hardship and danger, and with every faculty, mental and physical, in complete coordination. It is only by a singular combination of time and place, and only once in millions of chances, that Nature produces such a being.

The canoe remained a few moments in the center of the red light, and its occupant, with a slight swaying motion of the paddle, held it steady in the current, while he listened. Every feature stood out in the glow, the firm chin, the straight strong nose, the blue eyes, and the thick yellow hair. The red blue, and yellow beads on his dress of beautifully tanned deerskin flashed in the brilliant rays. He was the great picture of fact, not of fancy, a human being animated by a living, dauntless soul.

He gave the paddle a single sweep and shot from the light into the shadow. His canoe did not stop until it grazed the northern shore, where bushes and overhanging boughs made a deep shadow. It would have taken a keen eye now to have seen either the canoe or its occupant, and Henry Ware paddled slowly and without noise in the darkest heart of the shadow.

The sunlight lingered a little longer in the center of the stream. Then the red changed to pink. The pink, in its turn, faded, and the whole surface of the river was somber gray, flowing between two lines of black forest.

The coming of the darkness did not stop the boy. He swung a little farther out into the stream, where the bushes and hanging boughs would not get in his way, and continued his course with some increase of speed.

The great paddle swung swiftly through the water, and the length of stroke was amazing, but the boy's breath did not come faster, and the muscles on his arms and shoulders rippled as if it were the play of a child. Henry was in waters unknown to him. He had nothing more than hearsay upon which to rely, and he used all the wilderness caution that he had acquired through nature and training. He called into use every faculty of his perfect physical being. His trained eyes continually pierced the darkness. At times, he stopped and listened with ears that could hear the footfall of the rabbit, but neither eye nor ear brought report of anything unusual. The river flowed with a soft, sighing sound. Now and then a wild creature stirred in the forest, and once a deer came down to the margin to drink, but this was the ordinary life of the woods, and he passed it by.

He went on, hour after hour. The river narrowed. The banks grew higher and rockier, and the water, deep and silvery under the moon, flowed in a somewhat swifter current. Henry gave a little stronger sweep to the paddle, and the speed of the canoe was maintained. He still kept within the shadow of the northern bank.

He noticed after a while that fleecy vapor was floating before the moon. The night seemed to be darkening, and a rising wind came out of the southwest. The touch of the air on, his face was damp. It was the token of rain, and he felt that it would not be delayed long.

It was no part of his plan to be caught in a storm on the Monongahela. Besides the discomfort, heavy rain and wind might sink his frail canoe, and he looked for a refuge. The river was widening again, and the banks sank down until they were but little above the water. Presently he saw a place that he knew would be suitable, a stretch of thick bushes and weeds growing into the very edge of the water, and extending a hundred yards or more along the shore.

He pushed his canoe far into the undergrowth, and then stopped it in shelter so close that, keen as his own eyes were, he could scarcely see the main stream of the river. The water where he came to rest was not more than a foot deep, but he remained in the canoe, half reclining and wrapping closely around himself and his rifle a beautiful blanket woven of the tightest fiber.

His position, with his head resting on the edge of the canoe and his shoulder pressed against the side, was full of comfort to him, and he awaited calmly whatever might come. Here and there were little spaces among the leaves overhead, and through them he saw a moon, now almost hidden by thick and rolling vapors, and a sky that had grown dark and somber. The last timid star had ceased to twinkle, and the rising wind was wet and cold. He was glad of the blanket, and, skilled forest runner that he was, he never traveled without it. Henry remained perfectly still. The light canoe did not move beneath his weight the fraction of an inch. His upturned eyes saw the little cubes of sky that showed through the leaves grow darker and darker. The bushes about him were now bending before the wind, which blew steadily from the south, and presently drops of rain began to fall lightly on the water.

The boy, alone in the midst of all that vast wilderness, surrounded by danger in its most cruel forms, and with a black midnight sky above him, felt neither fear nor awe. Being what nature and circumstance had made him, he was conscious, instead, of a deep sense of peace and comfort. He was at ease, in a nest for the night, and there was only the remotest possibility that the prying eye of an enemy would see him. The leaves directly over his head were so thick that they formed a canopy, and, as he heard the drops fall upon them, it was like the rain on a roof, that soothes the one beneath its shelter.

Distant lightning flared once or twice, and low thunder rolled along the southern horizon, but both soon ceased, and then a rain, not hard, but cold and persistent, began to fall, coming straight down. Henry saw that it might last all night, but he merely eased himself a little in the canoe, drew the edges of the blanket around his chin, and let his eyelids droop.

The rain was now seeping through the leafy canopy of green, but he did not care. It could not penetrate the close fiber of the blanket, and the fur cap drawn far down on his head met the blanket. Only his face was uncovered, and when a cold drop fell upon it, it was to him, hardened by forest life, cool and pleasant to the touch.

Although the eyelids still drooped, he did not yet feel the tendency to sleep. It was merely a deep, luxurious rest, with the body completely relaxed, but with the senses alert. The wind ceased to blow, and the rain came down straight with an even beat that was not unmusical. No other sound was heard in the forest, as the ripple of the river at the edges was merged into it. Henry began to feel the desire for sleep by and by, and, laying the paddle across the boat in such a way that it sheltered his face, he closed his eyes. In five minutes he would have been sleeping as soundly as a man in a warm bed under a roof, but with a quick motion he suddenly put the paddle aside and raised himself a little in the canoe, while one hand slipped down under the folds of the blanket to the hammer of his rifle.

His ear had told him in time that there was a new sound on the river. He heard it faintly above the even beat of the rain, a soft sound, long and sighing, but regular. He listened, and then he knew it. It was made by oars, many of them swung in unison, keeping admirable time.

Henry did not yet feel fear, although it must be a long boat full of Indian warriors, as it was not likely, that anybody else would be abroad upon these waters at such a time. He made no attempt to move. Where he lay it was black as the darkest cave, and his cool judgment told him that there was no need of flight.

The regular rhythmic beat of the oars came nearer, and presently as he looked through the covert of leaves the dusky outline of a great war canoe came into view. It contained at least twenty warriors, of what tribe he could not tell, but they were wet, and they looked cold and miserable. Soon they were opposite him, and he saw the outline of every figure. Scalp locks drooped in the rain, and he knew that the warriors, hardy as they might be, were suffering.

Henry expected to see the long boat pass on, but it was turned toward a shelving bank fifty or sixty yards below, and they beached it there. Then all sprang out, drew it up on the land, and, after turning it over, propped it up at an angle. When this was done they sat under it in a close group, sheltered from the rain. They were using their great canoe as a roof, after the habit of Shawnees and Wyandots.

The boy watched them for a long time through one of the little openings in the bushes, and he believed that they would remain as they were all night, but presently he saw a movement among them, and a little flash of light. He understood it. They were trying to kindle a fire-with flint and steel, under the shelter of the boat. He continued to watch them ‘lazily and without alarm.

Their fire, if they succeeded in making it, would cast no light upon him in the dense covert, but they would be outlined against the flame, and he could see them better, well enough, perhaps, to tell to what tribe they belonged.

He watched under his lowered eyelids while the warriors, gathered in a close group to make a shelter from stray puffs of wind, strove with flint and steel. Sparks sprang up and went out, but Henry at last saw a little blaze rise and cling to life. Then, fed with tinder and bark, it grew under the roof made by the boat until it was ruddy and strong. The boat was tilted farther back, and the fire, continuing to grow, crackled cheerfully, while the flames leaped higher.

By a curious transfer of the senses, Henry, as he lay in the thick blackness felt the influence of the fire, also. Its warmth was upon his face, and it was pleasing to see the red and yellow light victorious against the sodden background of the rain and dripping forest. The figures of the warriors passed and repassed before the fire, and the boy in the boat moved suddenly. His body was not shifted more than an inch, but his surprise was great.

A warrior stood between him and the fire, outlined perfectly against the red light. It was a splendid figure, young, much beyond the average height, the erect and noble head crowned with the defiant scalplock, the strong, slightly curved nose and the massive chin cut as clearly as if they had been carved in copper. The man who had laid aside a wet blanket was bare now to the waist, and Henry could see the powerful muscles play on chest and shoulders as he moved.

The boy knew him. It was Timmendiquas, the great White Lightning of the Wyandots, the youngest, but the boldest and ablest of all the Western chiefs. Henry’s pulses leaped a little at the sight of his old foe and almost friend. As always, he felt admiration at the sight of the young chief. It was not likely that he would ever behold such another magnificent specimen of savage manhood.

The presence of Timmendiquas so far east was also full of significance. The great fleet under Adam Colfax, and with Henry and his comrades in the van, had reached Pittsburgh at last. Thence the arms, ammunition, and other supplies were started on the overland journey for the American army, but the five lingered before beginning the return to Kentucky. A rumor came that the Indian alliance was spreading along the entire frontier, both west and north. It was said that Timmendiquas, stung to fiery energy by his defeats, was coming east to form a league with the Iroquois, the famous Six

Nations. These warlike tribes were friendly with the Wyandots, and the league would be a formidable danger to the Colonies, the full strength of which was absorbed already in the great war.

But the report was a new call of battle to Henry, Shif'less Sol, and the others. The return to Kentucky was postponed. They could be of greater service here, and they plunged into the great woods to the north and, east to see what might be stirring among the warriors.

Now Henry, as he looked at Timmendiquas, knew that report had told the truth. The great chief would not be on the fringe of the Iroquois country, if he did not have such a plan, and he had the energy and ability to carry it through. Henry shuddered at the thought of the tomahawk flashing along every mile of a frontier so vast, and defended so thinly. He was glad in every fiber that he and his comrades had remained to hang upon the Indian hordes, and be heralds of their marches. In the forest a warning usually meant the saving of life.

The rain ceased after a while, although water dripped from the trees everywhere. But the big fire made an area of dry earth about it, and the warriors replaced the long boat in the water. Then all but four or five of them lay beside the coals and went to sleep. Timmendiquas was one of those who remained awake, and Henry saw that he was in deep thought. He walked back and forth much like a white man, and now and then he folded his hands behind his back, looking toward the earth, but not seeing it. Henry could guess what was in his mind. He would draw forth the full power of the Six Nations, league them with the Indians of the great valley, and hurl them all in one mass upon the frontier. He was planning now the means to the end.

The chief, in his little walks back and forth, came close to the edge of the bushes in which Henry lay, It was not at all probable that he would conclude to search among them, but some accident, a chance, might happen, and Henry began to feel a little alarm. Certainly, the coming of the day would make his refuge insecure, and he resolved to slip away while it was yet light.

The boy rose a little in the boat, slowly and with the utmost caution, because the slightest sound out of the common might arouse Timmendiquas to the knowledge of a hostile presence. The canoe must make no plash in the water. Gradually he unwrapped the blanket and tied it in a folded square at his back. Then he took thought a few moments. The forest was so silent now that he did not believe he could push the canoe through the bushes without being heard. He would leave it there for use another day and go on foot through the woods to his comrades.

Slowly he put one foot down the side until it rested on the bottom, and then he remained still. The chief had paused in his restless walk back and forth. Could it be possible that he had heard so slight a sound as that of a human foot sinking softly into the water? Henry waited with his rifle ready. If necessary he would fire, and then dart away among the bushes.

Five or six intense moments passed, and the chief resumed his restless pacing. If he had heard, he had passed it by as nothing, and Henry raised the other foot out of the canoe. He was as delicate in his movement as a surgeon mending the human eye, and he had full cause, as not eye alone, but life as well, depended upon his success. Both feet now rested upon the muddy bottom, and he stood there clear of the boat.

The chief did not stop again, and as the fire had burned higher, his features were disclosed more plainly in his restless walk back and forth before the flames. Henry took a final look at the lofty features, contracted now into a frown, then began to wade among the bushes, pushing his way softly. This was the most delicate and difficult task of all. The water must not be allowed to plash around him nor the bushes to rustle as he passed. Forward he went a yard, then two, five, ten, and his feet were about to rest upon solid earth, when a stick submerged in the mud broke under his moccasin with a snap singularly loud in the silence of the night.

Henry sprang at once upon dry land, whence he cast back a single swift glance. He saw the chief standing rigid and gazing in the direction from which the sound had come. Other warriors were just behind him, following his look, aware that there was an unexpected presence in the forest, and resolved to know its nature.

Henry ran northward. So confident was he in his powers and the protecting darkness of the night that he sent back a sharp cry, piercing and defiant, a cry of a quality that could come only from a white throat. The warriors would know it, and he intended for them to know it. Then, holding his rifle almost parallel with his body, he darted swiftly away through the black spaces of the forest. But an answering cry came to his, the Indian yell taking up his challenge, and saying that the night would not check pursuit.

Henry maintained his swift pace for a long time, choosing the more open places that he might make no noise among the bushes and leaves. Now and then water dripped in his face, and his moccasins were wet from the long grass, but his body was warm and dry, and he felt little weariness. The clouds were now all gone, and the stars sprang out, dancing in a sky of dusky blue. Trained eyes could see far in the forest despite the night, and Henry felt that he must be wary. He recalled the skill and tenacity of Timmendiquas. A fugitive could scarcely be trailed in the darkness, but the great chief would spread out his forces like a fan and follow.

He had been running perhaps three hours when he concluded to stop in a thicket, where he lay down on the damp grass, and rested with his head under his arm.

His breath had been coming a little faster, but his heart now resumed its regular beat. Then he heard a soft sound, that of footsteps. He thought at first that some wild animal was prowling near, but second thought convinced him that human beings had come. Gazing through the thicket, he saw an Indian warrior walking among the trees, looking searchingly about him as if he were a scout. Another, coming from a different direction, approached him, and Henry felt sure that they were of the party of Timmendiquas. They had followed him in some manner, perhaps by chance, and it behooved Mm now to lie close.

A third warrior joined them and they began to examine the ground. Henry realized that it was much lighter. Keen eyes under such a starry sky could see much, and they might strike his trail. The fear quickly became fact. One of the warriors, uttering a short cry, raised his head and beckoned to the others. He had seen broken twigs or trampled grass, and Henry, knowing that it was no time to hesitate, sprang from his covert. Two of the warriors caught a glimpse of his dusky figure and fired, the bullets cutting the leaves close to his head, but Henry ran so fast that he was lost to view in an instant.

The boy was conscious that his position contained many elements of danger. He was about to have another example of the tenacity and resource of the great young chief of the Wyandots, and he felt a certain anger. He, did not wish to be disturbed in his plans, he wished to rejoin his comrades and move farther east toward the chosen lands of the Six Nations; instead, he must spend precious moments running for his life.

Henry did not now flee toward the camp of his friends. He was too wise, too unselfish, to bring a horde down upon them, and he curved away in a course that would take him to the south of them. He glanced up and saw that the heavens were lightening yet more. A thin gray color like a mist was appearing in the east. It was the herald of day, and now the Indians would be able to find his trail. But Henry was not afraid. His anger over the loss of time quickly passed, and he ran swiftly on, the fall of his moccasins making scarcely any noise as he passed.

It was no unusual incident. Thousands of such pursuits occurred in the border life of our country, and were lost to the chronicler. For generations they were almost a part of the daily life of the frontier, but the present, while not out of the common in itself, had, uncommon phases. It was the most splendid type of white life in all the wilderness that fled, and the finest type of red life that followed.

It was impossible for Henry to feel anger or hate toward Timmendiquas. In his place he would have done what he was doing. It was hard to give up these great woods and beautiful lakes and rivers, and the wild life that wild men lived and loved. There was so much chivalry in the boy's nature that he could think of all these things while he fled to escape the tomahawk or the stake.

Up came the sun. The gray light turned to silver, and then to red and blazing gold. A long, swelling note, the triumphant cry of the pursuing warriors, rose behind him. Henry turned his head for one look. He saw a group of them poised for a moment on the crest of a low hill and outlined against the broad flame in the east. He saw their scalp locks, the rifles in their hands, and their bare chests shining bronze in the glow. Once more he sent back his defiant cry, now in answer to theirs, and then, calling upon his reserves of strength and endurance, fled with a speed that none of the warriors had ever seen surpassed.

Henry's flight lasted all that day, and he used every device to evade the pursuit, swinging by vines, walking along fallen logs, and wading in brooks. He did not see the warriors again, but instinct warned him that they were yet following. At long intervals he would rest for a quarter of an hour or so among the bushes, and at noon he ate a little of the venison that he always carried. Three hours later he came to the river again, and swimming it he turned on his course, but kept to the southern side. When the twilight was falling once more he sat still in dense covert for a long time. He neither saw nor heard a sign of human presence, and he was sure now that the pursuit had failed. Without an effort he dismissed it from his mind, ate a little more of the venison, and made his bed for the night.

The whole day had been bright, with a light wind blowing, and the forest was dry once more. As far as Henry could see it circled away on every side, a solid dark green, the leaves of oak and beech, maple and elm making a soft, sighing sound as they waved gently in the wind. It told Henry of nothing but peace. He had eluded the pursuit, hence it was no more. This was a great, friendly forest, ready to shelter him, to soothe him, and to receive him into its arms for peaceful sleep.

He found a place among thick trees where the leaves of last year lay deep upon the ground. He drew up enough of them for a soft bed, because now and for the moment he was a forest sybarite. He was wise enough to take his ease when he found it, knowing that it would pay his body to relax.

He lay down upon the leaves, placed the rifle by his side, and spread the blanket over himself and the weapon. The twilight was gone, and the night, dark and without stars, as he wished to see it, rolled up, fold after fold, covering and hiding everything. He looked a little while at a breadth of inky sky showing through the leaves, and then, free from trouble or fear, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER II. THE MYSTERIOUS HAND

Henry slept until a rosy light, filtering through the leaves, fell upon his face. Then he sprang up, folded the blanket once more upon his back, and looked about him. Nothing had come in the night to disturb him, no enemy was near, and the morning sun was bright and beautiful. The venison was exhausted, but he bathed his face in the brook and resumed his journey, traveling with a long, swift stride that carried him at great speed.

The boy was making for a definite point, one that he knew well, although nearly all the rest of this wilderness was strange to him. The country here was rougher than it usually is in the great valley to the west, and as he advanced it became yet more broken, range after range of steep, stony hills, with fertile but narrow little valleys between. He went on without hesitation for at least two hours, and then stopping under a great oak he uttered a long, whining cry, much like the howl of a wolf.

It was not a loud note, but it was singularly penetrating, carrying far through the forest. A sound like an echo came back, but Henry knew that instead of an echo it was a reply to his own signal. Then he advanced boldly and swiftly and came to the edge of a snug little valley set deep among rocks and trees like a bowl. He stopped behind the great trunk of a beech, and looked into the valley with a smile of approval.

Four human figures were seated around a fire of smoldering coals that gave forth no smoke. They appeared to be absorbed in some very pleasant task, and a faint odor that came to Henry's nostrils filled him with agreeable anticipations. He stepped forward boldly and called:

"Jim, save that piece for me!"

Long Jim Hart halted in mid-air the large slice of venison that he had toasted on a stick. Paul Cotter sprang joyfully to his feet, Silent Tom Ross merely looked up, but Shif'less Sol said:

"Thought Henry would be here in time for breakfast."

Henry walked down in the valley, and the shiftless one regarded him keenly.

"I should judge, Henry Ware, that you've been hevin' a foot race," he drawled.

"And why do you think that?" asked Henry.

"I kin see where the briars hev been rakin' across your leggins. Reckon that wouldn't happen, 'less you was in a pow'ful hurry."

"You're right," said Henry. "Now, Jim, you've been holding that venison in the air long enough. Give it to me, and after I've eaten it I'll tell you all that I've been doing, and all that's been done to me."

Long Jim handed him the slice. Henry took a comfortable seat in the circle before the coals, and ate with all the appetite of a powerful human creature whose food had been more than scanty for at least two days.

"Take another piece," said Long Jim, observing him with approval. "Take two pieces, take three, take the whole deer. I always like to see a hungry man eat. It gives him sech satisfaction that I git a kind uv taste uv it myself."

Henry did not offer a word 'of explanation until his breakfast was over. Then lie leaned back, sighing twice with deep content, and said:

"Boys, I've got a lot to tell."

Shif'less Sol moved into an easier position on the leaves.

"I guess it has somethin' to do with them scratches on your leggins."

"It has," continued Henry with emphasis, "and I want to say to you boys that I've seen Timmendiquas, the great White Lightning of the Wyandots."

"Timmendiquas!" exclaimed the others together.

"No less a man than he," resumed Henry. "I've looked upon his very face, I've seen him in camp with warriors, and I've had the honor of being pursued by him and his men more hours than I can tell. That's why you see those briar scratches on my leggins, Sol."

"Then we cannot doubt that he is here to stir the Six Nations to continued war," said Paul Cotter, "and he will succeed. He is a mighty chief, and his fire and eloquence will make them take up the hatchet. I'm glad that we've come. We delayed a league once between the Shawnees and the Miamis; I don't think we can stop this one, but we may get some people out of the way before the blow falls."

"Who are these Six Nations, whose name sounds so pow'ful big up here?" asked Long Jim.

"Their name is as big as it sounds," replied Henry. "They are the Onondagas, the Mohawks, Oneidas, Senecas, Cayugas, and Tuscaroras. They used to be the Five Nations, but the Tuscaroras came up from the south and fought against them so bravely that they were adopted into the league, as a new and friendly tribe. The Onondagas, so I've heard, formed the league a long, long time ago, and their head chief is the grand sachem or high priest of them all, but the head chief of the Mohawks is the leading war chief."

"I've heard," said Paul, "that the Wyandots are kinsmen of all these tribes, and on that account they will listen with all the more friendliness to Timmendiquas."

"Seems to me," said Tom Ross, "that we've got a most tre-men-je-ous big job ahead."

"Then," said Henry, "we must make a most tremendous big effort."

"That's so," agreed all.

After that they spoke little. The last coals were covered up, and the remainder of the food was put in their pouches. Then they sat on the leaves, and every one meditated until such time as he might have something worth saying. Henry's thoughts traveled on a wide course, but they always came back to one point. They had heard much at Pittsburgh of a famous Mohawk chief called Thayendanegea, but most often known to the Americans as Brant. He was young, able, and filled with intense animosity against the white people, who encroached, every year, more and more upon the Indian hunting grounds. His was a soul full kin to that of Timmendiquas, and if the two met it meant a great council and a greater endeavor for the undoing of the white man. What more likely than that they intended to meet?

"All of you have heard of Thayendanegea, the Mohawk?" said Henry.

They nodded.

"It's my opinion that Timmendiquas is on the way to meet him. I remember hearing a hunter say at Pittsburgh that about a hundred miles to the east of this point was a Long House or Council House of the Six Nations. Timmendiquas is sure to go there, and we must go, too. We must find out where they intend to strike. What do you say?"

"We go there!" exclaimed four voices together.

Seldom has a council of war been followed by action so promptly.

As Henry spoke the last word he rose, and the others rose with him. Saying no more, he led toward the east, and the others followed him, also saying no more. Separately every one of them was strong, brave, and resourceful, but when the five were together they felt that they had the skill and strength of twenty. The long rest at Pittsburgh had restored them after the dangers and hardship of their great voyage from New Orleans.

They carried in horn and pouch ample supplies of powder and bullet, and they did not fear any task.

Their journey continued through hilly country, clothed in heavy forest, but often without undergrowth. They avoided the open spaces, preferring to be seen of men, who were sure to be red men, as little as possible. Their caution was well taken. They saw Indian signs, once a feather that had fallen from a scalp lock, once footprints, and once the bone of a deer recently thrown away by him who had eaten the meat from it. The country seemed to be as wild as that of Kentucky. Small settlements, so they had heard, were scattered at great distances through the forest, but they saw none. There was no cabin smoke, no trail of the plow, just the woods and the hills and the clear streams. Buffalo had never reached this region, but deer were abundant, and they risked a shot to replenish their supplies.

They camped the second night of their march on a little peninsula at the confluence of two creeks, with the deep woods everywhere. Henry judged that they were well within the western range of the Six Nations, and they cooked their deer meat over a smothered fire, nothing more than a few coals among the leaves. When supper was over they arranged soft places for themselves and their blankets, all except Long Jim, whose turn it was to scout among the woods for a possible foe.

"Don't be gone long, Jim," said Henry as he composed himself in a comfortable position. "A circle of a half mile about us will do."

"I'll not be gone more'n an hour," said Long Jim, picking up his rifle confidently, and flitting away among the woods.

"Not likely he'll see anything," said Shif'less Sol, "but I'd shorely like to know what White Lightning is about. He must be terrible stirred up by them beatin's he got down on the Ohio, an' they say that Mohawk, Thayendanegea is a whoppin' big chief, too. They'll shorely make a heap of trouble."

"But both of them are far from here just now," said Henry, "and we won't bother about either."

He was lying on some leaves at the foot of a tree with his arm under his head and his blanket over his body. He had a remarkable capacity for dismissing trouble or apprehension, and just then he was enjoying great physical and mental peace. He looked through half closed eyes at his comrades, who also were enjoying repose, and his fancy could reproduce Long Jim in the forest, slipping from tree to tree and bush to bush, and finding no menace.

"Feels good, doesn't it, Henry?" said the shiftless one. "I like a clean, bold country like this. No more plowin' around in swamps for me."

"Yes," said Henry sleepily, "it's a good country."

The hour slipped smoothly by, and Paul said:

"Time for Long Jim to be back."

"Jim don't do things by halves," said the shiftless one. "Guess he's beatin' up every squar' inch o' the bushes. He'll be here soon."

A quarter of an hour passed, and Long Jim did not return; a half hour, and no sign of him. Henry cast off the blanket and stood up. The night was not very dark and he could see some distance, but he did not see their comrade.

"I wonder why he's so slow," he said with a faint trace of anxiety.

"He'll be 'long directly," said Tom Ross with confidence.

Another quarter of an hour, and no Long Jim. Henry sent forth the low penetrating cry of the wolf that they used so often as a signal.

"He cannot fail to hear that," he said, "and he'll answer."

No answer came. The four looked at one another in alarm. Long Jim had been gone nearly two hours, and he was long overdue. His failure to reply to the signal indicated either that something ominous had happened or that—he had gone much farther than they meant for him to go.

The others had risen to their feet, also, and they stood a little while in silence.

"What do you think it means?" asked Paul.

"It must be all right," said Shif'less Sol. "Mebbe Jim has lost the camp."

Henry shook his head.

"It isn't that," he said. "Jim is too good a woodsman for such a mistake. I don't want to look on the black side, boys, but I think something has happened to Jim."

"Suppose you an' me go an' look for him," said Shif'less Sol, "while Paul and Tom stay here an' keep house."

"We'd better do it," said Henry. "Come, Sol."

The two, rifles in the hollows of their arms, disappeared in the darkness, while Tom and Paul withdrew into the deepest shadow of the trees and waited.

Henry and the shiftless one pursued an anxious quest, going about the camp in a great circle and then in another yet greater. They did not find Jim, and the dusk was so great that they saw no

evidences of his trail. Long Jim had disappeared as completely as if he had left the earth for another planet. When they felt that they must abandon the search for the time, Henry and Shif'less Sol looked at each other in a dismay that the dusk could not hide.

"Mebbe be saw some kind uv a sign, an' has followed it," said the shiftless one hopefully. "If anything looked mysterious an' troublesome, Jim would want to hunt it down."

"I hope so," said Henry, "but we've got to go back to the camp now and report failure. Perhaps he'll show up to-morrow, but I don't like it, Sol, I don't like it!"

"No more do I," said Shif'less Sol. "'Tain't like Jim not to come back, ef he could. Mebbe he'll drop in afore day, anyhow."

They returned to the camp, and two inquiring figures rose up out of the darkness.

"You ain't seen him?" said Tom, noting that but two figures had returned.

"Not a trace," replied Henry. "It's a singular thing."

The four talked together a little while, and they were far from cheerful. Then three sought sleep, while Henry stayed on watch, sitting with his back against a tree and his rifle on his knees. All the peace and content that he had felt earlier in the evening were gone. He was oppressed by a sense of danger, mysterious and powerful. It did not seem possible that Long Jim could have gone away in such a noiseless manner, leaving no trace behind. But it was true.

He watched with both ear and eye as much for Long Jim as for an enemy. He was still hopeful that he would see the long, thin figure coming among the bushes, and then hear the old pleasant drawl. But he did not see the figure, nor did he hear the drawl.

Time passed with the usual slow step when one watches. Paul, Sol, and Tom were asleep, but Henry was never wider awake in his life. He tried to put away the feeling of mystery and danger. He assured himself that Long Jim would soon come, delayed by some trail that he had sought to solve. Nothing could have happened to a man so brave and skillful. His nerves must be growing weak when he allowed himself to be troubled so much by a delayed return.

But the new hours came, one by one, and Long Jim came with none of them. The night remained fairly light, with a good moon, but the light that it threw over the forest was gray and uncanny. Henry's feeling of mystery and danger deepened. Once he thought he heard a rustling in the thicket and, finger on the trigger of his rifle, he stole among the bushes to discover what caused it. He found nothing and, returning to his lonely watch, saw that Paul, Sol, and Tom were still sleeping soundly. But Henry was annoyed greatly by the noise, and yet more by his failure to trace its origin. After an hour's watching he looked a second time. The result was once more in vain, and he resumed his seat upon the leaves, with his back reclining against an oak. Here, despite the fact that the night was growing darker, nothing within range of a rifle shot could escape his eyes.

Nothing stirred. The noise did not come a second time from the thicket. The very silence was oppressive. There was no wind, not even a stray puff, and the bushes never rustled. Henry longed for a noise of some kind to break that terrible, oppressive silence. What he really wished to hear was the soft crunch of Long Jim's moccasins on the grass and leaves.

The night passed, the day came, and Henry awakened his comrades. Long Jim was still missing and their alarm was justified. Whatever trail lie might have struck, he would have returned in the night unless something had happened to him. Henry had vague theories, but nothing definite, and he kept them to himself. Yet they must make a change in their plans. To go on and leave Long Jim to whatever fate might be his was unthinkable. No task could interfere with the duty of the five to one another.

"We are in one of the most dangerous of all the Indian countries," said Henry. "We are on the fringe of the region over which the Six Nations roam, and we know that Timmendiquas and a band of the Wyandots are here also. Perhaps Miamis and Shawnees have come, too."

"We've got to find Long Jim," said Silent Tom briefly.

They went about their task in five minutes. Breakfast consisted of cold venison and a drink from a brook. Then they began to search the forest. They felt sure that such woodsmen as they, with

the daylight to help them, would find some trace of Long Jim, but they saw none at all, although they constantly widened their circle, and again tried all their signals. Half the forenoon passed in the vain search, and then they held a council.

"I think we'd better scatter," said Shif'less Sol, "an' meet here again when the sun marks noon."

It was agreed, and they took careful note of the place, a little hill crowned with a thick cluster of black oaks, a landmark easy to remember. Henry turned toward the south, and the forest was so dense that in two minutes all his comrades were lost to sight. He went several miles, and his search was most rigid. He was amazed to find that the sense of mystery and danger that he attributed to the darkness of the night did not disappear wholly in the bright daylight. His spirit, usually so optimistic, was oppressed by it, and he had no belief that they would find Long Jim.

At the set time he returned to the little hill crowned with the black oaks, and as he approached it from one side he saw Shif'less Sol coming from another. The shiftless one walked despondently. His gait was loose and shambling-a rare thing with him, and Henry knew that he, too, had failed. He realized now that he had not expected anything else. Shif'less Sol shook his head, sat down on a root and said nothing. Henry sat down, also, and the two exchanged a look of discouragement.

"The others will be here directly," said Henry, "and perhaps Long Jim will be with one of them."

But in his heart he knew that it would not be so, and the shiftless one knew that he had no confidence in his own words.

"If not," said Henry, resolved to see the better side, "we'll stay anyhow until we find him. We can't spare good old Long Jim."

Shif'less Sol did not reply, nor did Henry speak again, until lie saw the bushes moving slightly three or four hundred yards away.

"There comes Tom," he said, after a single comprehensive glance, "and he's alone."

Tom Ross was also a dejected figure. He looked at the two on the hill, and, seeing that the man for whom they were searching was not with them, became more dejected than before.

"Paul's our last chance," he said, as he joined them. "He's gen'rally a lucky boy, an' mebbe it will be so with him to-day."

"I hope so," said Henry fervently. "He ought to be along in a few minutes."

They waited patiently, although they really had no belief that Paul would bring in the missing man, but Paul was late. The noon hour was well past. Henry took a glance at the sun. Noon was gone at least a half hour, and he stirred uneasily.

"Paul couldn't get lost in broad daylight," he said.

"No," said Shif'less Sol, "he couldn't get lost!"

Henry noticed his emphasis on the word "lost," and a sudden fear sprang up in his heart. Some power had taken away Long Jim; could the same power have seized Paul? It was a premonition, and he paled under his brown, turning away lest the others see his face. All three now examined the whole circle of the horizon for a sight of moving bushes that would tell of the boy's coming.

The forest told nothing. The sun blazed brightly over everything, and Paul, like Long Jim, did not come. He was an hour past due, and the three, oppressed already by Long jim's disappearance, were convinced that he would not return. But they gave him a half hour longer. Then Henry said:

"We must hunt for him, but we must not separate. Whatever happens we three must stay together."

"I'm not hankerin' to roam 'roun jest now all by myself," said the shiftless one, with an uneasy laugh.

The three hunted all that afternoon for Paul. Once they saw trace of footsteps, apparently his, in some soft earth, but they were quickly, lost on hard ground, and after that there was nothing. They stopped shortly before sunset at the edge of a narrow but deep creek.

"What do you think of it, Henry?" asked Shif'less Sol.

"I don't know what to think," replied the youth, "but it seems to me that whatever took away Jim has taken away Paul, also."

"Looks like it," said Sol, "an' I guess it follers that we're in the same kind o' danger."

"We three of us could put up a good fight," said Henry, "and I propose that we don't go back to that camp, but spend the night here."

"Yes, an' watch good," said Tom Ross.

Their new camp was made quickly in silence, merely the grass under the low boughs of a tree. Their supper was a little venison, and then they watched the coming of the darkness. It was a heavy hour for the three. Long Jim was gone, and then Paul-Paul, the youngest, and, in a way, the pet of the little band.

"Ef we could only know how it happened," whispered Shif'less Sol, "then we might rise up an' fight the danger an' git Paul an' Jim back. But you can't shoot at somethin' you don't see or hear. In all them fights o' ours, on the Ohio an' Mississippi we knowed what wuz ag'inst us, but here we don't know nothin'."

"It is true, Sol," sighed Henry. "We were making such big plans, too, and before we can even start our force is cut nearly in half. To-morrow we'll begin the hunt again. We'll never desert Paul and Jim, so long as we don't know they're dead."

"It's my watch," said Tom. "You two sleep. We've got to keep our strength."

Henry and the shiftless one acquiesced, and seeking the softest spots under the tree sat down. Tom Ross took his place about ten feet in front of them, sitting on the ground, with his hands clasped around his knees, and his rifle resting on his arm. Henry watched him idly for a little while, thinking all the time of his lost comrades. The night promised to be dark, a good thing for them, as the need of hiding was too evident.

Shif'less Sol soon fell asleep, as Henry, only three feet away, knew by his soft and regular breathing, but the boy himself was still wide-eyed.

The darkness seemed to sink down like a great blanket dropping slowly, and the area of Henry's vision narrowed to a small circle. Within this area the distinctive object was the figure of Tom Ross, sitting with his rifle across his knees. Tom had an infinite capacity for immobility. Henry had never seen another man, not even an Indian, who could remain so long in one position contented and happy. He believed that the silent one could sit as he was all night.

His surmise about Tom began to have a kind of fascination for him. Would he remain absolutely still? He would certainly shift an arm or a leg. Henry's interest in the question kept him awake. He turned silently on the other side, but, no matter how intently he studied the sitting figure of his comrade, he could not see it stir. He did not know how long he had been awake, trying thus to decide a question that should be of no importance at such a time. Although unable to sleep, he fell into a dreamy condition, and continued vaguely to watch the rigid and silent sentinel.

He suddenly saw Tom stir, and he came from his state of languor. The exciting question was solved at last. The man would not sit all night absolutely immovable. There could be no doubt of the fact that he had raised an arm, and that his figure had straightened. Then he stood up, full height, remained motionless for perhaps ten seconds, and then suddenly glided away among the bushes.

Henry knew what this meant. Tom had heard something moving in the thickets, and, like a good sentinel, he had gone to investigate. A rabbit, doubtless, or perhaps a sneaking raccoon. Henry rose to a sitting position, and drew his own rifle across his knees. He would watch while Tom was gone, and then lie would sink quietly back, not letting his comrade know that lie had taken his place.

The faintest of winds began to stir among the thickets. Light clouds drifted before the moon. Henry, sitting with his rifle across his knees, and Shif'less Sol, asleep in the shadows, were invisible, but Henry saw beyond the circle of darkness that enveloped them into the grayish light that fell over the bushes. He marked the particular point at which he expected Tom Ross to appear, a slight opening that held out invitation for the passage of a man.

He waited a long time, ten minutes, twenty, a half hour, and the sentinel did not return. Henry came abruptly out of his dreamy state. He felt with all the terrible thrill of certainty that what happened to Long Jim and Paul had happened also to Silent Tom Ross. He stood erect, a tense, tall figure, alarmed, but not afraid. His eyes searched the thickets, but saw nothing. The slight movement of the bushes was made by the wind, and no other sound reached his ears.

But he might be mistaken after all! The most convincing premonitions were sometimes wrong! He would give Tom ten minutes more, and he sank down in a crouching position, where he would offer the least target for the eye.

The appointed time passed, and neither sight nor sound revealed any sign of Tom Ross. Then Henry awakened Shif'less Sol, and whispered to him all that he had seen.

"Whatever took Jim and Paul has took him," whispered the shiftless one at once.

Henry nodded.

"An' we're bound to look for him right now," continued Shif'less Sol.

"Yes," said Henry, "but we must stay together. If we follow the others, Sol, we must follow 'em together."

"It would be safer," said Sol. "I've an idee that we won't find Tom, an' I want to tell you, Henry, this thing is gittin' on my nerves."

It was certainly on Henry's, also, but without reply he led the way into the bushes, and they sought long and well for Silent Tom, keeping at the same time a thorough watch for any danger that might molest themselves. But no danger showed, nor did they find Tom or his trail. He, too, had vanished into nothingness, and Henry and Sol, despite their mental strength, felt cold shivers. They came back at last, far toward morning, to the bank of the creek. It was here as elsewhere a narrow but deep stream flowing between banks so densely wooded that they were almost like walls.

"It will be daylight soon," said Shif'less Sol, "an' I think we'd better lay low in thicket an' watch. It looks ez ef we couldn't find anything, so we'd better wait an' see what will find us."

"It looks like the best plan to me," said Henry, "but I think we might first hunt a while on the other side of the creek. We haven't looked any over there."

"That's so," replied Shif'less Sol, "but the water is at least seven feet deep here, an' we don't want to make any splash swimmin'. Suppose you go up stream, an' I go down, an' the one that finds a ford first kin give a signal. One uv us ought to strike shallow water in three or four hundred yards."

Henry followed the current toward the south, while Sol moved up the stream. The boy went cautiously through the dense foliage, and the creek soon grew wider and shallower. At a distance of about three hundred yards lie came to a point where it could be waded easily. Then he uttered the low cry that was their signal, and went back to meet Shif'less Sol. He reached the exact point at which they had parted, and waited. The shiftless one did not come. The last of his comrades was gone, and he was alone in the forest.

CHAPTER III. THE HUT ON THE ISLET

Henry Ware waited at least a quarter of an hour by the creek on the exact spot at which he and Solomon Hyde, called the shiftless one, had parted, but he knew all the while that his last comrade was not coming. The same powerful and mysterious hand that swept the others away had taken him, the wary and cunning Shif'less Sol, master of forest lore and with all the five senses developed to the highest pitch. Yet his powers had availed him nothing, and the boy again felt that cold chill running down his spine.

Henry expected the omnipotent force to come against him, also, but his instinctive caution made him turn and creep into the thickest of the forest, continuing until he found a place in the bushes so thoroughly hidden that no one could see him ten feet away. There he lay down and rapidly ran over in his mind the events connected with the four disappearances. They were few, and he had little on which to go, but his duty to seek his four comrades, since he alone must do it, was all the greater. Such a thought as deserting them and fleeing for his own life never entered his mind. He would not only seek them, but he would penetrate the mystery of the power that had taken them.

It was like him now to go about his work with calmness and method. To approach an arduous task right one must possess freshness and vigor, and one could have neither without sleep. His present place of hiding seemed to be as secure as any that could be found. So composing himself he took all chances and sought slumber. Yet it needed a great effort of the will to calm his nerves, and it was a half hour before he began to feel any of the soothing effect that precedes sleep. But fall asleep he did at last, and, despite everything, he slept soundly until the morning.

Henry did not awake to a bright day. The sun had risen, but it was obscured by gray clouds, and the whole heavens were somber. A cold wind began to blow, and with it came drops of rain. He shivered despite the enfolding blanket. The coming of the morning had invariably brought cheerfulness and increase of spirits, but now he felt depression. He foresaw heavy rain again, and it would destroy any but the deepest trail. Moreover, his supplies of food were exhausted and he must replenish them in some manner before proceeding further.

A spirit even as bold and strong as Henry's might well have despaired. He had found his comrades, only to lose them again, and the danger that had threatened them, and the elements as well, now threatened him, too. An acute judge of sky and air, he knew that the rain, cold, insistent, penetrating, would fall all day, and that he must seek shelter if he would keep his strength. The Indians themselves always took to cover at such times.

He wrapped the blanket around himself, covering his body well from neck to ankle, putting his rifle just inside the fold, but with his hand upon it, ready for instant use if it should be needed. Then he started, walking straight ahead until he came to the crown of a little hill. The clouds meanwhile thickened, and the rain, of the kind that he had foreseen and as cold as ice, was blown against him. The grass and bushes were reeking, and his moccasins became sodden. Despite the vigorous walking, lie felt the wet cold entering his system. There come times when the hardiest must yield, and he saw the increasing need of refuge.

He surveyed the country attentively from the low hill. All around was a dull gray horizon from which the icy rain dripped everywhere. There was no open country. All was forest, and the heavy rolling masses of foliage dripped with icy water, too.

Toward the south the land seemed to dip down, and Henry surmised that in a valley he would be more likely to find the shelter that he craved. He needed it badly. As he stood there he shivered again and again from head to foot, despite the folds of the blanket. So he started at once, walking fast, and feeling little fear of a foe. It was not likely that any would be seeking him at such a time. The rain struck him squarely in the face now. Water came from his moccasins every time his foot was pressed against the earth, and, no matter how closely he drew the folds of the blanket, little streams

of it, like ice to the touch, flowed down his neck and made their way under his clothing. He could not remember a time when he had felt more miserable.

He came in about an hour to the dip which, as he had surmised, was the edge of a considerable valley. He ran down the slope, and looked all about for some place of shelter, a thick windbreak in the lee of a hill, or an outcropping of stone, but he saw neither, and, as he continued the search, he came to marshy ground. He saw ahead among the weeds and bushes the gleam of standing pools, and he was about to turn back, when he noticed three or four stones, in a row and about a yard from one another, projecting slightly above the black muck. It struck him that the stones would not naturally be in the soft mud, and, his curiosity aroused, he stepped lightly from one stone to another. When he came to the last stone that he had seen from the hard ground he beheld several more that had been hidden from him by the bushes. Sure now that he had happened upon something not created by nature alone, he followed these stones, leading like steps into the very depths of the swamp, which was now deep and dark with ooze all about him. He no longer doubted that the stones, the artificial presence of which might have escaped the keenest eye and most logical mind, were placed there for a purpose, and he was resolved to know its nature.

The stepping stones led him about sixty yards into the swamp, and the last thirty yards were at an angle from the first thirty. Then he came to a bit of hard ground, a tiny islet in the mire, upon which he could stand without sinking at all. He looked back from there, and he could not see his point of departure. Bushes, weeds, and saplings grew out of the swamp to a height of a dozen or fifteen feet, and he was inclosed completely. All the vegetation dripped with cold water, and the place was one of the most dismal that he had ever seen. But he had no thought of turning back.

Henry made a shrewd guess as to whither the path led, but he inferred from the appearance of the stepping stones-chiefly from the fact that an odd one here and there had sunk completely out of sight-that they had not been used in a long time, perhaps for years. He found on the other side of the islet a second line of stones, and they led across a marsh, that was almost like a black liquid, to another and larger island.

Here the ground was quite firm, supporting a thick growth of large trees. It seemed to Henry that this island might be seventy or eighty yards across, and he began at once to explore it. In the center, surrounded so closely by swamp oaks that they almost formed a living wall, he found what he had hoped to find, and his relief was so great that, despite his natural and trained stoicism, he gave a little cry of pleasure when he saw it.

A small lodge, made chiefly of poles and bark after the Iroquois fashion, stood within the circle of the trees, occupying almost the whole of the space. It was apparently abandoned long ago, and time and weather had done it much damage. But the bark walls, although they leaned in places at dangerous angles, still stood. The bark roof was pierced by holes on one side, but on the other it was still solid, and shed all the rain from its slope.

The door was open, but a shutter made of heavy pieces of bark cunningly joined together leaned against the wall, and Henry saw that he could make use of it. He stepped inside. The hut had a bark floor which was dry on one side, where the roof was solid, but dripping on the other. Several old articles of Indian use lay about. In one corner was a basket woven of split willow and still fit for service. There were pieces of thread made of Indian hemp and the inner bark of the elm. There were also a piece of pottery and a large, beautifully carved wooden spoon such as every Iroquois carried. In the corner farthest from the door was a rude fireplace made of large flat stones, although there was no opening for the smoke.

Henry surveyed it all thoughtfully, and he came to the conclusion that it was a hut for hunting, built by some warrior of an inquiring mind who had found this secret place, and who had recognized its possibilities. Here after an expedition for game he could lie hidden from enemies and take his comfort without fear. Doubtless he had sat in this hut on rainy days like the present one and smoked his pipe in the long, patient calm of which the Indian is capable.

Yes, there was the pipe, unnoticed before, trumpet shaped and carved beautifully, lying on a small bark shelf. Henry picked it tip and examined the bowl. It was as dry as a bone, and not a particle of tobacco was left there. He believed that it had not been used for at least a year. Doubtless the Indian who had built this hunting lodge had fallen in some foray, and the secret of it had been lost until Henry Ware, seeking through the cold and rain, had stumbled upon it.

It was nothing but a dilapidated little lodge of poles and bark, all a-leak, but the materials of a house were there, and Henry was strong and skillful. He covered the holes in the roof with fallen pieces of bark, laying heavy pieces of wood across them to hold them in place. Then he lifted the bark shutter into position and closed the door. Some drops of rain still came in through the roof, but they were not many, and he would not mind them for the present. Then he opened the door and began his hardest task.

He intended to build a fire on the flat stones, and, securing fallen wood, he stripped off the bark and cut splinters from the inside. It was slow work and he was very cold, his wet feet sending chills through him, but he persevered, and the little heap of dry splinters grew to a respectable size. Then he cut larger pieces, laying them on one side while he worked with his flint and steel on the splinters.

Flint and steel are not easily handled even by the most skillful, and Henry saw the spark leap up and die out many times before it finally took hold of the end of the tiniest splinter and grew. He watched it as it ran along the little piece of wood and ignited another and then another, the beautiful little red and yellow flames leaping up half a foot in height. Already he felt the grateful warmth and glow, but he would not let himself indulge in premature joy. He fed it with larger and larger pieces until the flames, a deeper and more beautiful red and yellow, rose at least two feet, and big coals began to form. He left the door open a while in order that the smoke might go out, but when the fire had become mostly coals he closed it again, all except a crack of about six inches, which would serve at once to let any stray smoke out, and to let plenty of fresh air in.

Now Henry, all his preparations made, no detail neglected, proceeded to luxuriate. He spread the soaked blanket out on the bark floor, took off the sodden moccasins and placed them at one angle of the fire, while he sat with his bare feet in front. What a glorious warmth it was! It seemed to enter at his toes and proceed upward through his body, seeking out every little nook and cranny, to dry and warm it, and fill it full of new glow and life.

He sat there a long time, his being radiating with physical comfort. The moccasins dried on one side, and he turned the other. Finally they dried all over and all through, and he put them on again. Then he hung the blanket on the bark wall near the fire, and it, too, would be dry in another hour or so. He foresaw a warm and dry place for the night, and sleep. Now if one only had food! But he must do without that for the present.

He rose and tested all his bones and muscles. No stiffness or soreness had come from the rain and cold, and he was satisfied. He was fit for any physical emergency. He looked out through the crevice. Night was coming, and on the little island in the swamp it looked inexpressibly black and gloomy. His stomach complained, but he shrugged his shoulders, acknowledging primitive necessity, and resumed his seat by the fire. There he sat until the blanket had dried, and deep night had fully come.

In the last hour or two Henry did not move. He remained before the fire, crouched slightly forward, while the generous heat fed the flame of life in him. A glowing bar, penetrating the crevice at the door, fell on the earth outside, but it did not pass beyond the close group of circling trees. The rain still fell with uncommon steadiness and persistence, but at times hail was mingled with it. Henry could not remember in his experience a more desolate night. It seemed that the whole world dwelt in perpetual darkness, and that he was the only living being on it. Yet within the four or five feet square of the hut it was warm and bright, and he was not unhappy.

He would forget the pangs of hunger, and, wrapping himself in the dry blanket, he lay down before the bed of coals, having first raked ashes over them, and he slept one of the soundest sleeps of

his life. All night long, the dull cold rain fell, and with it, at intervals, came gusts of hail that rattled like bird shot on the bark walls of the hut. Some of the white pellets blew in at the door, and lay for a moment or two on the floor, then melted in the glow of the fire, and were gone.

But neither wind, rain nor hail awoke Henry. He was as safe, for the time, in the hut on the islet, as if he were in the fort at Pittsburgh or behind the palisades at Wareville. Dawn came, the sky still heavy and dark with clouds, and the rain still falling.

Henry, after his first sense of refreshment and pleasure, became conscious of a fierce hunger that no amount of the will could now keep quiet. His was a powerful system, needing much nourishment, and he must eat. That hunger became so great that it was acute physical pain. He was assailed by it at all points, and it could be repelled by only one thing, food. He must go forth, taking all risks, and seek it.

He put on fresh wood, covering it with ashes in order that it might not blaze too high, and left the islet. The stepping stones were slippery with water, and his moccasins soon became soaked again, but he forgot the cold and wet in that ferocious hunger, the attacks of which became more violent every minute. He was hopeful that he might see a deer, or even a squirrel, but the animals themselves were likely to keep under cover in such a rain. He expected a hard hunt, and it would be attended also by much danger—these woods must be full of Indians—but he thought little of the risk. His hunger was taking complete possession of his mind. He was realizing now that one might want a thing so much that it would drive away all other thoughts.

Rifle in hand, ready for any quick shot, he searched hour after hour through the woods and thickets. He was wet, bedraggled, and as fierce as a famishing panther, but neither skill nor instinct guided him to anything. The rabbit hid in his burrow, the squirrel remained in his hollow tree, and the deer did not leave his covert.

Henry could not well calculate the passage of time, it seemed so fearfully long, and there was no one to tell him, but he judged that it must be about noon, and his temper was becoming that of the famished panther to which he likened himself. He paused and looked around the circle of the dripping woods. He had retained his idea of direction and he knew that he could go straight back to the hut in the swamp. But he had no idea of returning now. A power that neither he nor anyone else could resist was pushing him on his search.

Searching the gloomy horizon again, he saw against the dark sky a thin and darker line that he knew to be smoke. He inferred, also, with certainty, that it came from an Indian camp, and, without hesitation, turned his course toward it. Indian camp though it might be, and containing the deadliest of foes, he was glad to know something lived beside himself in this wilderness.

He approached with great caution, and found his surmise to be correct. Lying full length in a wet thicket he saw a party of about twenty warriors-Mohawks he took them to be-in an oak opening. They had erected bark shelters, they had good fires, and they were cooking. He saw them roasting the strips over the coals-bear meat, venison, squirrel, rabbit, bird-and the odor, so pleasant at other times, assailed his nostrils. But it was now only a taunt and a torment. It aroused every possible pang of hunger, and every one of them stabbed like a knife.

The warriors, so secure in their forest isolation, kept no sentinels, and they were enjoying themselves like men who had everything they wanted. Henry could hear them laughing and talking, and he watched them as they ate strip after strip of the delicate, tender meat with the wonderful appetite that the Indian has after long fasting. A fierce, unreasoning anger and jealousy laid hold of him. He was starving, and they rejoiced in plenty only fifty yards away. He began to form plans for a piratical incursion upon them. Half the body of a deer lay near the edge of the opening, he would rush upon it, seize it, and dart away. It might be possible to escape with such spoil.

Then he recalled his prudence. Such a thing was impossible. The whole band of warriors would be upon him in an instant. The best thing that he could do was to shut out the sight of so much luxury in which he could not share, and he crept away among the bushes wondering what he could do to

drive away those terrible pains. His vigorous system was crying louder than ever for the food that would sustain it. His eyes were burning a little too brightly, and his face was touched with fever.

Henry stopped once to catch a last glimpse of the fires and the feasting Indians under the bark shelters. He saw a warrior raise a bone, grasping it in both hands, and bite deep into the tender flesh that clothed it. The sight inflamed him into an anger almost uncontrollable. He clenched his fist and shook it at the warrior, who little suspected the proximity of a hatred so intense. Then he bent his head down and rushed away among the wet bushes which in rebuke at his lack of caution raked him across the face.

Henry walked despondently back toward the islet in the swamp. The aspect of air and sky had not changed. The heavens still dripped icy water, and there was no ray of cheerfulness anywhere. The game remained well hidden.

It was a long journey back, and as he felt that he was growing weak he made no haste. He came to dense clumps of bushes, and plowing his way through them, he saw a dark opening under some trees thrown down by an old hurricane. Having some vague idea that it might be the lair of a wild animal, he thrust the muzzle of his rifle into the darkness. It touched a soft substance. There was a growl, and a black form shot out almost into his face. Henry sprang aside, and in an instant all his powers and faculties returned. He had stirred up a black bear, and before the animal, frightened as much as he was enraged, could run far the boy, careless how many Indians might hear, threw up his rifle and fired.

His aim was good. The bear, shot through the head, fell, and was dead. Henry, transformed, ran up to him. Bear life had been given up to sustain man's. Here was food for many days, and he rejoiced with a great joy. He did not now envy those warriors back there.

The bear, although small, was very fat. Evidently he had fed well on acorns and wild honey, and he would yield up steaks which, to one with Henry's appetite, would be beyond compare. He calculated that it was more than a mile to the swamp, and, after a few preliminaries, he flung the body of the bear over his shoulder. Through some power of the mind over the body his full strength had returned to him miraculously, and when he reached the stepping stones he crossed from one to another lightly and firmly, despite the weight that he carried.

He came to the little bark hut which he now considered his own. The night had fallen again, but some coals still glowed under the ashes, and there was plenty of dry wood. He did everything decently and in order. He took the pelt from the bear, carved the body properly, and then, just as the Indians had done, he broiled strips over the coals. He ate them one after another, slowly, and tasting all the savor, and, intense as was the mere physical pleasure, it was mingled with a deep thankfulness. Not only was the life nourished anew in him, but he would now regain the strength to seek his comrades.

When he had eaten enough he fastened the body of the bear, now in several portions, on hooks high upon the walls, hooks which evidently had been placed there by the former owner of the hut for this very purpose. Then, sure that the savor of the food would draw other wild animals, he brought one of the stepping stones and placed it on the inside of the door. The door could not be pushed aside without arousing him, and, secure in the knowledge, he went to sleep before the coals.

CHAPTER IV. THE RED CHIEFS

Henry awoke only once, and that was about half way between midnight and morning, when his senses, never still entirely, even in sleep, warned him that something was at the door. He rose cautiously upon his arm, saw a dark muzzle at the crevice, and behind it a pair of yellow, gleaming eyes. He knew at once that it was a panther, probably living in the swamp and drawn by the food. It must be very hungry to dare thus the smell of man. Henry's hand moved slowly to the end of a stick, the other end of which was a glowing coal. Then he seized it and hurled it directly at the inquisitive head.

The hot end of the stick struck squarely between the yellow eyes. There was a yelp of pain, and the boy heard the rapid pad of the big cat's feet as it fled into the swamp. Then he turned over on his side, and laughed in genuine pleasure at what was to him a true forest joke. He knew the panther would not come, at least not while he was in the hut, and he calmly closed his eyes once more. The old Henry was himself again.

He awoke in the morning to find that the cold rain was still falling. It seemed to him that it had prepared to rain forever, but he was resolved, nevertheless, now that he had food and the strength that food brings, to begin the search for his comrades. The islet in the swamp would serve as his base-nothing could be better-and he would never cease until he found them or discovered what had become of them.

A little spring of cold water flowed from the edge of the islet to lose itself quickly in the swamp. Henry drank there after his breakfast, and then felt as strong and active as ever. As he knew, the mind may triumph over the body, but the mind cannot save the body without food. Then he made his precious bear meat secure against the prowling panther or others of his kind, tying it on hanging boughs too high for a jump and too slender to support the weight of a large animal. This task finished quickly, he left the swamp and returned toward the spot where lie had seen the Mohawks.

The falling rain and the somber clouds helped Henry, in a way, as the whole forest was enveloped in a sort of gloom, and he was less likely to be seen. But when he had gone about half the distance he heard Indians signaling to one another, and, burying himself as usual in the wet bushes, he saw two small groups of warriors meet and talk. Presently they separated, one party going toward the east and the other toward the west. Henry thought they were out hunting, as the Indians usually took little care of the morrow, eating all their food in a few days, no matter how great the supply might be.

When he drew near the place he saw three more Indians, and these were traveling directly south. He was quite sure now that his theory was correct. They were sending out hunters in every direction, in order that they might beat up the woods thoroughly for game, and his own position anywhere except on the islet was becoming exceedingly precarious. Nevertheless, using all his wonderful skill, he continued the hunt. He had an abiding faith that his four comrades were yet alive, and he meant to prove it.

In the afternoon the clouds moved away a little, and the rain decreased, though it did not cease. The Indian signs multiplied, and Henry felt sure that the forest within a radius of twenty miles of his islet contained more than one camp. Some great gathering must be in progress and the hunters were out to supply it with food. Four times he heard the sound of shots, and thrice more he saw warriors passing through the forest. Once a wounded deer darted past him, and, lying down in the bushes, he saw the Indians following the fleeing animal. As the day grew older the trails multiplied. Certainly a formidable gathering of bands was in progress, and, feeling that he might at any time be caught in a net, he returned to the islet, which had now become a veritable fort for him.

It was not quite dark when he arrived, and he found all as it had been except the tracks of two panthers under the boughs to which he had fastened the big pieces of bear meat. Henry felt a malicious satisfaction at the disappointment of the panthers.

"Come again, and have the same bad luck," he murmured.

At dusk the rain ceased entirely, and he prepared for a journey in the night. He examined his powder carefully to see that no particle of it was wet, counted the bullets in his pouch, and then examined the skies. There was a little moon, not too much, enough to show him the way, but not enough to disclose him to an enemy unless very near. Then he left the islet and went swiftly through the forest, laying his course a third time toward the Indian camp. He was sure now that all the hunters had returned, and he did not expect the necessity of making any stops for the purpose of hiding. His hopes were justified, and as he drew near the camp he became aware that its population had increased greatly. It was proved by many signs. New trails converged upon it, and some of them were very broad, indicating that many warriors had passed. They had passed, too, in perfect confidence, as there was no effort at concealment, and Henry surmised that no white force of any size could be within many days' march of this place. But the very security of the Indians helped his own design. They would not dream that any one of the hated race was daring to come almost within the light of their fires.

Henry had but one fear just now, and that was dogs. If the Indians had any of their mongrel curs with them, they would quickly scent him out and give the alarm with their barking. But he believed that the probabilities were against it. This, so he thought then, was a war or hunting camp, and it was likely that the Indians would leave the dogs at their permanent villages. At any rate he would take the risk, and he drew slowly toward the oak opening, where some Indians stood about. Beyond them, in another dip of the valley, was a wider opening which he had not seen on his first trip, and this contained not only bark shelters, but buildings that indicated a permanent village. The second and larger opening was filled with a great concourse of warriors.

Fortunately the foliage around the opening was very dense, many trees and thickets everywhere. Henry crept to the very rim, where, lying in the blackest of the shadows, and well hidden himself, he could yet see nearly everything in the camp. The men were not eating now, although it was obvious that the hunters had done well. The dressed bodies of deer and bear hung in the bark shelters. Most of the Indians sat about the fires, and it seemed to Henry that they had an air of expectancy. At least two hundred were present, and all of them were in war paint, although there were several styles of paint. There was a difference in appearance, too, in the warriors, and Henry surmised that representatives of all the tribes of the Iroquois were there, coming to the extreme western boundary or fringe of their country.

While Henry watched them a half dozen who seemed by their bearing and manner to be chiefs drew together at a point not far from him and talked together earnestly. Now and then they looked toward the forest, and he was quite sure that they were expecting somebody, a person of importance. He became deeply interested. He was lying in a dense clump of hazel bushes, flat upon his stomach, his face raised but little above the ground. He would have been hidden from the keenest eye only ten feet away, but the faces of the chiefs outlined against the blazing firelight were so clearly visible to him that he could see every change of expression. They were fine-looking men, all of middle age, tall, lean, their noses hooked, features cut clean and strong, and their heads shaved, all except the defiant scalp lock, into which the feather of an eagle was twisted. Their bodies were draped in fine red or blue blankets, and they wore leggins and moccasins of beautifully tanned deerskin.

They ceased talking presently, and Henry heard a distant wailing note from the west. Some one in the camp replied with a cry in kind, and then a silence fell upon them all. The chiefs stood erect, looking toward the west. Henry knew that he whom they expected was at hand.

The cry was repeated, but much nearer, and a warrior leaped into the opening, in the full blaze of the firelight. He was entirely naked save for a breech cloth and moccasins, and he was a wild and savage figure. He stood for a moment or two, then faced the chiefs, and, bowing before them, spoke a few words in the Wyandot tongue-Henry knew already by his paint that he was a Wyandot.

The chiefs inclined their heads gravely, and the herald, turning, leaped back into the forest. In two or three minutes six men, including the herald, emerged from the woods, and Henry moved a

little when he saw the first of the six, all of whom were Wyandots. It was Timmendiquas, head chief of the Wyandots, and Henry had never seen him more splendid in manner and bearing than he was as he thus met the representatives of the famous Six Nations. Small though the Wyandot tribe might be, mighty was its valor and fame, and White Lightning met the great Iroquois only as an equal, in his heart a superior.

It was an extraordinary thing, but Henry, at this very moment, burrowing in the earth that he might not lose his life at the hands of either, was an ardent partisan of Timmendiquas. It was the young Wyandot chief whom he wished to be first, to make the greatest impression, and he was pleased when he heard the low hum of admiration go round the circle of two hundred savage warriors. It was seldom, indeed, perhaps never, that the Iroquois had looked upon such a man as Timmendiquas.

Timmendiquas and his companions advanced slowly toward the chiefs, and the Wyandot overtopped all the Iroquois. Henry could tell by the manner of the chiefs that the reputation of the famous White Lightning had preceded him, and that they had already found fact equal to report.

The chiefs, Timmendiquas among them, sat down on logs before the fire, and all the warriors withdrew to a respectful distance, where they stood and watched in silence. The oldest chief took his long pipe, beautifully carved and shaped like a trumpet, and filled it with tobacco which he lighted with a coal from the fire. Then he took two or three whiffs and passed the pipe to Timmendiquas, who did the same. Every chief smoked the pipe, and then they sat still, waiting in silence.

Henry was so much absorbed in this scene, which was at once a spectacle and a drama, that he almost forgot where he was, and that he was an enemy. He wondered now at their silence. If this was a council surely they would discuss whatever question had brought them there! But he was soon enlightened. That low far cry came again, but from the east. It was answered, as before, from the camp, and in three or four minutes a warrior sprang from the forest into the opening. Like the first, he was naked except for the breech cloth and moccasins. The chiefs rose at his coming, received his salute gravely, and returned it as gravely. Then he returned to the forest, and all waited in the splendid calm of the Indian.

Curiosity pricked Henry like a nettle. Who was coming now? It must be some man of great importance, or they would not wait so silently. There was the same air of expectancy that had preceded the arrival of Timmendiquas. All the warriors looked toward the eastern wall of the forest, and Henry looked the same way. Presently the black foliage parted, and a man stepped forth, followed at a little distance by seven or eight others. The stranger, although tall, was not equal in height to Timmendiquas, but he, too, had a lofty and splendid presence, and it was evident to anyone versed at all in forest lore that here was a great chief. He was lean but sinewy, and he moved with great ease and grace. He reminded Henry of a powerful panther. He was dressed, after the manner of famous chiefs, with the utmost care. His short military coat of fine blue cloth bore a silver epaulet on either shoulder. His head was not bare, disclosing the scalp lock, like those of the other Indians; it was covered instead with a small hat of felt, round and laced. Hanging carelessly over one shoulder was a blanket of blue cloth with a red border. At his side, from a belt of blue leather swung a silver-mounted small sword. His leggins were of superfine blue cloth and his moccasins of deerskin. Both were trimmed with small beads of many colors.

The new chief advanced into the opening amid the dead silence that still held all, and Timmendiquas stepped forward to meet him. These two held the gaze of everyone, and what they and they alone did had become of surpassing interest. Each was haughty, fully aware of his own dignity and importance, but they met half way, looked intently for a moment or two into the eyes of each other, and then saluted gravely.

All at once Henry knew the stranger. He had never seen him before, but his impressive reception, and the mixture of military and savage attire revealed him. This could be none other than the great Mohawk war chief, Thayendanegea, the Brant of the white men, terrible name on the border. Henry gazed at him eagerly from his covert, etching his features forever on his memory. His face,

lean and strong, was molded much like that of Timmendiquas, and like the Wyandot he was young, under thirty.

Timmendiquas and Thayendanegea-it was truly he-returned to the fire, and once again the trumpet-shaped pipe was smoked by all. The two young chiefs received the seats of favor, and others sat about them. But they were not the only great chiefs present, though all yielded first place to them because of their character and exploits.

Henry was not mistaken in his guess that this was an important council, although its extent exceeded even his surmise. Delegates and head chiefs of all the Six Nations were present to confer with the warlike Wyandots of the west who had come so far east to meet them. Thayendanegea was the great war chief of the Mohawks, but not their titular chief. The latter was an older man, Te-kie-ho-ke (Two Voices), who sat beside the younger. The other chiefs were the Onondaga, Tahtoo-ta-hoo (The Entangled); the Oneida, O-tat-sheh-te (Bearing a Quiver); the Cayuga, Te-ka-ha-hoonk (He Who Looks Both Ways); the Seneca, Kan-ya-tai-jo (Beautiful Lake); and the Tuscarora, Ta-ha-en-te-yahwak-hon (Encircling and Holding Up a Tree). The names were hereditary, and because in a dim past they had formed the great confederacy, the Onondagas were first in the council, and were also the high priests and titular head of the Six Nations. But the Mohawks were first on-the war path.

All the Six Nations were divided into clans, and every clan, camping in its proper place, was represented at this meeting.

Henry had heard much at Pittsburgh of the Six Nations, their wonderful league, and their wonderful history. He knew that according to the legend the league had been formed by Hiawatha, an Onondaga. He was opposed in this plan by Tododaho, then head chief of the Onondagas, but he went to the Mohawks and gained the support of their great chief, Dekanawidah. With his aid the league was formed, and the solemn agreement, never broken, was made at the Onondaga Lake. Now they were a perfect little state, with fifty chiefs, or, including the head chiefs, fifty-six.

Some of these details Henry was to learn later. He was also to learn many of the words that the chiefs said through a source of which he little dreamed at the present. Yet he divined much of it from the meeting of the fiery Wyandots with the highly developed and warlike power of the Six Nations.

Thayendanegea was talking now, and Timmendiquas, silent and grave, was listening. The Mohawk approached his subject indirectly through the trope, allegory, and simile that the Indian loved. He talked of the unseen deities that ruled the life of the Iroquois through mystic dreams. He spoke of the trees, the rocks, and the animals, all of which to the Iroquois had souls. He called on the name of the Great Spirit, which was Aieroski before it became Manitou, the Great Spirit who, in the Iroquois belief, had only the size of a dwarf because his soul was so mighty that he did not need body.

“This land is ours, the land of your people and mine, oh, chief of the brave Wyandots,” he said to Timmendiquas. “Once there was no land, only the waters, but Aieroski raised the land of Konspioni above the foam. Then he sowed five handfuls of red seed in it, and from those handfuls grew the Five Nations. Later grew up the Tuscaroras, who have joined us and other tribes of our race, like yours, great chief of the brave Wyandots.”

Timmendiquas still said nothing. He did not allow an eyelid to flicker at this assumption of superiority for the Six Nations over all other tribes. A great warrior he was, a great politician also, and he wished to unite the Iroquois in a firm league with the tribes of the Ohio valley. The coals from the great fire glowed and threw out an intense heat. Thayendanegea unbuttoned his military coat and threw it back, revealing a bare bronze chest, upon which was painted the device of the Mohawks, a flint and steel. The chests of the Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca head chiefs were also bared to the glow. The device on the chest of the Onondaga was a cabin on top of a hill, the Caytiga’s was a great pipe, and the figure of a mountain adorned the Seneca bronze.

“We have had the messages that you have sent to us, Timmendiquas,” said Thayendanegea, “and they are good in the eyes of our people, the Rotinonsionni (the Mohawks). They please, too, the ancient tribe, the Kannoseone (the Onondagas), the valiant Hotinonsionni (the Senecas), and all our

brethren of the Six Nations. All the land from the salt water to the setting sun was given to the red men by Aieroski, but if we do not defend it we cannot keep it."

"It is so," said Timmendiquas, speaking for the first time. "We have fought them on the Ohio and in Kaintuck-ee, where they come with their rifles and axes. The whole might of the Wyandots, the Shawnees, the Miamis, the Illinois, the Delawares, and the Ottawas has gone forth against them. We have slain many of them, but we have failed to drive them back. Now we have come to ask the Six Nations to press down upon them in the east with all your power, while we do the same in the west. Surely then your Aieroski and our Manitou, who are the same, will not refuse us success."

The eyes of Thayendanegea glistened.

"You speak well, Timmendiquas," he said. "All the red men must unite to fight for the land of Konspioni which Aieroski raised above the sea, and we be two, you and I, Timmendiquas, fit to lead them to battle."

"It is so," said Timmendiquas gravely.

CHAPTER V. THE IROQUOIS TOWN

Henry lay fully an hour in the bushes. He had forgotten about the dogs that he dreaded, but evidently he was right in his surmise that the camp contained none. Nothing disturbed him while he stared at what was passing by the firelight. There could be no doubt that the meeting of Timmendiquas and Thayendanegea portended great things, but he would not be stirred from his task of rescuing his comrades or discovering their fate.

They two, great chiefs, sat long in close converse. Others-older men, chiefs, also-came at times and talked with them. But these two, proud, dominating, both singularly handsome men of the Indian type, were always there. Henry was almost ready to steal away when he saw a new figure approaching the two chiefs. The walk and bearing of the stranger were familiar, and HENRY knew him even before his face was lighted tip by the fire. It was Braxton Wyatt, the renegade, who had escaped the great battles on both the Ohio and the Mississippi, and who was here with the Iroquois, ready to do to his own race all the evil that he could. Henry felt a shudder of repulsion, deeper than any Indian could inspire in him. They fought for their own land and their own people, but Braxton Wyatt had violated everything that an honest man should hold sacred.

Henry, on the whole, was not surprised to see him. Such a chance was sure to draw Braxton Wyatt. Moreover, the war, so far as it pertained to the border, seemed to be sweeping toward the northeast, and it bore many stormy petrels upon its crest.

He watched Wyatt as he walked toward one of the fires. There the renegade sat down and talked with the warriors, apparently on the best of terms. He was presently joined by two more renegades, whom Henry recognized as Blackstaffe and Quarles. Timmendiquas and Thayendanegea rose after a while, and walked toward the center of the camp, where several of the bark shelters had been enclosed entirely. Henry judged that one had been set apart for each, but they were lost from his view when they passed within the circling ring of warriors.

Henry believed that the Iroquois and Wyandots would form a fortified camp here, a place from which they would make sudden and terrible forays upon the settlements. He based his opinion upon the good location and the great number of saplings that had been cut down already. They would build strong lodges and then a palisade around them with the saplings. He was speedily confirmed in this opinion when he saw warriors come to the forest with hatchets and begin to cut down more saplings. He knew then that it was time to go, as a wood chopper might blunder upon him at any time.

He slipped from his covert and was quickly gone in the forest. His limbs were somewhat stiff from lying so long in one position, but that soon wore away, and he was comparatively fresh when he came once more to the islet in the swamp. A good moon was now shining, tipping the forest with a fine silvery gray, and Henry purveyed with the greatest satisfaction the simple little shelter that he had found so opportunely. It was a good house, too, good to such a son of the deepest forest as was Henry. It was made of nothing but bark and poles, but it had kept out all that long, penetrating rain of the last three or four days, and when he lifted the big stone aside and opened the door it seemed as snug a place as he could have wished.

He left the door open a little, lighted a small fire on the flat stones, having no fear that it would be seen through the dense curtain that shut him in, and broiled big bear steaks on the coals. When he had eaten and the fire had died he went out and sat beside the hut. He was well satisfied with the day's work, and he wished now to think with all the concentration that one must put upon a great task if he expects to achieve it. He intended to invade the Indian camp, and he knew full well that it was the most perilous enterprise that he had ever attempted. Yet scouts and hunters had done such things and had escaped with their lives. He must not shrink from the path that others had trodden.

He made up his mind firmly, and partly thought out his plan of operations. Then he rested, and so sanguine was his temperament that he began to regard the deed itself as almost achieved. Decision

is always soothing after doubt, and he fell into a pleasant dreamy state. A gentle wind was blowing, the forest was dry and the leaves rustled with the low note that is like the softest chord of a violin. It became penetrating, thrillingly sweet, and hark! it spoke to him in a voice that he knew. It was the same voice that he had heard on the Ohio, mystic, but telling him to be of heart and courage. He would triumph over hardships and dangers, and he would see his friends again.

Henry started up from his vision. The song was gone, and he heard only the wind softly moving the leaves. It had been vague and shadowy as gossamer, light as the substance of a dream, but it was real to him, nevertheless, and the deep glow of certain triumph permeated his being, body and mind. It was not strange that he had in his nature something of the Indian mysticism that personified the winds and the trees and everything about him. The Manitou of the red man and the ancient Aieroski of the Iroquois were the same as his own God. He could not doubt that he had a message. Down on the Ohio he had had the same message more than once, and it had always come true.

He heard a slight rustling among the bushes, and, sitting perfectly still, he saw a black bear emerge into the open. It had gained the islet in some manner, probably floundering through the black mire, and the thought occurred to him that it was the mate of the one he had slain, drawn perhaps by instinct on the trail of a lost comrade. He could have shot the bear as he sat-and he would need fresh supplies of food soon-but he did not have the heart to do it.

The bear sniffed a little at the wind, which was blowing the human odor away from him, and sat back on his haunches. Henry did not believe that the animal had seen him or was yet aware of his presence, although he might suspect. There was something humorous and also pathetic in the visitor, who cocked his head on one side and looked about him. He made a distinct appeal to Henry, who sat absolutely still, so still that the little bear could not be sure at first that he was a human being. A minute passed, and the red eye of the bear rested upon the boy. Henry felt pleasant and sociable, but he knew that he could retain friendly relations only by remaining quiet.

“If I have eaten your comrade, my friend,” he said to himself, “it is only because of hard necessity.” The bear, little, comic, and yet with that touch of pathos about him, cocked his head a little further over on one side, and as a silver shaft of moonlight fell upon him Henry could see one red eye gleaming. It was a singular fact, but the boy, alone in the wilderness, and the loser of his comrades, felt for the moment a sense of comradeship with the bear, which was also alone, and doubtless the loser of a comrade, also. He uttered a soft growling sound like the satisfied purr of a bear eating its food.

The comical bear rose a little higher on his hind paws, and looked in astonishment at the motionless figure that uttered sounds so familiar. Yet the figure was not familiar. He had never seen a human being before, and the shape and outline were very strange to him. It might be some new kind of animal, and he was disposed to be inquiring, because there was nothing in these forests which the black bear was afraid of until man came.

He advanced a step or two and growled gently. Then he reared up again on his hind paws, and cocked his held to one side in his amusing manner. Henry, still motionless, smiled at him. Here, for an instant at least, was a cheery visitor and companionship. He at least would not break the spell.

“You look almost as if you could talk, old fellow,” he said to himself, “and if I knew your language I’d ask you a lot of questions.”

The bear, too, was motionless now, torn by doubt and curiosity. It certainly was a singular figure that sat there, fifteen or twenty yards before him, and he had the most intense curiosity to solve the mystery of this creature. But caution held him back.

There was a sudden flaw in the light breeze. It shifted about and brought the dreadful man odor to the nostrils of the honest black bear. It was something entirely new to him, but it contained the quality of fear. That still strange figure was his deadliest foe. Dropping down upon his four paws, he fled among the trees, and then scrambled somehow through the swamp to the mainland.

Henry sighed. Despite his own friendly feeling, the bear, warned by instinct, was afraid of him, and, as he was bound to acknowledge to himself, the bear’s instinct was doubtless right. He rose,

went into the hut, and slept heavily through the night. In the morning he left the islet once more to scout in the direction of the Indian camp, but he found it a most dangerous task. The woods were full of warriors hunting. As he had judged, the game was abundant, and he heard rifles cracking in several directions. He loitered, therefore, in the thickest of the thickets, willing to wait until night came for his enterprise. It was advisable, moreover, to wait, because he did not see yet just how he was going to succeed. He spent nearly the whole day shifting here and there through the forest, but late in the afternoon, as the Indians yet seemed so numerous in the woods, he concluded to go back toward the islet.

He was about two miles from the swamp when he heard a cry, sharp but distant. It was that of the savages, and Henry instinctively divined the cause. A party of the warriors had come somehow upon his trail, and they would surely follow it. It was a mischance that he had not expected. He waited a minute or two, and then heard the cry again, but nearer. He knew that it would come no more, but it confirmed him in his first opinion.

Henry had little fear of being caught, as the islet was so securely hidden, but he did not wish to take even a remote chance of its discovery. Hence he ran to the eastward of it, intending as the darkness came, hiding his trail, to double back and regain the hut.

He proceeded at a long, easy gait, his mind not troubled by the pursuit. It was to him merely an incident that should be ended as soon as possible, annoying perhaps, but easily cured. So he swung lightly along, stopping at intervals among the bushes to see if any of the warriors had drawn near, but he detected nothing. Now and then he looked up to the sky, willing that night should end this matter quickly and peacefully.

His wish seemed near fulfillment. An uncommonly brilliant sun was setting. The whole west was a sea of red and yellow fire, but in the east the forest was already sinking into the dark. He turned now, and went back toward the west on a line parallel with the pursuit, but much closer to the swamp. The dusk thickened rapidly. The sun dropped over the curve of the world, and the vast complex maze of trunks and boughs melted into a solid black wall. The incident of the pursuit was over and with it its petty annoyances. He directed his course boldly now for the stepping stones, and traveled fast. Soon the first of them would be less than a hundred yards away.

But the incident was not over. Wary and skillful though the young forest runner might be, he had made one miscalculation, and it led to great consequences. As he skirted the edge of the swamp in the darkness, now fully come, a dusky figure suddenly appeared. It was a stray warrior from some small band, wandering about at will. The meeting was probably as little expected by him as it was by Henry, and they were so close together when they saw each other that neither had time to raise his rifle. The warrior, a tall, powerful man, dropping his gun and snatching out a knife, sprang at once upon his enemy.

Henry was borne back by the weight and impact, but, making an immense effort, he recovered himself and, seizing the wrist of the Indian's knife hand, exerted all his great strength. The warrior wished to change the weapon from his right band, but he dared not let go with the other lest he be thrown down at once, and with great violence. His first rush having failed, he was now at a disadvantage, as the Indian is not generally a wrestler. Henry pushed him back, and his hand closed tighter and tighter around the red wrist. He wished to tear the knife from it, but he, too, was afraid to let go with the other hand, and so the two remained locked fast. Neither uttered a cry after the first contact, and the only sounds in the dark were their hard breathing, which turned to a gasp now and then, and the shuffle of their feet over the earth.

Henry felt that it must end soon. One or the other must give way. Their sinews were already strained to the cracking point, and making a supreme effort he bore all his weight upon the warrior, who, unable to sustain himself, went down with the youth upon him. The Indian uttered a groan, and Henry, leaping instantly to his feet, looked down upon his fallen antagonist, who did not stir.

He knew the cause. As they fell the point of the knife bad been turned upward, and it had entered the Indian's heart.

Although he had been in peril at his hands, Henry looked at the slain man in a sort of pity. He had not wished to take anyone's life, and, in reality, he had not been the direct cause of it. But it was a stern time and the feeling soon passed. The Wyandot, for such he was by his paint, would never have felt a particle of remorse had the victory been his.

The moon was now coming out, and Henry looked down thoughtfully at the still face. Then the idea came to him, in fact leaped up in his brain, with such an impulse that it carried conviction. He would take this warrior's place and go to the Indian camp. So eager was he, and so full of his plan, that he did not feel any repulsion as he opened the warrior's deerskin shirt and took his totem from a place near his heart. It was a little deerskin bag containing a bunch of red feathers. This was his charm, his magic spell, his bringer of good luck, which had failed him so woefully this time. Henry, not without a touch of the forest belief, put it inside his own hunting shirt, wishing, although he laughed at himself, that if the red man's medicine had any potency it should be on his own side.

Then he found also the little bag in which the Indian carried his war paint and the feather brush with which he put it on. The next hour witnessed a singular transformation. A white youth was turned into a red warrior. He cut his own hair closely, all except a tuft in the center, with his sharp hunting knife. The tuft and the close crop he stained black with the Indian's paint. It was a poor black, but he hoped that it would pass in the night. He drew the tuft into a scalplock, and intertwined it with a feather from the Indian's own tuft. Then he stained his face, neck, hands, and arms with the red paint, and stood forth a powerful young warrior of a western nation.

He hid the Indian's weapons and his own raccoon-skin cap in the brush. Then he took the body of the fallen warrior to the edge of the swamp and dropped it in. His object was not alone concealment, but burial as well. He still felt sorry for the unfortunate Wyandot, and he watched him until he sank completely from sight in the mire. Then he turned away and traveled a straight course toward the great Indian camp.

He stopped once on the way at a clear pool irradiated by the bright moonlight, and looked attentively at his reflection. By night, at least, it was certainly that of an Indian, and, summoning all his confidence, he continued upon his chosen and desperate task.

Henry knew that the chances were against him, even with his disguise, but he was bound to enter the Indian camp, and he was prepared to incur all risks and to endure all penalties. He even felt a certain lightness of heart as he hurried on his way, and at length saw through the forest the flare of light from the Indian camp.

He approached cautiously at first in order that he might take a good look into the camp, and he was surprised at what he saw. In a single day the village had been enlarged much more. It seemed to him that it contained at least twice as many warriors. Women and children, too, had come, and he heard a stray dog barking here and there. Many more fires than usual were burning, and there was a great murmur of voices.

Henry was much taken aback at first. It seemed that he was about to plunge into the midst of the whole Iroquois nation, and at a time, too, when something of extreme importance was going on, but a little reflection showed that he was fortunate. Amid so many people, and so much ferment it was not at all likely that he would be noticed closely. It was his intention, if the necessity came, to pass himself off as a warrior of the Shawnee tribe who had wandered far eastward, but he meant to avoid sedulously the eye of Timmendiquas, who might, through his size and stature, divine his identity.

As Henry lingered at the edge of the camp, in indecision whether to wait a little or plunge boldly into the light of the fires, he became aware that all sounds in the village-for such it was instead of a camp-had ceased suddenly, except the light tread of feet and the sound of many people talking low. He saw through the bushes that all the Iroquois, and with them the detachment of Wyandots under White Lightning, were going toward a large structure in the center, which he surmised to be

the Council House. He knew from his experience with the Indians farther west that the Iroquois built such structures.

He could no longer doubt that some ceremony of the greatest importance was about to begin, and, dismissing indecision, he left the bushes and entered the village, going with the crowd toward the great pole building, which was, indeed, the Council House.

But little attention was paid to Henry. He would have drawn none at all, had it not been for his height, and when a warrior or two glanced at him he uttered some words in Shawnee, saying that he had wandered far, and was glad to come to the hospitable Iroquois. One who could speak a little Shawnee bade him welcome, and they went on, satisfied, their minds more intent upon the ceremony than upon a visitor.

The Council House, built of light poles and covered with poles and thatch, was at least sixty feet long and about thirty feet wide, with a large door on the eastern side, and one or two smaller ones on the other sides. As Henry arrived, the great chiefs and sub-chiefs of the Iroquois were entering the building, and about it were grouped many warriors and women, and even children. But all preserved a decorous solemnity, and, knowing the customs of the forest people so well, he was sure that the ceremony, whatever it might be, must be of a highly sacred nature. He himself drew to one side, keeping as much as possible in the shadow, but he was using to its utmost power every faculty of observation that Nature had given him.

Many of the fires were still burning, but the moon had come out with great brightness, throwing a silver light over the whole village, and investing with attributes that savored of the mystic and impressive this ceremony, held by a savage but great race here in the depths of the primeval forest. Henry was about to witness a Condoling Council, which was at once a mourning for chiefs who had fallen in battle farther east with his own people and the election and welcome of their successors.

The chiefs presently came forth from the Council House or, as it was more generally called, the Long House, and, despite the greatness of Thayendanegea, those of the Onondaga tribe, in virtue of their ancient and undisputed place as the political leaders and high priests of the Six Nations, led the way. Among the stately Onondaga chiefs were: Atotarho (The Entangled), Skanawati (Beyond the River), Tehatkahtons (Looking Both Ways), Tehayatkwarayen (Red Wings), and Hahiron (The Scattered). They were men of stature and fine countenance, proud of the titular primacy that belonged to them because it was the Onondaga, Hiawatha, who had formed the great confederacy more than four hundred years before our day, or just about the time Columbus was landing on the shores of the New World.

Next to the Onondagas came the fierce and warlike Mohawks, who lived nearest to Albany, who were called Keepers of the Eastern Gate, and who were fully worthy of their trust. They were content that the Onondagas should lead in council, so long as they were first in battle, and there was no jealousy between them. Among their chiefs were Koswensiroutha (Broad Shoulders) and Satekariwate (Two Things Equal).

Third in rank were the Senecas, and among their chiefs were Kanokarih (The Threatened) and Kanyadariyo (Beautiful Lake).

These three, the Onondagas, Mohawks, and Senecas, were esteemed the three senior nations. After them, in order of precedence, came the chiefs of the three junior nations, the Oneidas, Cayugas, and Tuscaroras. All of the great chiefs had assistant chiefs, usually relatives, who, in case of death, often succeeded to their places. But these assistants now remained in the crowd with other minor chiefs and the mass of the warriors. A little apart stood Timmendiquas and his Wyandots. He, too, was absorbed in the ceremony so sacred to him, an Indian, and he did not notice the tall figure of the strange Shawnee lingering in the deepest of the shadows.

The head chiefs, walking solemnly and never speaking, marched across the clearing, and then through the woods to a glen, where two young warriors had kindled a little fire of sticks as a signal of

welcome. The chiefs gathered around the fire and spoke together in low tones. This was Deyuhnyon Kwarakda, which means “The Reception at the Edge of the Wood.”

Henry and some others followed, as it was not forbidden to see, and his interest increased. He shared the spiritual feeling which was impressed upon the red faces about him. The bright moonlight, too, added to the effect, giving it the tinge of an old Druidical ceremony.

The chiefs relapsed into silence and sat thus about ten minutes. Then rose the sound of a chant, distant and measured, and a procession of young and inferior chiefs, led by Oneidas, appeared, slowly approaching the fire. Behind them were warriors, and behind the warriors were many women and children. All the women were in their brightest attire, gay with feather headdresses and red, blue, or green blankets from the British posts.

The procession stopped at a distance of about a dozen yards from the chiefs about the council fire, and the Oneida, Kathlahon, formed the men in a line facing the head chiefs, with the women and children grouped in an irregular mass behind them. The singing meanwhile had stopped. The two groups stood facing each other, attentive and listening.

Then Hahiron, the oldest of the Onondagas, walked back and forth in the space between the two groups, chanting a welcome. Like all Indian songs it was monotonous. Every line he uttered with emphasis and a rising inflection, the phrase “Haih-haih” which may be translated “Hail to thee!” or better, “All hail!” Nevertheless, under the moonlight in the wilderness and with rapt faces about him, it was deeply impressive. Henry found it so.

Hahiron finished his round and went back to his place by the fire. Atotarho, head chief of the Onondagas, holding in his hands beautifully beaded strings of Iroquois wampum, came forward and made a speech of condolence, to which Kathlahon responded. Then the head chiefs and the minor chiefs smoked pipes together, after which the head chiefs, followed by the minor chiefs, and these in turn by the crowd, led the way back to the village.

Many hundreds of persons were in this procession, which was still very grave and solemn, every one in it impressed by the sacred nature of this ancient rite. The chief entered the great door of the Long House, and all who could find places not reserved followed. Henry went in with the others, and sat in a corner, making himself as small as possible. Many women, the place of whom was high among the Iroquois, were also in the Long House.

The head chiefs sat on raised seats at the north end of the great room. In front of them, on lower seats, were the minor chiefs of the three older nations on the left, and of the three younger nations on the right. In front of these, but sitting on the bark floor, was a group of warriors. At the east end, on both high and low seats, were warriors, and facing them on the western side were women, also on both high and low seats. The southern side facing the chiefs was divided into sections, each with high and low seats. The one on the left was occupied by men, and the one on the right by women. Two small fires burned in the center of the Long House about fifteen feet apart.

It was the most singular and one of the most impressive scenes that Henry had ever beheld. When all had found their seats there was a deep silence. Henry could hear the slight crackling made by the two fires as they burned, and the light fell faintly across the multitude of dark, eager faces. Not less than five hundred people were in the Long House, and here was the red man at his best, the first of the wild, not the second or third of the civilized, a drop of whose blood in his veins brings to the white man now a sense of pride, and not of shame, as it does when that blood belongs to some other races.

The effect upon Henry was singular. He almost forgot that he was a foe among them on a mission. For the moment he shared in their feelings, and he waited with eagerness for whatever might come.

Thayendanegea, the Mohawk, stood up in his place among the great chiefs. The role he was about to assume belonged to Atotarho, the Onondaga, but the old Onondaga assigned it for the occasion to Thayendanegea, and there was no objection. Thayendanegea was an educated man, he

had been in England, he was a member of a Christian church, and he had translated a part of the Bible from English into his own tongue, but now he was all a Mohawk, a son of the forest.

He spoke to the listening crowd of the glories of the Six Nations, how Hah-gweh-di-yu (The Spirit of Good) had inspired Hiawatha to form the Great Confederacy of the Five Nations, afterwards the Six; how they had held their hunting grounds for nearly two centuries against both English and French; and how they would hold them against the Americans. He stopped at moments, and deep murmurs of approval went through the Long House. The eyes of both men and women flashed as the orator spoke of their glory and greatness. Timmendiquas, in a place of honor, nodded approval. If he could he would form such another league in the west.

The air in the Long House, breathed by so many, became heated. It seemed to have in it a touch of fire. The orator's words burned. Swift and deep impressions were left upon the excited brain. The tall figure of the Mohawk towered, gigantic, in the half light, and the spell that he threw over all was complete.

He spoke about half an hour, but when he stopped he did not sit down. Henry knew by the deep breath that ran through the Long House that something more was coming from Thayendanegea. Suddenly the red chief began to sing in a deep, vibrant voice, and this was the song that he sung:

This was the roll of you,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

You that joined in the work,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

You that finished the task,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

The Great League,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

There was the same incessant repetition of "Haih haih!" that Henry had noticed in the chant at the edge of the woods, but it seemed to give a cumulative effect, like the roll of thunder, and at every slight pause that deep breath of approval ran through the crowd in the Long House. The effect of the song was indescribable. Fire ran in the veins of all, men, women, and children. The great pulses in their throats leaped up. They were the mighty nation, the ever-victorious, the League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, that had held at bay both the French and the English since first a white man was seen in the land, and that would keep back the Americans now.

Henry glanced at Timmendiquas. The nostrils of the great White Lightning were twitching. The song reached to the very roots of his being, and aroused all his powers. Like Thayendanegea, he was a statesman, and he saw that the Americans were far more formidable to his race than English or French had ever been. The Americans were upon the ground, and incessantly pressed upon the red man, eye to eye. Only powerful leagues like those of the Iroquois could withstand them.

Thayendanegea sat down, and then there was another silence, a period lasting about two minutes. These silences seemed to be a necessary part of all Iroquois rites. When it closed two young warriors stretched an elm bark rope across the room from east to west and near the ceiling, but between the high chiefs and the minor chiefs. Then they hung dressed skins all along it, until the two grades of chiefs were hidden from the view of each other. This was the sign of mourning, and was followed by a silence. The fires in the Long House had died down somewhat, and little was to be seen but the eyes and general outline of the people. Then a slender man of middle years, the best singer in all the Iroquois nation, arose and sang:

To the great chiefs bring we greeting,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

To the dead chiefs, kindred greeting,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

To the strong men ‘round him greeting,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

To the mourning women greeting,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

There our grandsires’ words repeating,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

Graciously, Oh, grandsires, hear,
All hail! All hail! All hail!

The singing voice was sweet, penetrating, and thrilling, and the song was sad. At the pauses deep murmurs of sorrow ran through the crowd in the Long House. Grief for the dead held them all. When he finished, Satekariwate, the Mohawk, holding in his hands three belts of wampum, uttered a long historical chant telling of their glorious deeds, to which they listened patiently. The chant over, he handed the belts to an attendant, who took them to Thayendanegea, who held them for a few moments and looked at them gravely.

One of the wampum belts was black, the sign of mourning; another was purple, the sign of war; and the third was white, the sign of peace. They were beautiful pieces of workmanship, very old.

When Hiawatha left the Onondagas and fled to the Mohawks he crossed a lake supposed to be the Oneida. While paddling along he noticed that man tiny black, purple, and white shells clung to his paddle. Reaching the shore he found such shells in long rows upon the beach, and it occurred to him to use them for the depiction of thought according to color. He strung them on threads of elm bark, and afterward, when the great league was formed, the shells were made to represent five clasped hands. For four hundred years the wampum belts have been sacred among the Iroquois.

Now Thayendanegea gave the wampum belts back to the attendant, who returned them to Satekariwate, the Mohawk. There was a silence once more, and then the chosen singer began the Consoling Song again, but now he did not sing it alone. Two hundred male voices joined him, and the time became faster. Its tone changed from mourning and sorrow to exultation and menace. Everyone thought of war, the tomahawk, and victory. The song sung as it was now became a genuine battle song, rousing and thrilling. The Long House trembled with the mighty chorus, and its volume poured forth into the encircling dark woods.

All the time the song was going on, Satekariwate, the Mohawk, stood holding the belts in his hand, but when it was over he gave them to an attendant, who carried them to another head chief. Thayendanegea now went to the center of the room and, standing between the two fires, asked who were the candidates for the places of the dead chiefs.

The dead chiefs were three, and three tall men, already chosen among their own tribes, came forward to succeed them. Then a fourth came, and Henry was startled. It was Timmendiquas, who, as the bravest chief of the brave Wyandots, was about to become, as a signal tribute, and as a great sign of friendship, an adopted son and honorary chief of the Mohawks, Keepers of the Western Gate, and most warlike of all the Iroquois tribes.

As Timmendiquas stood before Thayendanegea, a murmur of approval deeper than any that had gone before ran through all the crowd in the Long House, and it was deepest on the women's benches, where sat many matrons of the Iroquois, some of whom were chiefs-a woman could be a chief among the Iroquois.

The candidates were adjudged acceptable by the other chiefs, and Thayendanegea addressed them on their duties, while they listened in grave silence. With his address the sacred part of the rite was concluded. Nothing remained now but the great banquet outside—although that was much—and they poured forth to it joyously, Thayendanegea, the Mohawk, and Timmendiquas, the Wyandot, walking side by side, the finest two red chiefs on all the American continent.

CHAPTER VI. THE EVIL SPIRIT'S WORK

Henry slipped forth with the crowd from the Long House, stooping somewhat and shrinking into the smallest possible dimensions. But there was little danger now that any one would notice him, as long as he behaved with prudence, because all grief and solemnity were thrown aside, and a thousand red souls intended to rejoice. A vast banquet was arranged. Great fires leaped up all through the village. At every fire the Indian women, both young and old, were already far forward with the cooking. Deer, bear, squirrel, rabbit, fish, and every other variety of game with which the woods and rivers of western New York and Pennsylvania swarmed were frying or roasting over the coals, and the air was permeated with savory odors. There was a great hum of voices and an incessant chattering. Here in the forest, among themselves, and in complete security, the Indian stoicism was relaxed. According to their customs everybody fell to eating at a prodigious rate, as if they had not tasted anything for a month, and as if they intended to eat enough now to last another month.

It was far into the night, because the ceremonies had lasted a long time, but a brilliant moon shone down upon the feasting crowd, and the flames of the great fires, yellow and blue, leaped and danced. This was an oasis of light and life. Timmendiquas and Thayendanegea sat together before the largest fire, and they ate with more restraint than the others. Even at the banquet they would not relax their dignity as great chiefs. Old Skanawati, the Onondaga, old Atotarho, Onondaga, too, Satekariwate, the Mohawk, Kanokarih, the Seneca, and others, head chiefs though they were of the three senior tribes, did not hesitate to eat as the rich Romans of the Empire ate, swallowing immense quantities of all kinds of meat, and drinking a sort of cider that the women made. Several warriors ate and drank until they fell down in a stupor by the fires. The same warriors on the hunt or the war path would go for days without food, enduring every manner of hardship. Now and then a warrior would leap up and begin a chant telling of some glorious deed of his. Those at his own fire would listen, but elsewhere they took no notice.

In the largest open space a middle-aged Onondaga with a fine face suddenly uttered a sharp cry: "Hehmio!" which he rapidly repeated twice. Two score voices instantly replied, "Heh!" and a rush was made for him. At least a hundred gathered around him, but they stood in a respectful circle, no one nearer than ten feet. He waved his hand, and all sat down on the ground. Then, he, too, sat down, all gazing at him intently and with expectancy.

He was a professional story-teller, an institution great and honored among the tribes of the Iroquois farther back even than Hiawatha. He began at once the story of the warrior who learned to talk with the deer and the bear, carrying it on through many chapters. Now and then a delighted listener would cry "Hah!" but if anyone became bored and fell asleep it was considered an omen of misfortune to the sleeper, and he was chased ignominiously to his tepee. The Iroquois romancer was better protected than the white one is. He could finish some of his stories in one evening, but others were serials. When he arrived at the end of the night's installment he would cry, "Si-ga!" which was equivalent to our "To be continued in our next." Then all would rise, and if tired would seek sleep, but if not they would catch the closing part of some other story-teller's romance.

At three fires Senecas were playing a peculiar little wooden flute of their own invention, that emitted wailing sounds not without a certain sweetness. In a corner a half dozen warriors hurt in battle were bathing their wounds with a soothing lotion made from the sap of the bass wood.

Henry lingered a while in the darkest corners, witnessing the feasting, hearing the flutes and the chants, listening for a space to the story-tellers and the enthusiastic "Hahs!" They were so full of feasting and merrymaking now that one could almost do as he pleased, and he stole toward the southern end of the village, where he had noticed several huts, much more strongly built than the others. Despite all his natural skill and experience his heart beat very fast when he came to the first.

He was about to achieve the great exploration upon which he had ventured so much. Whether he would find anything at the end of the risk he ran, he was soon to see.

The hut, about seven feet square and as many feet in height, was built strongly of poles, with a small entrance closed by a clapboard door fastened stoutly on the outside with withes. The hut was well in the shadow of tepees, and all were still at the feasting and merrymaking. He cut the withes with two sweeps of his sharp hunting knife, opened the door, bent his head, stepped in and then closed the door behind him, in order that no Iroquois might see what had happened.

It was not wholly dark in the hut, as there were cracks between the poles, and bars of moonlight entered, falling upon a floor of bark. They revealed also a figure lying full length on one side of the hut. A great pulse of joy leaped up in Henry's throat, and with it was a deep pity, also. The figure was that of Shif'less Sol, but he was pale and thin, and his arms and legs were securely bound with thongs of deerskin.

Leaning over, Henry cut the thongs of the shiftless one, but he did not stir. Great forester that Shif'less Sol was, and usually so sensitive to the lightest movement, he perceived nothing now, and, had he not found him bound, Henry would have been afraid that he was looking upon his dead comrade. The hands of the shiftless one, when the hands were cut, had fallen limply by his side, and his face looked all the more pallid by contrast with the yellow hair which fell in length about it. But it was his old-time friend, the dauntless Shif'less Sol, the last of the five to vanish so mysteriously.

Henry bent down and pulled him by the shoulder. The captive yawned, stretched himself a little, and lay still again with closed eyes. Henry shook him a second time and more violently. Shif'less Sol sat up quickly, and Henry knew that indignation prompted the movement. Sol held his arms and legs stiffly and seemed to be totally unconscious that they were unbound. He cast one glance upward, and in the dim light saw the tall warrior bending over him.

"I'll never do it, Timmendiquas or White Lightning, whichever name you like better!" he exclaimed. "I won't show you how to surprise the white settlements. You can burn me at the stake or tear me in pieces first. Now go away and let me sleep."

He sank back on the bark, and started to close his eyes again. It was then that he noticed for the first time that his hands were unbound. He held them up before his face, as if they were strange objects wholly unattached to himself, and gazed at them in amazement. He moved his legs and saw that they, too, were unbound. Then he turned his startled gaze upward at the face of the tall warrior who was looking down at him. Shif'less Sol was wholly awake now. Every faculty in him was alive, and he pierced through the Shawnee disguise. He knew who it was. He knew who had come to save him, and he sprang to his feet, exclaiming the one word:

"Henry!"

The hands of the comrades met in the clasp of friendship which only many dangers endured together can give.

"How did you get here?" asked the shiftless one in a whisper.

"I met an Indian in the forest," replied Henry, "and well I am now he."

Shif'less Sol laughed under his breath.

"I see," said he, "but how did you get through the camp? It's a big one, and the Iroquois are watchful. Timmendiquas is here, too, with his Wyandots."

"They are having a great feast," replied Henry, "and I could go about almost unnoticed. Where are the others, Sol?"

"In the cabins close by."

"Then we'll get out of this place. Quick! Tie up your hair! In the darkness you can easily pass for an Indian."

The shiftless one drew his hair into a scalp lock, and the two slipped from the cabin, closing the door behind them and deftly retying the thongs, in order that the discovery of the escape might

occur as late as possible. Then they stood a few moments in the shadow of the hut and listened to the sounds of revelry, the monotone of the story-tellers, and the chant of the singers.

"You don't know which huts they are in, do you?" asked Henry, anxiously.

"No, I don't," replied the shiftless one.

"Get back!" exclaimed Henry softly. "Don't you see who's passing out there?"

"Braxton Wyatt," said Sol. "I'd like to get my hands on that scoundrel. I've had to stand a lot from him."

"The score must wait. But first we'll provide you with weapons. See, the Iroquois have stacked some of their rifles here while they're at the feast."

A dozen good rifles had been left leaning against a hut near by, and Henry, still watching lest he be observed, chose the best, with its ammunition, for his comrade, who, owing to his semi-civilized attire, still remained in the shadow of the other hut.

"Why not take four?" whispered the shiftless one. "We'll need them for the other boys."

Henry took four, giving two to his comrade, and then they hastily slipped back to the other side of the hut. A Wyandot and a Mohawk were passing, and they had eyes of hawks. Henry and Sol waited until the formidable pair were gone, and then began to examine the huts, trying to surmise in which their comrades lay.

"I haven't seen 'em a-tall, a-tall," said Sol, "but I reckon from the talk that they are here. I was s'prised in the woods, Henry. A half dozen reds jumped on me so quick I didn't have time to draw a weepin. Timmendiquas was at the head uv 'em an' he just grinned. Well, he is a great chief, if he did truss me up like a fowl. I reckon the same thing happened to the others."

"Come closer, Sol! Come closer!" whispered Henry. "More warriors are walking this way. The feast is breaking up, and they'll spread all through the camp."

A terrible problem was presented to the two. They could no longer search among the strong huts, for their comrades. The opportunity to save had lasted long enough for one only. But border training is stern, and these two had uncommon courage and decision.

"We must go now, Sol," said Henry, "but we'll come back."

"Yes," said the shiftless one, "we'll come back."

Darting between the huts, they gained the southern edge of the forest before the satiated banqueters could suspect the presence of an enemy. Here they felt themselves safe, but they did not pause. Henry led the way, and Shif'less Sol followed at a fair degree of speed.

"You'll have to be patient with me for a little while, Henry," said Sol in a tone of humility. "When I wuz layin' thar in the lodge with my hands an' feet tied I wuz about eighty years old, jest ez stiff ez could be from the long tyin'. When I reached the edge o' the woods the blood wuz flowin' lively enough to make me 'bout sixty. Now I reckon I'm fifty, an' ef things go well I'll be back to my own nateral age in two or three hours."

"You shall have rest before morning," said Henry, "and it will be in a good place, too. I can promise that."

Shif'less Sol looked at him inquiringly, but he did not say anything. Like the rest of the five, Sol had acquired the most implicit confidence in their bold young leader. He had every reason to feel good. That painful soreness was disappearing from his ankles. As they advanced through the woods, weeks dropped from him one by one. Then the months began to roll away, and at last time fell year by year. As they approached the deeps of the forest where the swamp lay, Solomon Hyde, the so called shiftless one, and wholly undeserving of the name, was young again.

"I've got a fine little home for us, Sol," said Henry. "Best we've had since that time we spent a winter on the island in the lake. This is littler, but it's harder to find. It'll be a fine thing to know you're sleeping safe and sound with five hundred Iroquois warriors only a few miles away."

"Then it'll suit me mighty well," said Shif'less Sol, grinning broadly. "That's jest the place fur a lazy man like your humble servant, which is me."

They reached the stepping stones, and Henry paused a moment.

"Do you feel steady enough, Sol, to jump from stone to stone?" he asked.

"I'm feelin' so good I could fly ef I had to," he replied. "Jest you jump on, Henry, an' fur every jump you take you'll find me only one jump behind you!"

Henry, without further ado, sprang from one stone to another, and behind him, stone for stone, came the shiftless one. It was now past midnight, and the moon was obscured. The keenest eyes twenty yards away could not have seen the two dusky figures as they went by leaps into the very heart of the great, black swamp. They reached the solid ground, and then the hut.

"Here, Sol," said Henry, "is my house, and yours, also, and soon, I hope, to be that of Paul, Tom, and Jim, too."

"Henry," said Shif'less Sol, "I'm shorely glad to come."

They went inside, stacked their captured rifles against the wall, and soon were sound asleep.

Meanwhile sleep was laying hold of the Iroquois village, also. They had eaten mightily and they had drunk mightily. Many times had they told the glories of Hode-no-sau-nee, the Great League, and many times had they gladly acknowledged the valor and worth of Timmendiquas and the brave little Wyandot nation. Timmendiquas and Thayendanegea had sat side by side throughout the feast, but often other great chiefs were with them-Skanawati, Atotarho, and Hahiron, the Onondagas; Satekariwate, the Mohawk; Kanokarih and Kanyadoriyo, the Senecas; and many others.

Toward midnight the women and the children left for the lodges, and soon the warriors began to go also, or fell asleep on the ground, wrapped in their blankets. The fires were allowed to sink low, and at last the older chiefs withdrew, leaving only Timmendiquas and Thayendanegea.

"You have seen the power and spirit of the Iroquois," said Thayendanegea. "We can bring many more warriors than are here into the field, and we will strike the white settlements with you."

"The Wyandots are not so many as the warriors of the Great League," said Timmendiquas proudly, "but no one has ever been before them in battle."

"You speak truth, as I have often heard it," said Thayendanegea thoughtfully. Then he showed Timmendiquas to a lodge of honor, the finest in the village, and retired to his own.

The great feast was over, but the chiefs had come to a momentous decision. Still chafing over their defeat at Oriskany, they would make a new and formidable attack upon the white settlements, and Timmendiquas and his fierce Wyandots would help them. All of them, from the oldest to the youngest, rejoiced in the decision, and, not least, the famous Thayendanegea. He hated the Americans most because they were upon the soil, and were always pressing forward against the Indian. The Englishmen were far away, and if they prevailed in the great war, the march of the American would be less rapid. He would strike once more with the Englishmen, and the Iroquois could deliver mighty blows on the American rearguard. He and his Mohawks, proud Keepers of the Western Gate, would lead in the onset. Thayendanegea considered it a good night's work, and he slept peacefully.

The great camp relapsed into silence. The warriors on the ground breathed perhaps a little heavily after so much feasting, and the fires were permitted to smolder down to coals. Wolves and panthers drawn by the scent of food crept through the thickets toward the faint firelight, but they were afraid to draw near. Morning came, and food and drink were taken to the lodges in which four prisoners were held, prisoners of great value, taken by Timmendiquas and the Wyandots, and held at his urgent insistence as hostages.

Three were found as they had been left, and when their bonds were loosened they ate and drank, but the fourth hut was empty. The one who spoke in a slow, drawling way, and the one who seemed to be the most dangerous of them all, was gone. Henry and Sol had taken the severed thongs with them, and there was nothing to show how the prisoner had disappeared, except that the withes fastening the door had been cut.

The news spread through the village, and there was much excitement. Thayendanegea and Timmendiquas came and looked at the empty hut. Timmendiquas may have suspected how Shif'less

Sol had gone, but he said nothing. Others believed that it was the work of Hahgweh-da-et-gah (The Spirit of Evil), or perhaps Ga-oh (The Spirit of the Winds) had taken him away.

"It is well to keep a good watch on the others," said Timmendiquas, and Thayendanegea nodded.

That day the chiefs entered the Long House again, and held a great war council. A string of white wampum about a foot in length was passed to every chief, who held it a moment or two before handing it to his neighbors. It was then laid on a table in the center of the room, the ends touching. This signified harmony among the Six Nations. All the chiefs had been summoned to this place by belts of wampum sent to the different tribes by runners appointed by the Onondagas, to whom this honor belonged. All treaties had to be ratified by the exchange of belts, and now this was done by the assembled chiefs.

Timmendiquas, as an honorary chief of the Mohawks, and as the real head of a brave and allied nation, was present throughout the council. His advice was asked often, and when he gave it the others listened with gravity and deference. The next day the village played a great game of lacrosse, which was invented by the Indians, and which had been played by them for centuries before the arrival of the white man. In this case the match was on a grand scale, Mohawks and Cayugas against Onondagas and Senecas.

The game began about nine o'clock in the morning in a great natural meadow surrounded by forest. The rival sides assembled opposite each other and bet heavily. All the stakes, under the law of the game, were laid upon the ground in heaps here, and they consisted of the articles most precious to the Iroquois. In these heaps were rifles, tomahawks, scalping knives, wampum, strips of colored beads, blankets, swords, belts, moccasins, leggins, and a great many things taken as spoil in forays on the white settlements, such is small mirrors, brushes of various kinds, boots, shoes, and other things, the whole making a vast assortment.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.