

A red shield-shaped banner is centered on a dark green, textured background. The banner is held up by a white pole with decorative finials at the top and bottom. The text on the banner is in a white, serif, all-caps font. Below the shield, a white pole with a decorative finial is visible, and a red ribbon is tied around it.

UNDER
MAD ANTHONY'S
BANNER

JAMES BALL NAYLOR

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“ General, the man you seek stands before you ”

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UNDER MAD ANTHONY'S BANNER

BY
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AUTHOR OF
"Ralph Marlowe,"
"The Sign of the Prophet,"
"In the Days of St. Clair,"
Ect., Ect.

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To the memory of Gen. Anthony Wayne who saved the Northwest Territory for his country and furthered the westward march of civilization this book is gratefully dedicated. x

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UNDER MAD ANTHONY'S BANNER

CHAPTER I.

Time—The middle of November, 1791. Scene—A creek valley in what is now the lower part of Jefferson county, Ohio, fifteen miles from the settlement of Wheeling upon the Virginia shore of the Ohio river.

Over hill and dale stretched the unbroken forest. The bare-boughed trees huddled closely together and shivered at the touch of the crisp morning breeze. In vain the rising sun poured its slanting rays upon the brown earth and sought to warm the hazy atmosphere. The brawling brook that rushed headlong toward the great river two miles away glinted angrily in the smoky light and murmured sullenly of its never-ending journey. A rustle of the fallen leaves—and a gray squirrel, with whisking tail and furious chatter, hurriedly scampered to his hole in a hollow oak. There he glued his eyes to the circular doorway of his domicile and keenly

watched the movements of a red fox that had scared him away from his breakfast among the dead leaves. The fox, with sidelong movements and furtive glances, disappeared among the underbrush, and the squirrel again descended to his breakfast. Upon the dead limb of a giant beech, a crow cawed lustily, pausing at intervals to listen to the answering call of a distant companion or to bend his black orbs upon a saucy woodpecker flitting and hammering beneath him.

Upon a narrow strip of bottom-land a few rods from the bank of the stream, stood a solitary cabin of unhewn logs. A translucent column of blue smoke ascended from the mud-daubed chimney and lost itself among the gray boughs overarching the rude habitation. A gaunt deerhound lay curled upon the puncheon doorstep, and from a pole-fenced enclosure back of the house came the grunting of a fat and contented porker. A cowbell tinkled in the clearing farther up the stream.

The cabin door swung inward, and a man, bending his tall form, stepped out upon the ground. We use the term advisedly. Hal Barton—English refugee and American pioneer—*was* a man. Six-feet-two in height and weighing over two hundred pounds, he towered above his fellows, as the oak above brambles. His carriage was erect; his step, elastic. Great bunches of muscles rounded his hips, shoulders and limbs, but not an ounce of surplus tissue marred the symmetry of his form. He was

twenty-five years old and knew not the meaning of ill-health or fatigue. His smooth face, tanned a red-brown by exposure, was fair—a face to win a woman's heart and his laughing blue eyes, through which his reliant self looked out, scorning alike frowns and favors, sparkled with keen intelligence. A mane of tawny hair rippling over his broad shoulders added to his leonine appearance.

He sniffed the cool air and swept his eyes around the forest scene. Then, leaning his gun against the log wall and pushing his fur cap far back, he held out his brawny arms toward the open doorway, crying cheerily:

“Come, Margaret—come, lass—a kiss before I go. The sun's an hour high and I must be off.”

A plump, fair-faced little woman sprang over the sill and nestled in his arms. He brushed the brown hair away from her white forehead and gazed lovingly down upon her. Then he laughingly bent and kissed her, at the same time playfully wiping the tears from her brown eyes with the fringed skirt of his hunting shirt.

“Don't cry, lass—don't cry,” he murmured soothingly. “I'll be back by mid-afternoon and bring you the cloth for a new frock. There—there, dry your eyes and be your own brave self.”

“But it—is so lonely—when you are gone, Hal,” the young wife said, vainly trying to control her sobs; “and you're gone so much, hunting and trapping——”

"Working for you, lass," he interrupted, a cloud momentarily overspreading his features.

"I know—I know," she hastily assented.

Then, drying her eyes, she locked her soft fingers around his big brown hand and smiled up at him:

"See, I am brave now. You'll be back by mid-afternoon, Hal?"

He nodded, but a faraway look was in his eyes.

"What is it?" she asked timidly.

"Are you happy with me?" he returned suddenly.

"What a question, Hal. To be sure I am."

"Just a little lonely at times, eh?"

"Only when you're gone."

"You wouldn't wish to leave me and return to the mansion across the waters—the luxury that might have been yours?"

"You doubt me?" she cried, the red blood rushing to her cheeks as she attempted to draw away from him.

But he caught her to his bosom and, smothering her with passionate kisses, laughed boisterously:

"Only a joke, lass—only a joke! Be brave a little longer. The country is settling rapidly; soon we shall have neighbors in plenty. But I must be off. Nothing can harm you, but don't leave the house. Goodby."

Giant that he was, he set her within the cabin; and, snatching up his gun and bundle of peltries, strode away. She waved a farewell to him as he disappeared among the trees; then she closed the

puncheon door and returned to her household duties, softly humming a song and smiling as though her thoughts were pleasant, whether of the future or of the past.

Hal Barton did not pause until he reached the mouth of the creek, two miles from his cabin. A moment he stood upon the shore and looked out upon the broad bosom of the beautiful river. Then he dragged a dugout from its hiding-place among the willows that fringed the bank, and, embarking, paddled swiftly down the stream toward the Wheeling settlement. A stiff breeze rippled the surface of the water and lent aid to his efforts. Although it was November and the air was biting, he threw off his cap and, impatiently tossing the hair from his forehead, dipped the paddle into the turbid flood and shot the light vessel forward with the speed of a racehorse. His great muscular arms swung with the regularity of a pendulum. The water swirled at the bow and danced in a foaming wake behind him. With an exhilaration born of healthful exercise and rapidity of motion, he laughed softly to himself as he bent to the work. Like a swiftly shifting panorama, the landscape flew past—a landscape of dreary, leafless forest. He narrowly escaped wreck upon a half-submerged treetop. The spice of danger but lent zest to his keen enjoyment.

Suddenly turning a sharp bend in the river, he saw a large canoe containing four occupants laboriously stemming the current upon the Virginia shore.

Not knowing whether they were friends or foes, Hal dropped his paddle, looked to the priming of his long rifle, and loosened the knife in his belt. Then he resumed his course, but kept close to the Ohio shore and warily watched the movements of the strangers. As the two crafts drew closer together, he noted that three of the men were wielding paddles and that the fourth, who occupied the stern, was dressed in the uniform of the United States army.

"Must be some officer from the blockhouse at Wheeling," he thought. "No, it can't be; there are but a few soldiers there at present. And what would an officer be doing away from the fort? May be carrying a dispatch to Fort Steuben or Fort Pitt."

Placing his hands to his mouth, he sent ringing across the water a loud halloo. A lusty cheer came back in reply.

"Whence do you hail?"

"From Fort Washington," replied the officer in the stern.

Hal turned the course of his dugout and paddled rapidly toward them, muttering under his breath:

"From Fort Washington! They have news of St. Clair's army, then. I hope he has succeeded in subduing the Indians and driving them out of the Maumee valley. No white settler will be safe in the Northwest territory until the savages have been taught a wholesome lesson."

As he drew near the strangers' craft, he could restrain his excitement no longer, and cried:

"What's the news from St. Clair's army?"

A wave of sadness overswept the face of the young officer, as he replied:

"General St. Clair's army has been cut to pieces."

"What!" And Barton almost leaped from his frail vessel.

"It's too true. I'm on my way to the seat of government with dispatches containing full particulars."

The three paddlers ceased their efforts, and Hal's canoe floated alongside.

"When did it happen?" he asked in a subdued tone. "Tell me all about it."

The officer closely scrutinized the questioner a moment before replying. Then he inquired:

"You're an American?"

"By adoption—yes."

"And by birth?"

"An Englishman."

A fierce scowl contorted the military man's features, as he cried fiercely:

"Then I've naught to tell you. Had it not been for your nation aiding and abetting the savages, there would have been no necessity of an Indian war; and hundreds of brave men whose bones lie unburied in the forest would now be alive."

Hal Barton's face flushed and his huge frame quivered with anger and excitement. The veins

upon his neck and temples stood out like cords, and his tawny mane bristled.

"England and the English!" he roared. "You can never know the fierce, implacable hate that I bear them, although I'm of their blood. I've greater cause to hate the mother country than you or any American has. Am I not a fugitive from her tyranny? I'm an American by adoption only—but an American to the core!"

The three paddlers slapped their thighs and shouted; and the officer smilingly held out his hand, saying:

"I'm sorry I probed an old sore, my friend, but pleased to hear you say you're an American, and glad to take your hand and call you friend. We have need of such men as you. Now I'm ready to answer your questions. The battle with the Indians occurred on the fourth of this month. It was a surprise and a slaughter. As I've told you, St. Clair's army was cut to pieces, and retreated to Fort Washington in sad disorder. English gold bought the lives of American freemen. We left Little Turtle and his braves in undisputed possession of the field. Nine hundred scalped and mutilated Americans are food for the wolves. It's an awful thing—a national calamity."

For a full minute the five men were silent. Barton's breath came hard and fast. At last he jerked out:

"You say the English government has aided the Indians—how?"

"By furnishing them the sinews of war—arms and ammunition."

"What will our government do?"

"I don't know. But I must be moving; a long, toilsome journey lies before me. Goodby."

Again the two men so strangely met shook hands—and parted. When the two canoes had swept a few yards apart, the young officer turned and called after Hal:

"What's your name, friend?"

"Hal Barton."

"And mine's Captain Edward Axline. Goodby."

Barton's thoughts, as he resumed his journey down the river, were grave,

"It's well my nest in the woods is near two forts," they ran. "But then they have withdrawn most of the troops and the others will have to go as soon as a new campaign is organized. I don't fear for myself—but Margaret——"

The light of love irradiated his countenance, as he murmured his wife's name.

"Well, I'll do the best I can to protect her. In the future I must not be away from the cabin so much. If my services are needed, I'll take her to a place of safety and enlist."

It was near midday when he came in sight of the Wheeling settlement. A number of settlers were building a boat at the water's edge. They appeared

to be greatly excited about something, for they had laid down their tools and were all talking and gesticulating at the same time. As Hal leaped ashore and drew his dugout upon the beach, he heard one of them remark:

"It's a 'tarnal shame, so it is; and England's to blame fer it. I'll tell you what this country's got to do. She's got to give them cussed Britishers another lickin'—an' the sooner it's done the better. Men mowed down like ripe wheat by the bloody redskins; it makes my blood bile! An' here's the gover'ment talkin' 'bout a peace policy. Peace! Great peace there'll be 'long as ther's Injins with Britishers' guns in the'r hands."

"Yes," supplemented another, "all you say's true—an' more. Think of it! Here we are today at the mercy of any band o' prowlin' red devils. The gover'ment talks peace till the Injins is fat an' sassy on Britishers' beef sent in from 'cross the lakes, an' ready to raise the devil gener'ly."

"Then she 'draws all the soldiers from the frontier posts, sends 'em out into the Injin country to be massacred, an' leaves our women an' children defenseless. That's a great peace policy, I say. Won't even 'low us to strike a blow in our own defense. Didn't that ol' tyrant, General Harmer, put Lew Wetzel in prison, jest 'cause he killed an Injin? An' Wetzel's the greatest Injin-fighter that ever lived. He's done more to pr'tect the settlers an' the'r fam'lies than ol' General Harmer an' his whole

army. All *he* ever done was to git a lot of men killed an' scalped—jest like St. Clair's done. A hundred men like Lew Wetzel 'd whip more redskins than the Britishers could send ag'inst 'em."

Barton had approached the men unobserved, and stood listening to their inflammatory talk. A large, beef-faced, scant-haired individual stepped from the log he had been scoring, and rolling up his sleeves and cracking his fists together, shouted:

"You can bet y'r last shillin' Lew Wetzel's a great Injin-fighter—an' he's a good rough-an'-tumble fighter, too. He can whip any two Injins 'tween here an' the Mississip', single-handed; an' he can trounce any ugly-mugged Englishman that ever set foot on American soil. I've wras'led with him an' hunted with him, an' I know him like a book."

"Don't know 'bout Wetzel whippin' any Englishman that ever set foot on American soil," interrupted a stoop-shouldered, bandy-legged little man, lighting his pipe and composedly seating himself upon a boat gunwale. "They grow some purty big men over the water. Take Hal Barton, fer instance——"

"Hal Barton!" sneered the beef-faced man. "He's nothin' but a lump o' mud. I could whip him myself, with one hand tied behind me. Cuss him! I don't like him anyhow. He don't talk like other people, he don't act like other people. He's 'ristocratic, he won't even take a dram o' rum with a

body. He's all blow an' bluster—like the wind;
an' if ever he comes blowin' 'round me, I'll—"

"What will you do?"

It was Barton who spoke. Coolly stepping from behind the pile of timber that had partially concealed him, he faced the braggart and smilingly asked the question. The beef-faced man's jaw dropped and he took a step backward. There he stood staring at the unexpected arrival, in speechless amazement. Terror was depicted upon his countenance, and his toil-hardened hands shook. His companions slapped their thighs and roared in glee at his predicament.

"What will you do?" repeated Hal, advancing upon the abashed coward. The English giant was smiling still, but a mischievous glint was in his blue eyes.

"I—I was jest jokin', Barton," stammered the man, attempting to back away. "I saw you behind the—the timber, an' was—was jest braggin' to fool——"

Roars of laughter cut short his lame apology. Hal sprang forward, and, seizing the cringing wretch by the neck and belt, cried laughingly:

"At any rate, you need a bath."

And with the words, he tossed the wildly struggling man into the river. Then, waving an adieu to the others, who were indulging in all sorts of antics as they watched their shivering, sputtering

companion crawling up the shelving bank, he picked up his rifle and bundle of peltries and sauntered away toward the cluster of huts that constituted the settlement.

He noted that the few soldiers at the fort were busily engaged in cleaning the old swivel-gun and scouring their own pieces. At the trader's store he bartered his peltries for cloth and ammunition; and a half hour later he was stemming the current in an endeavor to reach home ere nightfall. Once only he stopped; but that was to aid a company of emigrants whose barge was aground on a sandbar and not to rest his tireless arms. The lower sank the sun, the swifter dipped his paddle. He was ill at ease; his mind was disturbed by what he had seen and heard.

For the first time he realized the defenseless condition of the frontier settlements. As he reached the mouth of the creek and secreted his dugout in its accustomed hiding place, he resolved that he would not again leave Margaret alone for so long a time. "What if harm has come to her today!" was the thought that intruded itself and lent wings to his feet, as he sped through the fast-darkening forest.

The sun had disappeared behind the western hills and the fringe of night's garment swept the earth. The cabin had a somber and deserted look. No welcoming light beamed from chink or cranny.

His heart pulsating with unspoken fear, he sprang forward and pushed open the door. The fire on the hearth had gone out—the cabin was deserted!

CHAPTER II.

Hal Barton's fears were realized. Some harm had befallen his wife. He called her name. The only reply he received was the echo of his own voice among the rafters. He felt his way to the bed in the corner, thinking that she might have fallen ill in his absence. She was not there. Again he called her name in a louder voice. No answer. Then he rushed out of doors, shouting: "Margaret! O, Margaret!" Far up the hillslope he heard the mocking echo: "Margaret!"

Like a mad man he rushed to and fro in the darkness, wildly hallooing her name. The fat porker in the enclosure back of the house squealed for his supper. Under the shed of poles and brush, the gentle cow tinkled her bell and mooed. Hal stopped calling and listened intently. A weird moaning came to his ears, from afar up the valley. It was the winter wind among the trees. A storm was approaching. The heavens grew black as ink,

and the darkness was intense. The moaning, shrieking sound drew nearer. A few drops of rain pattered upon the dead leaves. He started, and, holding his throbbing temples in both hands, groaned in agony of spirit:

“My God! What am I to do? Where can she be?”

The storm was upon him. Raindrops beat upon the cabin roof; the wind shrieked and whistled down the valley. He sought the doorway for shelter and vainly tried to collect his wits. He could not think—his brain was on fire—his heart was ice. Over and over he upbraided himself for his prolonged absence. Hark! What was that sound? It was repeated and answered. Then it came again and again. Hal Barton, strong man that he was, grew weak as a new-born babe. It was the howling of wolves!

“Wolves! Wolves!” he shuddered. “God keep and protect her! But I must act—I must save her—I must!”

He groped his way into the cabin, and by means of flint and steel, struck a fire upon the cold hearth. He piled on dry wood, and soon the rough walls glowed with the light of the dancing flames. Then, snatching up his rifle and a blazing brand, he rushed forth, having no definite plan in mind. All he knew was that he must do something or go mad. The sudden flurry was over; the rain had ceased to fall

and the wind came in fitful gusts. It was growing colder.

By the light of the flaring torch, he carefully examined the ground around the house. But the earth was hard-packed; no footprints were discernible. Far away on the hilltops the wolves were still howling. With bent head and sturdy stride, he set off in that direction. He climbed the steep hillside, descended into a shallow ravine beyond, and, crossing it, found himself upon a second range of hills. He paused to listen and reconnoiter.

Many times during the progress of his quest he had called his wife's name. Now he shouted until the aisles of the virgin forest rang. The dismal howling of the wolves could be heard—that was all; but the sound was fainter and farther away.

A sudden swirl of air extinguished his torch. Realizing the futility of further effort in the dense blackness that surrounded him, he slowly and painfully retraced his steps to the cabin.

Arriving there he replenished the waning fire, and, restlessly pacing up and down the narrow confines of the room, tried to determine in his mind what had become of Margaret. She had not left the vicinity of her own free will, of that he was sure. Had she been captured by Indians? No; the redmen would have left the charred ruins of the cabin to tell of their visit. Someone or something had enticed his wife away from the house; and she was lost in the forest. Again the strong

man shuddered; he could not forget the blood-curdling howls he had heard upon the hill. Perhaps already the half-famished pack had devoured her. He dropped into a low splint-bottomed chair before the fire, and, covering his face with his hands to shut out the vision his imagination had conjured, rocked himself to and fro.

After a time he grew calmer and attempted to decide what he should do. In the morning he would try to find her trail and follow her. If he failed, he would go to Wheeling and organize a searching party. He would never rest until he found her, dead or alive. Again he cursed himself for his negligence. Could it be possible that the Indians had kidnapped her, carried her into captivity, a fate worse than death?

Beside himself with grief and suspense, he sprang erect and resumed his pacing up and down the uneven floor. A well-thumbed, leather-bound Bible upon the rude shelf above the fireplace attracted his attention. It was Margaret's Bible, an heirloom brought from England. He took it from its resting place, feeling that he might find within its sacred pages some word of strength and guidance.

Once more he seated himself, the ancient volume upon his knee. A slip of paper projecting from between the yellow leaves caught his eye. Mechanically he drew it forth, and, turning it over, read by the flickering light of the fire:

"Today I have decided that I can never be happy

and contented with you. The very sight of this place has grown hateful and distasteful to me. Whatever love I ever bore you, you have killed by prolonged absences and willful neglect. I leave today never to return; I go with your cousin across the sea. A final farewell. MARGARET."

Again he read the curt and cruel missive through, without the movement of a muscle. He carefully scrutinized the writing. It was Margaret's. He turned the slip of paper over and over, examining it minutely. It was paper she had brought with her from England. Calmly, stoically he arose, and going to a small iron-bound chest in one corner of the room, threw up the lid and drew forth an inlaid writing desk. He compared the piece of paper in his hand with the packet that lay before him. He was not mistaken. He saw that quills and ink were in their accustomed places. One of the quills showed traces of recent use and a partially dried drop of ink adhered to the outside of the ink-jug. It was all very plain; not a shadow of doubt remained in his mind.

As he closed the lid of the chest and arose to his feet, his face was deathlike; but his nerves were of steel. Rigidly erect he walked about the floor and closely inspected all articles of furniture and clothing. Evidently, Margaret had taken nothing with her but her cloak and hood. Once more he replenished the fire and seated himself before it. He did not groan or shed a tear. Like one gazing upon

a horror, he sat staring into the red embers, hour after hour. Over and over, the thought ran through his brain.

"Gone—gone! Gone with my cousin, Dick Holloway—gone back to England and the luxury that once she renounced. And but this morning, with her arms about me and her lips seeking mine, she told me she was happy and contented. She pretended to love me, too, only this morning; and yet she says that whatever love she ever bore me, I have killed by prolonged absences and willful neglect. Oh, Margaret! False, false as Satan's promises! And I thought you an angel of fidelity, thought that when all others proved false you would still be true. God help me to forgive you, my lass—God help me!"

The fire was burning low; gray ashes strewed the hearth. It was midnight. He bent forward, as though striving to read his fate in the fading coals, and murmured chokingly:

"It was a mistake—a mistake all the way through. I should have left her in England to marry Dick Holloway and enjoy the luxury and wealth she had been taught to expect. She was too tender a blossom to stand want and hardship. And he followed us to America. Did I not see him in Boston? He has trailed us to this lonely region where I thought he could never find us, and awaiting an opportunity, has lured her away from me. Oh, lass—lass! And I loved you so!

“But she is not wholly to blame. I was away from her hours at a time; she was lonely; she brooded over what she had lost in marrying me. And it killed her love—whatever love she bore me. Perhaps she did not love me as I thought, as I loved her. No doubt my own great love blinded me. But it’s all over—and the future is blank. No! I mustn’t say that. God has placed me here for some purpose. Though all the world be false, He is truth. I must strive—I must do—though the heart break and the brain go mad! The past—the past——”

He relapsed into silence. The fire expired and the room grew cold. He gave no heed. He was living in that past of which he had spoken, and these are the scenes and incidents that presented themselves to his mind:

Twenty years before, in one of the southern counties of England, there lived a wealthy land-owner named John Holloway. Behind his many-gabled mansion of gray stone stretched the undulating uplands; and before it the blue sea spread out to the horizon. The big house stood upon a frowning headland, and a winding driveway led down to a straggling fishing-village in a sheltered cove just back of the yellow sands. This village was of no little importance at the time. It contained several hundred cottages and had its own church and rector; and the fish that its inhabitants salted and cured went far toward feeding the poor of London.

John Holloway's family consisted of his wife, his son, a lad of seven years, and his nephew, a boy of five. The latter was the child of Mr. Holloway's dead sister, who had run away from the parental roof to marry a strolling musician, and who had died deserted and broken-hearted in the great metropolis. With open arms the uncle and aunt had received the little waif and taken him to their hearts. They learned to love him as they loved their own son, and were as solicitous of his welfare. The two cousins had been christened Richard and Harold, but John Holloway, with a fixed propensity for abbreviating everything he said and did, promptly cut their names to Dick and Hal.

Ruring their childhood, Dick Holloway and Hal Barton were constant playmates and fast friends. They romped together over the broad lawns and the shining sands of the seashore. Hal, though two years the younger, was the recognized leader in all their pranks and adventures. Sturdy-limbed, sunny-natured and fearless, he appealed to the admiration of his more delicate, irascible and timid cousin. Dick's hair and complexion were dark; Hal's were light.

Things moved along without jar until Dick was nineteen and Hal seventeen. Then the new rector's daughter, Margaret Fulton, a winsome, brown-haired lass of sixteen, came into their lives. Both cousins fell madly in love with her and trouble began. Apparently, Margaret could not tell

which of her youthful lovers she preferred. Perhaps she was herself too young to know her own heart. At times she appeared to favor the swarthy-complexioned, musical-voiced Dick. At other times it was evident that she was more strongly drawn toward the bluff, leonine Hal. Each cousin became madly jealous of the other; and many wordy encounters were the result. No doubt words would have led to blows, had Dick possessed the requisite amount of courage. But none knew better than he that he was no match for his stalwart cousin.

At this stage of affairs, Mrs. Holloway, a quiet, lovable woman, fell ill and died. Her husband, heart-sick and lonely, determined to spend a year in travel upon the continent. To this end he sent Dick, who until now had been under the instruction of a tutor at home, away to college, and procured for a Hal a position under the government. The latter's education had not been neglected. He had studied with Dick and had proven the more apt scholar of the two.

This move on the part of John Holloway for a time put an end to the youngsters' love-making. Dick was at Oxford; Hal, in London; and Margaret at home with her father. At the end of twelve months Mr. Holloway returned to England. Only during the holidays were the cousins at home, and then they sedulously avoided each other's society and refused to resume their old companionship. They were more estranged than ever. Dick had

absorbed aristocratic ideas and was intolerant and overbearing. He looked upon his cousin as a plebian, and took no pains to conceal his aversion for him. Hal, on the other hand, had become impregnated with democratic principles. Although he had been in the employ of the government, he took delight in shocking his uncle and cousin by voicing his sentiments in their presence. He was the same hale, bluff Hal; but he had convictions in regard to liberty and the inalienable rights of the common people—and he had the courage to speak what he thought.

He openly avowed that he believed the American colonists were right in rebelling against the rule of the mother country. This brought down upon his head a storm of abuse from both uncle and cousin. When the holidays were over, the two young men departed without either having had an opportunity of being alone with the young woman both loved.

Six months later John Holloway was killed by a fall from his horse, and the two cousins were summoned home in haste. After the funeral the will was read. It had been executed but a few months before Mr. Holloway's death. Dick fell heir to everything—Hal was cut off with a pound. No doubt his pronounced democratic views had lost him a share of the estate. Dick entered into possession of the fortune and immediately revealed his real nature. He promptly gave Hal to understand that he was a beggar and must make his home elsewhere.

Young Barton departed from the gray walls that had grown dear to him from boyish associations; but he did not leave the neighborhood. He took up his headquarters at the village inn and again laid siege to Margaret's heart.

The young woman confessed that she liked him better than his cousin; but tearfully informed him that her father opposed their union and urged her to accept Holloway. Then it was that Hal showed the true chivalry of his disposition. Realizing that his presence meant trouble for Margaret and feeling that he had nothing to offer her in exchange for Dick's wealth, he quietly bade her goodby and returned to his duties in London. It was a sore trial, but he bore it with the fortitude of a resolute man.

Dick was left with the field to himself. Coaxed by her wealthy lover and urged by her impecunious father, Margaret yielded; and a few months after Hal's departure she was engaged to his cousin. But having gained her consent, Dick was in no hurry, apparently, to enter into the joys of married life. He was sowing his wild oats broadcast. He spent much time in London, traveled on the continent, and led a fast life wherever he was. Several years passed, and still Margaret was an inmate of the village rectory.

During all this time she heard nothing of Hal Barton. He was as one dead to her. Nor did he hear of her, except in an indirect way and at infrequent intervals. Suddenly he put in an appearance

at the fishing-village. He had been persecuted for his democratic principles and had been discharged from his position under the government. The aristocracy of the metropolis, at the instigation of Dick Holloway, had accused him of political intrigue, and the government had set a price upon his liberty. Forewarned by a friend, he had fled, and was now a fugitive. He had come to say farewell to Margaret before leaving his native land never to return.

He was a youth no longer. His splendid physique and indomitable courage excited Margaret's admiration. The old love again welled up in her heart. Hal read it in her flushed face and suffused eyes. He was sorry, yet glad, that he had come. Bidding her a formal adieu, he turned to leave the woman he loved with all the strength of his great manly nature. But she clung to his big firm hand and looked up at him appealingly. It was more than he could bear. He forgot his danger, her vows—everything. He bent his blue eyes full upon her for one moment; then, catching her in his strong arms, cried fiercely:

“If you love me, lass, you shall go with me to America, though the whole English nation oppose. What say you?”

For answer she clung to him, silently sobbing upon his breast. Within a fortnight they had persuaded the rector to marry them, and were aboard a vessel bound for the United States. The day after Barton's escape, Dick Holloway suddenly re-

turned to his estate. Finding that Margaret had married his hated rival and left the country, he vowed vengeance and set out in pursuit.

When Hal Barton and his bride arrived in America, they settled first in Boston. There the husband obtained employment in the warehouse of an importing firm; and for a year or more the young couple lived happily. But one evening in going home from his work, Barton met his cousin face to face. The two passed without speaking. Hal kept his discovery to himself; he did not wish to worry Margaret. However, the next day when he returned from the warehouse she met him at the door and told him that she herself had seen Holloway spying around the cottage. She was greatly alarmed, was trembling and tearful, and refused to be comforted until she had exacted a promise from her husband to remove her beyond reach of the unwelcome intruder. Hal would have stayed and dared his cousin to do his worst—the tawny-haired giant knew not the meaning of cowardice—but Margaret appeared terrorized by the presence of the man to whom she had been betrothed.

Within a week they had packed their few belongings, joined a company of immigrants, and were on their way to the western wilderness. Arriving in the newly-founded settlement of Wheeling, after a journey of untold hardship, they paused to rest and look around them. Barton was not pleased with the location. At first he thought of going on to

Marietta; but, after due deliberation, decided to cross the river and erect a dwelling in the very heart of the woods. Margaret professed to be well pleased with the proposed move; apparently she desired to get entirely beyond the pale of civilization, beyond the possibility of Dick Holloway finding her. Hal selected a site, and, with the help of his friends, erected a cabin. There the couple lived in peace and quietude until that fateful November day that marks the beginning of our story.

CHAPTER III.

Hal Barton emerged from the past in which he had been living, and arose to his feet. It was gray daylight. His limbs were stiff and his heart lay like lead in his breast. Bareheaded he strode from the cabin, and, throwing back his shoulders and expanding his great chest, drank deeply of the pure, cold air. After milking and feeding the cow and attending to the wants of the squealing porker, he returned and cooked a scanty breakfast and busied himself with preparations for departure.

"The cow and pig," he murmured, "I'll give to some poor family at Wheeling. Nothing else of value remains except Margaret's keepsakes,——" A sob rose in his throat—"and as she has left them behind, it's best to destroy them with the rest. I don't mean to leave a trace of our Eden!"

Piling clothing, bedding and articles of furniture in the center of the floor, he touched a firebrand to the promiscuous heap; and, slinging his pouch and

powder horn to his side, he picked up his rifle and left the house, closing the door after him. A few yards from the building, he paused and bent his head.

"Is there anything I've forgotten?" he thought. Ah! Turk, the deer-hound. Where is he? Has he, too, proven false and deserted me? I cannot believe it. I left him on guard; he was fidelity itself——"

He started and grasped his rifle firmly. A peculiar, inarticulate whimpering came from a clump of bushes upon the creek bank. He listened intently. The sound was repeated. He hurried toward the sound, knowing instinctively what he should find. Quickly parting the brush and brambles, he beheld a sight that made his blood boil and his huge frame quiver with suppressed rage. A pair of liquid brown eyes met his own in a mute appeal for help. Stretched prone upon the frozen ground, he saw the dog that he had loved and trained. The poor animal was shot through the body, but still alive, still conscious. A trail of blood marked where the sorely wounded brute had dragged himself into the bushes to die. He whined softly as Barton came into view and, feebly wagging his tail, attempted to crawl to his master's feet.

Hal stooped and patted the glossy head and gazed into the eyes fast glazing in death. The dog licked the hands that caressed him. The tears welled up in the Englishman's eyes.

"Brave old Turk—faithful fellow!" he murmured softly. "I shall never see your like again. You've lost your life in defense of what you considered my rights. Surely there's a heaven for such as you. Your courage was unwavering; your friendship, unalterable. Your love was idolatry. If God delights in such virtues, He'll not let you go down to nothingness. Farewell, old friend—farewell!"

Something akin to a smile for a brief moment lighted the great brown eyes and twitched the gray muzzle. Then Turk's limbs stiffened. A single convulsion—and the deerhound was dead. For fully a minute Hal stood with bowed head and contorted features. Then, hastily brushing the tears from his eyes, he removed his fur cap, and, raising his face toward the cloudless heavens, said solemnly:

"Here under God's bright skies and above the dead body of my one faithful friend, I vow to avenge myself upon the man who has wrought ruin upon me. I will not seek him; but if he ever crosses my path, his life shall pay for his evil deeds!"

He turned to take a last look at what had been his home. Blue-black smoke was rising through the clapboard roof; and red tongues of flame were creeping out of the crevices in the log walls and lapping at the dry bark outside. With a choking sensation in his throat and a feeling of desperate loneliness in his heart, Hal Barton shouldered his

gun and trudged away in the direction of the river. He intended going to Wheeling, send someone for the cow and pig, and then——

The whole future appeared as a fathomless blank. He had no plans, no hopes, no desires. As he stumbled along the uneven trail leading down the creek valley, he was aroused from his gloomy reverie by the sound of stealthy footsteps behind him. Like a flash he whirled, and stood face to face with two rough-looking men bearing guns. They were white trappers from Wheeling, returning from a trapping expedition. Slung at the back of each was a string of peltries. The two were slightly confused by the Englishman's sudden movement, and retreated a few steps as he fixed his keen eyes upon them.

"Good mornin', Barton," one of them hastily stammered. "We're jest gittin' in from a spell o' trappin', an' as we come down the valley past y'r place, we saw y'r shack on fire."

"Yes, the cabin's afire," Hal returned quietly.

"Oh! you knowed it, did you?" and there was a ring of suspicion in the fellow's tone.

"Yes," was the monosyllabic reply.

"Did it ketch from the chimney?" inquired the first speaker's companion.

"No."

"How, then?"

"I set it afire," was the curt answer.

The two trappers exchanged significant glances.

Then one of them ventured :

"Folks 'bout here ain't in the habit o' burnin' down the'r own houses. Maybe that's the style over in England, though. Where's y'r wife?"

"None of your business," Hal retorted hotly. He was suffering mentally; and the fellow's manner and words irritated him.

"Maybe it's none o' *my* business," the trapper answered, "but it'll be the business o' *somebody* in authority, I can tell you that. The cabin's burnt down—you say y'rself you set it afire—an' y'r wife's gone. Me an' Jake saw drops o' blood in the yard, too. I'd advise you to make friends of us, 'r you may git into trouble that you'll have a hard time a-gittin' out of. Ther's *some* law in this country."

Hal sprang forward, and, towering above the two men, cried hoarsely :

"Yes, my wife's not with me; I burned my own cabin. Does either of you mean to accuse me of the crime of murder?"

The trappers cowered before the fierce aspect of the enraged giant. At last the one who had first spoken muttered sullenly :

"I don't accuse you o' nothin', Barton; but you'd 'ave a mighty hard time a-convincin' some people. But I don't say nothin'; only things looks kind o' suspicious."

"I've committed no crime," Hal said sternly, but quietly. "The cabin was my own; I burned it to the ground. My private affairs concern no one but

myself. I'm not bound to babble of them. Let me say once for all that your base suspicions are utterly groundless."

"That'll do fer you to say," sneered the bolder of the two men.

Nervous and irritable from what he had already endured, Barton for the moment lost control of himself. With catlike quickness he dealt the speaker a resounding slap with his open hand. The trapper was lifted from his feet by the force of it and sent rolling among the brush and fallen leaves.

"That will teach you to keep a civil tongue in your head, you insolent scoundrel," Hal said in an intense, even tone. "It's beneath me to chastise such a mewling babe as you; but you brought it upon yourself by your insolence. Listen—both of you! If I hear a word of your slanderous talk in Wheeling, you shall answer for it."

And he left them mutely staring after him, as he rapidly covered the short distance intervening between them and the mouth of the creek.

On arriving in Wheeling he sauntered about the settlement in indecision. He did not know how he was to send anyone for the domestic animals, without revealing more or less of the trouble that had come upon him. This he was determined not to do, come what would. At last, he resolved upon a course of action. He went to an acquaintance, a man who had immigrated to the West in the same company, and said;

"Hanson, I've made up my mind to return to the East. My wife has already taken her departure. You can have my cow and pig by going for them."

Hanson thanked him for his generous offer, and asked no questions. It was not unusual for settlers to become dissatisfied with the privations and hardships that surrounded them and to return to the comparative comforts of the older settlements. So the simple-minded pioneer thought nothing of Hal's sudden notion to do what many another had done.

But the difficulties that beset Barton in his attempt to depart quietly and peaceably from the vicinity, were not all dispelled. The two trappers had arrived at their homes, a short time after he had beached his canoe in front of the village of huts. Timidly at first, but more boldly as they saw their own suspicion and indignation reflected in the faces of their hearers, they told of the burning cabin and their encounter with Hal in the woods. One rash assertion led to another, and the two men vied with each other in an endeavor to incense the people against the luckless Englishman. It was no difficult task; and they succeeded only too well. So well, in fact, that an hour after the first malicious word had been whispered abroad, a wild-eyed mob was hunting for the tawny-haired giant, bent on inflicting summary punishment upon him for his supposed crime. In those days, in such communities, retributive justice was swift. Not infrequently the death sentence was executed—and the guilt or in-

nocence of the suspected offender established afterward. Courts were few and jails insecure. Mob vengeance was certain, and burdened with no legal restrictions nor technicalities.

The crowd of settlers came upon the object of their search just as he was leaving the Yankee trader's place, and, with yells of rage and imprecations, set upon him. "There's the wife-murderer!—Kill the cussed Britisher!—At him, men!"—were the cries that suddenly greeted Hal's ears as he stepped from the trader's door and started in the direction of the river. He was intending to set out upon his lonely journey to Fort Pitt and the East. At first he failed to understand the full import of the words. He was not left long in doubt, however. The crowd surged around him and barred his way. Angry, glowering faces surrounded him; eager hands nervously gripped loaded rifles; and hoarse voices belabored themselves hoarser. Someone upon the outskirts of the throng discharged a firearm. The ball cut a lock from Barton's temple, and a tiny stream of blood trickled down his cheek. Like a lion he turned and stood at bay. His bronzed face paled, but he showed no other sign of emotion.

"Who fired that shot?" shouted the beef-faced man whom Hal had thrown into the river on the previous day. "Don't shoot any more; ther's danger o' killin' each other. We can take him alive. Come on, men!"

With an indescribable outcry, the mob pressed

upon him. He clubbed his rifle and coolly awaited the onslaught. Seeing this, the foremost hesitated, surged backward, and stood still. Taking advantage of the respite, Hal cried:

"What do you mean—what do you want?"

"You—you!" were the answering cries.

"What have I done?"

A momentary silence fell upon the crowd, and the beef-faced man, who appeared to be the leader, replied:

"Murdered y'r wife."

"It's a base lie!"

"We're a-goin' to take you, anyhow."

"What's your purpose?"

"We're goin' to hang you to the first tree we come to."

"Hang him—hang him!" came from all sides.

"Come and take me, then," roared Hal, as with flashing eyes and tossing mane he described a circle around his head, with his clubbed rifle.

The challenge was promptly accepted. Those in the rear pressed upon those in front and forced them forward. Hal struck to earth a number of them; but soon they were so close as to render his blows ineffective. Dropping his gun and drawing his knife, he set his back against the log wall and prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible. A blow from a gun barrel sent the weapon spinning from his hand but not until more than one of his assailants had felt its keen edge. Defenseless he

stood before them, but they knew no pity. They were thirsting for his blood. With yells they threw themselves upon him, and by weight of numbers bore him to the ground. He flung them off and arose, fighting desperately. They were too many, however, and would have overpowered him had not a diversion occurred in his favor.

A dark, stocky man suddenly appeared upon the outskirts of the crowd. At a glance his eye took in the situation. Quickly elbowing his way through the packed mass that opposed him, with incredible strength he flung aside the leaders of the attack, and, springing to Hal's side, demanded authoritatively:

"Men, what's the meanin' o' this?"

The motley mob, many of them bleeding from wounds they had received, and burning for revenge, glared at the newcomer in silent rage. However, when they saw who it was that had snatched their prey from them, they meekly hung their heads and suddenly found their tongues.

"He's a Britisher," muttered one man, sullenly.

"What o' that?" was the new arrival's prompt rejoinder. "Does that give you any right to jump on him, twenty to one, an' try to kill him?"

"He's murdered—his wife an' burnt 'er up—in his cabin," stammered the beef-faced man. But his eyes dropped before the other's keen gaze.

"How d' you know?" And the words fell distinctly.

The self-constituted leader of the mob was growing embarrassed. He could not face those sharp, black eyes,

"'Cause Jake Parmer an' Sam Holton told us so."

"How do *they* know?"

"W'y, they saw—saw his burnin' cabin, an'—an' he told 'em he set it afire hisself; an' his wife's missin'—an'—an'——"

"An' what?"

But the cowardly braggart had no more to say. He would have slunk away, but he was hemmed in and could not escape. The dark-visaged man gave him no further attention, but, turning to Hal, said:

"Are you hurt much, friend?"

"A few bruises and scratches,——" And the blond giant actually smiled!—"nothing of a serious nature. Let me offer you my sincere thanks for your timely intervention. There were a few more of them than I could conveniently handle."

The newcomer looked at the Englishman with frank admiration. Barton's face was stained with blood, his long hair was touseled, and his clothing was torn and disarranged, but he still looked the superb man that he was. Now he quietly stood gazing down upon the man who probably had saved his life. He saw that the stranger was about five-foot-nine in height, but very broad-shouldered, deep-chested and muscular. His skin was swarthy; his face, deeply pock-marked. A pair of deep-set, restless black eyes shone beneath his jutting forehead,

and a cataract of raven hair fell below his shoulders. He was dressed in the frontier garb of the day, consisting of buckskin hunting-shirt and leggins, fur cap and moccasins. He carried a rifle almost as long as himself, and a knife and tomahawk were stuck in his belt. His age was about twenty-seven years.

"You don't owe me any thanks," Hal heard his rescuer saying. "But what about this charge o' murder that these men bring ag'in you, friend?"

"It's false—absolutely untrue," Barton replied, looking his questioner squarely in the eyes.

"You burnt y'r cabin down?"

"I did."

"What fer?"

"Because it pleased me to do so."

A shade of annoyance swept over the woodman's dark face. Evidently he was not accustomed to such cool treatment. He suppressed his rising irritation, however, and continued his interrogatories:

"Where's y'r wife?"

"Friend"—and Hal stretched forth his hand, which the other took—"I am under obligations to you. You came to my rescue when I was about to be overpowered by this mob. I'm duly grateful. But I'm innocent of any crime; and I must refuse to answer your questions."

Sullen murmurs arose, and the excited settlers stirred restlessly. Seeing this, the stranger addressed Barton thus:

"Friend, I believe you're tellin' the truth; I believe you're innocent. But these men here ain't satisfied. Will you consent to be placed in confinement till the whole matter can be looked into? I'll stand good fer y'r safety."

Hal's blood-stained face darkened' ominously and his eyes flashed defiantly as he replied:

"As I said, I'm innocent. I won't consent to be confined as a common felon; but this I *will* do. I'll give you, and you alone, a satisfactory explanation of the circumstances that cause these men to suspect me of the crime of murder."

"Will that satisfy you, men?" the swarthy man asked.

"Yes—yes," came from a dozen mouths. "Whatever Lew Wetzel says an' does'll be all right."

Lew Wetzel! Hal again bent his gaze upon his companion. He had heard of the famous scout and Indian-fighter, but had never seen him until now. Lew Wetzel! The name that struck terror to the hearts of the fiercest redmen that roamed the forest wilds. The Englishman again held out his hand, saying:

"Have I the honor of being under obligations to Lew Wetzel?"

"It's Lew Wetzel, sure enough," the other chuckled dryly; "but you ain't under no obligations to him, as I said before. Come on, le's step out here an' have a little talk; the men 're gittin' impatient."

The two drew aside and talked in low, earnest

tones for some minutes. Then Wetzel returned to the group and said:

"You men 're mistaken. Barton hain't committed no crime—I'm certain o' that. Are you satisfied?"

There was a division of opinion. The greater number of the men were satisfied with the verdict thus tendered; and so expressed themselves. But a few of the more turbulent, who had felt the thrust of Hal's knife, and the strength of his powerful right arm, grumbled:

"He's a Britisher—a 'ristocrat! Let's hang him, anyhow!"

Lew Wetzel's deep chest heaved and a scowl of rage made his dark face darker.

He burst forth:

"You made me judge o' this case, an' I've rendered a verdict. Any man that ain't satisfied with the decision can settle the matter with me. You litter o' cowardly houn' puppies! You're worse than the mean, low-lived redskins. You jumped onto Hal Barton twenty to one, an' you couldn't lick him. I'm goin' to stand by him an' see him through. Do you hear me? Ther' ain't enough men, such as you are, in the Nor'west Territory to drub us two. If you're thirstin' fer blood, come right on. I ain't in the habit o' blowin'—you all know that—and I mean jest what I say. Shame on you!"

No one showed any desire to accept the challenge. A few, including the beef-faced man, slunk away to dress their wounds and mumble over their grievances. Hal had recovered his knife and gun and stood watching the play of emotions upon the faces before him. Many of his erstwhile enemies came forward to shake his hand and express regret for their hasty actions. He good-naturedly forgave them. When the crowd had disappeared, Wetzel was the first to speak.

"Friend," he said, "you hain't told me all o' y'r trouble, an' I don't ask you to. But you're *in* trouble an' I pity you. I want to help you, but right here I want to say that I can't make myself believe that y'r wife left you of 'er own free will. I know that women's ways—like the ways o' Providence—'re past findin' out; but the little woman that *once* loved you 'll *alluz* love you. I feel kind o' womanish myself since I met you—sort o' wantin' to fall head over heels in love with you. No, sir; y'r wife didn't leave of her own accord. Somebody toted 'er away 'r stole 'er. It wan't Injins—'nless some white cuss was leadin' 'em. Injins would 've burnt the cabin. Some white scamp had somethin' to do with it."

"Yes," Hal Barton answered solemnly, "a white villain enticed her away. But she went because she desired to go; not because she was forced to do so."

"How d' you know that?" asked Wetzel.

"She left me a note telling me what she had done."

"You're sure it's the little woman's writin'?"

"Absolutely sure," Hal replied positively.

He had meant to keep his domestic troubles to himself; and here he was confiding his secrets to this swarthy woodman, a comparative stranger. Yet for some inexplicable reason he did not marvel at himself.

The scout screwed his pock-marked face into a grimace that almost concealed his eyes, as he said, musingly :

"I hain't got much book-learnin'; but I'd like right smart to hear that note read—I would."

Hal complied with the request. Wetzel heard him through, listening intently to every syllable that fell from the Englishman's lips. Then he remarked in a tone of sadness :

"I guess you're right, Hal Barton; she's been false to her vows before God an' man. Well, ther's no use grievin'. An' I ain't a-goin' to let you go back East; it's no place fer a man o' sorrow. Come with me fer a huntin' trip in the woods—right out in God's wilderness—an' you'll fergit y'r trials an' troubles. We can hunt wild varmints an'——" Here a look of fiendish hate swept over the scarred countenance—"shoot a few redskins. P'raps you won't like to kill Injins at first, but if you'll jest remember that every one you send to the happy-huntin'-grounds means longer life to some white

woman 'r child, you'll soon git used to it. I won't take no fer an answer. You're a-goin' with me."

The following day the two men, fast friends in so short a time, turned their backs upon the semi-civilization of the settlement, and entered the trackless wilds west of the Ohio river.

CHAPTER IV.

When the news of St. Clair's defeat reached the seat of government at Philadelphia and spread throughout the East, people bowed their heads in shame and sorrow. General Harmer's luckless campaign of the previous year had piqued and irritated them but this was a national calamity the magnitude of which appalled them. On receiving the dispatches giving details of the fell catastrophe, Washington lost his self-control. Striding up and down his private apartment, he wrung his hands and groaned:

"And here in this room—the last thing I said to him—I cautioned General St. Clair to beware of a surprise! But he shall have justice—full justice!"

If the people of the seaboard were shamed and angry, the pioneers upon the border were stunned and terrified. None knew so well as they what the defeat of the army meant. They realized that the Indians would be emboldened to fall upon the scattered and defenseless settlements, and they trem-

bled for the safety of their helpless women and children. During these trying times such men as Lew Wetzel and Hal Barton were of inestimable service to the inhabitants of these isolated communities. Scorning danger themselves, they inspired others with courage. They spent days in the forest, spying upon predatory bands of savages that were bent upon murder and pillage. They gave timely warning of the approaching foe; and on many occasions fought single-handed for the salvation of some solitary squatter's household.

President Washington realized the terrific state of affairs upon the western frontier, and was prompt to act. He called General Anthony Wayne from the obscurity of private life and gave him command of the army, or, rather, of the fraction that remained. Many of the older officers had met death in the ill-fated campaign just ended, and the younger men were inexperienced and inclined to be headstrong and unruly. Add to this the facts that the privates were utterly demoralized by two unsuccessful campaigns, and that the ship of state was under reefed sails to escape the shoals of bankruptcy, and one has a meager idea of the task General Wayne had before him. He was asked to take command of an army that had no existence. He must bring order out of chaos; make something of nothing. A less indomitable spirit than Mad Anthony's would have shrunk from the herculean undertaking.

With the words of the president—"Another defeat would be inexpressibly ruinous to the government"—ringing in his ears, Wayne left Philadelphia in the spring of 1792, and proceeded to Pittsburg. Here he began recruiting his army. On the 28th of November he removed to a point twenty-two miles down the river and went into camp for the winter. It was from this place that he sent his famous request to congress, saying:

"I want you to send me colors for the army. They shall not be lost!"

On the 30th of April, 1793, he broke camp and proceeded to Cincinnati, intending to quarter his troops at Fort Washington. But on his arrival he found the vicinity of the fortification unsuitable for drills and maneuvers, and he chose a site one mile farther down the river. As it was the only place he could find that met with his approval, he called his encampment "Hobson's Choice."

Here he erected temporary barracks for the troops, consisting principally of log huts and sheds, and during the spring and early summer continued to make efforts to evolve a trained army from the incongruous materials that had been furnished him. Many difficulties beset him. His officers were young men and required much counsel and advice which they did not always take kindly. Many of the privates were lazy and stubborn; and acts of open insubordination were not infrequent. Bare mention of the Indians struck terror to the hearts

of the raw recruits, and many of them deserted. The morale of the army was not what it should have been. Most of the troops had been recruited from the border settlements where they had known comparatively little of law and order and the rigid restrictions of military life were irksome to them. Drunkenness and gambling prevailed to an alarming extent among officers and men. Still Mad Anthony—the hero of many a hard-fought battle—did not despair. With a spirit born of indomitable energy and invincible pluck, he kept hammering away at the faulty mass of material, and by midsummer he felt that he had in his hands a finished instrument, an army upon which he could depend.

Fort Washington, at the eastern edge of the village of Cincinnati, was the most important fortification in the territory. It stood near the river bank and consisted of rows of two-story log cabins surrounding an acre of ground. At each corner was a strong blockhouse. At the time of which we write, Colonel Wilkinson was commandant of the small body of troops stationed there.

Cincinnati was nothing more than a collection of huts with a few hundred inhabitants, and did not differ from other backwoods villages of the day. The secretary of the territory occupied a cabin just back of Fort Washington; and immediately east of the garrison resided the surgeon general. All the business of the place was done by two or three traders, who occupied buildings no better than the

shacks in which the settlers lived. As has been said, drunkenness prevailed among both soldiers and citizens, and unprincipled traders reaped a rich harvest by the sale of fiery intoxicants. Let us take a look at the place as it appeared on a sultry evening in July, 1793:

Long, lank shadows stole down from the hillsides, as the sun sank in the west, and threw themselves athwart the valley. Chains clanked and cattle lowed; the settlers were driving their weary teams in from the clearings. Columns of blue smoke, showing that the evening meal was preparing, shot straight upward and disappeared. Children ran laughing from cabin to cabin; and tanned and sweat-grimed men, scouring their flushed faces and calloused hands, prepared to partake of the suppers that awaited them. In front of the traders' stores, groups of idlers sleepily argued the many perplexing problems of state and smoked their pipes reflectively.

The sun touched the horizon's rim. Down at Hobson's Choice the soldiers lounged in picturesque attitudes upon the green sward and watched the cooks at the campfires. Officers in uniforms, regulars in stained and faded regimentals, and volunteers and rangers in nondescript attire mingled upon the parade ground. Drill was over for the day, and the men were walking and lolling about, and grumbling at the heat, the fare, and the military discipline. Not a few of the hot-blooded ones were

finding fault with the administration, on account of its peace policy and apparent lack of energy and determination.

"'Taint no use a-talkin'," growled a tall, raw-boned Kentuckian, "this damned peace policy is all Quaker nonsense! What 're we here fer, I'd like to know? Drillin' an' drillin' from one day's end to another—it's all bosh. Ol' Anthony's got the army in good trim. Le's lick the cussed redskins an' go back home. I want to git back to my cabin in ol' Kaintuck. What's the use o' the gover'ment tryin' to make peace with a lot o' devilish Injins? The only way to make peace with 'em is to kill 'em."

Murmurs of approval arose from his comrades.

"'Thot's roight—yez niver spoke a truer word."

The speaker was Rory McFarlan, an Irish volunteer from—heaven knew where. He had served in the British army for ten years and had seen a deal of hard service. He was of middle age and weight, a tough and flexible blade that had been tempered by the heat of many a bloody conflict. His freckled face, snub nose and red and refractory hair, the whole intensified by a gleaming saber scar above his right eye, gave to his countenance a sinister aspect. But a brave, warm heart had Rory. He would have given his life for a friend; and as he himself was wont to say—"Would ruther foight than ate."

He had a soldier's instinct, training and bearing. He never neglected to salute his superiors, nor to aid a comrade in distress; and was a great favorite

with officers and privates. However, his keen, witty retorts sometimes cut deeper than he intended and occasionally left a wound that refused to heal. His one great failing was his love for liquor; and more than once it had caused him to nurse his aching head in the guardhouse.

Now he continued:

"P'ace policy, indade! The divil take such a policy. The only policy a sojer oughter know is the policy o' drillin' an' foightin'—an' o' drillin' we've hod a plinty. The army won't be in as good kilter in a month as it is today—an' ould Mod Anthony knows it. There's a sojer, bhoys! He'd be afther thim blitherin' blasts o' hell—thim red nays-gurs—the morry, if the gover'ment 'd only let him. Wot're we waitin' on? Yez can't one o' yez tell me. The horsepital's full o' sick sojers, an' the surgeon's killin' more men wid his bleedin' an' blisterin' than the Injins 'd kill in a month's campaign. After an army's complately drilled it's damnation to 'em to kape 'em in oidleness—thot's w'ot Oi say."

"Ahoy! ahoy, there, Rory!" cried a cheery voice. "You're makin' more noise 'n a man-o'-war, an' emittin' more smoke 'n a howitzer. What 're you emptyin' y'r broadsides about, anyhow?"

The speaker sauntered up to the group and carelessly threw himself upon the ground. He was another of the incongruous links in the chain with which General Wayne meant to strangle the Indian

insurrection, a rough, misshapen little man who had trod a ship's deck as much as he had ever walked the earth. He had served with Commodore Whipple in the Revolutionary War; and his scars proved that he had smelt gunpowder more than once. His stooped shoulders, bow-legs and long arms gave him a peculiar, ungainly, ludicrous appearance. But the opinion was current among the soldiers that he could jump higher and hit harder than any man in the army, except Rory McFarlan. Receiving no answer to his salutation, he continued.

"What's the matter with you land-lubbers? Afraid you'll have to sand the decks for action?"

At this Rory found his tongue. Removing his short pipe from his wide mouth and cocking one eye in a comical manner, he retorted sneeringly:

"Afraid, yez salt-wather spalpane! Here's one Oirish gintleman thot don't know the m'anin' o' the word. Sand the decks fer action! W'en we do, we'll make a powdther-monkey o' yez—fer it's all yez're fit fer, Jack Keelson."

The listeners grinned. They were enjoying the prospect of a friendly tilt between the two eccentric characters. But at that moment the mess cook stuck his head out of the shed door and bawled, "Supper!" The men leaped to their feet and scrambled for places at the board.

"Give me leeway, you red-headed baboon, 'r I'll smash y'r jibboom an' turn it up morn'n it is,"

Keelson cried, playfully tapping Rory upon the nose.

"You owdacious plrate!" shouted the latter, making a grab for the sailor's collar. But Jack ducked his head, gave a hitch to his baggy trousers, and, nimbly dancing to the opposite side of the long room, stood laughing at the discomfited Irishman. Roars of laughter shook the crazy building as the men seated themselves. A stern, but not unkindly face appeared in the doorway, and a clear, resonant voice said good-humoredly:

"Softly, boys, softly."

It was their beloved commander, General Anthony Wayne!

Twilight, like a rosy, diaphanous mist, enveloped the earth. In the swamps bordering the river, frogs were beginning their nightly serenade. Along the cart-road leading from Hobson's Choice to Cincinnati, groups of officers and privates were hastening toward the village. A few were on business bent, but by far the larger number were off for a night of dissipation and frolic. Of the latter, several had dispensed with the formality of obtaining leaves of absence. They would languish in the guardhouse next day.

A peculiar, musty, disagreeable smell arose from the river and adjoining marshes. The dew was falling; and the moon, rising big and round above the treetops, began to flood the scene with silvery radiance. Half tipsy soldiers and civilians exchanged

boisterous greetings. The ruddy light of tallow-dips and flaming torches gleamed from open doors and windows. In the back part of Jim Hill's store a group of men were laughing and drinking. The bar was a rough plank supported by whisky barrels, and the decanter was a brown earthen pitcher. Hill, in a linsey-woolsey wamus, the sleeves of which were rolled above his bony elbow, refilled the pitcher from time to time and grinned broadly as he gathered in the nimble coins. The rattle of empty pewter mugs was music to his sordid soul. His red nose shone like a beacon light of danger and his breath was a pestilence; but no one took warning. The liquor flowed; and the crowd, constantly increasing in numbers, grew more and more hilarious. Two befuddled settlers quarreled over who should pay for their potations, and adjourned to the outer air to settle their differences. No one followed them; no one paid the least attention. In the broad band of light that streamed from the doorway, two men paused and looked into the room. The smell of tobacco and ardent spirits greeted their nostrils.

"Le's go in, mate, an' wet our whistles," suggested one of them.

"To hell wid yez, Jack Keelson!" retorted the other. "Would yez 'ave me in the guardhouse, the morry? Sure an' didn't Oi promise the Colonel Oi wouldn't drink a drap o' liquor the noight! Oi've given me word an' Oi'll kape it. Though how the divil Oi'm to kape it w'en Oi've give it to the

Colonel, is more than the brains in me pate can tell, jist. Le's be movin' away, fer the smell o' the whusky's more'n Oi can stand."

"All right, Rory," Keelson replied, evident reluctance in his tone and manner. "If a man can't stow a dram without stowin' a hogshead, he'd better beat out to sea an' leave the cargo alone."

A tall, inky-eyed, olive-complexioned young man in the uniform of a lieutenant crowded past the two soldiers and entered the door.

"Arrah!" ejaculated Rory. "There goes that dommed frog-'atin' Frincher, Lieutenant Cartier. Jack, if that snaky-eyed spalpane don't kape away from Bob Sterlin's, an' quit forcin' his attintions 'pon Miss Judith, the divil'll be to pay one o' these foine days. The gal hates him loike p'ison—anybody can see thot. His blarney won't change 'er aither. Some day ould Bob'll git toired o' the Frincher's nonsense an' blow the top of his head off."

Jack Keelson ground his teeth as he hissed:

"I hate the 'tarnal Frenchman, I do. An' I don't see what General Wayne sees in him that he wants him anchored alongside. He may be a good soldier, but I don't like the cut of his jib. He's all legs an' arms—a reg'lar pirate craft. An' nobody seems to know what port he hails from; some says from the British D'minion, an' others says from France. As fer me, I'd like to overhaul his manifest. I'll bet a

shillin's worth o' tobacker he ain't got a lawful cargo."

The two friends were moving away from the door as they spoke. Suddenly Lieutenant Rudolphe Cartier, the man of whom they had been speaking, flitted past them and hurriedly disappeared in the direction of the eastern outskirts of the village.

"Hist! There he goes this blissed minute," McFarlan whispered, clutching his companion's arm. "Me word fer it, the purthy young woman ain't far away; an' the black scoundrel's afther 'er loike an Oirishman afther a hot p'rtaty. Be the powers o' darkness! But w'y can't he l'ave the poor colleen alone. If she loved him as Miss Joanny loves Cap'n Axline, it wouldn't make no differ'nce; but seein'——"

He broke off abruptly. A woman's scream for help, piercing and clear, rang out upon the night air. By this time the two comrades had reached the eastern termination of the village. The cry came from the darkness beyond, from farther up the river.

"It was Miss Judith's voice," asserted Jack.

"An' thot frog-'atin' porkypine's up to some divilment," Rory completed. "If he's froightened 'r harrumed the purthy colleen, Oi'll make him ate me fist, if Oi'm flayed aloive fer it the morry. Come on, me bhoy!"

And like a shot the two were off in the direction of the spot whence the call for aid had come.

CHAPTER V.

On that July evening two men were plodding their way along the northern bank of the Ohio, in the direction of Cincinnati. They were footsore and hungry; and their heavy rifles were becoming burdensome. As they emerged from the forest into the clearing, a half mile from the eastern edge of the village, their shadowy figures loomed up big and grim in the moonlight.

"Here's a clearing, the first sign of civilization in miles," remarked the taller. "We must be nearing the town."

"Yes," his companion answered, "we're purty near our journey's end, if I ain't badly mistaken. An' I ain't at all sorry, we've had a long an' hard ja'nt of it. I see a light twinklin' right down yander; it must be from a cabin. Le's push on."

As they drew near the light, they saw it issued from the open doorway of a commodious two-story log house on a gentle rise a hundred yards from

the river. On reaching this human habitation, the first they had seen in days, they saw other lights farther down the river, and judged rightly that the Mecca of their journey was before them. The discovery lent them new strength. All at once they halted in their tracks and listened. A woman's scream came to their ears.

A few hurried steps brought them to a fallen tree-top. Encircling this, they suddenly came upon a young woman struggling in the arms of a man.

"Help!" she again called faintly.

Without a warning word, the taller of the two travelers unceremoniously caught the assailant by the collar and flung him violently to the earth. The young lady was panting with emotion, and would have fallen had not her rescuer seated her upon the fallen tree trunk. The other traveler dropped the butt of his gun to the ground, and folding his arms upon its muzzle, silently awaited the outcome of the affair. Half-stunned, the prostrate man staggered to his feet and stared stupidly around.

Whipping out a long knife, with an oath, he bounded toward the tall stranger, who had his back turned and was bending over the half-fainting woman. The bright blade glittered in the moonlight; but the blow did not fall. The tall man's companion threw his rifle to his shoulder, and cried:

"Gently there, stranger—none o' that, 'r I'll send an ounce o' cold lead through ye, quicker'n a gray squirr'l can whisk his tail, 'r my name ain't Lew

Wetzel! There, that's better——" As the other dropped his knife and retreated several steps.— "Now hold y'r temper an' keep y'r distance, an' we won't have no trouble. Hal, this cowardly sarpent was goin' to stick you from behind. 'Spect you'd better keep y'r eye on him."

By this time Barton had allayed the young woman's fears and soothed her into quiet. Turning, at the sound of his friend's voice, he saw the knife his enemy had dropped, and picked it up. Thrusting it into his belt and striding up to the owner, he said in an unmoved voice:

"I'll retain your weapon in remembrance of your treacherous, murderous intent." Then in a harsher tone: "Tell me the meaning of this outrage."

"I have no explanation to offer," the fellow blustered; "and you shall pay for your unwarranted interference in my affairs."

He spoke with a slightly foreign accent; noting which Wetzel chuckled:

"A Frencher—by the great horn-spoon!"

"Your threats don't alarm me in the least," Hal returned, "and you'd better keep a civil tongue; it'll be better for you. I don't care to waste further time with you at present—but we shall meet again. My name 's Hal Barton."

The Frenchman drew himself up proudly, as he replied:

"And *I* am Lieutenant Rudolphe Cartier of the

United States army, at present an aid of General Anthony Wayne."

"Huh!" Wetzell muttered in an undertone. "Is that the kind o' cattle General Wayne's keepin' 'round him? If it is, his army'll meet with the same fate St. Clair's did. Ther's no dependency to be put in them renegade Frenchers; they'll sell out to the highest bidder any time."

To Lieutenant Cartier's vain-glorious announcement, Barton returned scathingly:

"I'm sorry to hear that General Wayne, whom I believe to be a brave and chivalrous soldier, should have to put dependence in such men as you have shown yourself to be."

The officer's face was contorted with rage as he hissed:

"Monsieur Barton, as you are pleased to call yourself, you have attacked and insulted me, an officer of the army. You shall pay dearly. I shall report you to my commanding officer, General Wayne. He will have you publicly flogged for this outrage."

"Listen!" thundered Hal, losing his temper. "Had Mad Anthony himself done what you have done, I should have interfered in behalf of his victim. Now leave me before I break every bone in your miserable carcass. Not another word—go!"

Lieutenant Cartier, accustomed to browbeating his inferiors, realized that he had aroused a giant, and concluding that a still tongue meant a whole

skin, suddenly slunk away. When the Frenchman's footfalls had died out in the distance, Barton turned to the young lady and said :

"Where's your home? I'll conduct you thither."

"My home," she replied in clear, sweet tones, "is a little farther up the river. You must have passed it, if you came down the stream."

"I remember it—a two-story log house."

"Yes, sir."

"Wetzel"—Hal addressed his friend in a low tone—"wait for me here till I see this lady safe within her own door."

The scout, gazing after them, said to himself :

"He takes to women folks as natur'ly as a beaver takes to water. An' purty near two years in the woods hain't cured him o' the habit. It's odd 'bout his wife leavin' him, as she done. I don't see how she could—fer a braver, truer man never drawed breath. Wouldn't s'prise me if somethin' comes o' this adventure. The gal's good-lookin'—near's I could tell; an' them Frenchers 're treacherous, revengeful skunks."

He yawned sleepily :

"Heigho! Ther's alluz trouble to be found in the settlements. The only peaceable spot on earth is in the woods. Let them have the settlements as wants 'em; as fer me, give me the life I lead—hello! what was that?"

A snapping twig aroused him. Instantly his

finger was upon the trigger of his rifle and his keen eyes were searching the shadows.

"That was the crackin' of a dead limb," he murmured softly; "an' in my humble 'pinion some human foot broke it. Well, they'll not ketch me nappin', whoever they be."

As Hal Barton escorted the young woman toward her home, she remarked timidly:

"Mr. Barton—I heard you tell Lieutenant Cartier your name—I don't know how to thank you. But believe me when I say that I feel under deep obligations——"

"Don't mention it," Hal interrupted.

Why did his heart throb in unison with the notes of that soft, clear voice? Why did his blood tingle at the touch of that small hand upon his arm? He could not see her face distinctly, but she was tall and walked with a strong elastic step. Like one in a dream he heard her saying:

"Mr. Barton, your language tells me you are an educated gentleman. My father—but, there, I've not told you my name, even."—And she laughed confusedly.—"My father is Robert Sterling; my mother is dead. Joanna and I are the only children; we are twins. My name 's Judith."

She broke off abruptly; but for some moments he did not reply. They had drawn near the house, when he said:

"You have been accustomed to good society.

How is it that I find you here among these semi-barbarians?"

The question bordered on impertinence. But she understood and did not resent it.

"My father was a prosperous merchant in Baltimore," she explained, "but he met with business reverses, and, like others, came to the Northwest Territory in the hope of retrieving his fortunes. We've been here but a year."

They were within a few yards of her own door. She loosed his arm, with the words:

"Come in and meet my father and sister. They, too, will thank you for the assistance you have rendered me."

"No, not tonight," he answered hastily; "my comrade is awaiting me. At another time, perhaps——"

He stopped and looked her full in the face. The light streaming from the open doorway revealed her form and features distinctly. She was beautiful—dark liquid eyes, clear olive complexion and silken brown hair. She was studying him as intently as he was studying her, and both smiled. To relieve her embarrassment she held out her hand, saying:

"I'll detain you no longer; but, if you remain in the settlement a few days, I trust you'll call upon us; my father will want to meet you."

As he clasped her hand in his calloused palm, he replied earnestly:

"Thank you. I come here to offer my services to

General Wayne. If I remain here, I shall certainly accept your invitation."

"Good night," she said simply.

"Good night," he returned, but he did not drop her hand. Instead, he bent over her and asked, almost fiercely:

"Miss Sterling, will you tell me how you came to be in company of such a man as Lieutenant Cartier?"

She knew that according to the rules of polite society she ought to feel insulted. But she did not. Again her woman's subtle instinct told her that his apparent rudeness was but well-meant interest in her welfare. So she returned in an unmoved voice:

"Shall I explain?"

"If you will—yes."

"Ever since the army came here last spring, Lieutenant Cartier has been forcing his attentions upon me. He called at our home first with my sister's accepted suitor, a brother officer. We received him hospitably but from the first I did not like him. However, I concealed my aversion and was courteous. He professed to love me and sought my hand in marriage. I gently, but firmly rejected him and told him that he must call no more. Still he came; and I appealed to my father. I don't know what passed between them; but from that day to this Lieutenant Cartier has hated my father and has made threats that he would take his life. He has dogged my footsteps and frightened me with his

wild talk. I fear he drinks heavily when off duty. To-night he overtook me as I was returning from the village, and again asked me to marry him. When I refused him and told him to leave me, he caught me and threatened to kill me if I did not consent to his desire. You know the rest. Perhaps you saved my life, for he had been drinking. Be on your guard, Mr. Barton; he'll attempt to revenge himself upon you."

Hal drew his tall form to its full height as he replied, almost coldly:

"I don't fear him. But I advise you to avoid him; he's scoundrel enough to carry his vile threats into execution. Again, good night."

Judith watched her rescuer until his great bulk disappeared in the shadows. Then she entered the house, thinking of all that had happened and wondering why she had made a confidant of a total stranger.

"There's been a couple o' fellers standin' out yander, 'hind that bunch o' brush, fer quite a while," was the greeting Barton received as he returned to the spot where he had left his friend. "I hain't been able to ketch sight of 'em, but I heerd 'em trampin' 'bout—an' I know ther's twò of 'em. Hope we ain't goin' to run into no more difficulties—I do, by thunder! They mightn't set well on empty stomachs. An' I'm hungrier'n a pack o' wolves."

"Let's hasten toward the village," Hal replied, tersely.

They set out a rapid gait; but just as they reached the pile of brush of which the scout had spoken, two figures stepped from behind it and barred the path.

"Good evening," Barton said gruffly, without slacking his pace.

"To leeward there, Rory," one of the men laughed good-naturedly; "he's bearin' down on us like a man-o'-war under full sail. Avast there, you lubber! You'll have us under y'r keel in a jiffy. Port y'r helm, stranger—hard aport."

But Hal paid no attention. He was in no mood for trifling. What he had just experienced had stirred the ashes of old memories, fanned into flame embers that he had considered dead. Without another word he and Wetzel brushed past the two men; and would have continued their course without a backward glance, had not Rory McFarlan called after them:

"Hould on a bit, stranger. Oi want to spake wid yez."

Hal stopped, and whirling about, demanded:

"What's wanted? Out with it."

"Be all the saints o' the calendar! But yez bate all the min Oi iver saw, jist. Can't yez stop an' pass a civil word, mon?"

"We've had a long trip and are hungry and tired," Hal replied hurriedly, preparing to move on.

"An' p'rformed a noble deed at the close o' y'r journey—begorra! Me an' Jack Keelson, here,

're mates; an' we b'long to the army down to Hobson's Choice—we're a couple o' Mod Anthony's bhoys. We saw yez cow thot blackguard awhoile ago. But yez oughter give him an everlastin' good trouncin'—yez're big enough to do it an' not half try. Me an' Jack follered the dirty spalpane, m'anin' to p'rtect the purthy colleen, but yez done it completely—an' saved us from gittin' into trouble, loikely. We want to thank yez."

The four men shook hands, and conversed in low tones for some minutes, Wetzal leaning upon his gun and taking little part in the conversation. At last Rory remarked:

"So yez're afther inlistin'?"

"We come to offer our services as scouts," Hal explained.

"Jist the koind o' min Giner'l Wayne'll be afther nadin' whin he starts afther thim red naygurs; an' yez'll see no ind o' hard sarvice, if yez march under Mod Anthony's banner. Come wid me an' Jack; we're goin' down to Hobson's Choice this blissed minute. We'll foind yez somethin' to ate an' a bit o' turf to slape on. Come on, me hearties; yez can't foind two betther mates than Jack Keelson an' Rory McFarlan."

They set out, Rory and Jack leading the way.

"Did you ever see a trimmer craft, Rory, than the big feller?" Jack whispered, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward Barton.

"Niver," Rory answered with an impressive shake of his head.

"An' the other one's broad in the beam an' deep in the hold," Keelson resumed, "a sta'nch, sea-goin' hull that won't founder in any gale—'r I'm no judge."

McFarlan simply nodded.

They passed through the village and took the road toward Hobson's Choice. Just ahead of them were three regulars in an advanced stage of intoxication, walking arm in arm, weaving from side to side, and singing—or bawling, rather—at the top of their voices:

"'Twas November the fourth, in the year ninety-one
 We had a sore engagement near Fort Jefferson;
 Sinclaire was our commander, which may remembered be,
 For there we left nine hundred men in Western Ter'tory."

There were thirteen stanzas of like merit; and they sang them through to the end. The three regulars passed the guard; and then came our friends' turn.

"These two min be afther inlistin'," Rory explained. "Oi'll stand good fer 'em."

An hour later the two hungry woodmen had satisfied their appetites and were fast asleep, with their rifles beside them.

CHAPTER VI.

Hal Barton was awakened the next morning by the boom of the sun-rise-gun at Fort Washington. As the hoarse growl broke the sultry stillness and echoed down the valley, the Englishman stretched his stiffened limbs and slowly arose to his feet. Early as it was, he found the camp astir and his companions gone. Camp-fires were blazing and red-faced mess cooks were preparing the morning meal. Hal sauntered down to the river and, hastily throwing off his clothing, took a plunge in the limpid water. Much refreshed, he returned to camp to find breakfast ready and his friends impatiently awaiting his coming.

"Look here, mate," cried Jack Keelson, standing with his bowlegs far apart and his hands upon his hips, "you'll never make a soldier'r a sailor, if you don't learn how to take y'r reckonin' an' keep y'r bearin's. You must 'ave been lost in the fog. Didn't you hear the cook pipe all hands to breakfast? It's well along in the mornin' watch."

"I beg your pardon, men, for having kept you waiting," Hal began; but Rory McFarlan interrupted him with:

"Sit yez down by me, Hal Barton. Can't yez see thot Jack's talkin' to hear hissilf, jist? Yez ain't kipt a mother's son of us waitin'. But wher've yez been?"

"Down at the river, taking a bath."

"Howly mother presarve us! The oidee of a mon takin' a bath, 'specially 'fore breakfast! Barton yez 'll ruin the morals o' the intoire army wid y'r bathin' an' y'r blarney. Set to, mon; it'll soon be toime fer scourin' accoutrements an' gittin' ready fer inspection an' drill."

The entire mess broke into a roar at the joke at Hal's expense—in which he joined. Even Wetzel's black eyes twinkled, and his grim, pock-marked face relaxed.

Breakfast over, the camp took on a more animated appearance. Officers with rattling scabbards stalked hither and thither; soldiers scoured and burnished arms, buckles and buttons; volunteers carefully inspected their flint-locks, and brushed and tidied their soiled and frayed clothing. For General Wayne's eyes would be upon them; and each man would be held responsible for the condition of his dress, arms and accoutrements.

Barton and Wetzel sauntered about the camp. The scout was duly impressed with what he saw, and remarked in his original way:

"This fussin' an' fixin' may be all right, Hal; but I don't want to take no part in it. Seems like tomfoolery. They're gittin' ready fer drill now. I saw 'em drill at Fort Harmer an' Fort Washington, more'n once. That was when ol' Gener'l Harmer had me in prison fer killin' an Injin. He b'lieved in a peace-policy jest like the gover'ment's talkin' 'bout now. But all this drillin' makes me sick; I can't stomach it. If we've got to go through such nonsense, I won't 'nlist—that's all. I'd die in a week. It's purty nigh as bad as bein' in prison. I don't see how them fellers stand it."

"If we enlist as scouts," Hal returned, smilingly, "we'll not be subjected to such tiresome duties. We'll be responsible to no one but the commander."

"An' we won't have to drill, n'r shine up our rifles fer folks to look at?"

"No."

"All right, then. But I ain't goin' to stand no tarnal tomfoolery. If Gener'l Wayne wants me to spy 'round the Injins an' keep track o' the'r deviltry, I'm jest the man he's lookin' fer."

Hal assured his backwoods friend that the commanding officer would expect them to perform the duties of scouts and dispatch-bearers, nothing more. This satisfied the freedom-loving Wetzel; and the two resumed their round of observation. As they were crossing a corner of the parade ground, a few minutes before the beginning of the forenoon drill, they came face to face with a young officer in

the uniform of a captain. He was a lithe, active young fellow with a bronzed face full of courage and tenacity of purpose. Stopping suddenly he extended his hand, saying:

"I recognize you, Hal Barton, and I am both surprised and pleased to see you here. I trust you have come to enlist. We need the aid of such men as you to make this campaign a glorious success. I don't want to carry the sad news of another defeat to Philadelphia."

Hal grasped the extended hand, and, shaking it warmly, replied:

"Captain Axline, I thank you for your confidence in my loyalty to my adopted country. This is my friend, the famous scout and Indian-fighter, Lew Wetzel. For two years, almost, he has been training me in the art of woodcraft. We came to offer our services as scouts."

Captain Axline's face lighted up with pleasure. In an ecstasy he seized Wetzel's hand, crying:

"I'm delighted to meet one so famous as Lew Wetzel, the man who has been wronged and imprisoned for protecting defenseless women and children from the merciless savages. More than once I've heard our beloved commander wish he knew your whereabouts. Many bordermen have offered their services; but none so well acquainted with all the artifices of Indian warfare as Lew Wetzel."

The simple-minded scout was so confused by the captain's words and manner that he could not utter

a syllable in reply. Hotly pursued by a score of Indians in war paint and feathers, he would have dodged from tree to tree and chuckled as he reloaded his rifle. Bound to the black stake and threatened with horrible death, he would have flung taunting words in the teeth of his tormentors and met his fate like a stoic. But now he stood utterly abashed, knocked speechless by a sincere compliment. Seeing the backwoodsman's embarrassment, Captain Axline turned to Hal and said:

"Barton, you and your friend can render inestimable aid to the army as scouts. Have you seen General Wayne?"

"No."

"Then," the officer resumed, hurriedly, "meet me here when we break ranks after drill. I'll take you to him. I must be off now."

The two friends—so dissimilar in many things, but alike in wealth of manliness and poverty of affectation, watched the maneuvers with unassumed interest. When the drill was over Captain Axline hurried to them and went with them to General Wayne's headquarters, a well-built log house of two rooms, standing a few rods from the river bank. As Barton followed the captain through the door, he saw a tall, soldierly man nervously pacing up and down the room. It was the daring, indomitable General Anthony Wayne, the hero of Stony Point, the man who said to General Washington, "General, I'll storm hell, if you will plan it." His bright

eyes and straight nose denoted an alert disposition ; while his firm mouth and square jaws were indicative of great firmness and courage. His features were clear-cut and handsome.

Captain Axline saluted his superior officer and stood awaiting recognition. General Wayne paused in his walk and asked brusquely, but not unkindly :

“What is it, Axline?”

“General, I have here two men who have come to offer their services as scouts——” the captain began ; but with a gesture of impatience the commander interrupted :

“Enough—enough ! If they can drive teams or take charge of baggage, assign them quarters. Otherwise, I cannot use them. It seems that every frontiersman thinks he possesses the essential qualities of an Indian scout. I already have too many—such as they are.”

And he resumed his restless pacing of the floor.

Captain Axline was disconcerted. His flushed face showed it. Wetzel dropped the butt of his gun to the floor with a thud ; and, resting his chin upon it, fixed his black eyes upon the general. A quizzical expression rested upon the Indian-fighter's disfigured countenance. An amused smile irradiated Barton's handsome features. General Wayne had not deigned to cast a glance at the newcomers ; but now he turned at the end of the room and quietly surveyed them. As he did so a sudden change took place in his expression and demeanor.

His tall figure grew rigidly erect; his thin nostrils quivered; apathy gave way to animation.

"Who is this man—this giant, Axline?" he demanded, nodding toward Hal.

"Hal Barton, a scout, who has spent two years in the forest with Lew Wetzel."

"Ah!" Then to the Englishman: "You've been a pupil of the famous Lew Wetzel?"

"I'm not ashamed to answer yes," Hal replied, smiling.

Wetzel shifted his position uneasily, and glanced around him as though seeking an escape from what was coming.

"Do you know Wetzel's whereabouts?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?" And the commander bent forward eagerly.

Before Hal could reply, Wetzel asked quickly:

"Gener'l, do you want to put him in prison fer killin' Injins, as Gener'l Harmer done?"

First a cloud of annoyance, and then a flickering smile, swept over Anthony Wayne's face.

"My friend," he answered, "you don't know me or you wouldn't think me capable of such an act. I'm no *Quaker*, and I want no men of peace in my service. The present policy of the government—but I have said enough. Were Lew Wetzel here I would show him that I know how to appreciate the service he has rendered his countrymen."

Something like a chuckle sounded in Wetzel's

throat ; and he hugged his long rifle fondly. Again addressing Hal, General Wayne said :

"You haven't answered my question, Mr. Barton."

"General, the man you seek stands before you."

The commander's face was a study in surprise, incredulity and pleasure. Captain Axline burst into a laugh which he promptly suppressed. The general advanced, and, seizing Wetzel's hand, wrung it heartily, all the while studying the scout's form and features. At last he spoke :

"Wetzel, the fame of your prowess has preceded you. I'm glad to see you at Hobson's Choice ; and while I'm commander you shan't be imprisoned for killing one Indian or a thousand."

Then to Captain Axline :

"Captain, did I understand you to say these men have offered their services as scouts?"

"They have, general."

"Very well, I accept the offer. Assign them quarters and see that they get full rations. Gentlemen, I bid you good morn—— wait a moment. Your duties will not begin until we start upon the campaign, which I trust will be soon ; but you will draw a private's pay from today."

As Hal and Wetzel followed Captain Axline from the room, Lieutenant Cartier crowded past them and entered the apartment, giving them a malignant scowl as he did so. When our friends were out of

hearing, the new arrival saluted the commander and asked:

"General, may I inquire what those men who just left your presence were doing here?"

"They came to offer their services as scouts."

"And you engaged them, general?"

"I did. Why do you ask?"

Lieutenant Cartier was expecting the question, and was ready to play his part. With a fine show of hesitation and embarrassment, he stammered:

"I—I do—do not care to—that is——"

"Well?" the general said, sharply.

"I have no reason for asking the question, except——" and again he stopped.

"Except what, Lieutenant?" Wayne cried, angrily.

"Well, that man Barton, as he calls himself, is an Englishman——"

"How do you know?"

"A soldier from Wheeling told me."

"What of it?"

"Nothing, General, only——"

"You are a Frenchman."

"Y-e-s."

"And *my* ancestors were English from Ireland, and Jesus Christ was a Hebrew. But what has all that to do with Hal Barton's making a trustworthy scout, Cartier? Speak out—you're holding back something."

Lieutenant Cartier's face flushed and his lips

twitched. It was evident that he was greatly embarrassed or very angry. He answered chokingly:

"Just this, General Wayne. The settlers of Wheeling, where he lived for some time, do not consider him loyal. They also accuse him of murdering his wife and making his cabin her funeral-pyre. All this a soldier from Wheeling told me this morning. Then, too, Barton"—here Cartier revealed his white teeth, and his voice was like the snarl of a savage cur—"attacked me last evening while I was talking to a young lady in the village——"

"Ah!" General Wayne interrupted, nodding vigorously. "Well, go on."

"And throwing me violently to the ground, conducted the young woman from my presence. He came upon me from behind, and of course I was unprepared for his attack."

"Was the attack unprovoked, Lieutenant?"

"It was, General; I had never spoken to him, had never seen him in my life."

"And what did you do?"

"I resented his unwarranted interference, his insolence. I would have given him the chastisement he richly merited, but his companion leveled his rifle at me——"

"Lew Wetzel leveled his rifle at you?"

"Barton's companion did. He threatened to shoot me, if I stirred from my tracks."

"What you tell me is almost beyond belief, Lieutenant Cartier," Wayne said icily.

"It is true, General."

"No doubt, no doubt, Cartier. But I think you two men are rivals, though you don't seem to be aware of the fact. A mere lovers' affair! Let's hear no more about it."

Cartier was not satisfied. He had expected General Wayne to fly into a passion and declare that Barton and Wetzel should leave the camp at once. And here the old war-horse was condoning their offense. Cartier was piqued, indignant, astounded. Hitherto he had basked in the sunshine of the Commander's favor. Was it possible that he had lost caste? Was he to be supplanted by a despised backwoodsman? He made one more effort to influence his superior officer against the Englishman. In an injured tone he said:

"I really care naught for the fellow's attack upon me, General. But surely you do not mean to retain a man as scout—a most important office in such a campaign as we shall undertake—whose loyalty his own neighbors do not trust?"

"Of course I'll retain him," Wayne answered obstinately. "Your persistency but proves to me that you two young men are rivals in love. Keep your boyish nonsense to yourself, Lieutenant. I've taken Mr. Barton on trial, on faith, just as I have taken every volunteer, yourself included. I believe my

judgment as good as the recruiting officer's. Let the matter drop."

Lieutenant Cartier bowed and retired. As he moved in the direction of his own quarters, he exclaimed aloud:

"I must not suffer defeat—the stake is too great!"

Then, as though fearful that his exclamation had been overheard, he glanced about apprehensively and shivered.

CHAPTER VII.

The morning following their interview with General Wayne, Barton and Wetzel left camp at sunrise and plunged into the depths of the forest. At dusk they returned, bringing with them an abundance of game. Their mess-mates showed their appreciation by clamorous shouts and grotesque antics; and the mess-cook promptly kicked over the camp kettle of lean beef and began to broil venison steaks upon the red coals.

“You two men beat all the land-lubbers I ever saw,” Jack Keelson cried, admiringly. “I b’lieve you’d be able to pr’vide grub fer a crew wrecked on a desert island. What stewards you’d make on a whalin’ vessel! Wouldn’t you make a change o’ diet, though? W’y, I’ve eat salt-horse an’ sea-biscuits on shipboard, ’fore now, till I felt like turnin’ cannibal an’ eatin’ the cook hisself. You may use my body fer shark bait, if that ain’t a fact.”

"Stop y'r clack, yez noisy loon," Rory McFarlan bawled as he elbowed the sailor aside and faced Hal. "Mr. Barton, have yez seen Cap'n Axline, the day?"

"I have not, McFarlan," was the smiling reply.

"Well, he's been lookin' fer yez more n'r once; an he tould me to tell yez whin yez got back to camp to come to his quarters. He'd be after spakin' wid yez."

"Thank you, McFarlan."

"'Fore yez goes, Oi want to spake wid yez mesilf a moment, jist."

The two men left the group around the campfire. When they had gone a few yards, McFarlan stopped and asked suddenly:

"Barton, does yez count me an' Jack Keelson as y'r fri'nds?"

"To be sure I do," Hal replied' wonderingly.

"An' loike us, yez don't loike that mane, sn'akin' divil of a Lieutenant Cartier?"

"I don't like him but I'd do him no harm, unless he sought to injure me or some of my friends," Barton hastened to say.

"Thot's all roight. Oi understands yez, an' yez understands me. Oi'm a sojer from the crown o' me hat to the soles o' me shoes; an' oi don't loike to say a word 'g'inst an officer. But thot Lieutenant's up to some mischief, he is. Listen an' Oi'll be afther tellin' yez w'at Oi mane. Whoile yez an' Wetzel was out huntin', jist afther drill this fore-

noon, a mon comes into camp sellin' buttons, an' nadles, an' thread, an' all sich loike fixin's. He 'peared to be some koind of a furriner from his palaver.

"Wull, afther a toime, me an' Jack sees him a-houldin' a bit of a talk wid Lieutenant Cartier; an' we ambles in thot diriction, jist. Would yez belave the word of an honest mon—an' Jack'll tell yez the same—thot furriner was sp'akin' as plain an' purty as Oi does meself, Hal Barton. Naither of the two sees me an' Jack; an' we watches to see w'at they're doin'. The bate of it! We couldn't hear much they said, but it was 'bout a bit o' paper the Lieutenant held in his hand.

"An' as we was backin' away, jist, to kape 'em from seein' us, thot dirthy spalpane of a Cartier gives the paper to the furriner an' tells him to skee-daddle. An' the furriner l'aves the camp an' goes back up the road.

"But he didn't go up to the village—me an' Jack watches him. When he thought no one was lookin' he dodged into the woods—the sn'akin' cuss—an' was off loike the divil was afther him. W'at does yez s'pose was the m'anin' of it all?"

"You're sure of this, Rory?" Barton asked incredulously.

"Am Oi sure? Am Oi sure that me mother was a woman? Yez'd betther ask Jack Keelson thot question."

McFarlan called to the sailor, and, as the latter came rolling up, said:

"Jack, Oi've been tellin' Hal Barton w'at we saw an' heard Lieutenant Cartier an' thot furriner doin' an' sayin' the day. Didn't we see 'em together, Jack?"

"Aye, mate, we did."

"An' hear 'em talkin' low an' secret loike?"

Jack nodded vigorously.

"An' didn't the Lieutenant give the strange mon a slip o' paper an' tell him to be off?"

"You're steerin' toward the truth, mate, an' the wind's in y'r favor."

"An' whin the gr'asy furriner got the bit of paper, didn't he l'ave camp an' dodge into the woods loike the sly ould varmint that he was, jist?"

"Right as main brace you are, Rory McFarlan."

"There," Rory cried triumphantly, "didn't Oi tell yez the truth, Hal Barton?"

"I didn't doubt your word, my friend," Hal explained; "I could scarcely believe that I had heard aright. I thought you must have made a mistake."

"Divil a bit's the mishtake Oi've made! An' now w'at me an' Jack wants to know is w'at to do about it all. Can't yez give us some advice, Hal, me bhoy?"

"Have I your permission to consult Wetzel?" Barton asked in reply.

"Yes," McFarlan and Keelson answered in concert.

"Very well. I'll let you know when we have

talked over the matter. Perhaps, too, I'd better speak to Captain Axline. He knows more of such things than any of us."

"The very mon," Rory replied. "An' yez'll see him the noight?"

"Yes, I'll see the Captain immediately after supper. How far were you from Lieutenant Cartier and the stranger when they were conversing?"

"About six fathoms," Jack said promptly.

"So short a distance? It seems strange that they didn't discover you."

"We had our hulks moored around the corner o' the officers' mess-shed, an' was as still as a calm in the tropics," was the sailor's reply.

"And no one else was near?"

"Not a sowl," Rory answered positively.

"Well—but the cook calls to supper. Breathe not a word of all this to anyone. It may mean much, and it may mean nothing. Can you describe the stranger to me?"

"A leather-faced, wiry little mon about me soize," McFarlan declared.

"An' with two black eyes as near like Lieutenant Cartier's as one rope's end's like another's," Keelson completed.

By this time the three friends had joined their comrades in a rush for the mess-table, and the subject was dropped. After supper Barton drew Wetzel aside and told him of the meeting between Lieutenant Cartier and the mysterious stranger. With-



A plump, fair-faced, little woman sprang over the sill and nestled in his arms

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out a change of expression the scout received the information.

"What do you think of it?" Hal asked when he had finished his recital.

"I skeercely know what to think," Wetzel replied reflectively. "Did you say, Hal, that the peddler was a little dried-up, black-eyed man?"

"So Rory and the sailor described him."

"Must 'ave been one o' them Frenchers from 'crost the lakes, then. That 'd seem to indicate he was in the pay o' them Britishers an' spyin' 'round here fer no good. If Lieutenant Cartier give him a paper, it prob'ly contained inf'rimation 'bout the strength o' the army. But I can't give you no advice 'bout what's the best thing to do, Hal; I don't know much 'bout these military rules an' regylations. You'd best go an' ask Cap'n Axline. I wish to goodness the army'd soon git ready to move. I'll die, penned up here in this place—I can't stand it. I'm jest hankerin' to git on the trail of a redskin once more."

It was twilight. As Hal Barton crossed the parade ground toward Captain Axline's quarters, he drank in the beauties of his surroundings. A wall of dark green foliage surrounded the camp on all sides. Through the thin fringe of trees upon the shore, he could see the river. In the uncertain light the water looked glassy, green and cool. The dying campfires shone as faint sparks in the gathering gloom, and served to render duskier the figures

about them. The air was close. At frequent intervals flashes of sheet lightning lent to the scene a momentary brightness. Then all was sweet, dusky twilight again.

Hal was thinking of the present. But for some reason the present was linked with the past. Why should Judith Sterling's face rise before him? She was naught to him, nor could she ever be. He had put love behind him. And why did Margaret's brown eyes again gaze into his and Margaret's soft voice, as soft as a caress, again breathe love in his ear? He shook himself angrily. He would have none of it. Yet in spite of his sturdy resolve, the two faces hovered about him; and left him only when he stood in the presence of Captain Axline.

"Come in," the Captain called cheerily as Hal rapped upon the half-open door.

As the Englishman stepped over the sill the officer was seated at a rough desk writing. A tallow candle stuck in a wide-mouthed ink-jug served to light the room and show its barrenness. The floor was of hard-packed earth; the walls, of unhewn logs. A rude table, a desk and a few stools constituted the furniture. A couch of poles and undressed furs occupied one end of the room. However, the captain had no cause for complaint; his apartment was as well furnished as that of General Wayne. Mad Anthony's officers did not grow effeminate through luxurious surroundings.

When Captain Axline saw who it was he threw

down his quill and with outstretched hand moved toward his visitor.

"Be seated, Barton," he said, warmly grasping Hal's hand. "I hardly know how to address you, what to call you. You lay claim to no title, and yet in some way you are superior to ordinary men."

"Call me plain Hal Barton," answered the Englishman, the faintest hint of annoyance in his tone.

"Please be seated," Captain Axline insisted, pushing a stool toward his caller. "And don't be annoyed. I assure you no flattery was intended. I am vain enough to imagine myself a student of human nature; and I feel that you're far above the fellows with whom you associate. Be that as it may, I consider you an equal, a friend. I'll call you Hal, if you'll call me Ed."

This last sentence the officer uttered with a smile.

"You may call me what you like," Barton replied, smiling in return. "As for myself, I cannot forget that you are Captain Axline."

The two seated themselves, and the Captain remarked, tentatively:

"I suppose McFarlan told you that I desired to see you?"

"Yes."

For a full minute the young officer was silent, apparently lost in reflection. Then he resumed:

"When I met you upon the parade ground yesterday, your face vividly recalled to my mind our first meeting, when I was on my way to Philadel-

phia with the news of General St. Clair's defeat. I recognized you as a man whom I had met but once before in my life, and accosted you as one is in the habit of accosting a chance acquaintance. Had I known what I have since learned, I should have greeted you much more cordially, I assure you. Last evening I went to call upon Robert Sterling and daughters. There I learned from the lips of Miss Judith herself, that you shielded her from Lieutenant Cartier's unreasonable anger and threats of violence. Of course, I don't believe he would have dared to harm her; but your act was none the less brave. Miss Judith was greatly alarmed and greatly impressed with your bravery——"

"It was nothing," Hal interrupted half testily.

"It was much to Miss Judith and her friends. And as a friend of her family, I wish to thank you on behalf of myself; and invite you to call at the house, that they may show you how much they appreciate what you did."

"I understand, Captain Axline, that it was you who introduced Lieutenant Cartier to Robert Sterling and his daughters?"

"It was I—I am sorry to say."

"You know no more of me than you know of your brother officer, not so much, perhaps. You may make another mistake."

Captain Axline looked keenly at the speaker. What sort of man was this cool, suave giant? He could not fathom him. He expected to see him

smiling, but no, his expression was calm and dignified.

"You're a gentleman, are you not, Hal Barton?" the Captain asked very earnestly.

"I lay claim to that honor," was the quiet reply.

"Then what mistake can I make in introducing you to my friends?" was Captain Axline's next question.

"You made a mistake in presenting Lieutenant Cartier."

"Perhaps, but——"

"Undoubtedly he assured you that he was a gentleman. You have my word as you had his, no more."

"Mr. Barton," the officer said frigidly, "cease to speak riddles. Make your meaning plain. If you don't wish to honor my friends by calling upon them——"

"But I *do*," Hal interrupted.

"Then why this vague talk?"

The blonde giant smiled as he replied: "Captain Axline, I shall consider it a great honor to be permitted to call upon your friends, the Sterlings. I wished, however, to ascertain that you really desired me to do so; and were not extending the invitation as a debt of gratitude that Miss Judith and her relatives feel they owe me."

"You're a bluff, blunt fellow, Hal Barton——" Hal nodded, and the Captain concluded:

"And I'll stake my life that you're a brave and

honest man. The matter is settled. Tomorrow evening we'll call upon the young ladies and their father. I'm very sorry Lieutenant Cartier so far forgot himself as to offer violence to a lady; and doubly sorry you were compelled to chastise him. He's an able officer and enjoys the confidence of our beloved commander, General Wayne; but he's a passionate Frenchman—"

"And a pusillanimous poltroon and traitor!"

Hal Barton fairly hissed the words between his teeth. All his suavity had disappeared; his icy calmness had melted away in the heat of his rising ire. His blue eyes glittered and his shaggy mane bristled. The sputtering candle silhouetted his great head upon the rough wall; and his companion remarked the resemblance of the shadow to the picture of a roused lion.

"Barton—Barton! What do you mean?" gasped the astonished Captain.

The Englishman shook himself like some big animal, and bringing his brawny fist down upon the table with a force that made it bound from the floor, cried:

"You know well what I mean, Captain Axline, when I say that Lieutenant Cartier is a poltroon!!! He has proven himself such. I've no patience with you when you attempt to extenuate his cowardly act. As to the latter part of my statement, he's a traitor to our country's cause, I believe."

"I understand your feelings toward Lieutenant

Cartier, Barton, and honor you for your chivalrous loyalty to womankind. But you've made a grave charge against my comrade-in-arms; a charge that—if it came to the ears of the commander, will make serious trouble for somebody, I fear. Will you not explain fully what you mean?"

"Gladly. I came to your quarters with the intention of laying the matter before you and asking your advice."

Hal had partially recovered his composure. And now he quietly told the Captain all he had heard from McFarlan and Keelson. The young officer listened to the recital with rapt attention. When the speaker had finished, his listener remarked smilingly:

"I fear, Barton, you've allowed Rory's exaggerated statements and your own aversion to Lieutenant Cartier to lead you astray. Hasn't it occurred to you that the Lieutenant was simply sending a note of apology to Miss Judith?"

"No," Hal answered bluntly.

"Well," the Captain resumed calmly, "I think that's the explanation. Lieutenant Cartier enlisted at Pittsburg. He came direct from the French army, he has an honorable discharge. He's a fine tactician and a thorough soldier. I'm loath to believe him other than a——" and Captain Axline hesitated and stopped.

"Other than what, Captain?" Hal asked in an even tone.

"Other than a man who would give his life for his country's cause."

"You believe him incapable of treachery, then?"

"I must believe so," the officer answered warmly. "Barton, you don't appear to understand that a man's innocent until he's proven guilty. And there's no evidence that Lieutenant Cartier has *contemplated* a treasonable act, even."

"You believe the slip of paper was intended for Miss Judith, Captain?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't the Lieutenant send it by one of our own men? Why did he choose a stranger? And above all, why was he so anxious to avoid observation?"

"Question me no further—I cannot answer your queries," was Captain Axline's rather petulant reply.

"Have you any advice to offer, Captain?" Hal continued coolly.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I'd advise you to say nothing of your suspicions. If they're true, we'll learn the truth in time; if they're false, the less said the sooner mended. Don't you agree with me, Hal Barton, my friend?"

And Captain Axline arose and laid his hand affectionately upon his companion's shoulder.

"Yes, I agree with you," Barton returned with a smile. "But I'm a man of positive convictions, of warm likes and dislikes; and I've not changed my

opinion of the man or the matter. Goodnight, Captain."

"Goodnight. Don't forget our engagement for tomorrow evening."

Hal Barton left the flickering light within for the dewy dusk without. The fires had died down and the camp was in darkness. He found his comrades wrapped in slumber, and their regular breathing mingling with the buzz of insect life about them. Just as he was crossing the boundary of the mystical land of dreams, he heard a sentry call the hour of ten o'clock and announce that all was well. Then the giant, his head pillowed upon his arm, slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

Again the pallid fingers of dawn reached above the eastern hilltops and lifted the curtain of night. Before there was any sign of life in the camp, a solitary, indistinct figure stole past the drowsy sentry and disappeared in the dark woodland. As the man with incredible celerity glided through the intricate tangle of the forest, he softly chuckled to himself:

“It’s all right fer Gener’l Wayne to place sentries. They’re first rate to keep soldiers in ’r Injins out, p’r’aps; but w’en Lew Wetzel makes up his mind he wants to go ’r come, he won’t wait to ask leave. May be my actions ain’t ’cordin’ to military rules, but they’re ’cordin’ to the rules o’ natur’. I crawled along right under that sleepy feller’s nose an’ he wan’t none the wiser. Well, I guess I’ve gone ’bout far enough till it grows lighter. I ought to strike that spyin’ varmint’s trail not far from this spot. I

couldn't sleep all night, fer thinkin' 'bout him. Ther's somethin' wrong. An' I'm a-goin' to find out what it is."

Little by little, the faint light of morning insinuated itself among the trees and filtered through the leafy branches. The scout stood leaning upon his rifle and straining his eyes through the semi-gloom that surrounded him. Of a sudden he started and muttered:

"Jest as I thought, here's the critter's footprints. An' he hain't took no pains to conceal 'em. On-doubtedly thought he was dealin' with ord'nary soldiers; didn't s'pose he'd have Lew Wetzel on his trail. His track is hours cold, but I can foller it. An' I'll know where he's goin' an' what he's up to 'fore the sun sets twice more."

Shouldering his gun, the scout set off through the woods, slowly at first, but more rapidly as the increasing light enabled him to follow the trail more easily. With long, rapid strides he covered mile after mile, pausing only to stoop and drink from some brook, or to lift his coonskin cap from his forehead, brush away the sweatdrops, and sweep his piercing gaze around him. At noon he did not stop; but satisfied his hunger by a few pieces of dried meat he had in his pouch. He was traversing the Miami valley, moving northward as fast as his untiring zeal and strength could carry him.

Night came. Supperless he went to bed upon the bare ground, his trusty weapon hugged to his

breast. At break of day he was again upon the trail. Occasionally he paused to eat a handful of wild raspberries. The sun rose to the zenith, and began to descend the western arc of the heavens. Still he kept on.

"I'd give a purty thing fer a hunk o' broiled venison; I'm 'most famished," he thought as he rested a moment and mopped his face. "But it won't do to have a gun speakin' in these parts; there's too many keen ears might hear it. It's purty aggravatin', though, fer I saw the purtiest pair o' antlers jest a few minutes ago. But 'twon't do. The trail's gittin' too hot. 'Fore sundown I'll be lookin at the back o' that sneakin' cuss that's carryin' that paper from Lieutenant Cartier to some Britisher. 'F I can only ketch him alone, I'll soon end the whole business. Dead men tell no tales, an' they carry no more papers, neither. I hate to kill a white man. But then a Frencher ain't much better'n an Injin. It's got to be done, anyhow. I'm 'fraid every minute he'll jine some party o' redskins an' 'git out o' my reach."

In the dense forest there was not the whisper of a breeze. The air was almost suffocating. After a half hour's brisk walking, Wetzel stopped suddenly and leaped behind a tree. Just a few yards in advance he had caught sight of the object of his quest. Carefully looking to the priming of his rifle, he cautiously pursued the disappearing figure.

It was growing dusk. Soon his aim would be un-

certain. Realizing this, the scout hurried forward. But he was doomed to disappointment. Just as he had thrown his rifle to his shoulder and was sighting along the gleaming barrel, a chorus of shouts greeted his ears. Then the man he pursued stepped into an open glade, and was immediately surrounded by a company of half-clad Indians and outlaws.

With a groan of anger and chagrin, the scout dropped to the ground and lay quiet. The camp was in full view, not a hundred yards away from him. He ground his teeth in silent rage as he watched the dark forms flitting to and fro around the new arrival. But the distance was too great; he could not see distinctly what was going on, nor hear. With a recklessness born of failure, he slowly and cautiously wriggled nearer. When within thirty yards of the camp, he secreted himself behind a small hummock and devoted his undivided attention to the play enacting before him.

For the first time the scout got a full view of the man whom he had tracked so far. The latter was a lithe, active and wizened half-breed—"half French-er an' half Injin," Wetzl decided. Other half-breeds and Indians, to the number of two score, stood around him and listened eagerly to what he was saying. The leader of the party, whom the half-breed was addressing, stood where the light of the flickering campfire fell full upon him. He was a white man of medium height, but active and muscular. His garb was wildly picturesque, consisting

of a suit of fringed and beaded buckskin with leggings and moccasins to match. His arms were of the finest—the butts of his pistols and gun inlaid with bits of silver, pearl and ivory. A red-and-yellow silk handkerchief encircling his head partially concealed a livid scar upon his brow.

Wetzel caught his breath sharply and muttered:

“Simon Girty! Now the mischief *is* to pay fer sure. But hark! What is it that French-Injin’s a-sayin’?”

“Me went to ze camp of ze Thirteen Fires; me find ze Lieutenant Cartier. I sell him tree—four—five tings from ze pack. Zen we talk an’ nobody hear. Lieutenant Cartier gave me ze paper an’ say begone. Here it is, Captain.”

A smile of satisfaction swept over Girty’s face. He eagerly stretched out his hand, and hastily thrust the bit of parchment into the pocket of his hunting shirt, without so much as glancing at its contents.

“Must place a pow’rful sight o’ value on that bit o’ paper,” grumbled Wetzel in deep disgust. “Never even stopped to read it. Wolves an’ bears! but I’d like right smart to know what’s in it. Howsomever, I guess I’m clean beat out this time——”

He stopped abruptly to listen, and heard the outlaw saying:

“You’re a jewel, Jean. Here’s the dagger and bag of gold I promised you. Buy good liquor with the money, and keep the knife to drink some thiev-

ing, lying Yankee's blood. You've done well, though it wasn't much of an undertaking after all. All it required was a little pluck and cunning, and you've got both. You're sure no one suspected you?"

The half-breed shook his head.

"Nor followed you?"

Wetzel breathlessly awaited the fellow's reply.

"Me sure no one follow Jean," the half-breed answered as he thrust the dagger into his belt and jingled the yellow coins in his palm.

"That's all, then. Now, men, let's have supper and to sleep; tomorrow we've a hard journey before us. It's many miles from here to the lakes; and the commandant 'll be anxiously awaiting our coming. With Lieutenant Cartier at one end of the line and the British at the other, it'll be strange if we don't outflank General Wayne as we did St. Clair. Though Wayne's as crafty as a fox and as bold as the devil himself."

The last two sentences Girty uttered to himself, as he strode to a fallen log and seated himself upon it, not ten yards from the spot where Wetzel lay. The scout almost gasped for breath, but not on account of his own safety. The temptation assailed him to make one final effort to recover the paper the outlaw had in his bosom. The Indians and half-breeds were busily engaged at the campfire, raking over coals and broiling strips of flesh upon them.

"Wonder if I'd better try it?" mused the scout

as he flattened himself closer to the earth and panted with suppressed excitement. "'F I succeed, I'll rid the world of a monster an' git that paper. 'F I fail, it'll let 'em know ther's been somebody on that French-Injin's trail—an' spoil everything. It'll only take one little stab—but 'twon't do; it's too risky. I ain't afraid 'bout myself, but——"

A moment more he hesitated; and that moment proved fatal to his contemplated plan. Girty arose and slowly returned to the group around the fire. It was now quite dark. With the noiselessness and celerity of a serpent, Wetzel glided away in the darkness. A half hour later he was beyond sight and hearing of his enemies and speeding rapidly toward the Ohio river, miles away.

At Hobson's Choice, the morning of the scout's departure upon the trail of the half-breed, Hal Barton arose early. His sleep had been broken and unrefreshing. Conflicting thoughts and emotions were striving for the mastery. He missed his friend; but was neither surprised nor worried. He had become accustomed to Wetzel's moods and actions, and did not doubt that eccentric individual was amply able to take care of himself. He had a suspicion that the mysterious stranger, who had visited the camp on the preceding day, had to do with the scout's absence; but the Englishman kept his own counsel.

"Wot luck did yez have wid Cap'n Axline?" Mc-

Farlan inquired in a stage whisper, as he and Keelson met Hal at the mess-table.

"None," was the cautious reply. "He gives little credence to your story and advises us to wait."

"Wait, is it?" snorted Rory, unable to control his rising ire. "Some more o' that dommed waitin' p'ace-policy. Wait it is 'ntil the Britishers 'ave furnished the bloody red naygurs wid the means o' defeatin' us—wait 'ntil Lieutenant Cartier——"

"Avast, Rory!" cautioned Jack. "Your mouth's like a powder magazine, ready to go off any minute. Keep a cool head 'r you'll blow us all into perdition. These mates mustn't know what *we* know."

The Irishman curbed his fiery temper; but he sat and grumbled to himself for an hour afterward.

That evening Hal Barton went with Captain Axline to call upon the Sterlings. He was cordially welcomed by the father and two daughters, and thanked over and over. Although the sisters were twins, Joanna appeared to be the younger. She was more vivacious and childlike than Judith, and looked to the latter for advice and guidance. They were almost identical in personal appearance, and their dark beauty contrasted strongly with the sandy hair, light blue eyes and fair skin of Robert Sterling. It was very evident that they were much more like their Irish mother.

The young people spent the warm evening in pleasant converse, Mr. Sterling taking but little

part. Sitting upon the log step with Judith, and looking out upon the Ohio shimmering in the moonlight, Hal Barton, for some mysterious reason, was happier than he had been for months. Captain Axline and Joanna occupied seats near them. During a lull in the conversation the officer asked suddenly:

"Miss Judith, did you receive a communication from Lieutenant Cartier yesterday?"

A shade of annoyance swept over the young woman's beautiful face, and she set her lips in a hard, straight line as she replied:

"I did not."

The Captain lifted his black eyebrows in surprise.

"Nor today?" he continued.

"Nor today."

"No note of apology?"

"Nothing," she interrupted coldly. "Nor am I anxious to receive his apologies. Why do you inquire so closely, Captain Axline?"

"Why, I—I," he stammered, "had reason to think that the Lieutenant sent you a note of apology, that's all. It doesn't matter. Please forget that I inquired."

The subject was dropped; but the two young men exchanged significant glances.

"You'll call again, will you not?" Judith said to Hal at parting.

"If you desire it," he answered with the accent on the personal pronoun.

"I *do* desire it," was the frank, but modest reply.

"Very well, I'll call again, and soon." And dropping her hand he hastened to overtake his comrade.

The two young men sauntered toward Hobson's Choice. Apparently each was busy with his own thoughts, for neither spoke until they were nearing the camp. Then Captain Axline remarked:

"Barton, I was mistaken about that piece of paper Cartier gave to the peddler."

"Yes," was the quiet reply.

"And I'm now convinced that there's some truth in your suspicions," the officer continued. "Tomorrow I'll lay the whole matter before General Wayne. But say nothing to anyone."

"All right," Hal replied absent-mindedly. He was thinking of Judith Sterling and not of Rudolphe Cartier. Rousing himself, he added hastily:

"I've placed the matter in your hands, Captain; do whatever you think best."

"Who goes there?" demanded a familiar voice.

"Friends," answered Captain Axline.

"As if Oi didn't know that!" continued the voice sneeringly. "But yez'll not git into camp the noight, Cap'n, 'f yez don't give the proper word, jist. Arrah! but yez know, it don't yez? Well, in yez goes, an' good luck to yez both in y'r love-makin', is the wish o' Rory McFarlan."

CHAPTER IX.

At the earliest opportunity Captain Axline sought an interview with the commanding officer. The General was examining a roll of maps and dictating memoranda to Lieutenant Cartier.

"You desire to see me, Axline?" the old warrior asked, whirling briskly and facing the captain.

"I do, General, but——" And Axline glanced significantly at Cartier, who had his back toward them.

General Wayne understood his subordinate's meaning look, and said quickly:

"If you've anything of a private nature to communicate, Captain, you needn't mind your brother officer. Lieutenant Cartier, like every other officer in the army, I trust, is discretion itself."

"But I desire to see you alone, General, on a personal matter," Axline explained.

"Very well but you must be brief; I'm very busy. Lieutenant Cartier, you may retire. I'll call you when we are through."

Cartier arose slowly, not deigning to notice Captain Axline, and, gathering up his writing materials, reluctantly quitted the apartment. When the door had closed behind the retreating officer, General Wayne pointed to a stool, saying:

"Be seated, Axline, and be brisk with your business."

As briefly as possible, the junior officer made the senior acquainted with the object of his visit. The General listened impassively. When the younger man had finished the older asked, smilingly:

"Is that all, Captain Axline?"

"Yes, General," replied the Captain in a tone of surprise. He could not understand his superior's smiling indifference.

"Well," resumed Wayne, "to use a backwoods expression, you're barking up the wrong tree. Axline, I took you for a young man of keener discernment. You know, or should know, as well as I, that this man Barton and Lieutenant Cartier are rivals for a certain young lady's favors——"

"General Wayne!" interrupted the Captain

"What?" the older man cried irritably.

"You're mistaken, General," Axline hastened to say. "Hal Barton has been here but a few days. He's hardly acquainted with Miss Judith Sterling,

to whom Lieutenant Cartier has been devoting his attentions——”

“And yet they are rivals. Cartier has confessed as much to me. You see, Axline, this is simply a lover’s quarrel. First Cartier comes with a complaint against Barton; now you, as Barton’s mouthpiece, come with a charge against the Lieutenant. It’s all boyish nonsense. And, as I told Cartier, I’ll hear no more of it—not a word.”

“But, General,” the Captain insisted. “Rory McFarlan and Jack Keelson saw——”

“Yes, yes; I know what you would say. But they saw nothing of a suspicious nature—absolutely nothing. What if Lieutenant Cartier did give a peddler of gimcracks a bit of paper, eh? A note to his lady love, undoubtedly——”

“Miss Judith received no communication from Lieutenant Cartier.”

“Well, the man may not have delivered it or it may have been intended for some other young lady. You young bloods are gay Lotharios. No, no, Axline; it won’t do. Your accusation is absurd. Would you have me believe that your brother officer is a traitor?”

Captain Axline remained silent and the General resumed:

“Now, Captain, if you wish to retain my favor, you’ll never mention this matter again. I have all confidence in Lieutenant Cartier. On the other hand, I believe Hal Barton to be an honest man.

Therefore, I'll not take one side nor the other, in this petty quarrel, nor shall I permit any of my officers to do so. As a final word, let me hear no more of it. You may retire."

With a crestfallen air and a feeling that he had received scant courtesy, Captain Axline left General Wayne's presence and returned to his quarters.

"General Wayne won't listen to a word against Lieutenant Cartier," he muttered. "Why? Of course Cartier's a good soldier—there's no gainsaying that—but may he not be a spy in the camp? The General's obstinate, unreasonable. And yet—" And the young officer smiled grimly.—"I was just as unreasonable when Hal Barton first informed me of what Rory and Jack had seen. There's something desperately wrong about this matter, and the whole thing rests with me. But what can I do? General Wayne will listen to nothing further, unless I can produce positive proof of Cartier's guilt. I must rely upon myself and my friends to thwart this villain, for villain I am convinced he is.

"For the present I can only wait and watch. Would to God I had sent Barton and Wetzel in pursuit of that rascally peddler! They would have run him to earth and brought back the telltale paper—the very evidence I need."

For several days Captain Axline did not get an opportunity to communicate to Hal Barton the result of his interview with General Wayne. In the meantime, Wetzel returned to camp and informed

his friends of the cause of his absence, and of what he had seen and heard. To Hal the news seemed of grave importance; and, consumed with excitement and impatience, he went in search of Captain Axline. He found the young officer in earnest conversation with McFarlan and Keelson at his quarters.

"Good evening, Barton," was the Captain's greeting. "Is this true that Rory and Jack have just been telling me?"

Ere Hal could frame a reply, Rory snorted angrily:

"Is it true, Cap'n! Does yez doubt the word of an ould sojer thot's smelt gunpowder so much he feels lonesome if a whiff of it ain't in every passin' breeze?"

"Be quiet, Rory," said the officer somewhat sternly. "I'm not doubting your word; I wish simply to confirm your statement. You might have misunderstood Wetzal——"

"Misunderstood! Cap'n, Oi'll give yez to understand thot Rory McFarlan can come as near tellin' w'at's in a bottle by the shmell o' the stopper, as any mon in the army, jist."

"Hard down on y'r helm there, Rory," cried Jack. "Don't you see you're gittin' into deep water? Let the Cap'n an' Hal Barton untangle this snarl in the riggin'."

"What is it you desire to know?" inquired Hal, addressing the officer.

"Just this. Rory and Jack tell me that your friend, Lew Wetzel, followed the peddler and obtained important proof of Lieutenant Cartier's perfidy. Is it true?"

"It is true, Captain."

And Hal gave a detailed account of Wetzel's pursuit of the half-breed. Captain Axline was silent for some minutes. Then he remarked:

"Wetzel saw this half-breed deliver the paper into the hands of Simon Girty?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry the scout was not able to overtake the scoundrel, ere he reached the renegade's camp. We need that paper, need it badly. With it I could go to General Wayne and convince him of the truth of Cartier's guilt. As it is, we must bide our time. The General has threatened me with his disfavor. I dare not go to him again without positive proof—"

"Begorra!" Rory ejaculated. "There's nothin' to prevent mesilf goin' to ould Mod Anthony an' explainin' the dirty doin's o' that rascally black-guard. Oi'll do it, jist."

"No, no!" Captain Axline said, hastily. "Rory, you'd ruin everything; leave it all to Barton and me——"

"Pull in y'r oars an' stop splashin', Rory," Keelson interjected,

"Lock up that big sea-chist yez call y'r mouth, 'r Oi'll plant me fist in it, Jack Keelson!"

McFarlan clenched his hands and dashed at his

comrade. With a jeering laugh, the nimble-footed sailor danced around the irate Irishman; and the two gradually circled to another part of the camp. When they were out of earshot Captain Axline resumed:

"Hal Barton, the salvation of this army probably rests upon our shoulders. You understand?"

"I do, perfectly."

"That's all, then. We must restrain Rory and Jack. Wetzel is discreet. If you learn anything more, let me know promptly. General Wayne thinks this is a personal quarrel between you and Lieutenant Cartier. The latter has complained of your attack upon him on the night of your arrival. You've been instrumental in raising suspicion against the Lieutenant. As a consequence the commander looks upon the whole thing as a case of personal antipathy, a sort of lovers' quarrel. Nothing further can be done at present but we must keep our eyes and ears open. Hal Barton, my country needs your help."

"Anything that an honorable man can do, I'll do for the safety and glory of my country; and my country is the United States of America!" was Hal's earnest answer.

The two men clasped hands. Their faces were flushed. Then, without a word, the Englishman whirled and strode away, leaving his companion staring after him.

All through July one hot, sultry day succeeded

another. The hospital was filled with fever patients. Then came August with its cool nights and furnace-like days; and influenza and dysentery joined forces with malaria. The ranks of the army were decimated. However, the soldiers ceased their murmurings and bore their ill fortune with the fortitude of veterans. One day, they were cheered and stimulated by the report that the government's peace commission had failed, and that the army was to move at once; and the next, they were depressed by a counter report that no news at all had been received from the seat of government.

August passed and September ushered in the cold fall rains. The quarters at Hobson's Choice were open and uncomfortable. General Wayne looked upon his suffering troops, and swore more than one sulphurous oath at the dilatory policy that had kept him from opening the campaign during good weather. Discipline was maintained and drills and maneuvers were continued. Lew Wetzel and Hal Barton spent their time in procuring wild meat for their messmates, and in longing for the order to advance into the Indian country. That is, the former was actively anxious for the campaign to open; the latter, but passively so, for Barton, like Captain Axline, would have been content to linger in the vicinity of Cincinnati, had not duty promised to call him elsewhere.

Hal's acquaintance with Judith Sterling had ripened into warm friendship. Seldom did an evening

pass that he and his military friend were not callers at the Sterling residence. The Captain and Miss Joanna were betrothed; and many were the tears Judith's sister shed in private over the thought that her lover would leave her soon, perhaps never to return.

Hal Barton saw whither he was drifting, and more than once resolved to break off his acquaintance with the Sterling family. But he went on. He realized at last that he loved the beautiful Judith, and felt that she loved him. Her every tone and action betrayed the secret in spite of her maidenly reserve. Hal was greatly distressed. A cloud hung over his past life. Although his wife had proven false, he did not feel free to love this innocent girl. Margaret's face faded from his memory; Judith's face was there in its stead. He had loved his wife dearly; but that seemed long, long ago. He had thought to love her always, and now he loved another with equal fervor. Margaret was of the dead; Judith, of the present. Why should he not love her? Why should he make himself miserable over what had been beyond his control? He blushed when he thought of how easily he had forgotten the woman who had linked her fate with his. He paled when he thought of relinquishing all claim to Judith's love.

He argued with himself. It was wrong for him to think of loving Judith. He had but half a heart to offer her. It was a lie; he loved her with his

whole soul. Perhaps when he told her all she would scorn him. False. He knew her only too well. He would reveal the past to her and let her decide. Coward! He was a strong man; he would do nothing of the kind. Although he was brave and strong, he was not of warlike disposition. He exerted his great strength in combat only when necessary. He had no bloodthirsty taste for war; he loved the arts of peace. The fondest wish of his heart was for a peaceful home. Was he to be denied this boon? Was the perfidy of one woman to ruin his whole life? But had Margaret deserted him voluntarily? Might there not be some horrible mistake? Was not her own confession of guilt next to his heart!

Tossed this way and that by conflicting currents of emotion, he passed many restless days. September was drawing to a close. Rumors were abroad in the camp that late as was the season the campaign would be opened before the advent of winter. He must decide promptly. He could not leave Judith, perhaps never to see her again, without an understanding. He would go to her and tell her of the past, of his overmastering love for her. He decided, vacillated, hesitated, and was undetermined again. Fate cut the gordian knot for him.

One glorious autumn day late in September, Hal and Judith wandered into the forest adjacent to the village. There had been a heavy frost the night before, and the russet and crimson leaves were

dropping to earth. From the cloudless sky the yellow sunlight streamed; and the crisp breeze played mad pranks with the falling leaves and Judith's dark tresses. The lovers had been talking of the coming campaign and its probable result. Then a half mournful silence fell upon them. Stopping upon the brink of a deep, but narrow gully, they stood mutely surveying the landscape.

The breeze stiffened and sent the dead leaves whirling into the ravine at their feet. The forest trees swayed, creaked and moaned. Hal was aroused from his reverie by a rattling, thunderous sound directly overhead. Intuitively he knew what it meant. Catching Judith in his arms, he cleared the gully with a mighty bound and stood upon the opposite bank. He was not a second too soon. With a reverberating roar a huge limb fell where they had stood.

Half fainting, Judith clung to him.

"Oh! Hal—Mr. Barton, I——"

Then, blushing and trembling, she sought to withdraw from his embrace. But he held her fast. She read his soul in his eyes, and hid her flushed countenance upon his breast.

"Judith!" he said, half fiercely.

She made no reply.

"Judith," he repeated, tenderly, lovingly.

"What, Hal?" came the faint whisper in reply.

"I love you dearly, Judith. Give me what I have saved, give me your sweet self."

She was startled at the bluntness of his proposal. Her eyes dropped before his passionate gaze and she trembled visibly, but made no reply. Gently seating her, he told her of his love.

"Judith," he said at last, "do you love me? Will you consent to be my wife?"

For a moment she hesitated. Then nestling in his arms, she gently pushed the tawny hair from his eager face, and kissing him, whispered softly:

"Yes, Hal. You are my king. I love you."

Very slowly they found their way back to the village. At the edge of the wood he kissed her and bade her good-by. He saw her dress of dark woolen outlined against the gray logs of the house, saw her wave a white hand to him—and then she disappeared within doors. With bowed head and thoughtful mien, he strode away toward Hobson's Choice. He looked little like the bold lover triumphant over all difficulties. He was elated and depressed by turns. Had he acted for the best? What would be the final outcome of it all? He shook himself, and condemned himself for a moody coward. Then he smiled brightly—and again relapsed into the depths of gloom.

The sun was setting. As Hal drew near the camp, he was greeted by unusual sights and sounds. The dull rumble of drums rolled up and down the valley, and the piercing screams of fifes and bugles echoed far up the wooded slopes. Men were shouting themselves hoarse, and dogs were barking.

Squads of soldiers, bearing the colors of their respective regiments, marched up and down the parade ground. All was bustle and confusion. Officers met and wrung each other's hands. Privates hugged each other and danced in mad delight. Some of the sick, even, crawled from their couches, smiling wearily and cheering feebly. Then the sunset gun at Fort Washington awoke the echoes for miles up and down the valley, and an answering roar from hundreds of throats arose from Hobson's Choice.

"What's the meaning of all this hubbub?" Hal inquired of himself.

Ere he could shape a satisfactory answer in his mind, Rory McFarlan and Jack Keelson saw him and ran toward him.

"W'at's the mater wid yez that yez don't let y'r big voice out in a whoop an' hooroar, Hal Barton?" the Irishman shouted.

"Why should I?" returned Barton.

"Listen at the mon!" gasped Rory, a dumb-founded look upon his face.

"He's as dumb as a lobster," cried Jack in disgust.

"But what's all this about?" demanded Hal, catching the two by their collars and shaking them playfully.

"An' hain't yez heard?" Rory exploded.

"Hain't you heard the news?" Jack gurgled.

"No," Barton cried impatiently.

“Sure!” bawled Rory. “Ould Mod Anthony’s jist heard from the gover’ment. The message got here an hour ago, jist. The p’ace-commission’s a fizzle an’ a failure; an’ Giner’l Washin’ton says to lambast the red naygurs to our heart’s contint. The army’ll be on the move in a week ’r two, Hal Barton. Hooroar!”

CHAPTER X.

It was on the twenty-third day of September that General Wayne received the communication from General Knox, secretary of war, advising him of the failure of the peace-commission, and authorizing him to open the campaign as soon as he thought he could make it sharp and effective. Two weeks later the General had everything in readiness. On the seventh of October, the entire army, two thousand six hundred strong, moved out of its camp at Hobson's Choice and took up the march for the Indian country.

An animated scene presented itself to the citizens of Cincinnati on that historic morning. Mad Anthony and his staff reined in their steeds at the outskirts of the camp, and impatiently awaited the final preparations for departure. Inferior officers spurred hither and thither, forming the troops in marching order. Horses neighed, oxen lowed, and

dogs barked. The commands of officers, the cheers of privates, and the curses of teamsters mingled with the creak and rattle of heavily-laden wagons and carts. The ground was soft from recent rains, and the lumbering vehicles cut deep into the black mould of the forest. Scarcely had the long line wormed its way from the site of the camp, ere it was halted to lighten loads and double teams.

It was during this stop that Captain Axline and Hal Barton stepped aside to steal a last word with their sweethearts, who were watching the cavalcade. McFarlan shifted from one leg to the other as he stood in the ranks, and looked first at the lovers and then at Wetzell and Keelson, with a half-quizzical, half forlorn expression of countenance. Jack and the scout were also gazing at the young people—the former with a grave face and a suspicious moisture about the corners of his eyes, the latter with his chin resting impassively upon the muzzle of his rifle.

“Be the howly St. Pathrick, but it’s a foine thing to ’ave a swateheart!” Rory jerked out at last. “Would yez look at ’em out there, Jack Keelson? Did yez iver see the bate of it? Billin’ an’ cooin’ loike four young turkle-doves. Arrah! but it’s a foine soight sure. Ther’s nothin’ loike havin’ a swateheart to l’ave behoind yez whin yez goes to war, jist.”

“Yes, it’s a fine thing to ’ave a sweetheart!” Jack sneered pessimistically, as he dashed the back of his

hand across his eyes. "A fine thing, indeed, to leave 'er at home to cry 'er eyes out. A soldier 'r sailor has no business to be spliced 'r anchored to a female. Look at them two mates—every yard o' canvas set fer the voyage, an' the'r anchors still overboard. They won't be ready to sail in a week, 'nless somebody cuts the'r painters an' lets 'em drift out o' port, with the tide. What do you know about sweethearts, anyhow, Rory McFarlan?"

"An' w'at does Oi know 'bout swatehearts, yez bow-laiged bit o' salt junk? Oi know all *about* 'em, as a good-lookin' son of ould Oireland should, jist. Wasn't me mother a swateheart, yez ugly-mugged grampus? An' didn't Oi l'ave the purthiest little colleen in ould county Clare, thot ever skinned a p'rtaty wid 'er thumb nail—say? Me Katie's a darlint—arra! An' minny's the toime she's sung to me:

'Och, Rory, be aisy, don't t'ase me no more!
 Three toimes yez 'ave kissed me this mornin' before;
 'Twas once at the spring an' 'twas 'twice at the door—
 Och, Rory, be aisy, don't t'ase me no more!

W'at does Oi know 'bout swatehearts? Jack Keelson, yez 're a fool!"

"Tear my top gallants to ribbons, if I ever saw such a conceity land-lubber!" Jack answered contemptuously. "Blowin' a gale 'bout his sweethearts! An' all the sweetheart he ever had was a rum-bottle. Sweethearts! Rory McFarlan, that face o' yours 'd make a figgerhead turn pale with fright.

Sweethearts! 'F you could only see the purty Nancy I left down on the Jersey coast you might talk o' sweethearts. Red lips, black eyes, white teeth——"

"And kinky wool!" completed Rory.

Jack laughed good-naturedly; and, winking at the Irishman, he turned to Wetzel and said:

"What do you think, Wetzel? You hain't said a word."

The scout puckered his pock-marked features into a comical grimace, as he replied:

"I think you two fellers can chatter more an' say less 'n any two men I ever saw. You're worse 'n a passel o' crows in a cornfield."

Rory and Jack nodded and smiled at each other, and Wetzel continued:

"A fine pair you'd be to 'ave on an Injin trail! You'd lose y'r scalps 'fore you'd got a hundred yards from camp. You've got to drop y'r blarney an' palaver when you git into the Maumee country, 'r you'll git y'r hair raised. I never had but one sweetheart in my life. An' that's ol' Knock-'em-stiff, here."—And he fondly patted his long gun.—"Her voice ain't lovin' an' gentle, but she ain't no flirt that smiles on you one minute an' frowns the next. Women's a necessary evil, I s'pose; but they 're mighty unhandy to have 'round in time of a scrimmage. Women was made fer peace, men was made fer war. I never seen a man in love with a piece o' linsey-woolsey but what she

got him into trouble o' some kind. Take Hal Barton, fer instance——”

Wetzel shut his jaws with a snap, and said no more. He realized that he was ~~about~~ to divulge a secret. McFarlan and Keelson exchanged significant glances and waited for him to proceed; but not another syllable did he utter.

“W'at was yez goin' fer to say, Wetzel?” Rory asked.

The scout, his chin upon the muzzle of his rifle, made no reply.

At that moment the bugle sounded and the column began to move. Captain Axline hastily wrung Joanna's hand and resumed his position at the head of his troops. Hal Barton lingered a moment longer.

‘I should think one 'xperience 'd be enough fer *any* man; but then it's nothin' to me,” muttered Wetzel, as he strode to the head of the column and impatiently awaited his comrade's coming.

A few seconds later Hal reached the scout's side, and the two led the way into the forest. Judith and Joanna hid their tearful faces from the prying eyes of the marching soldiers, and sought the privacy of home.

The army moved slowly toward the north. General Wayne followed the line over which St. Clair had advanced and retreated two years before. The road was an uneven trail through the wilderness, difficult and hazardous. The streams were swollen

by the fall rains; and the ground in many places was soft and treacherous. Axmen were kept busy clearing a way for the wagons. Small bands of lynx-eyed savages hung upon the flanks of the army, ready to kill stragglers or harass the main body of troops, if opportunity should offer. Barton, Wetzel and other scouts made wide detours, and kept the commander apprised of the movements of these wily foes. Necessarily the progress of the army was slow, and it was the thirteenth of October when General Wayne for the first time came in sight of the log walls at Fort Jefferson. He had been six days in moving his army eighty miles.

The season was far advanced and the weather so threatening that the commander, after a consultation with his officers, decided to fortify the place strongly and go into winter quarters. He changed the name of the camp from Fort Jefferson to Greenville, in honor of his revolutionary friend and comrade, General Green.

Four days after the arrival of the army at Greenville, the first Indian attack occurred. A prowling band fell upon a convoy of provisions on its way from Cincinnati to the new encampment. There were about ninety men in the company protecting the train; but so sudden and fierce was the attack that the savages almost succeeded in capturing it. Lieutenant Lowery and Ensign Boyd fell at the first fire; and many of the soldiers beat a hasty and ignominious retreat. Lieutenant Rudolphe Cartier

was with the train, and, on the death of Lieutenant Lowery, assumed command and ordered a general retreat. Barton and Wetzel were in the vicinity on a scouting expedition. They had been trailing the band that made the attack. Attracted by the firing they hurried to the support of the soldiers, and impetuously threw themselves into the thick of the fight. Shielding themselves behind tree-trunks, they loaded and fired their rifles with marvelous rapidity and effect. Recognizing the two new comers as their bitterest foes, the Indians faltered; and a number of retreating soldiers returned and renewed the fight. Lieutenant Cartier, his face aflame with passion, sprang to the side of our friends and hissed:

"Retreat, retreat, I command you!"

"Not as long as powder-an'-ball holds out," was Wetzel's reply; and he dropped another Indian in his tracks.

Losing all control of himself, the Lieutenant struck at the scout with the flat of his sword, shouting:

"Don't you see they outnumber us two to one? Would you have the whole company slaughtered? The soldiers will follow your example. Retreat, or I shall run you through the body!"

Wetzel did not reply, but went on rapidly reloading his piece. But Hal Barton had overheard the officer's words, and turning upon him, roared:

"Coward! Traitor! Retreat if you desire. If

you do, I'll take command and save the train—or die in the attempt.”

“You shall pay for this act of insubordination!” Cartier shouted with pallid, frothing lips, as he walked away.

The Indians, perceiving that the soldiers had regained their courage and were making a valiant stand, broke and fled. Lieutenant Cartier hastened to Greenville to give his version of the affair to General Wayne. On the arrival of the convoy, Hal and Wetzel were summoned before the commander to answer to the charge of insubordination.

“I am told you refused to retreat when ordered to do so by the commanding officer,” General Wayne said. “Is it true?”

“It is true, General,” Hal answered respectfully.

“What excuse have you for not obeying the order?”

“We saw no necessity for retreating. And subsequent events proved our judgment correct.”

“Quite right,” remarked the General with a nervous twitching of his thin lips; “but you should have obeyed the command, nevertheless.”

“For one, Gener'l,” Wetzel replied quietly, “when I'm in an Injin scrimmage I ain't in the habit of obeyin' anybody but Lew Wetzel. I calkerlate he knows 'bout as much 'bout redskins as the devil that made 'em. An' I ain't in fer retreatin' 'till my scalp's in more danger'n it was in that little rub——”

"But you must learn obedience," cried Wayne sternly, although his twinkling eyes belied the tone of his voice. "Such examples are ruinous to all discipline."

"But, Gener'l," the scout insisted, "I don't consider that I'm under anybody's orders but yours. I ain't no soldier. I'm an independent scout; an' if I want to have a little scrimmage with the redskins, ther' ain't no young fop in uniform a-goin' to stop me."

"Your reasoning is fallacious," the commander hastened to say. "Don't you see that such a course may precipitate a general engagement when we are least prepared for it? No, my friend, you must obey orders."

"I'll obey you, General Wayne, jest as I promised. But no 'tarnal coward like Lieutenant Cartier 'll ever git me to run from Injins till I'm ready to run—that's all."

Cartier and a number of other officers were present. The Lieutenant curled his lips scornfully, but said nothing. General Wayne drew himself up haughtily. Evidently he was preparing to reprimand the daring scout severely. Seeing this, Barton asked hurriedly:

"General Wayne, may I explain?"

The commander bowed stiffly; and again that peculiar twinkle shone in his eye. Hal proceeded:

"As you know, General, we were out on a scouting expedition. We ran across the trail of a large

body of Indians, and were rapidly following them, anxious to know what deviltry they had in mind, when the sound of firing came to our ears. Suspecting the truth, we hastened to the aid of the convoy. We found the company panic-stricken. Many of the soldiers were retreating in disorder. Lieutenant Lowery was dead, and Lieutenant Cartier was in command. He made no effort to rally his men. Instead, he ordered a general retreat. We refused to obey—Lew Wetzel and I—and the soldiers, encouraged by our example, rallied and recovered their ground. We saved the train of provisions and prevented a wholesale massacre. Would you have had us do otherwise, General?"

"No!" came the reply in ringing tones.

Lew Wetzel lifted his head in surprise. The assembled officers exchanged wondering glances. Lieutenant Cartier bit his lip, and, stepping forward, attempted to address his commander; but the General waved him aside and resumed:

"There are exceptions to all rules, military rules included. You disobeyed orders; such orders should be disobeyed. You were in the right this time; but be careful in the future. Remember that I condemn your infraction of military regulations; but at the same time I commend your bravery. You may go. Lieutenant Cartier, I would speak with you in private."

When the Frenchman retired from General Wayne's apartment, a half hour later, a perplexed

and worried look rested upon his dark face. As he entered his own quarters he muttered to himself:

“I must be more careful in the future. Another false step means ruin. I was too anxious. But the loss of the provisions would have crippled the army and encouraged the Indians. I must go slow, however. What will thousands of British gold avail me, if I forfeit my life. And Judith——”

A few days later, General Scott with a thousand mounted riflemen from Kentucky joined the army at Greenville. But the season was too far advanced for military operations, so General Wayne ordered the men to return to their homes to await the opening of spring.

The work upon the fortifications at Greenville was pushed vigorously. When the first hard freeze came in early November, the troops were comfortably quartered. With the advent of cold weather, the Indians withdrew from the vicinity; and the army settled down to the humdrum of winter camp-life. The only excitement was the arrival of an occasional messenger or provision-train from Cincinnati.

On the twenty-third of December, General Wayne ordered Major Burbeck to take eight companies of foot and a detachment of artillery, and repossess the field of St. Clair's defeat, twenty-nine miles from Greenville. For the encouragement of

the troops the commander himself accompanied the expedition.

He took a small reinforcement of mounted men with him. On his arrival at the ill-fated battlefield, he erected a fortification to which he gave the name of Fort Recovery. Then he gathered and interred the bones of the brave men who had fallen in that struggle, and fired three discharges from St. Clair's recovered cannons over the graves. With General Wayne at the time were Dr. Scott, Captain Butts and Lieutenant Wiliam Henry Harrison, afterward president of the United States.

While Wayne was at this place, chiefs of the various tribes came to him and professed an anxiety to enter into peace negotiations. He put no faith in their expressions of submission; but gave them thirty days in which to return to Fort Recovery with all the white prisoners they had among them. They did not come.

CHAPTER XI.

“Lieutenant Cartier wants to see you at his quarters.”

The speaker was an orderly, and he addressed Hal Barton, who was standing just outside the fortification at Greenville. General Wayne was still at Fort Recovery, and had sent Lew Wetzel toward the Maumee to spy upon the movements of the allied tribes. Barton had remained at the main encampment, doing little except to make daily excursions into the adjacent forest.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon of a wet and disagreeable January day. The soggy earth was half covered with melting snow, and the water courses were swollen and angry. Fog filled the surrounding woods, and a cold, drizzling rain was falling. The soldiers, spiritless and discontented, partook of their scanty fare and hovered around the campfires, scarcely speaking for hours at a time.

Even those mercurial imps, Rory McFarlan and Jack Keelson, forgot to indulge in their customary pranks. It was a day of moroseness and gloom. The camp bore a lifeless and deserted aspect. A horse neighed shrilly and tossed his head impatiently, as the chill drizzle beat upon him through the open walls of the stable. A muffled figure stalked sullenly from one barrack to another.

Hal Barton, standing without the walls of the fortification, his rifle in his hands, looked far into the vista of woodland—and saw nothing that was before him. He was thinking of Cincinnati and Judith. He regretted that he had not been permitted to accompany Wetzel. The hardships and dangers of a scouting trip would have been preferable to inactivity. But, for some reason, General Wayne had ordered him to remain at Greenville.

For the moment Hal forgot Judith. Why had the commander wished him to stay in camp? When he parted from Wayne at Fort Recovery, ten days before, the General said to him:

“I’ve sent your comrade, Lew Wetzel, toward the Maumee country, to ascertain what the Indians are doing. You may return to Greenville and there await orders.”

At the time, Barton and Wetzel had just borne a message to the General from the commanding officer at Greenville.

The Englishman turned his back to the driving rain and continued to muse upon the condition of

affairs. But he could make nothing of it. He was about to enter the forest just beyond him when the orderly accosted him with the words that open the chapter.

In surprise Hal faced the man and replied:

"Aren't you mistaken, sir?"

"No, sir," returned the orderly, positively; "the Lieutenant told me to find you and send you to him—that he wanted to speak with you."

"Whom did he tell you to find?"

"Hal Barton, the scout."

"I'm the man."

"Yes, sir. Will you come?"

"Tell Lieutenant Cartier that I'll grant his request,"—he did not say, "I'll obey his order"—"that I'll call upon him at his quarters, within a few minutes."

The orderly noted Barton's tone and words and, bowing stiffly, left him. For a full minute Hal stood staring at the earth.

"I wonder what Cartier wants of *me*—of all men?" he muttered under his breath. "If the cowardly traitor has any treacherous design, he'd better beware. He ought to be fired from the army, crop and heels; he's a dangerous man. General Wayne should listen to the voice of reason. The sneaking cur will bite him from behind. What can he want of me? Well, the surest way to ascertain is to go to him."

With quick, firm steps he re-entered the open gate

of the fortification and hurried into Lieutenant Cartier's presence. The officer arose at Hal's entrance, but did not speak. The Englishman noted that the lieutenant appeared nervous and ill at ease.

"You sent for me?" Barton said bluntly.

"Yes. Will you not sit down?"

Cartier said this in an embarrassed tone of voice, interlacing his long fingers and nervously glancing from his visitor to the floor.

"No," Hal replied, coldly. "What do you want?"

"You treat me, your superior, with scant courtesy," the Lieutenant remarked, with a malicious smile.

Barton saw that the man was greatly agitated for some reason, and was making an effort to hide the fact. The Englishman was in no mood for dilly-dallying. He hated Cartier and he took no pains to conceal it. Now he answered, sharply:

"If I treat you with little courtesy, sir,"—he did not condescend to use the Frenchman's military title in addressing him,—"it's because I'm pleased to do so. I've little respect for you, as you have good reason to know. Again I repeat, what do you want?"

The Lieutenant's face flushed, then paled. He bit his lip and clenched his hands. Retaining control of himself, he asked, calmly:

"Will you obey an order?"

"Whose?" Hal inquired coolly.

"Mine."

"I hold myself subject to the orders of General Wayne alone."

"I want you to carry a letter to General Wayne at Fort Recovery, a communication of great importance."

"When?"

"Today—now."

"Is it so urgent?" Hal interrogated, keenly eying the officer.

"It is."

"Give me the letter."

"You will take it?"

There was an illy-concealed ring of triumph in Cartier's voice. His hand shook as he produced the packet and gave it to Barton, with the words:

"As I have said, this letter is of great importance. Get it through tonight. Observe great secrecy, tell no one of your journey. I would trust it to no other——"

"Stop!" thundered Hal, angrily. "I've agreed to carry this letter to General Wayne. I'll do so or lose my life in the attempt."—Here he glared so fiercely at the Lieutenant that the latter cowered and retreated a step.—"But I want no words of praise from *you*."

The blonde giant's eyes were blazing. He impatiently tossed his yellow mane from his forehead and, without a backward glance, left the room. When the sound of his retreating footsteps had died out, Cartier dropped upon a stool and panted:

"Thank heaven, that is over! Such interviews try one's nerves." And he laughed hysterically. "Ugh! He looked at me as though he suspected my designs; as though he would have liked to kill me. No doubt he would. But he will not dare to open the packet; he is the soul of honor."—This last with a sneer.—"Ah! I am playing a risky game; but the stakes are worth it. Ten thousand pounds in good yellow gold is not picked up every day. Let me see. The plans and specifications I delivered to the half-breed at Hobson's Choice went through safely. Yes, Girty is to be trusted. And last night I met him face to face for the first time. He is a scoundrel, a traitor. We are a well-matched pair.

"It was bold of him to creep up under the very walls of the fortifications. He does not lack courage, at least. Night after night I had watched for his coming, until I was almost in despair. It was well for us both that the night was dark and rainy, and that the sentry could be bribed. But in my haste I forgot to take the important papers outside the walls with me. How angry Girty was! I was afraid of him!

"Everything is all right now, however. If the scheme does not miscarry, I shall rid myself of a dangerous rival and deliver the details of the strength of General Wayne's army and his plans of campaign to a British emissary, at one and the same time. If adverse fortune thwarts me—" He shrug-

ged his shoulders.—“But if the fickle goddess smiles, I shall be rich beyond my fondest dreams, and Judith—well, the game is half won.”

He arose, stretched his slender form, shivered slightly and, seating himself at a desk, began an examination of a pile of maps and papers.

In the meantime Hal Barton was leaving the fortification. At the gate he met Rory McFarlan. A look of surprise and incredulity rested upon the Irishman's freckled face, as he cried:

“Fer the love o' the Virgin, Hal Barton! Yez're not goin' out to tramp the woods in such a storm as this?”

The giant caught his demonstrative friend by the arm and, lifting him as a child would a doll, set him upon a projecting log at the corner of one of the blockhouses, flanking the gate. Then he whispered, impressively:

“Rory!”

“Well, Hal Barton, w'at is it?”

“I'm startin' for Fort Recovery.”

“The noight?” in unbounded surprise.

“Yes. I bear a letter from Lieutenant Cartier to General Wayne.”

“May the howly saints presarve us!” Rory ejaculated.

“Hal Barton, me fri'nd, Oi'd as l'ave see yez car-ryin' foirebrands fer the divil, as totin' a message fer thot dom Frincher! Mark me words, jist. He's up to some divilment. Hal Barton, don't yez go.”

"I'll go," Barton returned, quietly. "I suspect him but I'll go."

"Thin Oi'm goin' wid yez," McFarlan declared, jumping from his perch.

"Stop!" Barton commanded.

Rory halted irresolutely, and Hal continued:

"I recognize the spirit that prompts you, Rory; but you cannot aid me in that way——"

"Can't Oi foight?" the Irishman demanded.

"Yes, yes," Hal replied, hastily; "but you must understand that I must fight treachery with cunning. If I can't reach Fort Recovery without fighting, I can't reach it at all. You know little of woodcraft; your presence would only embarrass me. But *here* you can do me a service. If I don't return in three days, you may know that harm has befallen me; and you can lay the matter before Captain Axline. He'll know what to do. In this way only can you help me. Keep my mission a secret for the present. Goodby, Rory."

"Goodby, Hal Barton," McFarlan said, feelingly. "Oi'm sorry, Oi am, to see yez go on such a divil's errand. But if any harrum comes to yez, yez can depind on Rory McFarlan an' Jack Keelson to save y'r loife 'r revinge y'r death, jist."

Cracking his fists and muttering angrily to himself, Rory returned to the comparative comfort of his quarters.

The Englishman set out upon his lonely journey of thirty miles through the fast-darkening forest.

The short winter day was rapidly drawing to a close. The rain had ceased to fall and the wind was growing colder and increasing in force. With bent head and alert ears, Hal followed the dim trail among the trees. When night shut down, black and appalling, he was ten miles from Greenville. With the rapid, swinging stride that he had learned of his teacher in woodcraft, he covered mile after mile. The sky began to clear and the moon peeped from behind scudding clouds. The wind fell and the night grew colder. On he went, paying little heed to the trail, but directing his course by an occasional glance at the rapidly clearing heavens. At intervals he paused, listened intently for a few moments, and again set forward. His steps were swift, but noiseless, and the journey was half covered and no adventure had befallen him.

Hark! Hal stopped suddenly and dropped to the ground. At the time he was traversing a flat ridge between two shallow valleys. His attention was arrested by a deep, sepulchral, groaning sound. Apparently it came from a point a few rods ahead of him. Lying flat upon the wet ground, he held his breath and strained his ears. The sound was not repeated. Only the complaining murmur of the rills in the valleys greeted his ears. Cautiously he raised his head and peered into the gloom that walled him in. He could see nothing but the dim outlines of tree trunks and skeleton copses. Yes, what was that shadowy something that appeared to

be slowly moving toward him? Breathlessly he waited. Nearer and nearer drew the great moving bulk. He caught the sound of heavy footfalls. It was a riderless horse.

"A trap!" muttered the giant, as he sprang to his feet and dodged behind a tree. "But they'll not catch me napping."

He struck the breech of his rifle to prime it. Peering from his shelter, he saw the horse stop a few yards from him and half turn about as though looking for some one to follow. Again a groan broke the stillness; and Hal caught the words:

"Help—help! In God's name help!"

The voice grew weaker toward the end of the cry and died out in a faint moan. Barton remained erect as a figure of stone, behind the tree. He was familiar with the strategy of Indians and outlaws and suspected a trap. His suspicions of Lieutenant Cartier's motive in sending him upon this night journey grew stronger. Prudence advised him to retreat; while humanity urged him to investigate. Perhaps he had permitted his suspicions to bias his judgment. It might be no trap. It might be some chance traveler from Fort Recovery, met with an accident. What should he do? His brain said, "Flee;" his heart said, "Remain." All this went through his mind with the rush of a rocket.

The groaning was repeated, fainter than before. Stepping from his shelter, he cautiously approached the horse. The animal snorted and trembled at his

approach, but did not move away. Reaching its side, Hal saw it bore a military saddle, and that the broken bridle-rein trailed upon the ground.

"Some soldier thrown and injured," was his mental comment. "He was bearing a dispatch to Greenville, undoubtedly."

Somewhat reassured, but guardedly and carefully, he approached the spot from which issued the appeals for help. The trail at that point ran through a thicket of slim saplings, and he hesitated for a moment. A stray moonbeam lighting the path just ahead fell upon the white, rigid face of a dead man. Hal stopped, all the while glancing around him. The dead man wore the uniform of the United States army. He had been shot through the heart, scalped, and stripped of arms and valuables. His form was stiff.

"A dispatch bearer murdered by the cursed Indians!" Hal muttered under his breath. "But he has been dead for some time; *he* didn't call for aid."

The Englishman arose from his stooping posture and called softly:

"Hello!"

No answer.

"Hello! Hello!" he repeated, in a little louder tone.

"Help!"

The answering cry was a mere breath from further along the trail.

Hal sprang forward with the thought :

“I must do all I can for the poor wretch—”

He broke off abruptly. Almost at his feet he saw another dark form.

“Friend,” he said in a low tone.

The prostrate man moaned weakly, but did not speak nor move. Hal was bending to lift him, when an extraordinary thing occurred. The dying man gave a flounce of his body, sprang erect ten feet away and, with a shrill, mocking laugh, disappeared in the thicket.

Barton took in the situation in a flash. His enemies had cunningly worked upon his sympathies to entrap him. They had killed the soldier from Fort Recovery and left his body in the path to attract the attention of the man for whom they were waiting. Hal turned to beat a retreat, but he was too late. A discordant chorus of yells and shouts deafened his ears. He heard the patter of moccasined feet and saw dusky forms hedging him in on all sides.

He made a desperate dash for life and liberty. Discharging his rifle at the nearest savage, he leaped upon a group that opposed him and, with his clubbed gun, beat them to the ground. Springing over their writhing forms, he gave a lion-like roar of defiance and dashed away with the speed and agility of a frightened buck. The Indians and half-breeds had expected no such resistance. For a moment they stared after the fleeing man.

"After him, you gaping fools!" bellowed a stentorian voice. "If he escapes, your lives shall pay the forfeit."

Already Barton had several rods the start. Admonished by the voice of their commander, the Indians and half-breeds spread themselves upon his trail. Headed off by a small party stationed to intercept his retreat toward Greenville, he turned and descended a gentle slope leading into the valley. He was gaining upon his pursuers when, as he ran blindly through the woods, he plumped into a labyrinth of wild grapevines and became hopelessly entangled. With shouts of fiendish delight and triumph his assailants again surrounded him. His mishap had lost him his gun. He struggled to his feet and, drawing his keen hunting knife, slashed and tore at the treacherous vines that bound him. Again he felt his limbs free, and again he roared defiance and attempted to break through the ranks of his enemies. Appalled by his voice and strength, they hesitated.

"On him, you cowardly hounds! On him, I say!" came the ringing command from the leader of the band.

The order was obeyed. Like ants attacking an intruder, they swarmed upon him. He thrust and cut desperately with his trusty blade of steel. They hung about his legs, sprang upon his back and bore him to the earth. He had received a severe blow upon the head and was losing consciousness. His

knife dropped from his fingers. Once more his enemies shouted in glee. But just as they thought they had him overpowered, he arose under their combined weight, essayed to fling them off, trembled, staggered, and sank to the ground, a senseless heap.

Simon Girty strode forward and cried angrily:

"You infernal cowards! If you've killed him, I'll have you flayed alive. Is he dead, Jean?"

"Ze big buffalo not dead—him still breave," announced the half-breed, after a hasty examination.

"It's a good thing that he does," returned the renegade, sternly. "Give me the packet he carries in his hunting shirt. That's it. Now bind his arms behind him before he revives, or the devil will be to pay again. He fights like a demon, and he has the strength and activity of a lion. Who struck him that blow, Jean?"

"Bad Elk hit Big Buffalo wiz ze butt of him carbine," replied Jean, shrugging his shoulders.

"Bad Elk," hissed Girty, fiercely, "you know I told this man was to be captured alive, that you mustn't injure him in any way. If he dies, if we lose the pleasure of torturing him at the stake, by your disobedience, you'll take his place at the black post! Do you hear me?"

Bad Elk stoically folded his arms upon his bare chest, and grunted in the Mingo tongue:

"Ugh! Bad Elk understands. He understands, too, that Big Buffalo has killed many redmen,

many Miamis. This night he has shot one brave and felt the flesh of many others with his sharp knife. Bad Elk sees around him the mark of Big Buffalo's hatred and prowess. Bad Elk bears a wound upon his breast made by the knife of Big Buffalo. Bad Elk sought to save his own life and avenge the wounds of his brothers."

"And Bad Elk has made a cursed fool of himself," sneered Girty. "He would have killed Big Buffalo. He would have lost his own life and missed the road to the happy hunting grounds. But enough—I see Big Buffalo is reviving. Dress your wounds and let's be off. The villages will ring with the shouts of warriors and the laughter of women, and children, when we take this giant among them, and when they know that he's to be given up to torture. He opens his eyes—he moves. Help him to his feet."

Jean and another half-breed assisted Hal to arise. The Englishman was still dazed, and faint and dizzy. Gradually the mists cleared from his brain, and he realized where he was. Surrounding him were the malignant faces of his enemies. There were two score or more of them. Escape was out of the question. His head ached and he was still slightly confused; but he proudly drew himself erect and demanded haughtily:

"Curs, where's your leader, your chief?"

"Him stand zere—him brave chief," replied Jean, jerking his thumb toward the renegade.

In the dim light Hal saw a man leaning against a tree a few feet away. Bending forward, he peered into the shadowy face, and started back with the sharp cry:

"Simon Girty!"

The outlaw laughingly replied:

"Glad to see you know me, Hal Barton—Big Buffalo. What can I do for you?"

"What are you going to do with me?"

Barton's brain was clear now; he had recovered his equanimity. He asked the question coolly.

"What am I going to do with you?" returned Girty.

"Yes."

"That's an easy question to answer. I'm going to take you to the villages upon the Maumee and give you to my Indian pets to torture. They'll burn you at the stake. Any other question you want to ask before we start?"

"You laid a trap to capture me," Hal answered. "How did you know of my coming?"

"Come, that's good!" and Girty chuckled. "How did I know of your coming? Lieutenant Cartier, your warm personal friend, sent you and this bunch of papers to me."—Here the renegade shook the packet in front of Barton's face.—"I don't mind telling you all this, for you'll never live to return to Greenville. No, Hal Barton, I've waited a long time to get you in my power. I only wish I had that pock-marked friend of yours, Lew Wetzel.

You two have given me more trouble than all the other scouts in the Northwest Territory. But your mischief-making 's at an end. You'll never follow my trail again and warn the settlers of my coming. What a jubilee we'll have when we roast you over a slow fire. By the way, there's another person who'll be glad to renew your acquaintance. I've heard him speak of you frequently—oh, so lovingly!"

"Who is it?" Hal inquired, in an unmoved tone.

"I don't believe I'll tell you, Big Buffalo. I don't want to rob you of the surprise and pleasure of the meeting. You've made friends among the redskins and British; they'll give you a warm reception."

Again Girty chuckled and, turning, spoke to his men in the Miami tongue. His band was a motley one, composed of half-breeds and picked warriors from various tribes. But it was evident that all understood the renegade's commands. Placing Barton between two stalwart braves, to whom he was secured by thongs, they set out upon their northward journey. At daylight they stopped and cooked and ate their breakfast, giving Barton a liberal share of venison and parched corn. The sun came up bright and warm, and the remnants of the carpet of snow quickly disappeared. All day long and far into the night, Girty's band trudged forward. At last they again went into camp and snatched a few hours' sleep upon the bare and frozen ground. Early the next forenoon the entire

party arrived at the Indian village upon the site of which Fort Defiance was afterward erected. Here a part of the band stopped; the remainder continuing their journey down the Maumee to Fort Miami, a British fortification erected on American territory.

On his arrival at Fort Miami, Girty delivered the packet of papers he had taken from Hal Barton, Lieutenant Cartier's treasonable revelations, to Colonel McKee, the British Indian agent. This vile renegade, in the service of the English government, carefully examined them, made what notes he wanted, and ordered Girty to forward the original documents to the British authorities at Detroit.

Hal Barton's captors conducted him to the Indian village a few miles beyond Fort Miami, a large town of the allied tribes, with a sprinkling of half-breeds and outlaws. As the returning band, with the white captive in their possession, entered the outskirts of the place, warriors, squaws and children came out to meet them, and danced and yelled in mad glee at sight of the fair-haired Hercules. Girty haughtily brushed the mob aside and led the way toward the large council lodge in the center of the village. Barton walked with bowed form, unheeding the savage jeers and taunts. Once only he lifted his head; and that was when he was near his destination.

A woman's sharp cry reached his ears and aroused him from his bitter thoughts. Glancing up

quickly, he beheld a pale, haggard face and two burning eyes staring at him from the open door of a hut of poles. The strong man shivered as though he had seen a ghost, and a deep groan escaped him.

The face was the face of Margaret Barton—his wife!

CHAPTER XII.

On the morning of the third day after Hal Barton's capture by Simon Girty and his band, Lew Wetzel walked into the presence of General Wayne at Fort Recovery. The scout's appearance gave positive proof that he had not been upon a pleasure jaunt. His rough clothing was torn, water-soaked and muddy. His hands and face were scratched and bleeding. But he was the same sturdy, philosophical woodman, in spite of his gaunt and dilapidated look. The weather had been wet, cold and subject to frequent and rapid changes. He had slept upon the soggy ground, forded swollen and icy streams and wormed his way through dense thickets of thorn and greenbrier. He had risked his life a dozen times to gain the information he sought, all for the love of adventure and the cause he served. A half-dozen fresh scalps dangling at his belt told that he had been in close quarters, and that his rifle had done deadly execution.

"Wetzel, I am glad to see you back safe and sound," was Wayne's cordial greeting, as he advanced and grasped the scout's horny hand. 'Your appearance indicates that you've traveled far and fared ill; and the bloody trophies at your side tell me that you've not at all times been in the company of your friends. Sit down and inform me of your journey and what you've ascertained of the plans and movements of the foe.'

"Of my trip, I hain't got much to say, 'cept that I've tried to carry out y'r orders, Gener'l," Wetzel answered lightly, as he seated himself and rested his gun across his knees.

"I've been to the Maumee country an' seen an' heerd a deal o' the redskins. I've tramped purty near from one end o' the river to t'other, an' I've crawled into every village 'long its banks. I've even peeked into the mouths o' the Britishers' cannons at Fort Miami. Course I had to take a few scalps, to save my own, which didn't hurt my feelin's to speak of."

The scout paused; and Wayne said, smilingly:

"It didn't hurt your feelings to kill a few Indians, eh? You're not an ardent peace partisan, then, Wetzel—no Quaker blood in you?"

"Mighty little blood in me that don't bile over at sight of an Injin," was the grim reply. The woodman's dark face was contorted by a black and terrible scowl as he continued:

"The tarnal devils killed the father I loved when

I was a mere boy. I vowed to kill as many of 'em as there was hairs in the scalp they stripped from his head. I've kept the promise I made over his dead body. An' I'm still a-killin' 'em whenever I git the chance."

"Haven't you heard that revenge belongs to the Lord, my friend?" Wayne asked, earnestly.

"Yes," slowly replied Wetzel; "an' I believe every word of it. But I'm a servant o' the Lord, an' helpin' him in his work. He can punish 'em in the next world all he wants to, but I'll have a hand in doin' it in this. Ther' ain't no use talkin' to me, Gener'l. The Injin that crosses Lew Wetzel's path 'll git a passport to the happy-huntin'-grounds. I may be wrong, but I'm jest as God made me. An' I don't lose no sleep 'bout the matter. 'F you don't kill a redskin when you've got the chance, he'll kill a dozen innocent women an' children 'fore the sun sets, maybe. An ounce o' cold lead 's an ounce o' pr'vention, so far's an Injin's concerned."

"You're more than half right," the commander admitted, "But what of your journey to the Maumee country?"

"Learned that the Injins 're huddlin' 'round ther' fires an' layin' plans fer future devilment. The pesky varmints don't like to wet ther' moccasins in snow water, 'nless ther's a right smart chance o' scalps an' plunder—an' no great risk. They'd ruther lay 'round an' gorge theirselves on beef fur-

nished by the Britishers than hunt fer venison, when the wind's from the north an' the snow flies. But they're plottin' an' plannin'; an' blowin' an' makin' speeches in their council-lodges 'bout what they'll do when spring opens. An' the Britishers 're givin' 'em aid an' encouragement, furnishin' 'em arms an' ammyntion, an' feedin' 'em on beef brought from Detroit an' cross the lakes. Gener'l, it made me so mad I could hardly keep from bitin' my tongue off to see that Britishers' fort standin' on American ground. If this thing goes on much longer, I'll lose my temper an' go to killin' Britishers same as Injins!"

"Is not your comrade, Hal Barton, an Englishman?" the General inquired mischievously, while his bright eyes twinkled.

Wetzel was silent for a few seconds. Then, looking the commander full in the face, he replied solemnly:

"Hal Barton had the misfortune to be born 'cross the water, in ol' England; but he's got an American heart in him, Gener'l. Almighty God saw it would be a mistake to leave him over there, so He sent him to this country to fight Injins an' help to make peace. Hal Barton's a man—every inch of him."

"You trust him fully?"

"Trust him, Gener'l? I've trusted my life in his hands when I was wounded an' couldn't finger a trigger, an' when a hundred yellin' red devils was all 'round us. An' I'm here alive to show how he

held me up with one hand an' carved his way out with the other. Trust him? I'd trust him to fight the very imps o' hell an' prove faithful to what he believed to be right. An' I'd give my life fer him any minute. No, Gener'l Wayne, I'm bound to say ther' ain't many native-born Americans as able an' willin' to serve this country as Hal Barton is."

Wayne was touched by the scout's uncouth but eloquent defense of his friend. Still the old soldier, for some reason, persisted:

"But I've been warned against him."

"Who done it?" Wetzal cried, excitedly fingering the stock of his rifle.

"One of my officers, a man whom I trust."

The scout's brows contracted and his eyes glistened like two points of polished steel. Slowly and distinctly he replied:

"I—know—who—you—mean, Gener'l."

"Whom?"

"That infernal scoundrel, spy an' traitor, Lieutenant Cartier!"

"My man," Wayne returned quickly, "you shouldn't make such charges unless you stand ready to prove them."

"Which I do," was the dogged response.

"Let's have no misunderstanding," the General cautioned. "Do you mean to say that you can prove Lieutenant Cartier to be a spy and traitor? Consider well before you answer."

"I don't need no time to consider, Gener'l

Wayne," was the prompt reply. "I can prove him to be 'jest what I say he is, if you're willin' to take the word of a man that's served you faithfully in the past, an' stands ready to do so ag'in."

"You mean yourself, Lew Wetzel?"

A conscious flush overspread the scout's dark face, as he replied in an embarrassed tone:

"I—I mean myself, Gener'l—not that I want to be braggin' on my own services, but—"

"I understand," said Wayne, hastily. "Go on. I'm positive that you won't make a willful misstatement, but I'm just as positive that you have misinterpreted what you've seen or heard. Go on, tell me what you know of Lieutenant Cartier that leads you to hold so poor an opinion of him."

Wetzel proceeded to tell of his pursuit of the mysterious peddler—the half-breed, Jean—and of the outcome of the adventure. General Wayne listened with rapt attention. When the scout had finished, the commander remarked gravely:

"Wetzel, I'm impressed with your candor and evident sincerity. Yet I cannot believe Lieutenant Cartier guilty of such heinous treachery. I've trusted him with most important secrets; I've made a confidant of him in many ways. No; there must be some horrible mistake. You say that you saw all this with your own eyes and heard it with your own ears?"

Wetzel nodded. Wayne mused for a few moments, and then continued:

"As I've said, I'm impressed by your sincerity. You have aroused my suspicions. But of positive proof, I have none; you have none to offer. For the present the matter must rest as it is. Lieutenant Cartier would deny the accusation and you could prove nothing. I'll watch, and you'll keep this particular part of our interview a profound secret. By the way, you're acquainted with the renegade to whom the paper was delivered, Simon Girty?"

"I know more of him, Gener'l, than any honest man wants to know."

"Have you seen him since the time of which you've told me?"

"I ain't jest exactly certain," replied Wetzel, dubiously, "but I kind o' think I have."

"Explain."

"Well, night afore last, as I was pushin' my way toward this p'int o' the compass, I come 'pon a small band of redskins an' half-breeds campin'. I crept as close to 'em as I dared, but the campfire was burnin' dim, an' I couldn't well see the'r faces. Still, I'm purty certain Simon Girty was among 'em. They'd been up to some devilment some place, fer they had a white prisoner. He was a big man, 'most as big as Hal Barton, as near as I could tell. But he was lashed to a saplin' an' his back was toward me, so I couldn't tell nothin' 'bout who he was."

A startled expression, like a swift shadow, swept

over the commander's clear-cut visage, as he asked, quickly:

"Wetzel, did the prisoner you saw wear the uniform of the United States army?"

"It was too dark, I couldn't see," the scout answered wonderingly.

"Are you positive that he was a large man, as large as Barton?"

"Well, purty nigh as big as Hal Barton, Gener'l, if not quite. Of course, I can't be real positive, seein' I was some distance from the man, an' the campfire flickerin' an' burnin' dim. What makes you ask?"

General Wayne answered excitedly:

"On last Monday morning, three days ago, an orderly left here, bearing an important communication to the commandant at Greenville. I instructed the man, one of my most trusty fellows, to return immediately. He should have been back here Tuesday. This is Thursday, and he has not put in an appearance. Do you think it possible that an accident has befallen him, that he has been killed by some prowling band of savages, or captured?"

"It's possible, Gener'l, that y'r man's been killed 'r took pris'ner by Simon Girty 'r some other renegade an' his band o' red devils. But more 'n likely he's safe an' sound 'mong some o' his ol' comrades at Greenville. Why didn't you send Hal Barton with y'r message? He'd 'ave took it through quicker an' safer 'n any soldier in y'r army."

"Barton was not here," the commander replied, "nor is he here now. After your departure for the Maumee country I sent him to Greenville to await orders. I thought that anyone could traverse the distance between here and there in perfect safety; so I sent the orderly, mounted and armed, to carry my communication. It was a grave mistake, I fear. I should have kept your friend here for such service. Wetzel, are you thoroughly exhausted?"

"Not so near give out but I can do anything you want done, Gener'l."

"Could you go to Greenville some time today—or, at farthest, tomorrow?"

"I can go at once—right now."

And the scout arose with alacrity and shouldered his rifle.

"Listen, then," Wayne resumed, hurriedly. "I'm greatly worried over the prolonged absence of my messenger. The letter he bore contained important information. I'm fearful he has been killed or captured, and that my communication has fallen into the hands of the enemy. Proceed with all dispatch to Greenville. If you find the orderly there, send him back here at once. Here's an order to deliver to him. If he isn't here by tomorrow noon, I'll know that my worst fears are realized; and I'll myself come to Greenville to investigate. You needn't return to bring me word. Have you had anything to eat this morning?"

"A bite o' meat an' a drink o' water—all I need,

Gener'l. Have you anything else to say? I'm ready to start."

General Wayne's eyes were moist as he held out his hand, saying:

"I have nothing further to add. Wetzel, I appreciate your services more than you know. Good-by, and God keep you!"

"Good-by, Gener'l."

A few minutes later the scout had left the fort and was again alone in the forest. He rapidly covered the trail leading from Fort Recovery toward Greenville, and at ten o'clock reached the scene of the murder of Wayne's orderly, the place where Hal Barton had been captured. After carefully inspecting the ground and examining the body of the dead soldier, Wetzel leaned against a tree and muttered:

"O! Mad Anthony's surmises was jest right. Here's where the soldier was killed by the pesky redskins—an' here's his dead body. It all comes o' sendin' a green man to carry letters through the woods, where death's liable to be lurkin' behind every tree an' bush. An' of course he had to go on horseback, so as to be a fair an' full mark fer the Injins layin' in ambush. When will them military fellers learn that they can't fight redskins like they fight white people, I wonder? The soldier's dead, an' his horse has wandered off into the woods to starve, I s'pose; so ther' ain't nothin' fer me to do but hurry on to Greenville an' send a squad back

to give him decent burial an' keep his bones from the wolves. It's a wonder some pack hain't smelled him out 'fore this."

The scout paused and looked intently at the face of the dead man. Then he resumed:

"Poor feller! He never knowed what hurt him. But ther's one thing that puzzles me. I can't understand it. Ther's signs all round this place of a mighty tussle. This soldier was killed all of a sudden; an' he didn't have nobody with him. He couldn't have made a fight. Who was it, then? Somebody's been captured, an' I s'pect it's the same prisoner I saw night afore last. The whole thing looks like the work o' Simon Girty, 'r some other outlaw. I see a trail o' blood leadin' into yon thick-et. I'll jest foller it an' see what I can find."

Parting the bushes, the scout was greeted by the stony stare of a dead Indian half reclining against a fallen tree-trunk. The brave had been shot through the chest, and had slowly bled to death.

"Sent one o' the greasy varmints to the happy-huntin'-grounds 'fore he give in, whoever he was," was the unmoved comment of Wetzel, as he retraced his steps to the place where the dead soldier lay. "I can't make it out—the marks 's too old. The man I saw in the Injins' an' outlaws' possession was a big, strong feller—bears an' buffaloes! It couldn't 'ave been Hal Barton—could it? Well, I'm wastin' time foolin' 'round here. I must git on to Greenville."

Shouldering his gun, he resumed his journey; and at four o'clock entered the gate of the fortification at Greenville.

CHAPTER XIII.

Captain Axline stood in front of his quarters at Greenville, talking to Rory McFarlan and Jack Keelson. The sun was sinking behind the western treetops, and the air was growing chill, although the day had been one of cloudless splendor and warm for the season. The two privates were greatly excited, both trying to talk at the same time, and giving the officer little chance to say anything.

"Rory, Rory!" cried Axline, in exasperation, at last. "Stop your clatter, just for a second. You don't give me time to get head nor tail of what you are trying to tell. Do you mean to say Hal Barton has been absent from camp for three days, and that you're uneasy over his absence?"

"Yis, Oi do," snorted Rory, irritably.

"Of course," assented Jack, giving a hitch to his trousers, and viciously chewing his quid of tobacco.

"But I cannot understand why you should be

concerned about him," said the Captain. "Hasn't he demonstrated time after time that he's able to take care of himself in the woods?"

"Sure, he has, jist," answered McFarlan. "But this toime he was afeared, hisself, he was runnin' plump into a hornets' nist."

"Yes," Keelson explained, "Barton told Rory jüst before he started, he was sailin' under Lieutenant Cartier's orders, but that he was afraid his chart was a false one an' his compass untrue, an' that he'd git into shoal water an' go aground on some hidden reef——"

"Stop, stop!" commanded Captain Axline. "Let me ask you a few direct questions, for it seems impossible to get an idea of what you mean from your senseless jargon. Do you know where Barton has gone?"

"To Fort Recovery, jist," Rory volunteered; "'r thot's where he intended to go, Cap'n."

"When did he start?"

"Three mortal days ago. An' he hain't come back, jist, an'——"

"What was his errand?"

"Ochone, Cap'n! But hain't Oi been afther tellin' yez that he wint to take a letter to ould Mod Anthony, an' thot he was sint by thot spalpane of a Cartier——"

"Lieutenant Cartier sent him with a letter to the commander?"

"Sure he did." And the Irishman nodded vigorously.

"Well, I see nothing in all that you have told me over which to be excited or worried."

"Listen, Cap'n," cried Keelson, standing with his bow legs far apart and his finger raised impressively. "Hal Barton was s'picious of the Lieutenant's motive in sending him 'pon a voyage to Fort Recovery. He was of the notion that Cartier meant both ship an' cargo to be lost, to fall into the hands o' pirates. D'you understand me, Cap'n?"

"Do you mean that Hal Barton suspected Lieutenant Cartier's motive in ordering him to carry a letter to General Wayne, that the scout thought the Lieutenant intended that the communication and its bearer should fall into the hands of the Indians?"

"Thot's it!" Rory exclaimed. "Thot's w'ot we'd be afther tellin' yez, Cap'n."

"Hal Barton told you this as he was leaving, McFarlan?"

"He did, jist."

Captain Axline bent his head in deep thought for some moments. He was aroused by hearing Rory say:

"An' he said, Cap'n, thot if he wasn't back here in three days, Oi was to tell yez—an' yez 'd know w'at to do."

"I see—I understand," remarked the officer, and again relapsed into silence.

"But w'at 're yez goin' to do?" the Irishman cried,

impatiently. "'Re yez goin' to let Hal Barton be burnt at the stake by the murderin' red naygurs—if they hain't killed him intoirely 'fore this—'r are yez goin' to sind out a squad o' the bhoys to hunt him?"

"I hardly know what to do," Axline admitted, a perplexed look upon his handsome young face. "I wish General Wayne were here, or Lew Wetzel _____"

"If it's Lew Wetzel you want to see, Cap'n," interrupted Keelson, "there he goes sailin' into the commandant's quarters this very minute, with a coontail streamin' from his masthead."

Captain Axline glanced swiftly in the direction indicated and beheld the scout entering the commanding officer's hut.

A half-hour the three waited for Wetzel to emerge. The sun had disappeared, the air was rapidly growing colder. Rory and Jack danced about, slapped their thighs with their open palms and complained of the cold. Axline was silent. When at last the scout put in an appearance the officer accosted him:

"Wetzel, I'm pleased to see you. You got back unharmed from your dangerous trip to the Maumee country, I see?"

"All safe and sound," smiled the woodman; "but proper hungry right at the present time, an' mighty anxious to git some supper. What's the chances, Cap'n, fer a square meal?"

"Very good, I think," Axline replied. "Rory and Jack will attend to your wants. After supper the three of you come to my room. I wish to consult you upon a grave matter. You'd better not speak of it"—This was addressed to Keelson and McFarlan—"among your comrades. Don't delay. Meet me as soon as possible."

An hour later they were assembled in Axline's quarters. Wetzels first words were:

"Cap'n, you said you wanted to hold a talk over somethin' of importance. I'm perfectly willin' to listen to you an' give you any help I can, in any way. But first I'd like to slip out an' hunt up Hal Barton. I hain't seen him fer some time an'——"

"It's of Hal Barton I wish to speak," interrupted the Captain.

"Of Hal Barton—what of him?" returned the scout, a shade of uneasiness in his tone.

Keelson fidgeted uneasily. McFarlan's mouth flew open and he essayed to speak, but Axline waved them into silence and began an explanation. Wetzels listened with rapt attention, his dark pock-marked face reflecting the play of his emotions. At last, unable longer to restrain himself, he leaped to his feet and strode up and down the room. His features worked and the tears oozed from his eyes, as he said, half angrily, half sorrowfully:

"At this very minute Hal Barton's a prisoner 'mong the redskins, an' in the pow'r o' Simon Girty, a fate worse'n death. The same band that killed

General Wayne's orderly, on the road here with a letter fer the commandant, captured him. He was sent into a trap by Lieutenant Cartier—an' Lieutenant Cartier shall pay fer it! Hear me, you men—an' Lew Wetzel never yet broke his word to red man 'r white—if a hair o' Hal Barton's head is harmed, that infernal Frencher 'll meet death at my hands! Yes, if I have to trail him from one end o' the world to t'other. If you wanted to ask me what to do in this case, Cap'n, all I've got to say's this: I'm goin' to foller them red devils an' try to rescue Hal Barton. You keep an eye on that Frencher; but don't kill him till I come back—leave him to me. Hal Barton was my friend——”

At this point the woodman's voice choked. Captain Axline turned away his face, and Keelson and McFarlan surreptitiously rubbed their eyes and nervously fumbled at their garments. For a full minute not a word was spoken. Then the scout quietly arose and, wiping his eyes upon the sleeve of his hunting-shirt, said:

“Cap'n, you'll please excuse me. It's been many a long day since Lew Wetzel played the baby. But Hal Barton's been a brother to me——” Here his voice again threatened to fail him. “I love him better'n any bein' on earth—not exceptin' my mother. I'm goin' to foller the cussed imps that has him in the'r pow'r. An' I'll bid you all good-by—fer I'm goin' to rescue him, 'r die a-tryin'. If I ain't back in a month from today, you may know

the Injins has got my scalp. An' then, in the name o' God and justice, put a bullet through that Frencher's black heart! Goodby—I'm a-goin'——"

He stopped abruptly and dropped his head in thought. His companions, in respectful silence, waited for him to resume. After a minute's silence, he remarked, as though communing with himself:

"But I can't start till I see Gener'l Wayne. He'll want to see me—an' he'll be here tomorrow. Well, a few hours won't make no differ'nce, fer the Injins has got Hal Barton to the'r villages by this time, an' they'll pow-wow fer a week 'r two 'fore they make him run the gantlet 'r tie him to the black stake. I'll wait an' see the Gener'l. Goodnight, men, I ain't feelin' first-rate—an' I want to be alone."

He shouldered the rifle that never left his presence, and seldom left his hands, and strode out into the blackness of the night. The three soldiers stood irresolutely looking into each other's faces. Finally Rory said, in a mournful and subdued tone:

"Come, Jack, we'll be afther goin'. Ther's no more to be said 'r done. May the morry bring Mod Anthony to us—we nade him. Ochone! but surely the divil's own work's been done, jist. Oi'd loike to git me fingers in thot dom Frincher's long wool fer one blissed minute, jist——"

"Wouldn't I smash his binnacle?" interjected Jack.

Captain Axline stood silently staring at the blank

log wall. Even when the two comrades bade him good-night and withdrew, he did not answer. After they were gone, he mechanically seated himself and indited a letter to Joanna and Judith, telling them of Barton's capture.

"I'll have an opportunity to send it to them to-morrow," he thought, as he snuffed out the candle and sought his couch. "Poor Judith—poor girl! It will break her heart. Black treachery! I'll do my duty when General Wayne comes, if I lose my commission!"

The young officer could not sleep; and morning found him still wide-eyed and restless. That day a small squad of soldiers went to recover the body of the murdered orderly and give it decent interment. When they returned to Greenville, late in the afternoon, they were accompanied by General Wayne and his staff. A prey to suspense, the old soldier had set out from Fort Recovery early in the morning. As soon as Captain Axline became aware of his commander's arrival, he sought an interview. Wayne's face was very grave, a few minutes later, when he said to the orderly at the door:

"Find Lieutenant Cartier, Lew Wetzell, Jack Keelson and Rory McFarlan, and send them to me at once. Then admit no one else."

The Lieutenant was the last of the four to arrive. A look of surprise rested upon his sallow countenance, as he saw the company. After respectfully saluting his superior officer, nodding stiffly to Axline

and disdainfully ignoring the presence of the others, he stood at attention, awaiting General Wayne's pleasure. The two privates stood elbow to elbow in the rear of the room, impatiently awaiting the General's first words. Axline was haggard, and absent-mindedly tapped the earth with the toe of his boot. Wetzel glared wickedly at the newcomer, and breathed hard.

"Good evening, Lieutenant," were Wayne's pleasant words of greeting. "I trust everything has gone well in my absence."

"So far as I know, everything has gone well," was Cartier's unembarrassed reply. "But, of course, you have seen the commandant, General, and he has informed you better than I can. I have looked after the matter you gave me in charge."

"Did you complete the maps and specifications I ordered you to prepare?"

General Wayne asked this question in a careless tone, with a preoccupied air.

"Complete them, General?" Cartier cried, in well-feigned surprise, lifting his black brows and opening his eyes very wide. "Did you not receive them?"

The commander was all attention at once. His thin nostrils dilated as though he scented danger; and the pupils of his keen eyes were cold, as he inquired sharply:

"Did I receive them, Lieutenant? I don't understand you."

"I sent them to you, General, three or four days ago," replied Cartier, with surprise and incredulity in tone and gesture.

"You sent them to me? By whom?"

And Wayne's voice was hard and stern.

"By one of your trusted scouts, Hal Barton."

The merest hint of a sneer curled the Lieutenant's thin lips as he said this. Wetzel's brows contracted and his eyes flashed in the firelight. Intuitively the simple-minded woodman saw what was coming. Axline started nervously, and Jack and Rory exchanged meaning glances.

"You sent them to me at Fort Recovery by Hal Barton?" Wayne pursued.

"Yes, General."

"I didn't receive them. Will you explain?"

With outstretched hands Cartier made a deprecating gesture, as he replied calmly:

"I sent them as I have told you, General Wayne. I have no explanations to offer."

The commander's face flushed. His anger was rising. "But why did you send them *at all?* Why did you run the risk of losing them to the enemy? I did not order nor ask you to do so."

With cool assurance and apparent innocence, the Lieutenant answered:

"You told me you wanted them as soon as I could prepare them, General. I did not know you were so soon to return, and I thought you would be pleased to receive them."

"Lieutenant Cartier, I instructed you to prepare them, to have them ready by my return. I made no suggestion that you should send them to me. I insist that you explain."

For some seconds a breathless silence prevailed in the bare apartment. The two principals looked hard at each other. The flickering firelight cast grotesque shadows upon the rough log walls. Outside the wind shrieked around the fortification.

"I'm waiting, Lieutenant," Wayne said at last in cold, even tones.

"What do you desire?"

Cartier's sallow face was twitching; and the hand that stroked his beardless chin trembled.

"I have told you. That you explain why you thought of sending those important documents to Fort Recovery."

"I had but one reason—the one I have given you."

"That's a dom lie!" Rory whispered to Jack. And the latter nodded approval.

"Keep silent or leave the room!" said General Wayne, sternly, turning upon the offenders and transfixing them with his fierce eyes. Then, to Cartier:

"You have no further explanation to offer. Very well—we'll see, Lieutenant. Hal Barton has been captured by Simon Girty and a band of Indians and half-breeds; and he and the papers are in possession of the British at this very moment. There's more than a suspicion in the minds of some of your

comrades that you intended the scout and the precious package he bore to fall into the hands of the enemy. To put it bluntly, that you purposely sent him into a trap."

Again silence reigned. Cartier's hand ceased to tremble. His face flushed, then paled; but he maintained a defiant attitude and an expression of injured innocence. Axline anxiously awaited the outcome. After a full minute, Cartier said slowly and sullenly:

"General Wayne, you do me great wrong by even mentioning the base suspicions of my enemies."

"Your enemies—who are they?"

With a disdainful sweep of the hand the Frenchman replied boldly:

"The men I see present, Captain Axline and his *friends*."

He accented the last word of the sentence. Axline did not change countenance. Wetzel smiled grimly; and the two privates winked and nodded knowingly.

"Why do you call them your enemies?" the General continued.

"Because they have been trying for some time to poison your mind against me."

"Answer me this question, Lieutenant. Is there cause for their suspicion?"

Cartier nerved himself for a supreme effort. He must convince the commander of his innocence and loyalty. He turned white to the lips and the blood

sang in his ears, as he realized that he must risk all upon one throw of the dice. If he won, he would have time to complete his work and escape. If he lost, he would be court-martialed and shot. After moistening his pale lips with his tremulous tongue, he answered solemnly and impressively:

"General Wayne, I cannot imagine what reason these men have for their charge against me. They may be honest in their belief; but they are mistaken. Before God I swear that I am absolutely innocent! And I ask that the whole matter be investigated at once."

"The owdacious spalpane!" Rory could not refrain from muttering.

"The bloody buccaneer!" Jack seconded, *sotto voce*.

The commander silenced them with a look, and proceeded:

"Lieutenant, I charge you with nothing; your comrades in arms charge you with nothing. But there are suspicious circumstances about this affair that all have noted, circumstances that I cannot understand. I find it hard to believe that Simon Girty and his villains were in Barton's path by mere coincidence——"

"I find it just as hard to believe as yourself, General," Cartier interrupted quietly.

Without heeding the interruption, Wayne continued:

"I fail to comprehend how so skilled a woodman

as Barton has proven himself to be could be captured, unless——”

“Are you sure that he was captured, General?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“How do you know that he was captured?”

“He never reached me with the maps and specifications. Besides, Lewis Wetzel saw him among Simon Girty’s men—the same band that murdered the orderly I sent out from Fort Recovery.”

“Yet I do not think he was captured.”

“What do you mean?”

“If Lew Wetzel saw Hal Barton among Simon Girty’s men, then the latter was there by choice.”

“You mean——”

“I mean that he has proven false to the trust you reposed in him, General. He has turned traitor and gone over——”

“Jest one more word o’ that kind o’ talk an’ you’re a dead man!”

It was Wetzel who spoke. His rifle was at his shoulder, his finger upon the trigger. Immovable as a statue of bronze he stood sighting along the gleaming barrel. The others of the company were paralyzed by the suddenness of his movements and the evidence of his deadly intent. Rory was the first to recover himself. Springing forward, he threw up the muzzle of the gun, crying:

“Hould y’r hand, Lew Wetzel! Would yez do murder? Though Oi ain’t sayin’ the blackguard don’t deserve to be killed intoirely, jist.”

Cartier staggered to the wall and leaned heavily against it. His features were colorless and his limbs were shaking. General Wayne breathed a deep sigh of relief, and, turning upon the scout, said severely:

"Surely you had no intention of doing what you threatened?"

"I meant to kill him, Gener'l, if he said another word 'bout Hal Barton bein' a traitor an' deserter," was Wetzel's unmoved reply.

"But don't you know that death would have been your portion had you murdered Lieutenant Cartier, man?"

"I know all that, Gener'l; but life ain't worth much anyhow. An' I won't hear a word ag'in Hal Barton from any man on earth. It don't 'pear to me that I'm doin' any good here, so I'll be goin' to my quarters. All I ask, Gener'l, is permission to go to the aid o' my friend. I want to start tomorrow mornin'. What have you got to say?"

"Of course you may go. I appreciate your devotion to your friend, Wetzel; but you were too impulsive just now. Will you need help in your enterprise?"

"A whole company o' soldiers wouldn't do me no good where I'm goin'; but I thank you fer the offer, Gener'l. I'll bid you goodby, fer I may not see you ag'in. It's mighty hard to tell. An' fer the Lord's sake, y'r own sake, an, the sake o' y'r country, Gen-

er'l, don't trust that black-hearted Frencher with any more secrets!"

The scout pointed his finger at the cowering Lieutenant, and was gone from the room ere the commander could frame a reply. With Wayne's permission, McFarlan and Keelson quickly followed the woodman. When the three were gone, the General said :

"Lieutenant Cartier, I've made no charges against you; I make none now. Time will reveal the secrets of Barton's mysterious capture or desertion, whichever it may prove to be. As speedily as possible you will prepare another set of the maps. The revelation of my plans to the enemy will oblige me to change them. You may go now; I wish to speak with Captain Axline. Good-night, Lieutenant."

Without a word, but with a slight obeisance, Cartier withdrew. When the door had closed behind the retreating officer, the commander turned to the Captain and with an oath declared :

"That man is an infernal traitor and spy! But I'll give him rope with which to hang himself. He can do no more mischief than he has already done. There's no positive proof against him at present. I don't know, Axline, but it would have been well to let Lew Wetzel put a bullet through the scoundrel's heart. Step to the door and tell the orderly to send the commandant and my staff officers here. I want to talk over important matters with all of you."

When the voice of the sentry announced the hour

of midnight, the lights were still burning in General Wayne's quarters and the old warrior was still discussing the coming campaign with his trusted officers.

CHAPTER XIV.

At dawn, with a backward glance at the barracks where the soldiers were still slumbering heavily, Lew Wetzel glided through the outer gate of the fortification at Greenville, and disappeared along the trail leading to Fort Recovery. At the moment the scout passed without the walls, Rory McFarlan vigorously shook his comrade and bellowed in his ear:

“Git up, Jack Keelson. If yez’re goin’ wid me, yez ain’t a minute to lose. Oi’ve made up me moind; Oi’m goin’ to foller Lew Wetzel. An’ the mon’s gone a’ready, jist, widout a boite o’ breakfast. Sure, an’ he must be tough as a blackthorn shillalah.”

“What’s the row, mate?” Keelson cried, as he sprang to his feet and rubbed his swollen eyes.

At the sound of conversation several of their sleeping comrades stirred uneasily. Rory placed a finger upon his lips, and, drawing Jack aside, whispered impressively:

"Ain't we goin' wid Lew Wetzel, to help in the rescue o' Hal Barton, Jack Keelson?"

"Of course," assented the sailor.

"Let's be off, thin. He's got sever'1 minutes the start of us. We'll git a permit from the Colonel, jist, an' be afther him in a jiffy."

But Keelson shook his head and replied:

"'Twon't do no good to go to the Colonel. He don't know nothin' 'bout it; he won't give us no passports."

"W'at 'll we do, thin?" Rory cried, impatiently. "Spake quick, mon, ther' ain't no time to lose."

"Go to ol 'Mad Anthony hisself."

"But, bejabbers! He ain't up yit. An' he'll be Mod Anthony, indade, if we rouse him."

"It's all we can do. Let's pipe him on deck."

"Come yez on, thin, Jack Keelson—an' be quick."

A few minutes later they were thundering at General Wayne's door. When admitted they beheld the commander half-dressed, standing before them in silent wonder. Rory hurriedly made known his business and concluded:

"Does yez give us l'ave to go, Gener'1?"

"But Wetzel said last night that one hundred soldiers could not aid him, would be a hindrance to him, in fact."

"That's true, Gener'1—he did say that lasht noight. But this mornin' he's changed his moind, an' he wants me an' Jack to go wid him."

"Very well, be off. I'll explain to your Colonel."

Like two boys released from school, Jack and Rory left the General's quarters, quickly secured their arms and hastened in pursuit of the scout. The morning was clear and cold. Hoar frost covered the dead leaves and twigs beneath their feet and sparkled in the first faint rays of the morning sun. As they left the fortification, they heard the impatient stamp and neigh of hungry horses, and the clatter and stir of privates and officers arousing to the duties of the day. The sleepy sentinel at the gate permitted them to pass without question; and they were without the walls.

"Which way did he steer?" Jack inquired of his companion.

"'Long the road to Fort Recovery, in course."

At a swift trot they pressed forward, expecting to overtake the scout in a few minutes. Neither of the two had ever been over the trail before; but it appeared to be well trodden and easy to follow.

An hour passed and they had not caught a glimpse of the flying woodman. Both were panting and perspiring from their unusual exertions.

"Be the howly St. Patrick, who drove the snakes from ould Oireland!" gasped McFarlan at last, "Oi don't understand the m'anin' o' this, Jack Keelson."

"N'r I," Keelson panted. "It seems to be a broad an' easy wake to foller. But where's the vessel?"

A moment they gazed at each other in silent perplexity. Then Rory cried:

"Sure, an' we're a pair o' fools, Jack, to be loiterin' here parleyin'. An' we'll niver ketch him by standin' still an' gawkin' at each other. Come on, yez."

Again they pushed onward as rapidly as the increasing unevenness of the ground would permit. The trail grew fainter and at last divided.

"Which way, now?" Jack asked.

"Always kape to the roight," Rory replied sentimentously.

They did so. Of course, they did not know it, but they had left the main road leading to Fort Recovery, and had taken an old Indian trail leaving the fort on the left and running due north. As they proceeded both had misgivings that they had gone astray, but neither confided his fears to the other. The trail grew fainter and fainter, and finally split into a number of paths forming a labyrinth among the trees.

"W'at's to be done, Jack Keelson?" McFarlan inquired as he came to a stop, a hopeless, helpless expression upon his freckled face.

"Don't know."—And Jack shook his head slowly and impressively.—"Never saw such a nest o' islands, reefs an' channels, in my born days. 'Pears like we've lost our bearin's. But what's become o' that hulk we've been follerin'?"

"It's more'n this son o' me mother knows, jist," was Rory's reply. "But we've got to do one o' two things; turn tail an' go back to the other road, 'r

kape on along one o' these cowpaths. W'at says yez?"

"I'm fer steerin' dead ahead an' trustin' to luck."

"All roight, Jack Keelson. Oi'm wid yez."

Choosing what appeared to be the main path, they followed its intricate doublings and turnings for some time. The sun rode high in the heavens and the day grew warmer. As they pushed farther and farther into the trackless wilds—for the last faint traces of the path had disappeared—they made the woods ring with their shouts, hoping in this way to attract the attention of the scout, who they still hoped was but a short distance in advance of them. Disgusted and weary at last, they sat down upon a mossy log to talk over their predicament.

"We're on the wrong tack," Keelson remarked, moodily. "A stern chase's a long chase, when you know you're follerin' in the wake o' the ship you want to overhaul; an' when you've lost sight of 'er an' ain't no idee where she is—not a sail in sight—it's a never-endin' chase. I'm fer takin' the sun on our starboard bow, an' putting back to Greenville. We hain't had a bite to eat today; an' fer one, I can't hold out much longer."

"An' does yez p'pose to go back to camp to be the laughin'-stock o' ivery sojer there?" Rory angrily inquired.

"Better be the laughin'-stock of our mates, than to die o' hunger," Jack replied sullenly.

"Sure, an' can't we kill somethin' to ate, an' cook it, jist?"

"What 'd we kill, I'd like to know? We hain't seen fish n'r fowl sence we started. Might as well be wrecked on a desert island. If I was on the high seas—an' I was a fool fer not stayin' there—with a good keel under me, I'd know what to do. But here I'm as helpless as a 'Gyptian mummey—an' you ain't no better."

"Yez talk o' goin' back to Greenville, Jack Keelson; an' Oi'll bet a dram o' good liquor yez don't know no more n'r the mon in the moon in w'at direction it is."

McFarlan had lost all idea of their whereabouts and suspected that his companion was no wiser. He anxiously awaited the sailor's reply.

"Pshaw!" sneered Jack.

"W'at way is it, thin?"

Keelson indicated a point of the compass.

"Yez 're fool, Jack!" Rory snorted. "An' completely turned about. Yez 're pointin' due north—roight toward the Injin country."

"You're an idiot, Rory McFarlan!" Keelson returned hotly.

"An' yez 're another!"

"The same to you!"

After this exchange of compliments they glared at each other in silence, for some time. Presently Jack said timidly:

"Rory."

"Well, Jack?"

"It's no use to quar'l. We've got to git our reckonin's 'fore we can continue this voyage 'r put back to port."

"Yes."

"Well, listen. Wasn't the sun in our wake when we set sail?"

"Oi've clean fergot—pr'aps it was."

"An' hain't we been bearin' north-by-north-west, all the while?"

"It may be—Oi'll be blessed if Oi know!"

"An' hain't the sun been swingin' south-by-west, all the forenoon?"

"If yez knows, Jack Keelson, yez knows more'n Oi do."

"Well, then, right there lies Greenville. An' we'd better be startin'."

"Roight where?"

"There."—And Jack pointed toward the south-east.

"Oi don't bel'ave it!"

"May ol' Neptune take you fer an ignorant an' blunderin' land-lubber, Rory McFarlan!" Keelson cried angrily.

"An' may the divil take yez fer a salt-wather ignoramus—an' sure, the ol' bhoy's too smart to take yez fer anything ilse, jist!" Rory retorted.

Again they sat and glared at each other; but their heated tempers soon cooled. This time McFarlan was the first to speak.



With a bold and fearless glance he swept the sea of faces before him

"Jack," he ventured.

"What is it, Rory?" was the reply.

"Oi say that Greenville lies roight over there."—
And he pointed due north.

"An' I say it lays there." Indicating the south-east.

"How'll we fix it, Jack?"

"It don't need no fixin'. *I'm* right; *you're* wrong."

"No; *Oi'm* roight—*yez* 're wrong."

"Le's draw cuts an' decide."

"Oi'm wid *yez*. If *Oi* git the longest one; we go *thot* way; if *yez* gits the longest one, we go *thot* way."

"All right."

They prepared the cuts and drew; and the Irishman got his choice.

Again they resumed their journey, leaving Greenville directly behind them. Refreshed by this short rest, although suffering the pangs of hunger, they steadily plodded forward. Jack was positive they were moving farther and farther from camp; but he comforted himself with the hope that they would eventually overtake Wetzel. Rory gave little thought to the matter. He had no faith in his comrade's ability to tell where they were. It was all chance—one direction was as likely to bring them out of their difficulty as another.

They kept on and on. A sort of stubborn hopelessness took possession of them; and, in spite of

hunger and fatigue, they set their teeth and silently dragged forward. The afternoon waned and night was swiftly approaching. The shadows deepened around them. With an involuntary shiver, Rory stopped suddenly and whispered in his companion's ear:

"Jack Keelson, does yez know w'at's goin' to become o' us?"

"No," replied Jack in the same guarded undertone, as he glanced apprehensively around.

"Well, we're goin' to starve an' freeze; an' be killed, scalped, an' burnt at the stake by them black-guardin' red naygurs."

"I ain't much afraid o' anything but starvin'," the sailor answered composedly. "We can build a fire an' keep from freezin', an' we've got to do it purty soon, for I've got the shivers this minute. As fer the Injins, we hain't seen none. N'r we hain't seen no game, an' that's the worst trouble."

"We're two precious fools fer coming' an' it's all y'r fault, Jack," Rory muttered sullenly.

"That's right—lay the lanyard on me," the sailor returned grumblingly.

"Didn't yez want to come this way, jist?"

"No."

"Yez did, Jack Keelson. When Oi wanted to turn about an' go back, yez would come right straight on."

"Huh!" Jack sneered contemptuously.

"Jack, Oi'd give me ould flintlock fer a dram o' the craythur. Oi'm perishin' fer a drap to drink."

"You're hungry, that's all that ails you. The bilge water's gittin' 'bove y'r cargo. But le's build a fire. Ther' ain't no use freezin' an' starvin' both. We'll anchor here tonight, an' in the mornin' we'll steer back to Greenville."

"Greenville! How'll yez foind it, jist?"

"You let me be master o' the craft, an' quit y'r raisin' a mutiny every watch, an' I'll bring us safe to port."

"Yez say so, Jack?"

"I do."

"Be me father's off ox, Oi'll do thot same! Oi'll not say another word, jist, if yez poilet us into the center o' Africa."

"Le's build a fire," Keelson suggested, with chattering teeth.

"All roight."

They set to work gathering fuel. When they had accumulated quite a pile, Jack made an effort to ignite it with flint and steel. Suddenly Rory tilted his pug nose aloft and suspiciously sniffed the atmosphere. Then he announced solemnly but emphatically:

"Jack Keelson, Oi smell mate a-cookin'!"

"Nonsense!" the sailor ejaculated as he rained a shower of sparks upon the dead leaves and dry moss.

"Oi *do*," the Irishman persisted.

"You're goin'—crazy from—hunger," replied Jack, clashing the flint and steel together and blowing vigorously upon the tinder. "I've seen cases—o' the kind—more'n once; but I never—saw a mate—give in to it so soon. By the great—bear, but I b'lieve you're right!"

The sailor dropped flint and steel and was upon his feet in an instant. With closed eyes and dilated nostrils, he took one deep inhalation after another. Presently he cried joyously:

"Rory, you're not mistaken. Somebody to the wind'ard's cookin' meat—an' not many cable-lengths away, either."

"Sure!"—And McFarlan sniffed and nodded.—
"W'at'll we do, Jack?"

"Le's investigate. May be it's a camp o' white men."

"'R a band o' red naygurs."

"It might be Lew Wetzal."

"Oh!"

"Come on—le's find out. We can't more'n git into trouble."

"Begorra! Ther' ain't no worse trouble 'n starvin'. Oi've often said Oi'd ruther foight n'r ate; an' Oi'd ruther foight n'r starve this howly minute. Le's be movin'."

Directly to the north of them lay a shallow and swampy valley. Hurriedly snatching up their guns, they cautiously descended the gentle slope leading to the bottom of the depression. By this time it was

quite dark in the thick forest. Pausing frequently to sniff the air and glance about them, they slowly worked their way forward. Suddenly Rory gripped Jack's arm and said in a stage whisper:

"Oi see a loight."

"So do I."

A few yards farther they advanced. Again the Irishman spoke:

"It's a campfoire, jist."

"Yes," Jack answered softly.

"An' Oi don't see no one 'round it."

"N'r I."

"P'raps they've ate the'r suppers an' gone."

"An' p'raps it's Injins—an' they've laid a trap fer us."

"Jack Keelson, me fri'nd, Oi can't stand the smell o' thot mate in me norsetrils. It's worse n'r the smell o' good liquor. Oi'm bound to have some of it, 'r lose me loife in a howly cause. W'at says yez?"

"I'm with you, mate. But how're we goin' to git it, without receivin' a broadside from the enemy's guns, as soon as we enter the light?"

"Oi don't know, jist."

"Le's lay down an' wait an' watch."

"An' starve! Oi can't do it, Jack—Oi'm hungry."

"Then le's walk right in, keepin' our fingers on the triggers, an' take our chances."

"Thot's roight. Come on."

Boldly the two strode forward until they stood side by side, in the full glare of the campfire. They

peered into the surrounding darkness; but saw nothing. They strained their ears; but no sound greeted them except the faint moaning of the wind among the trees and the crackle of the flames at their feet. A moment they looked at each other in utter amazement. Then, as though by preconcerted arrangement, each stooped and snatched a slice of venison from the red coals and began to devour it ravenously.

"W'at's the m'anin' of it all?" Rory asked, his mouth so full that he could scarcely articulate.

Jack took another immense bite and silently shook his head. The meat they held in their grimy hands was soon eaten; and each was reaching for the remaining slice that lay sputtering upon the coals, when they were startled by a peculiar gurgling, choking sound coming from the dense blackness just behind them. Involuntarily both turned and threw their muskets to their shoulders. This movement on their part was greeted by a guttural chuckle; and the next moment the smiling face of Lew Wetzel peeped from behind a huge tree trunk a few feet from them. Then the scout stepped from his place of concealment, exclaiming:

"Coons and beavers! I've heerd o' babies in the woods, but this is my first 'xperience in findin' 'em. I could 'ave shot a ramrod through both you fellers as you stood there together—strung you on it like fish on a line. What in tarnation 're you doin' here, anyhow?"

"Come to make yez a fri'ndly call, Lew Wetzel," replied Rory composedly. "An' yez nearly made me heart jump out o' me mouth, by y'r laughin' behoind me back, jist. Oi niver did loike to have folks make fun o' me in thot way."

Keelson gazed regretfully at the slice of venison consuming upon the hot embers and volunteered:

"We set sail from Greenville a short time after you did this mornin', meanin' to overhaul you an' lend you aid in rescuin' Hal Barton. But in some way we couldn't foller y'r wake. We lost our bearin's—an' just drifted in here by chance. We hain't had nothin' to eat today. You don't happen to have any more meat handy, do you?"

Without replying the scout brought a haunch of fresh venison from a small tree near at hand, and with his hunting knife cut several large slices and laid them upon the coals. The meat cooked quickly, its savory odors tantalizing the appetites of the hungry men. When it was done, the scout served each of his guests and took a liberal allowance himself, saying:

"I'll jest eat a bite with you—seein' I hain't had anything for twenty-four hours. I was jest gittin' ready to enjoy my supper when I heerd you two fellers comin' through the woods, makin' as much noise as an empty cart crossin' a stony ford. Won't you have another piece, my Irish friend?"

"Oi surely will," McFarlan replied promptly.

"I'll take a small slice, too," Jack remarked. "A

piece 'bout the size o' y'r two hands 'll do. I ain't near so holler an' empty as I was—feel as though a few more pounds o' meat an' some English plum-duff 'd be all I'd want."

"An' w'at the divil's plum-duff?" Rory inquired mumbly.

"Boiled plum-puddin'," the sailor explained. "The most toothsome dish in the world—a sailor's dish."

"An' yez 're hankerin' fer English plum-duff, 're yez, Jack Keelson. Yez'll be apt to git it—an' some Injin-meal-puddin' throwed in, 'fore we git back from rescuin' Hal Barton."

The sailor devoted his attention to the food in his hand and offered no reply. But Wetzel looked up quickly and said:

"Surely you men ain't in earnest 'bout meanin' to go with me to the Maumee?"

"Sure, an' we are," was Rory's positive answer.

The scout wiped his mouth upon his sleeve, and replied:

"'Twon't do. You fellers don't know nothin' 'bout scoutin'—sneakin' into Injin camps an' sneak-in' out ag'in. You'd only be a burden, a bother. You'd jest be in the road, an' keep me from doin' anything. You can't go. In the mornin' I'll give you the direction to foller, to reach Greenville. You're thirty-five 'r forty miles from there now. It's good in you to think o' helpin' me. But 'twon't do, you understand."

"It'll *have* to do, jist," Rory returned emphatically, "fer we're goin' wid yez, Lew Wetzel. We didn't foind our way here, an' we can't foind our way back; so we've *got* to gō wid yez. An' yez'll not foind us in the way. We'll l'ave iverything to yez to manage—we'll dō w'at yez says. But we'll help to dō the foightin'. Be me Oirish blood, Oi'm goin' wid yez!"

"So'm I," muttered the sailor. "I ain't goin' to sail twelve leagues jēst fer the pleasure o' sailin' back ag'in. It takes all kinds o' vessels to make a fleet—an' in some cases a sloop's as good as a frigate."

Wetzel said no more, but his face was a study. He did not know what to do. He was pleased that the two soldiers loved Hal Barton enough to risk their lives in his behalf. But he feared that the two would prove a never-failing source of annoyance and danger. He lighted his pipe and seated himself by the fire to think. Rory and Jack followed his example and silence fell upon the trio. The thought entered the scout's mind, that some time during the night he would slip away from them while they were sleeping. But he feared they might not be able to find their way back to Greenville; so he abandoned the idea. At last he arose and, throwing a few faggots upon the dying fire, remarked:

"I'll jēst take a squint 'round to see that the coast's clear. An' then we'll try to snatch a few

winks o' sleep. You fellers keep mighty mum while I'm gone."

"Look here, Lew Wetzel," McFarlan cried sharply. "Yez hain't no idee o' runnin' off an' l'avin' us, jist?"

The scout laughed outright, a rare thing for him to do. The Irishman's keen intuition amused him. Then he answered solemnly:

"No; I won't run off an' leave you, though I *could* do it, if I wanted to. You've made up your minds to go with me; I've made up my mind to take you. But you've got to leave everything to me. You fellers knows as little 'bout Injins an' the'r tricks an' deviltries as a 'possum knows 'bout heaven. Jest wait here quiet till I come back."

He sprang into the surrounding blackness and was gone, his moccasined feet giving forth no sound. A half hour passed, and he had not returned. Rory and Jack began to grow uneasy. The latter fidgeted and the former growled impatiently:

"W'at the mischief's the spalpane doin' out there in the dark so long, by hisself? Oi wish he'd come, jist; Oi'm slapy."

"Shatter my tops'l-halyards!" returned Jack. "The more I think of it, the more I'm thankful we drifted in here. It's a heap better'n tryin' to ride out the storm by ourselves."

Then reflectively: "But it 'd be a terrible thing if Wetzel 'd slip out with the tide an' leave us stranded—"

"Which he give you his promise he wouldn't do," the woodman interrupted as he stepped within the circle of light; "an' you hain't no reason to mistrust him."

The two soldiers stared at the speaker in silent amazement. They could not understand how he went and came so noiselessly. Wetzel continued:

"I've took a peep 'round, an' everything's quiet. Ther' ain't no pryin' eyes to spy out our light an' raise our scalps 'fore mornin'. I'll fix the fire, an' then we'll turn in fer forty winks o' sleep. Fer we've got to be movin' early in the mornin'."

"You don't think I'd better stay on watch, to p'rvent the redskins boardin' us under the shadder o' darkness?" Jack suggested.

"Shut up, Jack Keelson," Rory grumbled. "Don't yez think Lew Wetzel knows his business?"

The sailor made no reply. The men stretched themselves before the roaring fire and in a few minutes were fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

Hal Barton, a prisoner among the Indians at one of their numerous villages, a few miles below the British outpost, Fort Miami, had been mentally stunned and confused by the sight of his wife. He was conducted to the great council-lodge in the center of the town. The building was a large log cabin of one room. A curtain of skins closed the irregular opening in one end that did duty as a doorway; and a hole in the roof served as a window and furnished an avenue of escape for the smoke from the fire that blazed in the middle of the dirt floor. Here Hal was securely bound hand and foot and tethered to a staple in the wall. A solitary guard was placed over him; and he was left to his own wild thoughts and gloomy forebodings.

The bound Hercules lay full length upon the earthen floor of the lodge. He was exhausted, half crazed, and well-nigh in despair. He could scarcely

move for the thongs that bound him. The Indian guard sat by the fire and did not deign to cast a glance at his prisoner. No one entered the lodge to bring food or drink to the hapless captive. His throat was parched; his wrists and ankles were lacerated and bleeding. Two hours after darkness had set in, a stalwart brave entered the room, bringing meat and water to the guard. But he offered Hal nothing. The hours dragged slowly by. The Englishman could do naught but think—think. He reviewed the past; faced the present; and vainly strove to penetrate the future. So Margaret was alive and among the Indians. Was she a captive? Had she been taken prisoner, after all? He trembled at the thought. No; it could not be so. Had she not left a note explaining her departure? But the note said she had gone with his cousin, Dick Holloway, of course, across the seas. What, then, was she doing here? Was Holloway in the village, also? And if so, was Margaret his prisoner? No; the note!

Over and over in his mind he revolved the perplexing problem. He could make nothing of it. He could grasp no thread by which the tangle could be unraveled. His heart ached and his eyes grew moist, as he recalled her winsome face, and compared it with the wan countenance that had looked out upon him from the Indian hut. At any rate, it was plain that Margaret was not happy. Was it remorse, or was she a hopeless captive? Oh, if he

only knew! But what mattered it? Was not he, himself, a prisoner doomed to a horrible death? If he had wronged her, he could make no reparation now. It was too late—too late! But that note—that note!

Midnight came. The guard appeared to drowse by the fire. His chin rested upon his bronze chest; his black eyes were closed. The flames died out, and the faint glow of red embers alone lighted the room. Hal Barton could not sleep. Physical pain and mental anguish like twin demons tormented him. He stirred slightly and moaned:

“Oh, to be free! To fight my way to life and liberty—or to death and forgetfulness!”

The guard's head sank lower and lower. The faint light in the lodge grew dimmer. Hal strained at his bonds until the blood trickled from his finger tips. They were too strong—he could not break them. His hands were bound behind his back; he could not reach the thongs with his teeth. Repeated trials and failures but made him more desperate. He savagely chewed at the lariat that, passing around his neck, secured him to the log wall. He did not pause to ask himself what he expected to accomplish. An hour passed; the rope of hide was severed. The Indian guard had not changed his position. His regular breathing indicated that he slept. Barton cautiously attempted to roll himself nearer to the dying fire. He meant to essay the utterly reckless task of burning the cords

from his wrists. Writhing like a monstrous serpent, he made one complete revolution of his body. Then he lay perfectly quiet and scarcely dared to breathe. His heart labored tumultuously; his temples throbbed painfully. He was on the point of attempting a second movement, when the guard awoke with a startled grunt and sprang to his feet.

After quickly rekindling a blaze, the savage strode to the side of his prisoner. His impassive face relaxed into an amused grin when he discovered what the Englishman had done.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Big Buffalo is very hungry. Like a famished dog he gnaws at his rope."

Stooping, he rolled Barton to his former position near the wall and again secured him. Then he re-seated himself by the fire, but he dozed no more. Hal's feeble light of hope went out. To the disheartened prisoner, it seemed that dawn would never come. Completely worn out at last, he fell into a troubled sleep in which his whole life passed in review before him. When he awoke—his throat and mouth on fire, his muscles aching excruciatingly—daylight was streaming into the lodge, through chink and crevice in wall and roof. He made an effort to change his cramped position, but with a groan of agony desisted.

"Hello! Feeling first rate this morning?"

Rolling his eyes upward, Barton beheld Simon Girty standing near him, an evil smile upon his dark face. With the renegade was a half-breed,

bearing hot meat and corn-bread upon a wooden platter. Hal made no reply to the outlaw's brutal taunt.

"A little surly, eh? I'll take all that out of you in time. Here, Wolf,"—addressing the half-breed,— "give me the victuals. Now build up the fire. You'll stand guard over this big brute today. And if you let him escape—well, you know what the consequences 'll be. Sir Harry Barton of England, are you hungry?"

Girty laughed sneeringly as he made this inquiry. Instead of answering his tormentor's question, Barton asked in return:

"How do you know my name?"

"Your name? I've heard it plenty of times in the last two years. I'm not likely to forget it either—or the man that bears it."

"How do you know my name is Harry?"

"Oh! Just guessed at it. Hal's a kind of butt-cut of Harry, isn't it? But don't you want something to eat?"

"I'm hungry."

"Well, I don't know how it is with you, but when I'm hungry I eat. I've found out that's the only way to cure the complaint; but you've got to keep repeating the dose at intervals. Roll over here and let me unfasten your hands. Hello, here! You've been gnawing your rope, like any other cur. The redskins ought to have named you Big Dog instead of Big Buffalo. There, fall to and help yourself.

Wolf, bring this fellow a gourd of water. His throat's as dry as a powder-horn—he can't swallow. Sir Harry, pardon my not feeding you last night. Other urgent matters caused me to forget your comfort. By the Eternal, but you've a splendid form! It's a shame—yes, a burning shame, ha! ha!—to kill you off in your prime, by roasting you alive at the stake. By heavens, but you're a cool one! My hint of the horrible death that awaits you doesn't seem to interfere with your appetite. By all the imps of perdition! I admire you, I do. I admire your form, your grit. I believe I'd turn soft-hearted and intercede in your behalf, if it wasn't Cartier's request that you die at the stake."

"Why does Lieutenant Cartier desire my death by torture?" Barton inquired quietly, stretching forth one of his swollen and stiffened hands for another piece of meat.

"For two reasons. His own life's at stake. Beside, you know, you've given him no end of trouble in his love affairs. Yes, he wants you to die; and his wishes must be carried out. Right at the present time he has no trouble in getting everything he asks for; he's doing good service for the cause. Then, Sir Harry, I was only joking with you. I wouldn't dare to try to save you, you've been a trifle too intimate with Lew Wetzel; you've kicked over too many of these red hounds. They thirst for your blood. Of course you understand that I'm tender-hearted. But you've been fighting on the

wrong side. Here—Wolf's brought you a drink of water."

After eagerly draining the gourd of its contents, Hal returned it to the renegade, with the words:

"I understand you and your red associates perfectly, Simon Girty. Also, I understand the British and their motives and desires. I've no reason to expect mercy. I desire none. If I can escape unaided, I'll do so. Otherwise I'll die like a man."

"You're bold," Girty sneered. "You might reject the aid of many a man less able and willing to help you. But let that pass—I'll waste no more time with you. An old friend 'll call to see you after awhile."

The renegade grinned maliciously as he said this, and waited for Hal to speak; but receiving no reply he went on:

"Here, let me tie your hands. Now, if you try again to escape, I'll pin your neck to the ground with a couple of sticks. Wolf, guard this rascal well; You shall have a pint of rum for your trouble."

Girty withdrew. The half-breed took up a position near the door, gun in hand. Hal relapsed into his former condition of apparent lethargy, but his mind was busy. Two hours passed. The guard still maintained his stolid, upright position. Suddenly Barton caught the buzz of voices in earnest conversation. One of them sounded strangely familiar. The Englishman was striving to recall

when and where he had heard it, when the flap of skin was pushed aside and a white man strode into the room.

The interior was in semi-gloom; and apparently the new arrival, coming from the bright light without, did not at once notice the prisoner lying close to the dark wall. But Hal Barton, accustomed to the dusky twilight of the lodge, saw the newcomer's features distinctly. It was the debauched and crime-hardened face of his cousin, Dick Holloway!

In a torrent of rage the hot blood surged to Hal's brain. It sang in his ears, and like Thor's hammer rang blows upon his aching temples. He had vowed that he would kill his cousin, if ever opportunity offered. And here he was—he, Hal Barton, the giant—bound hand and foot; and Dick Holloway had come to mock him! The thought was maddening. He heard Holloway saying:

"Where's the prisoner? Ah! I see him now. Wolf, you may step outside; I wish to speak with him. Here's a shilling for you."

But the half-breed stubbornly shook his head and refused to take the money.

"What do you mean, you hard-headed dolt?" Holloway cried, his voice thick with anger. "Do you intend to disobey my order? Go—I say!"

The guard sullenly stood his ground, but made no reply.

"You stupid blockhead!" thundered the angry

man. His flabby face was aflame with rage. He was trembling with excitement.

"Here," he continued, "take this flask. Go and get drunk—it's all you're fit for. You will not? What's the matter? Tell me quickly, or I'll stick a knife into your worthless carcass."

The half-breed found his tongue and answered:

"Cap'n Girty him say Wolf to stay here an' watch Big Buffalo. Cap'n Girty him very mad, if Wolf leave. Him stay."

"Perdition take you and Girty both!" Holloway muttered savagely. "Keep your place, then, you idiot; it matters not to me. But Girty may cross me once too often!"

Mumbling half incoherently, he staggered to Barton's side, and stood looking down at the prostrate man. Hal returned his cousin's gaze, steadily, fiercely. He noted that Dick appeared ten years older than when he had last seen him. His countenance was rum-sodden; his gait, shuffling and nerveless. The smell of fiery liquor was upon his breath. Steadying himself, Holloway said sneeringly:

"I suppose you haven't forgotten me, cousin?"

"I know you, Dick Holloway."

The words rang out like a fling of defiance. Dick shrugged his shoulders and returned laughingly:

"Glad to hear it, I'm sure, dear cousin. Of course, you're delighted to see me. Please say that you are."

Hal was almost choking. He longed to break his fetters and tear the mocking miscreant limb from limb. He replied slowly and distinctly:

"Were my limbs free, I should be pleased to offer you the reception you so richly deserve."

"Ah! And what would you do?"

"Kill you where you stand!"

"How delightfully blood-thirsty you are, my dear relative, and how bold and defiant," Holloway returned, with a hoarse, mocking laugh. "But don't you think you're ungrateful—a little indiscreet, too?"

Barton looked the hate he felt; but made no answer.

"Why don't you talk to me?" persisted Dick. "Have you lost both your wits and your tongue?"

"Leave me to myself," was Hal's reply. "I don't care to talk to a drunken brute."

Holloway's face darkened ominously.

"Look here," he cried sharply. "Hal Barton, you're an ungrateful traitor. For years you lived on my father's bounty under the protection of the English flag. But you proved false to both your family and your country. You treacherously stole the woman I loved; you allied yourself with the enemies of your king. Today you have your reward. But blood's thicker than water. As soon as I heard of your capture, I came to console you, came promptly."

Hal made no reply.

"Yes," his cousin continued in a maudlin, sniveling tone, "I came to comfort and aid you, to save your life and free you, if possible—"

"You're a base liar—a soulless hypocrite!" interrupted Barton, in tones that made his tormentor recoil a step, and brought a look of surprise into the stolid face of the half-breed on guard. "I neither ask nor desire your aid," the prone giant continued. "I despise you. I'd trample you as a snake. And I loathe everything English for the wrongs that have been heaped upon me. A helpless captive, with no hope of escape or rescue, I fling defiance in your teeth. Do your worst—say your most taunting things; I'll not reply further. I'm an *American*—and I know how to meet death."

"Huh!" Holloway sneered, recovering himself. "You'll play sullen and speak no more, eh? We'll see how well you keep your resolve. Let me tell you something. Margaret, your darling Margaret, is in this village with you. You evince no surprise? Very well, let me go on. As you know, I followed you from England to America; I tracked you from Boston to Wheeling. There, in your absence, I visited your beloved wife at your home; and found her only too willing to leave you and go with me to the ends of the earth, if need be. Of course, you read the note she left you. The secret of it all, my stalwart cousin, is that she always loved me best. Ah! you squirm. Does my plain statement of facts hurt your pride? Listen. I took her

with me to Quebec; from Quebec to Detroit; from Detroit to this God-forsaken place. She has been my mistress, my servant, my slave. I've kicked, beaten and abused her. Her virtue's gone; her pride's subdued; her heart's broken. She's a bowed and wrinkled hag. Your peerless Margaret! Oho! you groan. Have you nothing to say yet?"

Hal Barton's eyes gleamed like living coals in the dusk of the lodge. His jaws were set; his features, contorted. His chest heaved spasmodically. His mental anguish was beyond words. But he uttered no sound and made no outcry. Dick Holloway rubbed his hands and mercilessly continued:

"Do you know what I came here for? Why, I brought your wife here? For two reasons. First, to subject her to privations and hardships; second, to let her see you die a horrible death at the hands of your savage captors. It's true. I've been here for months, awaiting your capture, knowing you'd be taken finally. And she shall see you die at the stake. In her presence I'll spurn your mangled body with my foot. I see you're enjoying my recital. Why not applaud the efforts I've made to interest and amuse you? You are phlegmatic, cold. And I'm exhausting myself in trying to cheer and comfort you. I'll brace myself with a dram from my flask."

After swallowing a quantity of the raw spirits and replacing the flask in his pocket, Holloway, smacking his lips, resumed:

"There, I feel better. There's nothing like good liquor to help a man to do his duty. And I'm doing my best to repay you for your past kindness and consideration. But in my zeal to make you forget your troubles—the dark present and the darker future—I made one little misstatement. I must correct it. Margaret did *not* leave you of her own free will. You start? You've suspected it, you've feared it? Well, it's true. I told you a lie to see you suffer. I tell you the truth now to see you suffer. I forced Margaret to accompany me. I had help at hand—some of these half-breed dogs you know so well. That note deceived you, threw you completely off the track. I knew it would. She wrote it—yes; but she wrote it when she left England in your company; wrote it and sent it to me. I kept it, thinking to shove it down your throat some time when I had you in my power. But I found a better use for it. It served my purpose well. I can read your face. I know what you'd say, were you not too stubborn to speak. Yes, I dipped her quill in the ink-jug and purposely spattered a few drops of ink upon the outside. Very cunning, wasn't it? And all these months you've thought her fickle, untrue; when she would have given her life for yours at any time—"

Richard Holloway suddenly ceased speaking and attempted to spring backward; but, tripping one foot upon the other, he fell sprawling. Quickly scrambling to his feet, he stood with dropped jaw and

bulging eyes, wildly staring at the helpless man whom he had been tormenting. Hal's anger had cooled. The hot flush had forsaken his face; and a shade of sorrow was there in its stead. He viewed his cousin's sudden and unusual action with wonder.

"I—I was scared—frightened," Holloway mumbled stupidly, rubbing his eyes and looking toward the door. "I thought for a moment you were a great writhing serpent, and were about to coil yourself about me. Ugh! I'm not well. I—I—"

He hesitated, stammered and stopped. Then, wheeling in his tracks, he hurriedly left the lodge.

Wolf stood by the door, impassive as a graven image. Barton, exhausted from his conflict of emotions, relaxed his tense muscles and stretched full length upon the ground, murmuring:

"The laws of the God of nature are inexorable. As a man sows so shall he reap."

CHAPTER XVI.

Two days passed—days of unalloyed misery to Hal Barton. His body was racked with pain; his heart, torn and bleeding. He rested little and slept less. For the first time in his life he wished he might die. What was life to him now? Margaret? A wreck of her fair self, a battered and broken idol! Judith? Ah, what a tragedy was life! By his own want of confidence in Margaret, he had condemned her to a fate worse than death. Her blood was upon his hands. No; the fatal note would have deceived anyone. And it was doubtful if he could have found her and rescued her at any rate. But he had not trusted her!

“God forgive me!” he moaned. “What a terrible mistake I made! I’m to die at the stake. It is better so—Judith will never know. But Margaret! My God!”

The thought roused him from the lethargy into

which he had fallen. What was he doing, of what was he thinking? Did he mean to die tamely, and leave his wife to such a fate? But what could he do? He could at least think and plan. He could alertly watch and wait for a chance of escape. Yes, he must. His feeble resolve had suddenly grown to a fixed purpose. He would eat and sleep; he would—

Then he began to think, not of the irretrievable things of the past, but of the perplexities of the present that beset him. He would escape; he would devote his life to the rescue and care of Margaret. He would never be able to undo the evil that had been done; but he could partially atone for his error. He felt better. At supper he ate heartily of the food placed before him. That night he slept soundly, and awakened much refreshed. Two things troubled him still. He had failed thus far to formulate a feasible plan of escape; then, there was Judith! He loved her, he had ceased to love Margaret. He felt only pity for his wife. He shuddered at the thought, but it was true. His wife had been true to him, but she held no place in his heart now. She loved him still, he did not doubt it; but he had no love to give her in return. If he succeeded in escaping death, two roads would await his footprints. The one, a narrow, winding path, shady and flower-bordered, leading to love and Judith; the other, a broad and straight highway, rough and stony, and dust-white in the glar-

ing sunlight, leading to duty and Margaret. It cost him a struggle to decide. Few men are strong enough to renounce love and cling to duty; but Hal Barton was.

Then for the first time since he had learned of Margaret's presence in the village, he was at peace with himself. Rapidly his old strength and energy returned. He felt that should necessity demand, he would be able to burst his bonds, strike to earth all who might oppose him, and escape to the woods, with Margaret in his arms. But he decided to do nothing rash, to bide his time.

On the morning of the fourth day of his incarceration, a concourse of warriors thronged into the lodge and seated themselves in a circle about the fire. Girty was among them. For two hours they smoked their pipes and listened to impassioned speeches by chiefs of the allied tribes. Hal watched the pantomimic proceedings closely. Occasionally he understood a word or phrase. He became aware that they were talking of him; that they were discussing how they should dispose of him. The renegade was the last to speak; but he spoke in the Indian tongue.

Barton was no wiser than before. When the council adjourned, Girty tarried, and, moving to the prisoner's side, said unfeelingly:

"Well, Big Buffalo, they've decided what they're going to do with you. Tomorrow afternoon you'll be tortured at the stake. You want to keep a stiff

upper lip. The redskins will get mad at you and put you out of your misery that much sooner. Really I'm a little sorry for you, but it can't be helped."

When the outlaw had gone, Hal realized that if he did not succeed in escaping within twenty-four hours, he was lost. He was unarmed, bound and helpless. Yet he did not despair. The day passed and night came; yet he was no nearer liberty than he had been in the morning. After eating heartily of the meat and corn-bread the guard gave him, he grew drowsy and fell into a light sleep.

Hark! What was that sound? A chorus of whoops and cheers, mingled with the bark of dogs and the patter of moccasined feet, greeted his ears. He was wide awake in a moment. The uproar was receding. Hal's heart beat expectantly; and his hope rose. Was a conflict going on? Had the village been attacked by a detachment of troops from Wayne's army?

Wolf was guarding the prisoner at the time. The half-breed's wonted impassiveness forsook him; and he restlessly paced up and down the room. At last he approached Barton, and stooping carefully examined the throngs that bound the Englishman's limbs. Then, apparently satisfied, he dashed aside the curtain of skins that closed the doorway, and was gone.

Hal lay listening intently, wondering what it all meant. He could hear no sound but the suppressed

murmur of many voices in the far distance. A half minute passed. Ah! someone was entering the lodge. The curtain was cautiously pushed aside. A light footfall sounded upon the hard-packed earth. From the place he occupied, Barton could not see the newcomer. The fire burned dimly and the room was in partial darkness. The footsteps slowly, almost noiselessly, drew nearer. Turning his head, he discerned the outlines of a female figure. He thought it was some squaw, come to torment him, till there was whispered in his ear the one word:

"Hal!"

"Margaret!" he ejaculated.

Dropping upon her knees, she covered his face with kisses, murmuring brokenly:

"At last—at last! Oh! Hal—my lad—my lad!"

His heart was in his throat; he could not speak. Her hot tears bathed his cheeks; her hands caressed and fondled him.

"Hal, my lad, have you no word for me?" she sobbed.

He found his voice and feelingly replied:

"Margaret, my lass, my wife! If only my hands were free, that I might touch you!"

His words electrified her. Like a flash she leaped to her feet and darted from the place. He scarcely had time to wonder what she meant to do, ere she had returned and severed the thongs, and he was free. Neither spoke. With her help he got upon

his feet. At first he could scarcely stand. Throwing his arms around her, he pressed her to his bosom and mingled his tears with hers. Both, for one brief moment, were living in the happy past. A stick of wood upon the fire broke in twain, and, sending a cloud of sparks toward the roof, burst into a bright blaze. In the increased light, he saw that she was indeed worn and feeble. Her form was slightly bent and she looked weak and sick.

"Do not tarry! Go—go!" she panted. "Take this knife—it's all the weapon I have to give you. But go before it's too late!"

"What meant the uproar I heard? Where is the half-breed that guarded me?" he asked hurriedly.

"A boatload of supplies and presents from Canada has arrived," she explained. "The whole village is at the riverside. The temptation was too much for the guard; he feared he would not get his share of the rum. He has gone, too. I watched and prayed for a chance to see you, to liberate you, if possible. When I saw him leave the lodge I came to you. But in my haste and trepidation, I forgot the knife. Go at once, Hal—please go!"

"Not without you," he answered stoutly.

"No—no," she pleaded; "do go alone, Hal! Alone you may escape; with me you will be retaken. Leave me to my fate. I'll not have to bear it long; I'm failing rapidly. You're wasting precious time. Oh, go, Hal, my lad!"

Her words cut him to the quick. Almost sternly he replied:

"We escape or die together, Margaret!"

"But you cannot escape with me," she cried, wringing her hands in an agony of grief and fear. "I couldn't accompany you a mile—I'm too weak. Every moment is precious. You're courting death by delay."

For the first time he realized how feeble she was. She was ghastly pale, and her limbs were trembling. Naught but excitement had sustained her thus far. He bowed his head; and the tears trickled down his cheeks. She pulled him down and kissed them away, murmuring soothingly:

"There—there, lad! Don't cry. The past is gone forever. We cannot recall it. Make your escape while there is yet time. I shall die happy, knowing that you are free—"

"Never!" he cried, in a tone so loud that she started and glanced apprehensively around. "I will not leave you, Margaret. Listen, lass. I've never searched for you, never made an effort to find and rescue you. I thought you had left me of your own accord—gone with my cousin because you preferred him to me—"

Throwing her arms about his neck, she breathed into his ear:

"I know everything, Hal, my love. Richard Holloway has told me of the deception he practiced after he had borne me screaming and struggling

from the cabin. The note did its work, as intended. I've never blamed nor censured you for believing me false. Through it all I've loved you, Hal, and I've been true to you, lad—true to the sacred vow I took—though I've been beaten, kicked and abused. If one spark of love for me yet remains in your heart, leave me at once. Grant me the pleasure of knowing I've been instrumental in saving you. For oh, Hal, I love you better than I love my life—myself—or my God!"

For answer he caught her up as though she were a babe, and, pressing her quaking form to his heart, strode toward the door. Pity, not passion, was actuating him, pity so sweet and tender that it seemed the holiest love. With his disengaged right hand, that held the knife she had given him, he pushed aside the flap of skins and stood in the open doorway. The cold night air fanned his brow. It was grateful to the hot-blooded man, but the thin form in his arms shivered and nestled closer to his throbbing heart. The heavens were black and snow was falling. "It will hide our trail," was the thought in Hal's mind. A moment he stood there, mentally taking his bearings and deciding which way to go. Then he took a step or two into the darkness. A mocking laugh arrested his progress; and a number of dark forms arose in his path. He had tarried too long; his escape was cut off.

"Not so fast, there, cousin mine," came the voice of Dick Holloway from the Stygian blackness.

"Would you run away without bidding us goodby, and leave us sorrowing over your departure? Besides, you'd deprive us of the pleasure of your company on the morrow, when we're to have a *fete* in your honor. How ungrateful you are of the many kindnesses we've showered upon you. And I see you have my Margaret, my lily, with you. Turn about and re-enter the lodge. We cannot spare you."

Barton felt the frail form in his arms grow limp; and he thought she had fainted. But the whispered words,—“Drop me and flee,” came faintly to his ear. Bending his head, he answered tenderly:

“The end has come. Put your arms around my neck. We'll die together.”

Holloway advanced upon them, saying:

“This is no time for billing and cooing. Do as I bid you, Hal Barton, or the consequences will be upon your own head. I was expecting a move of this kind; and I've caught you. If you don't want to see the woman torn to pieces by these savages, drop her and go back into the lodge. Do you hear me?”

Without a word, Hal lunged forward, striking at his cousin with the knife he held in his hand. A burning, stinging pain in the chest warned Holloway that he was wounded; and, springing backward, he cried frantically to the Indians:

“On him, braves! He has wounded me. Snatch

the jade from his arms and beat his brains out if he don't submit."

The savages, a dozen in number, leaped forward to execute the order. Handicapped as he was, Hal could make but feeble resistance; but he had no intention of surrendering. However, a diversion occurred in his favor. Ere his enemies could lay violent hands upon him, Simon Girty appeared upon the scene and shouted in ringing tones:

"Back, you hellhounds! What's the meaning of this?"

The warriors slunk back a few steps, leaving the renegade standing by Barton's side. Hal set Margaret upon her feet, placed an arm around her, and calmly awaited the outcome. Holloway stepped forward and asked angrily:

"Girty, why do you interfere in my affairs?"

"Your affairs!" the outlaw sneered.

"Yes, my affairs. And it isn't the first time you've meddled.

"You're a modest young man!" Girty retorted angrily. "Is not this man my prisoner? Did you capture him? And I come here and find him free and you urging the Indians to kill him. You may explain, Richard Holloway."

"I *will* explain," the other blustered. "I found him free, and carrying off that young woman who leans so lovingly upon him. He attacked and wounded me. Then I ordered the Indians to over-

power him and return him to the lodge. Is that satisfactory?"

"How did he free himself?" inquired Girty in return.

"The guard left him. And that wench cut his bonds. I suspected her design and watched."

Then, turning to Margaret, Dick continued:

"Come, my lily—come with me. You'll pay for this night's work."

But she made no move to leave her husband's side; and Holloway did not dare to approach her. Other Indians and half-breeds gathered until a crowd surrounded the door of the lodge.

"Do you hear me, you hussy? Come on!" Dick shouted, wildly gesticulating and shaking his fist at the cowering woman.

"Let her alone; I'll look after her," the renegade said quietly.

"You—you?"

"Yes."

"She's my prisoner."

"She's Hal Barton's wife; and I've taken it into my head to protect her from your violence and insults."

"I'll kill you!" hissed Holloway, beside himself with baffled rage.

"Ah!" was Girty's rejoinder. "Well, that's a game two can play at, and I hold the winning cards. Listen, now. You are wounded; you'd better go and have that cut dressed. And if you ever

threaten me again, or offer resistance to my wishes, I'll have my red hounds tear you to pieces. Leave, I say. And don't speak another word to this woman while she remains here. Go!"

With muttered curses, Holloway slunk out of the crowd. Girty turned to Hal and said in a low tone:

"Barton, I can't save you. But I would if I could, so help me God! By tomorrow I may change my mind. But tonight I pity you and your wife. I don't know what's come over me; I'm not usually chicken-hearted. I hate you as my bitter enemy; but I'd save you for your wife's sake, if I could. I can't save you, but I can and will do this: I'll see that your wife isn't abused any more; and the first chance that offers, she shall be returned to the whites. Dick Holloway has had his day. I'll see that he doesn't molest her any more. Now I'll let you bid her goodby. Then you must be rebound. Do you consent?"

"You have us in your power; you can do with us as you will," Hal answered sadly.

"But you don't trust me to do what I have promised?"

"I do not," was the bold reply.

"And, by all things sacred, I can't blame you! You know me pretty well. I've a bad name among the whites and probably I deserve it. I hate Americans, one and all. But I've told you the truth. I mean to keep my word. I'll do just what

I said I'd do, but you'll not live to know it. Will you offer resistance?"

"It would avail me nothing."

Hal bent and tenderly kissed Margaret, whispering in her ear—"Hope!" She made no reply. Her slender frame was shaking with sobs, and she could not speak. When she was led away, he quietly and apathetically submitted to the thongs and was returned to the interior of the council-lodge.

CHAPTER XVII.

The same evening that Hal and Margaret were frustrated in their attempt to escape, three men stood around a campfire in the heart of the tangled forest upon the south bank of the Maumee, opposite the Indian village. They were Lew Wetzel and his two companions. Night had set in and snow was falling. The north wind, growing colder as the minutes passed, whirled clouds of snow pellets through the mazes of the wood. But our friends' camp was in a sheltered nook; and their fire, hidden from the prying eyes of the savages by intervening trees and thick reeds and underbrush, kept the trio from freezing. The scout was saying:

"No; I hain't got no complaint to make ag'inst either of you. You've done a heap sight better'n I expected you to—I'll say that. You've both got sense—an' in time you'd learn the ways o' the woods. But Hal Barton's in that Injin town right

'cross the river there; an' we've got to find some way to git him away from them redskins. I've had a 'tarnel time o' follerin' him up; but I've run him to earth at last. I'm sure of it. 'Cause why? Well, this town's close to the Britisher's fort; an' Girty'd natur'ly carry the papers he got there. Then he'd take his prisoner to the biggest Injin village in the neighborhood, to give him up to torture. Hal Barton's right 'cross the river from us."

"W'at does yez pr'pose to do, Lew Wetzel?" Rory inquired.

"I'm goin' to take the canoe o' the Injin I killed this afternoon, an' paddle over there an' see what I can find out. Then I'll come back an' let you fellers know what we've got to try to do. You've had y'r suppers; so all you'll have to do while I'm gone is to set by the fire an' keep still. Ther' won't be no redskins prowlin' 'round the camp on such a night as this. Hello! What's all that rumpus mean?"

The clamor of whooping and yelling savages and barking dogs came faintly to the ears of the trio.

"Be the sod of ould Oireland!" McFarlan ejaculated. "But it sounds loike the divil 'd got loose, an' was houldin' a carnival wid his black imps, jist."

"More like a tribe o' cannibals havin' a feast," muttered Keelson, in an awestruck tone.

"It's the Injins," Wetzel explained. "Somethin' up. I'll jest run out to the bank an' find out what it means."

He was off ere his companions could answer. After an absence of a few minutes, he returned and said:

"Somethin' 'r somebody of importance has come to the village; an' the redskins is down at the water's edge, rejoicin' over it. More 'n likely it's a boatload o' stuff from Canada. Anyhow, it's a good time fer me to be over there lookin' round. It's gittin' cold fast; so keep up a good fire an' stay by it while I'm gone."

Again the scout took his departure. Reaching the river, he drew a small bark canoe from its hiding place among the bushes and paddled swiftly up the stream for a half mile, then shot his diminutive craft toward the opposite shore, and landed unobserved. Drawing the light vessel well up among the undergrowth, he glided away in the direction of the village. He made a circuit toward the left and entered the place from the rear. Everything was in darkness. Without hindrance or difficulty, he made his way to the center of the town. Silence reigned around him. Occasionally he caught the glimmer of a flickering torch bobbing along the distant shore, or the prolonged yell of some exultant brave. The wind howled a gale among the huts and lodges; and the snow scurried and drifted as it fell. Instinctively the scout found the council-lodge, where he thought it probable his friend was confined, and warily approached it. He had just reached one of the rear corners of the rude struc-

ture, and was on the point of gluing his eye to a crevice in an attempt to gain a view of the interior, when the noise of voices in angry altercation greeted his sense of hearing. Dropping to the ground, he flattened his body against the log wall and listened breathlessly.

"One of 'em 's Simon Girty," he muttered under his breath; "an' ol' Nick's always to pay wher' he is. I wish I could hear what they say. Ther's some devilment afoot, I'll bet a ramrod. I s'pose it wouldn't do fer me to try to creep a little nearer to the front o' the lodge—that's wher' they are. No; I s'pect not—better let well enough alone. But i.'s a pow'rful temptation—it is."

Again he strained his ears. He could catch a word now and then, but nothing of importance. Gradually the sounds died out. He could hear nothing but the wind. His position was uncomfortable in the extreme. He was shivering with cold; his limbs were cramped and aching. Impatiently he got upon his hands and knees and crept to the front of the building. Not a soul was within sight or hearing, apparently. Very cautiously he approached the doorway and inch by inch drew aside the flap of skins. He peeped into the lodge. A bright fire blazed in the center of the floor, and two Indians sat near it, their guns resting upon their knees. Hal Barton, securely bound, lay stretched against one of the rough walls.

Wetzel swept the interior with his keen black

eyes, taking in everything at one swift glance. Then he softly dropped the corner of the curtain into place and, silently rising to his feet, glided away in the darkness.

The snow still fell fitfully, and the fierce wind whirled it in blinding clouds. Laboriously the scout retraced his steps toward the rear of the village. He had passed the last hut and was just entering the dense wood that surrounded the cleared space occupied by the town, when a dark figure arose directly in his path. It was an Indian warrior. Wetzels, half blinded by the driven snow, was full upon the brave ere either was aware of the other's presence. The savage shaped his lips for a whoop of alarm; but the warning cry died within the dusky chest. Like a lightning bolt the scout's clubbed rifle descended, and the bronze figure lay stretched upon the frozen ground. After carefully examining his fallen enemy, the woodman remarked coolly:

"It always goes mighty hard with an Injin to kind o' check him up sudden when he's 'bout to fetch a warwhoop. Seems that a warwhoop locked up in his in'ards is worse on him than a peck o' green persimmons. It does, by Moses! 'Twas mighty unlucky fer this ugly-mugged varmint that he took a notion to yell jest w'en he did; 'cause I wan't anxious an' itchin' to hear no music o' that kind. He's a Delaware, too—near's I can tell in the dark—an' a big stout brave. A feller sees strange

sights nowadays—Shawnees an' Delawares fightin' side by side—an' a few Wyandots throwed in. It's the ol' story o' the lion an' the lamb. An' it all comes o' the schemin' o' the Britishers. Well, I'll have to raise this critter's scalp an' hide his carcass. 'Twon't do to leave it in the open. The snow'll cover up my tracks all right, but I've got to hide this thing. Guess I'll jest take his arms an' ammy-nition, too. By the great horn spoon! He carried a purty rifle—an' made by the Britishers, I'll bet. Wish I could see the marks on it. It'll do fer Hal Barton; the red skunks has took his. I'll jest fix things an' be off. That paddy an' sailor 'll be havin' conniption fits—two at a time—if I stay away from 'em much longer. I never did see two such larripin' tongues before in my life, as them two cusses has!"

He tore the reeking scalp from the head of his fallen foe, and hung the ghastly trophy at his belt where dangled a half dozen others. Then, securin' the Delaware's arms and ammunition, he secreted the body beneath a pile of logs and brush and hurried away toward the river.

"The snow 'll hide all signs o' my visit," he communed with himself, as he leaped into the canoe and paddled toward camp. "But 'tain't goin' to snow much longer—it's gittin' too cold. The flakes is gittin' fewer an' finer all the time; an' ice is formin' long the shores. So much the better fer my plan. I'll be all right if it only freezes hard enough. If it

don't—but ther's no use supposin' such a thing. The Lord 'll be with me an' help me to save Hal Barton!"

On reaching the campfire in the thick woods, he detailed to his comrades all that he had heard, seen and done,

"An' whoy didn't yez shoot one o' the red naysgurs, stab the other, an' jump in an' cut Hal Barton loose, jist," Rory asked excitedly. "Sure, thot's the stoyle this sprig o' shamrock 'd be affther doin' it in."

"Yes, an' you'd git y'r scalp raised an' do no good," Wetzel returned contemptuously.

"Well, w'at's y'r plan? Out wid it!" the Irishman cried angrily,

"Listen to me," Jack interjected. "I say that we launch the gig, row over to the town, an' free Hal Barton. The three of us can do it, mates,"

"A dom foine plan thot is!" sneered McFarlan. "Jack, yez ought to be an Injin chief—yez knows so much 'bout the'r ways o' fightin'. L'ave it to Lew Wetzel—he knows his business."

"Batten down y'r hatch, Rory McFarlan," the sailor muttered sullenly, "'r I'll be aboard you with pike an' cutlass, in less 'n a minute."

"Shut up—both o' you," Wetzel commanded sternly. "This is no time fer spittin' an' scratchin' like a couple o' sick catamounts. We've come here to do a certain thing—an' we're goin' to do it. But it's got to be done jest so, 'r not at all. I'd be in

cannibals might send a broadside 'cross here that 'd carry all of us. But the canoe's too light—it'll hardly carry two. An' we hain't no chance o' gittin' a bigger one. But we've all got to git over there some way; one white man can't contend with a whole townful o' redskins to once, without gittin' into a pesky sight o' trouble. If we can't git over the river by boat, we've got to git over some other way. Now, here's my scheme: It's gittin' cold fast. Ice's freezin' on the river. It'll be still colder tomorrow. By tomorrow night we can cross on the ice. Then we'll free Hal Barton, 'r die with him. What 'ave you got to say?"

"That's the stuff!" shouted Rory in a voice so loud that Wetzel cautioned him to restrain his ardor.

"You mean to voyage 'cross on the ice?" Jack asked dubiously.

"Yes," was the scout's reply.

"Maybe there won't be no ice?"

"But ther' *will*," was the positive answer.

"An' you're goin' tomorrow night?"

Wetzel nodded and frowned.

"P'raps the Injins 'll take into the'r heads to make Barton walk the plank tomorrow."

"What do you mean by sayin' they'll make him walk the plank?" Wetzel inquired, staring blankly at Keelson.

"I mean they may send him to Davy Jones's locker, that's what."

The scout's face showed that he was more puzzled than before. Rory burst into a hearty laugh and explained:

"Sure, Lew Wetzel, Jack 'd be afther tellin' yez thot the red naygurs may git it into the'r cokernuts to kill Hal Barton, the morry, jist."

"Oh!"—And Wetzel's stern visage relaxed into a smile. Then he said, musingly:

"An' Jack's right 'bout that, too. But it can't be helped. They ain't likely to torture him till the weather's better, but they may. We'll keep a sharp watch on the'r movements, though; an' if the worst comes to the worst, we'll try to carry him off in broad daylight. We will, by thunder! Now, le's try an' git some sleep. Fer tomorrow we've got to put out the fire, to keep 'em from seein' the smoke, an' watch the village from sunup till sundown. An' tomorrow night we'll be sleepin' the sleep that knows no wakin' 'r we won't have a chance to git a wink o' any kind."

They made a bed of brush and leaves; and, with their backs to the great log and their feet to the fire, soon fell asleep.

What subtle, potent force was it that traversed the intervening space between the scout's camp and the lodge in which his friend lay sleeping, touched the eyes of the helpless prisoner, and made him see his three comrades asleep around their campfire in the forest across the river? Whatever the power, the fleeting glimpse that Hal caught in his dream

was so real that it remained with him after he awoke. And, in spite of the fact that he felt it was the figment of an overwrought brain, he was comforted. He again closed his eyes and slept as soundly and peacefully as though he were beneath a hospitable roof, surrounded by friends.

At daybreak he awoke; and a dread realization of what the faint morning light portended flashed upon his mind. He steeled his nerves to the highest tension and resolved to show his savage tormentors how a brave man could meet death. He ate his breakfast as usual. The dreary forenoon passed. The fated hour at which he was to die at the black stake drew near.

Two hours after midday, a dozen grim-faced warriors entered the lodge and led him forth to his fate. A howling mob of squaws, children and dogs surrounded him, as his conductors in dignified and haughty silence led him toward the river-bank. The sky was clouded; the scene was oppressively dreary. The air was still and biting, and a coat of clear, green ice covered the river. The fire-blackened stake, at which many despairing victims had looked and shuddered, rose gaunt and awful. It stood upon a gentle elevation a few rods from the shore; and around it were massed hundreds of savages.

Hal Barton did not flinch nor falter. With erect form and dilated nostrils, he walked proudly to the place of torture. Quickly and skillfully his exe-

cutioners secured him with his back to the post. He stood facing the river, and before him surged a sea of eager and malicious faces. Yell after yell rent the air, as the braves who had him in charge completed their work and, stepping back into the crowd, left him standing alone. No such kingly victim had the allied tribes ever had the pleasure of torturing before.

Simon Girty and Dick Holloway were present. The former viewed the preparations for the fiendish murder of one of his race with Indian stolidity. The latter rubbed his flabby hands and leered wickedly, drunkenly. Hal's magnificent form towered above those of his clamorous foes as a granite rock above the raging surf. His strong-featured, bronzed face suffered no change of expression, as the faggots were piled around him. His great head, resting firmly upon his broad and massive shoulders, gave him the appearance of some ancient god defying the elements. He was stripped to the waist, but he did not shiver in the frigid atmosphere. With a bold and fearless glance he swept the sea of faces before him. He was looking for Margaret. But she was not there; and he heaved a sigh of relief and satisfaction.

A stooped and scrawny hag applied the torch to the tinder at his feet. With fierce joy the red flames shot upward and enveloped him. An exultant howl burst from the half-delirious multitude. Squaws and children armed with burning brands rushed

forward to add to the victim's excruciating misery. A ring of fire encircled him at a distance of a few feet from the foot of the stake. The heat and smoke choked and blinded him. He heard the expressions of hellish delight that arose from the throats of the red fiends hemming him in. But he gave no sign that he was conscious. Not until a burning brand was applied to his naked flesh, was there evidence that he was aught else than a herculean statue.

The touch of the firebrand had an electrical effect upon him. The acute pain maddened him, aroused all the devil in him. He would not stand it; he would not die ignominiously. He would burst his bonds and die fighting. He bowed his head, lifted his shoulders and stiffened his muscles. Again a live coal pressed against his bare flesh. His face grew purple with rage and exertion, as he surged this way and that. The thongs were strong and well secured; they did not part nor loosen. The Indians howled their delight. Two or three warriors pushed the circle of fire closer around him. Not a groan nor murmur escaped him; but his eyeballs rolled in blood-rimmed sockets; his chest rose and fell spasmodically.

Simon Girty laughed heartily at the spectacle; then shook his head and looked grave. Holloway chuckled and mumbled in a maudlin manner, his bloated countenance and expressionless eyes giving him an appearance of abject imbecility.

A young and not uncomely squaw procured a piece of bark, and dipping up a handful of live coals, threw them upon the giant's naked shoulders. The torture, though but momentary, was exquisite. With a deep, hoarse roar, like that of an enraged lion, Hal shook his great form and gathered all his strength for one final effort. He snapped the cords that bound his arms behind him, and, half turning in his tracks, threw his great weight and strength against the post to which he was lashed. Weakened by the many fires that had been enkindled at its base, the black stake snapped, tottered, and with a crash fell upon the blazing faggots, scattering coals of fire in all directions. It dragged Hal Barton to earth with it. But he wrenched himself free and like lightning sprang to his feet. The last fetter fell from his limbs. His clothing was on fire; his skin was blistered and blackened in many places. Half dazed, he stood irresolute for a moment. Then, with another roar of rage and pain, he broke through the ranks that surrounded him, and like a blazing comet dashed down the slope toward the river.

The savages were spellbound. Never had they seen such wonderful strength and desperate courage. Was it a man or a god they had sought to torture? Superstitious fear took possession of them. Children screamed and ran away; squaws and dogs howled in affright; warriors gazed stupidly after the fleeing man. Dick Holloway's face

grew ashen; his jaw dropped. Staggering back into the swarm of clamorous women and children, he beat a hasty retreat from the spot. The redoubtable, iron-nerved Simon Girty, even, was taken by surprise. However, he was first to recover his presence of mind. Frantically waving his arms, he shouted:

"After him, you idiots! Don't you see he's escaping?"

Instantly the spell was broken. With hoarse cries of rage, a hundred warriors hurled themselves down the slope in pursuit of the fugitive.

By this time Hal Barton had reached the river-side and leaped out upon the fragile ice. The fire had burned the fringe from his buckskin trousers and leggings and had gone out. But his long hair was scorched; he was badly burned. He did not hesitate. Swiftly and fearlessly he ran out upon the ice, directing his course toward the opposite side of the stream. The frail bridge cracked ominously and bent beneath him. It swayed and threatened to give way. The water spouted through innumerable fissures and wet his moccasins. His great weight and the rapidity of his progress made the ice rise and fall in waves like a bit of angry sea.

The braves seeing all this, stopped short at the river's edge and bellowed their disappointment. To their superstitious minds there was something uncanny about the whole proceeding. Did Big Buffalo bear a charmed life?

"After him, you red dogs!" Girty thundered. "Why do you stop? If the ice bears his great bulk, it'll bear you. Don't let him escape! After him; but bring him back alive. Don't shoot him unless you have to."

Thus urged, a number of the more daring Indians and half-breeds stepped gingerly out upon the treacherous ice and essayed to overtake the flying white man. Each, taking a path for himself, cautiously moved toward midstream. Barton was nearing the farther shore. Suddenly the sharp report of a rifle rang out upon the frosty air and a puff of smoke issued from the woods opposite the village. The foremost brave threw up his hands and sank lifeless upon the ice. A second and a third report followed in quick succession; and two more of the pursuing party dropped in their tracks. Consternation seized the others. With frenzied yells of fear, they discharged their guns at random, and, wheeling about, sought to regain the shore from which they had started. But in their haste they huddled too closely together. With a crash the ice broke beneath them.

The multitude screamed and groaned, and ran helplessly up and down the bank of the stream. Other warriors ventured to the assistance of their friends only to meet a like fate. The water was filled with struggling forms. Simon Girty cursed and tore his hair. From the forest upon the other side emerged three men, who tossed their arms and

encouraged the fugitive with lusty cheers. Hal Barton reached the land, and was in the arms of his comrades. Then McFarlan sent this parting shot ringing across the impassable gulf:

“Thot’s roight, yez dom red naygurs an’ haythen spalpanes, take a bath—fer yez ’re nadin’ it, jist! An’ if yez ’re sp’ilin’ fer a fracas wid Lew Wetzel an’ Hal Barton, an’ me an’ Jack Keelson, come on. Hooray! This is only a taste—begorrah! Wait till ould Mod Anthony comes to visit yez!”

A few of the savages made their way toward shore and were pulled out of the icy water by their people. The others gradually ceased to struggle. One by one they sank from sight and were swept away by the sluggish current. As the last tufted head disappeared, our friends moved into the depths of the dense and tangled woods.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Hal Barton heard the sound of firearms ahead of him and saw the anxious faces of his comrades peering out at him from the fringe of underbrush upon the bank, his flagging courage revived; and when he felt the firm earth beneath his feet and saw eager hands extended to greet and aid him, he was nearly overcome with revulsion of feeling. His breath came in gasps. His strong limbs trembled; and he would have fallen had not Lew Wetzel caught him around the waist and supported him. The scout's pockmarked face was alight with joy. Giving his friend a bearlike hug, he cried gleefully:

"Hal Barton, I'm pow'rful glad to git hold o' you once more. Don't go to givin' in—now it's all over. Here's this confounded Irishman an' tarnal sailor—that's give me so much trouble to hold 'em in check—they want to shake y'r paw, too. You run a mighty close shave, my boy. But you've come out

all right. Ther', I'm glad you're feelin' better—you'll be all right in a jiffy. Jest look at them redskins pilin' into the water! I hope to gracious the whole caboodle of 'em 'll git the'r everlastin' sickness, an' go to Davy Evans's locker—as Jack Keelson says. I do, by thunder!"

The four men turned their attention toward the drowning Indians. Rory sent his parting respects to them; at which the scout smiled broadly, knowing the savages could not understand more than a word or two of what the Irishman said. Presently Keelson remarked:

"Tain't a pleasant sight to see—even if they are Injins. It makes me think o' the wreck o' the *Barcus*, off the coast o' Scotland. Me an' the second mate was the only ones o' the crew o' thirty-seven that escaped. An' some way 'r other, the mate got a snarl in his top riggin' that made him crazier 'n a dolphin—he never knowed nothin' afterwards. As fer me, the surf pounded at my stomach till I hain't been able, since then, to stow more 'n half a cargo o' rations 'r rum. Shiver my timbers, if that ain't a fact! But let's git out o' here. Them Injin "A little brisk walk, indade! W'at the mischief 'd do mortal damage to our hulls."

"You're talkin' good sense fer once in y'r life," Wtezel said briskly. "It's a good long distance, but ther' ain't no use runnin' any risk. Come, all o' you, le's slip back here to camp an' make ready to clear out fer Greenville."

A few minutes later the four stood around the dying embers of the campfire in the depths of the woods. Thus far Hal Barton had not uttered a word. His emotion had kept him from speaking. Now he said feelingly:

"Comrades, I want to thank you—"

He choked, swallowèd, and could say no more. The tears wellèd up in his eyes and trickled down his bronzed cheeks. His friends looked upon him and became aware of his pitiable condition. His hair and clothing were singèd; his moccasins and leggings werè water-soaked. His chest and shoulders werè blisterèd. He was trembling from overexertion and shivering with cold.

"Don't say another word," Wetzel cried half angrily. "We hain't done nothin' fer you yet; but we *will* putty soon, 'r bust a button tryin'. You two fellers kindle up that fire—Hal's 'bout froze. I'll soon dress his burns an' fix him more comfortable. Then we'll 'ave a snack to eat, an' set out on our journey. Stir y'r stumps now."

Jack and Rory hastily droppèd upon their knees and blew vigorously upon the dying coals. Then they heaped upon them bark and wood. And soon the fire was blazing cheerily. The scout took a quantity of bear's grease, from the cavity in the breech of his rifle, and with it anointed Barton's burns. Then the woodman removed his own linsèy-woolsey wamus, that he wore under his hunting

shirt, and compelled his half-naked comrade to put it on. Finally he said:

"Now, Hal Barton, you're lookin' a 'tarnal sight better, whether you feel better 'r not."

"I'm better," was the reply. "But I'm very hungry."

"An' no wonder! Well, stick y'r feet to the fire an' dry y'r duds. Jack, you an' that thick-pated Irishman, broil some venison, while I slip out here an' take a squint at the Injins. We've got to keep an eye on 'em—an' it'll soon be gittin' dark."

When Wetzel returned from his point of observation, the savory odor of cooking meat greeted his nostrils. With a long-drawn sniff, he said:

"Jest as I thought, them mean skunks 's thirstin' fer revenge. They're down on the shore tryin' to plan out some way to cross the river. I think they mean to git in a big canoe an' break the'r way to this side. They've diskivered our smoke an' know we hain't gone, an' they'll be over here in an hour, ready to raise a 'tarnal row an' diffikilty. We've got to be gone 'fore that time, 'r we'll stand a right smart chance o' losin' our scalps. Le's fall to an' eat while we've got the opportunity."

Wetzel's companions were not slow to act on the suggestion. Barton ate with the relish of a man who had been taking violent exercise in the open air. Noticing this, Rory cried mischievously:

"Be the peat bogs o' ould Oireland, Hal Barton, yez may be suffer'n' from a few burns an' blisters,

jist; but ther's one thing the Injins hain't done—they hain't robbed you o' y'r appetite! Howly smoke! but how yez does ate!"

"No," Hal replied sadly, "physically I am but little injured. Already I feel my old strength returning. In a few days I'll be myself again. But had I gun and ammunition, I wouldn't return to Greenville with you."

"W'at's the row?" McFarlan asked quickly. Wetzel and Keelson simply sat and stared. They were too amazed to speak. Silently the scout arose, and procuring the gun and accoutrements he had taken from the Delaware on the previous night, he handed them to Barton, with these words:

"Ther's the things you wished fer, Hal Barton. I take it from y'r words you don't want to leave this place, fer some reason. I ain't goin' to ask you what it is. But I'll jest say this: 'Twant much use fer us to come all the way from Greenville to the Maumee to try to save you if you're goin' to stick y'r neck in the noose ag'in. You'd better 've drowned in the river than to fall into the hands o' the redskins ag'in. They'll make short an' sure work o' the job, next time. I never thought w'en I slipped into the'r town last night, an' saw you a pris'ner in the council-lodge—"

"Did you do that?" Hal inquired quickly. "Did you risk your life in that way for me?"

"Course I did. An' we had it all planned out to cut you loose tonight, an' git you free. But the

cussed varmints got in too big a hurry to roast you—”

“Wetzel,” Barton cried with more animation than he had yet shown, “step this way. I want to confide a secret to you. Rery and Jack shall know all in good time.”

The two fast friends drew aside and conversed in low, earnest tones. Hal quickly informed his comrade of the discovery he had made while a prisoner. When the former had concluded his story, the latter said:

“An’ you think o’ stayin’ here an’ tryin’ to rescue y’r wife?”

“Yes.”

“’Twon’t do, my boy. I’m proper sorry fer the poor little woman—an’ fer you. But ’twon’t do. As I said to you at Wheelin’, Hal Barton, wher’ you first told me o’ y’r wife leavin’ you, I couldn’t b’lieve she done it willin’ly. An’ it’s all come out as I ’s’pected. You’ve made an awful mistake—but nobody can blame you. An’ as fer y’r stayin’ here now an’ tryin’ to git y’r wife free—it’s all nonsense. ’Twon’t do at all. The redskins ’s buzzin’ ’round like a swarm o’ hornets that’s had a gun bar’l prodded into the’r nest. ’Twon’t be an hour till this neck o’ woods ’ll be full of ’em. Hark! What’s that now?”

“Something or somebody upon the river.”

“Yes; an’ it’s Injins. We’ve got to varmoose. Girty ’ll keep his promise to protect y’r wife from

that cuss of a Holloway, I think, seein' you didn't try to escape 'xcept at the stake wher' any mortal critter'd 'ave done the same. You'll have to leave 'er till some other time. I know it's hard, but ther' ain't no other way. Take them other chaps an' move a hundred yards further into the woods. I'll jine you there. I'm goin' to take a final squint at them devilish redskins."

Like a dusky shadow, Wetzel disappeared in the gathering dusk. Barton started to carry out his comrade's suggestion. Returning to Rory and Jack, he said hurriedly:

"The Indians are coming across the river. Let's beat out the campfire and move away from it. Wetzel will join us in a few minutes."

The Irishman and the sailor, without making reply, did as Hal directed. The three moved farther into the dark forest and awaited the scout's coming. Presently he glided up to them and said:

"It's jest as I thought, men. The cunnin' devils 're purty near to this shore. They thought they'd find us nappin'; but they didn't know who they had to contend with. If me an' Hal Barton can't sar-cumvent 'em, tain't no use o' anybody else tryin'. Ther's three canoe-loads of 'em—'bout twenty in all—an' they're cunnin' as foxes an' cruel an' blood-thirsty as wolves. They've broke the'r way through the ice—an' they're bent on havin' our scalps. Now, you two fellers"—addressing McFarlan and Keelson—"you've got to do as me an' Hal Barton says.

Ther' won't be no throwin' the cusses off o' our trail—the snow 'll leave too plain a track. So we've got to git as good a start as we can—an' make a runnin' fight of it, if they ketch up with us. Le's be moseyin'. Foller me an' make no noise—an' be sure you keep up with me."

"I feel like a cowardly cur running away in this manner," Barton began.

But Wetzels interrupted sternly:

"No more o' that, my boy. Hain't things always come out right, w'en you've left 'em to me?"

"Yes; but—"

"Then come on. Ther's a time fer all things. An' this ain't no time to do what you have in y'r mind; but it's a good time fer us all to have our hair raised, if we stand here parleyin'."

"I'm ready," was the sad but courageous reply.

The scout sprang forward into the blackness that walled them in. With peculiar, long swinging strides, he moved rapidly forward. His comrades followed silently. Hal had no difficulty in keeping close to him; but not so with Jack and Rory. At frequent intervals the two were compelled to break into a run to overtake the flying shadows in advance. The sky was clouded; the moon and stars were hid. Had it not been for the snow, the darkness would have been impenetrable. With an intuitive knowledge born of years of experience, Wetzels threaded the intricate passages of the dense and tangled wildwood. Hal kept at the scout's heels,

and McFarlan and Keelson floundered in the giant's wake.

Wetzel bore directly south. They left the river valley and reached higher ground. Here the forest was not so dense, and the light was better. More rapidly than ever the scout moved forward. Hours passed, and still the tireless leader did not slacken his pace. At last Rory panted:

"Howld on a minute, Lew Wetzel! Would yez be after killin' a poor paddy, intoirely? Sure, an' Oi'd as l'ave lose me hair as lose me legs, jist."

"What's the matter?" the scout asked in surprise.

"W'y you're running' faster'n a fishin'-smack in a stiff gale," Jack explained hastily; "an' we can't fol-ler y'r wake much longer. We've got to heave to an' trim our sails. I'm puffin' like a grampus; an' Rory's laborin' like a water-logged whaler."

"Has a little brisk walk like that tired you?" Wetzel inquired in a tone of disgust.

"An' is it toired yez says?" Rory snorted angrily. "A little brisk walk, indade! W'at the mischief 'ld yez call a long, hard ja'nt, jist? Yez 'ave been runnin' loike ould Nick was afther yez. Send me sowl to perdition, if Oi belave ther's an Injin widin twenty moiles of us. 'Sure, an' they'll niver ketch us 'nless they've got wings—an' thot's the solemn truth, jist."

"Don't talk so loud," Barton admonished. "Little you know of Indian speed and endurance. And they are persevering foes. I've no doubt they're

still upon our trail and not far away. Wetzel, while these fellows are breathing let us slip back along our trail and reconnoiter."

They did so; but they saw nor heard nothing of their pursuers. Wetzel, straining his eyes through the gloom, said musingly:

"Guess they must 'ave found some trouble in following our trail, after all. The show's dry an' don't leave a very clear track—an' the night's toler'ble dark, too. But the way to keep ahead is to go ahead. An' ther' ain't no trustin' to appearances."

Again they resumed their journey, but traveled more leisurely. The way grew rougher and progress more difficult. The dark hours dragged drearily. Cold, hungry and weary, Rory and Jack wasted their breath in ill-natured grumbling. They could not understand the need of such mad haste. Why not build a fire and rest until daylight? When they found that neither Wetzel nor Barton gave heed to their repeated hints and suggestions, they were angry indeed—and fell to berating each other.

Thus the night passed. When the first faint streaks of dawn showed in the east, the scout stopped and began to gather dry wood with which to build a fire. The site he selected was the summit of a knoll between two small streams. The prospect of rest and breakfast put Jack and Rory in a good humor; and soon they were chattering like a pair of magpies. Hal busied himself with the preparation of their simple breakfast, which con-

sisted of fresh venison without seasoning of any kind. The scout paced restlessly around the fire, and appeared ill at ease. At frequent intervals, he anxiously scanned the valley from which he and his companions had ascended, for signs of their pursuers. While the others were partaking of the morning meal, he took a piece of meat in his hand and retreated to the brow of the elevation, the better to obtain a view of the trail. There he stood devouring his food and apparently lost in thought. But his black eyes were alert. Of a sudden he started and firmly gripped the stock of his gun. Then, wheeling in his tracks, he quickly made his way to the campfire.

"They're comin'—an' not more 'n a half mile away," was his startling announcement.

His three companions dropped the food they held and leaped to their feet. Wetzel continued:

"That's right—throw away y'r meat. A lean houn' fer a long chase, is the ol' sayin'. An' we've got a long chase 'r a smart scrimmage on hands—one or t'other. It all d'pends on ourselves. Le's be off."

The scout's easy, loping gait enabled him to cover the ground with almost incredible swiftness. His comrades silently followed. The knoll, where they had broken their fast, merged into a narrow, low-lying ridge separating two shallow valleys. Along this spine our friends fairly flew. As they proceeded they noted that both valleys grew nar-

rower and deeper and gradually approached each other. The slopes of the ridge they were traversing became more precipitous; and the two shallow streams, confined by the narrowing of their beds, became deeper. At last Wetzel came to a sudden stop—a look of perplexity and mild alarm upon his disfigured face.

“Hal Barton, I’m ’fraid I’ve made the mistake o’ my life,” he said earnestly.

“I understand you,” was the quiet reply.

The scout continued:

“I’m ’fraid this neck o’ land keeps gittin’ narrower an’ finally ends in a p’int—the two creeks comin’ together to make a bigger stream. I’m some worried, too, fer fear the banks ’s goin’ to be so steep an’ high we can’t git down onto the ice—even if it ’d hold us w’en we got onto it, which ain’t likely. ’Pears to me I’ve run you all into a trap. If I have, saltpeter won’t save us. I ought to ’ave bore more to the west. I knowed ’bout this place but I kind o’ lost my bearin’s. What ’ave you got to say, Hal Barton?”

“We cannot retreat—our way’s cut off,” Barton replied positively. “We must proceed.”

“If we’re goin’ back at all, we’d best go now—” Wetzel began.

“Hark!” Hal interrupted.

All listened intently. A prolonged yell came faintly to their ears, followed by another and another, in quick succession.

"It's the Injins—an' they know they've got us trapped," Wetzel cried excitedly.

"Let's hasten onward," Barton answered quietly but firmly. "We may yet find some way of escape. Come!"

He took the lead, dashing swiftly over the slippery ground. Wetzel followed closely; and after the scout stumbled Rory and Jack. They had gone but a few hundred yards when their worst fears were realized. The neck of land ended abruptly—the two streams joined to form one. The four men stopped and looked at one another in consternation. At the point where they stood the low ridge was about thirty yards in width. It was covered with a thick growth of trees and bushes; and a perpendicular wall of shale, fifteen or twenty feet in height, surrounded it on all sides. The western valley, or ravine, was the narrower of the two; and where it joined the eastern, to form the main water-course, was about fifty feet in width. The valley formed by the junction of the other two, broadened immediately. And its banks were lower and less precipitous than those of its branches.

"How 're we goin' to git off o' here, I'd like to know?" asked Keelson, frantically rolling his eyes. "It's worse 'n bein' on a scuttled ship, a hundred miles from land an' no lifeboat handy."

"Oi niver realized me nade o' wings before," was McFarlan's comment.

"Ther' don't seem to be no way out," said the

scout with a grave shake of the head. "If we drop over the bank on to the ice, we'll break through an' git drowned. We can't go back without meetin' the Injins. An' to stay here means to surrender an' be burnt at the stake, 'r die fightin'. I don't see much chance fer us. Howsomever, whatever we do we've got to do purty quick, fer in a few minutes the redskins 'll be upon us. What's your idee, Hal Barton?"

"How many Indians are there?"

"Bout twenty, I'd say."

"Five to one. The odds are great; but *I'll* not surrender," was Barton's positive answer.

"An' I'm with you!" cried Wetzal, almost joyfully. "Won't we make a howlin' diffikilty with them pesky varmints! If Lew Wetzal's got to knock under, he'll jest send a few redskins to the happy-huntin'-grounds ahead o' him. Ther' won't be many of 'em left to carry our scalps back to the Maumee, I calkerlate—after we're done fer."

"Oi'm roight fond of a ruction, meself," Rory remarked meditatively; "but Oi'm blissed if Oi'm hankerin' fer too much of a good thing! Dom the mon that don't know w'en his mouth's full. Howsoever, me mother's eldest son 'll be wid yez. How about yez, Jack Keelson?"

"Tain't in me to be back'ards in a fight," Keelson answered sturdily. "But it 'pears to me that five to one is pilin' it on purty thick. I'm goin' to cast my weather eye 'round, an' see if ther' ain't

some way o' beachin' our craft an' gittin' ashore."

With these words, the sailor began a tour of inspection, while the others stood silently and nervously awaiting some sign of the approach of their enemies.

The sun was high and the day was growing warm. Not a sound came to their ears, but the steady drip of snow water falling from the shaly bank upon the ice below.

"Have the spalpanes give up the chase an' gone back, jist?" Rory inquired in a hoarse whisper.

"Not much—you don't know 'em," was the scout's reply. "They'll let out a war whoop purty soon that'll split y'r ears an' freeze the blood in y'r veins. Then they'll be on us like a whirlwind. Keep y'r finger on the trigger—an' don't throw away a shot."

At that moment Jack hurriedly rolled up to his companions and said breathlessly:

"Mates, if you'll take an ol' seadog's word fer it, I've found a way out of our trouble."

"W'at's thot, Jack Keelson?" Rory exclaimed, brightening visibly.

"Explain," cried Hal. "And remember this is no time for trifling."

"Triflin'!" the sailor ejaculated in an injured tone. "Do you think I'd be triflin' we'en the red pirates is ready to send us all to Davy Jones's locker? Not much! Come with me, an' I'll show you what I mean."

On the extreme point of the narrow strip of land stood an immense redoak. At an angle of forty-five degrees it inclined toward the farther bank of the western stream. Its trunk was bare of limbs and its thick, bushy top overhung the opposite shore. A wild grapevine, springing from the rocky soil near the root of the tree and passing twice around the trunk in its ascent, twined its strong tendrils among the top branches.

"There," Keelson cried triumphantly, pointing at the tree and vine.

"Yes, I see what you mean," was the scout's quick reply. "But the trunk's too big to climb. An' if we could climb it, we'd break our limbs 'r necks droppin' to the ground on t'other side. 'Twon't do. An' we'd jest as well git ready to sell our lives as dear as possible."

"You don't understand at all," Jack exclaimed. "Of course we can't climb to the masthead an' drop onto the other deck. But we can cut the skys'l-backstay an' swing from one bulwark to the other."

Wetzel and Barton failed to catch the sailor's meaning. They stood staring at him, thinking he had suddenly gone daft.

"Oi understand yez, Jack Keelson," McFarlan shouted joyously. "Yez mane to cut thot grapevoine an' swing y'self 'cross to the other bank, jist."

Keelson nodded vigorously.

"I doubt the feasibility of the plan," Hal remarked with a shake of the head. "However, des-

perate straits call for desperate measures. We'll try it."

A few vigorous strokes of his keen hunting knife sufficed to divide the vine near the ground. He swung his whole weight upon it and announced:

"It bears my weight and of course will bear any of you. Who'll be the first to swing across the chasm?"

"Let Jack go first—he's as active as a singed cat," was Rory's suggestion.

"How's he goin' to git the vine back to the rest of us?" Wetzel inquired.

"Tie a stone to it an' swing it back," Jack answered.

"You'll be in a purty fix if it don't land you on t'other side—an' leaves you danglin' 'twixt heaven an' earth," the scout remarked grimly. "Howsomever, you won't be no worse off 'n the rest of us, left here to be scalped. So go ahead an'—"

His voice was drowned by a deluge of war-whoops. Then all was still again.

"They're goin' to try to slip through the bushes, an' take us unawares," Wetzel observed sagely. "That's the last you'll hear of 'em till they begin shootin'. Swing off, Bowlegs, if you're goin' to. We hain't got much time."

Firmly grasping the smooth and shining vine, Keelson stepped back from the tree and prepared to swing off into space. He took a short run and leaped over the edge of the shaly cliff. Outward

and downward he swung until he hung over the middle of the ravine. Upward and onward he sailed with the grace and speed of a swallow. His friends held their breath. Would his impetus carry him to the other side? The vine by which he was suspended creaked and swayed ominously. His feet touched the opposite bank. He loosed one hand and frantically caught at the bushes along the brink of the wall. The next moment he scrambled to firm ground and stood erect. Tossing his cap into air, he shaped his mouth for a lusty cheer; but Barton raised a warning finger and checked him.

The excitable Irishman danced a hornpipe and grew red-faced with suppressed emotion. Jack weighted the swinging vine with a small stone and threw the free end to Wetzel.

"Here, you crazy paddy," the scout called in a cautious undertone, "it's your turn."

Imitating the sailor's example, McFarlan crossed in safety, Keelson helping him to land without mishap. The only difficulty that either experienced was in holding his gun and at the same time clinging to the swiftly traveling swing.

"Go, Wetzel," Barton whispered earnestly, "there's not a moment to lose."

"No, you go, Hal Barton."

"Let's not parley," Hal said firmly. "My weight may be too much for the frail vine. Go—go at once."

There was a slight stir in the bushes a few rods

from them. Wetzél's quick ears caught the sound. He whispered hesitatingly:

"I guess I'd better stay with you. Them red devils 'll bc 'pon you 'fore you can cross."

"For God's sake, go!" Hal almost hissed.

The scout delayed no longer. With celerity he launched his thickset body upon the tenuous tide of air. The topmost branches of the great oak quivered and the slender swing sagged dangerously. Just as his feet touched the goal a sound greeted his ears that sent the blood in a sickening flood to his heart and left him pale as death. It was a hurricane of savage howls in which surprise, rage and disappointment were blended. The Indians had discovered that their victims were escaping.

"Swing 'cross here quick," Wetzél shouted as he staggered to his feet and flung the grapevine to his comrade.

There was a crashing of heavy bodies through the underbrush upon the peninsula. Then twenty guns cracked and a hail of bullets splintered the cliff of shale upon which Wetzél and his companions stood. The savages had not seen Hal. They thought the scout was the last man to pass over.

"Git under cover—'r you're liable to taste lead!" Wetzél shouted to Jack and Rory.

The three dropped upon the ground behind sheltering trees and bushes. The Indians dashed to the edge of the wall and gave vent to their feelings by brandishing^a their empty firearms and yelling them-

selves hoarse. Wetzel's rifle spoke; and a painted brave threw up his hands and toppled from the cliff. In quick succession Keelson and McFarlan fired. Two more warriors followed their dusky brother toward the bottom of the frozen stream, their bodies crashing through the thin ice and instantly disappearing. With terrified shrieks and groans, their companions turned and fled precipitately toward shelter. At that moment Barton quickly emerged from behind the trunk of the oak, where he had been in hiding, and started upon his midair journey. There was a rasping, rattling sound in the treetop. A shower of dead leaves and bits of twigs filled the air. Hal's weight was too much; the twining tendrils of the vine were gradually yielding to the excessive strain. A groan went up from the unfortunate man's companions. The savages emerged from cover and danced and yelled in fiendish delight. With the momentum of a stone thrown from a catapult the Englishman's body struck the face of the wall. His gun flew from his hands and lodged upon the brink. Bruised and stunned, he clutched blindly at the fringe of overhanging bushes and hung at arm's length. Just as his nerveless fingers were loosening their hold and he was dropping to his death, like the roar of a distant cataract these words rang in his ears:

"Hang on fer jest a second, Hal Barton, an' I'll save you."

He was dimly conscious that the scout was peer-

ing down at him. Like one in a dream he felt something tighten around his chest. Then for the second time in his life he sank into complete insensibility.

Wetzel had passed a loop of the grapevine beneath his friend's arms. Now he cried sharply to McFarlan and Keelson:

"Give me a lift here—an' be quick 'bout it. The cussed redskins 're reloadin' the'r guns—they'll fire a volley into us in less 'n ten seconds."

The three exerted their combined strength and succeeded in hauling the insensible man from his perilous position. Just as they were reaching shelter the reports of several rifles rang out upon the air. Jack threw his hands to his head and fell prostrate.

"Tend to Bowlegs, Rory, an' I'll 'tend to Hal Barton," was Wetzel's command to the Irishman.

A half minute later they were secure from further harm in a thick growth of trees.

CHAPTER XIX.

When Barton regained consciousness he found himself lying upon a bed of dry leaves and Wetzel anxiously bending over him. His head ached, his throat was on fire, and a weight rested upon his chest.

"Water!" he gasped feebly.

The scout brought him some half-melted snow, remarking as he did so:

"I'm glad to see you comin' round all right, ol' man. I was 'fraid you was done fer. An Injin bullet plowed a furrer 'long the side o' the sailor's gourd, but 'twan't deep enough to silence his lar-rivin' tongue—not by a long shot. He's settin' up an' chirpin' as peart as a young robin. How 're you feelin' now?"

By this time Hal had recovered his scattered faculties. He made an effort to arise, but fell back with a groan of pain.

"Better let me help you," Wetzal suggested. "There—that's it. Now I guess you'll feel better. Lean y'r back ag'inst that log. I know it hurts—but you've got to grin and bear it. 'Tain't no wonder you squirm, though; you're burnt, an' blistered, an' bruised, an' busted, till ther' ain't no soundness in you—"

"How did you rescue me?" Hal faintly interrupted.

"I slipped a loop o' the grapevine under y'r arms. Then me an' Rory an' Jack hossed you up. An' it was a lift, too, I tell you. Jest as we was totin' you to shelter, the redskins fired on us. One o' the'r bullets knocked Jack cat-west-an'-crooked. I thought fer a little bit that Bowlegs was done fer, an' that I had two dead men on my hands. But you're both comin' 'round first rate."

"And what's become of the Indians?" was Barton's next question.

"That's what's botherin' me," Wetzal answered gravely. "They've left an' gone back 'long the trail. But whether they've give up the chase's more an' I can tell. May be they've only doubled on the'r track, to git over here an' take up our trail ag'in. One thing's certain, though. You an' Bowlegs won't be able to travel fer some hours—an' we've got to have somethin' to eat. In the meantime we're runnin' a big risk in stayin' here. This is my idee: I'll slip up the stream an' try to kill some kind o' meat—keepin' my eyes peeled fer the redskins.

The rest o' you stay here an' recuperate for a long ja'nt. What do you say?"

"I cannot improve upon your suggestion. Go at once but return as soon as possible. Before you start, place my gun in my hands."

"Where are yez goin', Lew Wetzel?" McFarlan demanded, arising to his feet and standing with arms akimbo, a look of alarm on his freckled face. He had just finished dressing his comrade's wound.

"Goin' to try an' git some meat to fill that yawp-in' Irish mouth o' yours," the scout returned as he shouldered his rifle and strode away.

"An' I've me here wid two invalids, jist?" Rory called after him. Wetzel nodded, but did not slacken his pace, as he disappeared among the trees.

"Invalids!" sneered Keelson, staggering to his feet and stretching his arms above his head. "I'm no invalid, I'd have you know, if I am a little shaky on my pegs."

"Be jabbers!" retorted the Irishman. "Jack Keelson, yez 're sassier 'n a pet crow since Oi toid up y'r gourd wid a piece o' me best wamus, jist."

Keelson's example encouraged Barton. Although he was much more severely injured, Hal got upon his feet and walked about. At first every movement gave him excruciating pain. A man of less resolution would have given up in despair. His limbs were of lead; his brain was of air. Gradually the pain and dizziness left him; and naught but ex-

treme soreness and weakness of the muscles reminded him of his narrow escape from death.

It was mid-afternoon when Wetzel returned, bearing a haunch of venison, and informed his companions that he had learned nothing of the Indians' whereabouts. After partaking heartily of their delayed dinner, the four men set out in a southerly direction, traveling slowly but steadily. Hal and Jack, though still weak—the latter from loss of blood, the former from nervous shock—stoically kept up with their companions. At nightfall they went into camp and rested until early morning, when they again resumed their journey. All that day and far into the night they pushed onward. The next evening, about four o'clock, they came in sight of the fortifications at Greenville.

As our friends entered the open gate of the fort, soldiers strolling about the inclosure caught sight of them. A storm of lusty cheers greeted the hungry, jaded men.

"Here's Lew Wetzel back with Hal Barton! Hello, Rory! Hello, Jack! Hurrah for Wetzel an' Barton!" were the cries that aroused the whole camp and emptied the barracks and officers' quarters. Officers and privates crowded around the newcomers, shook their hands and danced and yelled in glee. Questions poured in upon the weary travelers thick and fast. To all of them our friends returned brief answers, as they elbowed their way through the throng. General Wayne,

attracted by the uproar, opened his door and looked upon the moving scene. His practiced eye took in the situation at a glance. Calling an orderly to his side, he said:

"Lewis Wetzel has just returned to camp. Send him and his companions to me at once. Be prompt."

There was another intensely interested observer of the arrival of Wetzel and his party. It was Lieutenant Rudolphe Cartier. Warned by the tumult without, that something of an unusual nature was afoot, he cautiously peered from his half-open door. The first form he beheld in the surging throng was that of the man he had sent to his death. The first face he recognized was Hal Barton's. Like one who had received a knife thrust, the Lieutenant sprang back and shut the door. Then, placing a hand over his heart, he dropped upon a stool and panted:

"A ghost! I have seen Barton's ghost!"

His eyes bulged; his limbs shook. Color forsook his dark face, leaving him pale as death. The clamor outside continued. He heard some one cry:

"Hal Barton, I'm mighty glad to see you alive and well."

Cartier staggered to his feet and slowly, hesitatingly approached the door. With his hand upon the latchstring, he halted and listened.

"Hurrah for Wetzel! Hurrah for Barton!"

Little by little, inch by inch, the Frenchman

again opened the door. The crowd was thinning. Four men were entering the commander's quarters on the opposite side of the inclosure. They disappeared inside, and the door closed upon them. A mighty shout went up from their comrades outside. Then the throng quietly dispersed. As Cartier saw and understood all this, the blood returned to his countenance. Fastening his door and leaning heavily against it, he muttered hoarsely :

"Bah! I am a nervous fool. It is Monsieur Barton in the flesh. But if so, then am I defeated—ruined. Girty has played me false. How else could Barton be here? How else could he have escaped? Escape, did I say? It is a miracle. The fates are against me. General Wayne has suspected me; now he will know all. I have played the desperate game well but I have lost. Not everything, however, if I succeed in leaving here. British gold is mine to command, and Judith Sterling shall be my bride. Let Monsieur Barton live; I shall make him suffer torture more acute than the savages know how to inflict. I am not to blame for the failure; I did my part. Had Girty promptly put Barton to death, I could have remained here and worked out my scheme. But I must make one bold stroke for liberty. If I fail—"

He did not complete the sentence. There came a loud knock at the door.

"What is wanted?" the Lieutenant inquired tremulously.

"The commander desires your presence at headquarters immediately," came the distinct reply.

"Very well; tell him I will be there in a few minutes. I am shaving."

Cartier stood still, scarcely breathing, until the orderly's footsteps died out in the distance. Then he began to make hurried preparations for his departure. He smiled grimly as he thought how General Wayne would rage when he became aware that the bird had flown. He was not trembling now. His nerves were of steel. He shoved a brace of pistols into his belt and hung a leathern pouch at his side. Into the latter he dropped a packet of paper, a pocket compass, flint and steel, some ammunition and a quantity of cured meat. All this required but a few seconds.

"I think that is all," he murmured as he flung a military cloak around his shoulders and stepped toward the door. "I am leaving in such haste I cannot stop to bid my numerous friends *au revoir*. I shall take a horse and go by way of Fort Recovery. I know the way well; night will not greatly retard my progress. When I can no longer use the horse, I will turn him loose and proceed on foot. They will be compelled to journey fast and far if they catch me."

He slipped through the doorway, swiftly turned the corner of the building, and hastened toward the stables some rods away. The sun had set, and the western heavens were aglow with rosy light. The

surrounding forest loomed black and grim against the darkening sky. The men were at supper and the stables were deserted. Quickly saddling his horse, he led him forth and sprang upon his back. Two dangers yet confronted him. He was compelled to pass barracks and officers' quarters on his way to the gate, and he feared he might be discovered and halted. Besides, there was the sentinel, who would not permit him to go out at that hour without a permit from the officer of the guard. However, there was nothing to do but take the risks. Boldly he rode toward the closed gates. As he went by the barracks the sounds of laughter and song came to his ears. He reached the officers' quarters and passed them in safety. He neared the great gate. Joy! It was open. A provision train from Cincinnati had just arrived and was passing in. The rumble of heavily laden vehicles and the stentorian voices of the drivers made a pandemonium of harsh sounds. Darkness had succeeded dusk. Spurring to the right of the slow-moving wagons, he flitted through the gateway unobserved by the sentry, who had his eyes riveted upon the advancing train.

Lieutenant Rudolph Cartier was abroad—free. He took a deep inspiration and shifted his position in the saddle. Then, dashing the rowels into his horse's flanks, he galloped away in the direction of Fort Recovery.

As the four friends entered the commander's

quarters, the mess cooks were calling the soldiers to supper. General Wayne greeted the new arrivals warmly, expressing by look and word the happiness he felt over their safe return.

"I'll detain you no longer," he said at last. "Your supper's awaiting you, and no doubt you're ready for it. When you've satisfied your hunger, Barton, return. Wetzel, I'll hear a detailed account of your journey at another time."

He bowed them out, and, turning to his orderly, said briskly:

"Inform Lieutenant Cartier I wish to see him at once."

On their way to the mess-sheds, Barton and his companions were met by Captain Axline. Grasping both of Hal's hands, he murmured brokenly:

"Barton, I'm overjoyed to see you alive. I didn't know of your return. Just this moment I arrived from Cincinnati with a provision-train. I rode ahead of them—they must be near the gate now. You're unhurt?"

"Nothing of a serious nature," Barton answered.

"Come to my room in an hour," Axline resumed hurriedly. "I'm in a fever to hear all about your adventure. Then I've so much to tell you. You know whom I've seen."

"Yes," was the impassive reply.

The others had passed on. Axline and Hal were alone.

"Why do you speak so coldly?" inquired the Cap-

tain. "Judith, all of them, in fact, have been worried to death over your captivity. I cannot understand your apathy, Hal."

Very quietly the Englishman replied:

"After supper I must meet the commander. As soon as he's through with me, I'll call at your quarters. There we can talk without fear of interruption. I have sad and startling news to impart to you, Captain Axline."

"Barton, something terrible has happened."

"Yes, but I cannot explain now."

"For God's sake, don't keep me in suspense longer than is necessary. Come to my quarters as soon as you can."

"You have my promise, Captain."

A brief moment they stood holding each other's hands, then separated.

When Barton reached the messroom, the assembled soldiers gave him a boisterous welcome. He smilingly returned their greetings, but had little to say. The sight of Captain Axline had thrown him into a sorrowful train of thought. As soon as he had finished his supper, he slipped away from his noisy messmates and returned to the commander's quarters. General Wayne was restlessly pacing the floor, a scowl upon his handsome face.

"Sit down—sit down, Barton," he said shortly. "I sent for Lieutenant Cartier immediately after you left me. He returned me word that he would be here in a few minutes. But he hasn't come; and

I've again dispatched the orderly for him. While we're waiting for him, I wish to ask you a few pointed questions. Are you ready to answer?"

"I'll give you any information of any kind I can, General," Hal replied simply.

"Where were you taken prisoner?" was the General's first question.

"Between here and Fort Recovery."

"It was at night?"

"It was."

"What were you doing there, abroad and alone at night?"

"Carrying a packet of papers to yourself at Fort Recovery."

"Who sent you?"

"Lieutenant Cartier."

"By whom were you captured?"

"By a band of Indians and half-breeds, led by Simon Girty."

"And the papers you carried?"

"Were taken by the renegade. He told me he had been lying in wait for me; that Lieutenant Cartier had planned that I should be captured with the papers in my possession."

"What did Girty finally do with the documents?"

"Gave them into the hands of Colonel McKee, the British Indian-agent at Fort Miami."

"How do you know that?"

"Girty himself told me."

"Are you willing to face Lieutenant Cartier?"

"Certainly!" And Barton's lip curled contemptuously.

"And I've your permission to question you in his presence?"

"Of course."

"Very well. As soon as he comes I'll put you to the test. Ah! There he comes now."

But it was not the Lieutenant; it was the orderly. The soldier entered the room and respectfully stood at attention.

"Well?" Wayne demanded sharply.

The man saluted his commander and replied:

"Lieutenant Cartier isn't at his quarters—"

"Search for him; find him at once," cried the General impatiently.

"I've hunted him everywhere, General. He's not to be found."

"Stupid! Send Captain Axline to me, and continue your search for Lieutenant Cartier."

The orderly bowed and withdrew. A few minutes later Axline arrived.

"Axline," General Wayne shouted, "I want Cartier. Institute a search for him. Don't delay a minute. Of course he's somewhere about the camp."

The young officer bent his body and hurried forth. Hal sat pensively gazing into the fire that blazed upon the hearth, a cynical smile upon his handsome face. The commander fidgeted about the room and nervously glanced at his watch from time to time.

A quarter of an hour passed. Of a sudden Wayne turned to Barton, saying:

"Did Lieutenant Cartier see you when you arrived?"

"I don't know, General."

The elder man resumed his pacing up and down the floor. A few minutes later Axline and the orderly came in together. General Wayne questioned the young officer with his eyes.

"Lieutenant Cartier isn't at his quarters," the Captain made answer to his superior's mute question, "nor is he anywhere about the inclosure. His horse is gone from the stables. The sentry at the gate says no one has gone out; but one of the teamsters of the provision-train tells me a man on horseback passed out as he came in."

"The infernal traitor and scoundrel!" thundered the irate commander. "He has seen Barton—taken warning and escaped. Saddle a troop and after him, Axline! Undoubtedly he has gone in the direction of Fort Recovery. He's making toward the British post upon the Maumee. After him, Axline, and bring him back, dead or alive!"

In hot haste the officer went to do his commander's bidding. In a surprisingly short time, he galloped at the head of a squad of troopers through the gate of the fortification. The clatter of hoofs and jingle of spurs rang out sharp and clear upon the frosty air. Then those who had watched their de-

parture, shivering, returned indoors. And the camp sank to slumber.

At the close of the next day, Captain Axline and his party returned, crestfallen and weary. They had failed to catch a glimpse, even, of the fleeing traitor. General Wayne's anger was something terrible to behold. He cursed himself for his needless delay; and broke the vials of his wrath upon Axline's innocent head. After a time, however, he cooled down, begged the Captain's pardon, and said smilingly:

"Perhaps it's as well you didn't overtake the miserable cur. It would have been a shame to waste powder-and-ball upon him. Like Benedict Arnold, he'll receive his just deserts in the end."

That evening Hal Barton called upon Captain Axline and said:

"Captain, I'm ready to explain to you what I meant last night when I said I had sad and startling news."

"And I'm ready to hear you," returned his friend, leaning his back against the log wall and stretching his wet boots toward the fire.

Hal, in a few words, told his companion the story of his life, from his babyhood to the finding of Margaret among the savages. He finished with the question:

"Now, what shall I do?"

Axline had changed his position and was sitting

with his face buried in his hands. Lifting a tear-wet countenance to his friend, he said feelingly:

"It's all terribly sad. Judith—poor girl! It'll break her heart. You should write and tell her all. She has been almost wild with anxiety about your captivity. How she'll stand this second blow, God alone can tell! But she must know all."

"Wouldn't it be better for me to see her instead of writing?"

"I don't know—yes, I think it would."

"The wagon-train starts on its return journey to Cincinnati in the morning. With the commander's permission, I'll accompany it. Good night."

"Good night, Barton. And God bless you for a noble man!"

With these words ringing in his ears, Hal returned to his quarters. The next morning at day-break, he was on his way to Cincinnati.

CHAPTER XX.

After the removal of General Wayne's army from Cincinnati to Greenville and Fort Recovery, Robert Sterling and his two daughters lived in comparative retirement at their comfortable cabin a short distance above the village. There was but a handful of troops remaining at Fort Washington. Occasionally an officer from the garrison called and spent a half hour in social chat with Mr. Sterling. The society of the backwoods settlement was crude and unrefined; and Judith and Joanna held themselves aloof. For this they were heartily disliked and roundly abused by the women of the isolated community. It mattered not that the sisters divided their meager fare with less fortunate neighbors and aided in nursing many a sufferer back to life and health. They were denounced as aristocrats because they would not participate in the rude sports and games of the place, and were hated accordingly.

The hardy frontiersmen openly admired the courageous independence of the young women; but the village maids and matrons would tolerate no such sentiments.

When winter set in, the Sterlings lived more to themselves than ever. The father did little except chop wood in the clearing and keep a great fire roaring in the wide fireplace. Judith and Joanna made daily visits to Fort Washington to ascertain what news, if any, had been received from Greenville. It was a red-letter day when they were told that a messenger or wagon-train had arrived, and that there were letters for one or both of them. War is a cruel game; but it is most cruel to the mothers, wives and sweethearts who are compelled to remain at home. What days of fears, what nights of tears they know!

Of evenings Robert Sterling sat in the dancing firelight and read to his daughters, while they busied themselves with their sewing or knitting. The sisters exchanged confidences, and read parts of their letters to each other and to their father. The wintry wind moaned in the cavernous chimney and the snow piled deep upon the doorstep. They were shut in by the lone wilderness, but they were happy and content, living in the future instead of brooding over the past. On an evil day, Captain Axline's letter announcing that Hal Barton had been captured by the Indians came to waken them from their blissful reverie.

In an instant all was changed. The black pall of profound sorrow threw its shadow upon the threshold. Judith was almost prostrated by the news. For the first few hours she was wild with grief. Her father and sister sought to comfort and sustain her, as best they knew. But it was little of comfort or cheer they had to offer. With disheveled hair and tear-stained face, she walked the floor, wringing her hands and moaning pitifully. She was fully aware of the fatal character of the misfortune that had befallen the man she loved. She knew that the savages regarded him as one of their most able foes, and that little short of a miracle could save him from their vengeance. The only feeble glimmer of hope that penetrated the depths of her soul was the thought that Lew Wetzel was Hal' Barton's friend, and would do all that human power could do to rescue him from death.

Her violent grief spent itself at last, and she grew calm. But it was the calmness of despair. She did not neglect her household duties or add to the burdens of her father and sister by tearful outbursts. But her pale face and listless step and attitude told more eloquently than words or tears the sorrow that was hers. She prayed to the God in whom she placed her trust for the deliverance of her lover; but it was a prayer without hope of fulfillment, and she arose from her knees chilled and disappointed. But she carried herself proudly erect; and after her

first manifestation of womanly weakness rigidly restrained herself.

Robert Sterling sat by the fire and silently watched his stricken child. He was an undemonstrative man of few words. His children, his pipe and his books were his only intimate companions. He longed to comfort and reassure Judith, but he did not know how. He was incapable of telling aught but the truth, and there was no solace in the truth. He held her in his arms at times, affectionately patted her cheek and called her endearing names. He did not know it, but his dumb caresses and loving terms soothed her troubled spirit more than anything else could have done.

Joanna, who was of more yielding nature than her sister, more like the dead mother, wept sympathetically, and sobbing clung to Judith or followed her about the house. An impartial observer would have found it hard to tell which was more in need of consolation, which was the consoler.

After the first outbreak of grief Judith became calm. Noting this, Joanna dried her own tears and sought to convince her sister that Hal, by some mysterious interposition of Providence, would be enabled to escape. With sad faces and subdued voices, the two went about their work. The days and nights dragged drearily away. Captain Axline came to see them. He informed them that Lew Wetzel had gone to rescue the captive; and uttered reassuring words. But his look and tone belied his

language. He brought a faint ray of hope with him; but when he departed and closed the cabin door behind him, all was again utter darkness.

One still, cold evening the father and daughters sat by the fireside. Supper was over. Outside the dusk was deepening. The flashing firelight made the big, bare room bright and cheerful; but all sat gazing silently into the depths of the blaze. After a time Judith arose, and crossing the room took her hood and cloak from a peg upon the wall. Her father looked up inquiringly, but said nothing.

"Where are you going, Judith?" Joanna asked quickly.

"To the village, to Fort Washington," was the quiet reply.

"Not to-night, sister. It's dark. Wait until morning, and I'll accompany you."

Judith decidedly shook her head.

"Why must you go to-night?" Joanna persisted. "We were there this morning and no word had come from Greenville. The commandant told us that he was expecting no messenger, and that the teamsters who went with the provisions for the army wouldn't return before to-morrow. Wait until morning. You'll meet with disappointment, and will sleep none all night."

"You'd better do as Joanna suggests, Judith," Mr. Sterling remarked, removing his pipe from his lips and watching the blue smoke drift toward the open fire.

"No, father. Something impels me to go to-night; at once. I feel there is news for me of some kind——"

She hesitated and ceased speaking.

"Do you feel that it's good news, Judith?"—and Joanna opened her eyes wonderingly.

"I don't know—I can't tell. But I must go."

"Then I'll accompany you."

"I don't want your company, Joanna. I wish to be alone."

"Judith!"

"Don't think me unkind, sister," Judith hastened to say, throwing her arms around Joanna and tenderly kissing her. "But I'm in a strange mood to-night. Something impels me to do what I'm going to do, something beyond my power to resist. You stay here with father; I'll be back soon."

Releasing her sister, she flew to her father and gave him a loving caress. Then the door closed behind her; she was gone. Joanna swept the hearth with the wing of a wild-turkey, and, seating herself in a splint-bottomed chair, resumed her knitting. Robert Sterling smoked on in silence for some time. At last he knocked the ashes from his pipe and placed it in a cranny of the wall of the fireplace. Not a word passed between father and daughter. A tall English clock in one corner of the room ticked slowly and monotonously. Joanna anxiously watched its open, honest face. At frequent intervals the father drew a large silver watch from his

waistcoat pocket and compared it with the talkative clock. An hour passed. Judith did not return.

On leaving the house Judith had walked rapidly in the direction of the village. The ground was hard-frozen, and her footfalls rang out sharp and clear upon the still night air. The sky was starlit and cloudless. As she sped along the uneven path the headache that had tortured her all the afternoon disappeared. She felt brighter and more cheerful than for days.

She neared the first of the straggling cabins, passed it and suddenly paused to listen. A harsh, rumbling noise mingled with the voices of men came to her ears.

"The wagon-train!" she cried, eagerly hurrying in the direction whence the sound came.

Presently the black walls of Fort Washington loomed up before her. She saw a monstrous serpent worming its way in at the gate. It was the wagon-and-pack-train returning from Greenville. Breathlessly she leaped forward, hastening to follow the last wagon into the inclosure. A gigantic figure stepped from the shadow of the wall and barred the passage. For one brief moment she held her breath and trembled with fear. The next, with a glad cry that rang out like a benediction upon the night air, she sprang into the outstretched arms of the giant and buried her face upon his shoulder. It was Hal Barton!

"My love—my love!" she sobbed in an ecstasy of

joy and relief. "They told me a cruel untruth; they said you were a prisoner among the savages. I had given you up for lost. Oh! why did Captain Axline so wickedly deceive me? You don't answer, Hal—my love. Have you nothing to say to me?"

He did not speak. She felt his great frame shaking with some suppressed emotion; and raising her head she peered into his face. Still he said nothing. With her slim, white hand she fondled his face; and found his cheeks wet with tears.

"What is it, Hal?" she asked in a troubled tone, gently disengaging herself from his embrace and clinging to his arm with both hands.

For a full minute he struggled with his feelings. Then bending and tenderly kissing her, he made reply:

"I've much to say to you, Judith, much to tell you. But this isn't the place. What were you doing here alone?"

"I came to the garrison, hoping to hear from Greenville—from you or of you. I felt that my suspense was about to be broken. Oh, Hal, my love, you don't know how I have suffered! Why did Captain Axline deceive us?"

"Captain Axline told you the truth, Judith. I was a captive, but I escaped. You're shivering; you're cold. The gates of the fort are closed. Let's walk toward your home."

"I—I don't feel cold," she answered with chatter-

ing teeth; "but I'm nervous. I've been so troubled—so anxious——"

A sob came into her voice and choked her. He placed his arm around her waist; and together they moved toward her home. He was suffering the torments of a lost soul, but she did not know it. He loved her dearly, better than he loved any other being on earth, yet he had come to tell her a cruel, blighting truth and relinquish her forever. He felt that it was right, that he must do it; but his heart was breaking. He wanted so to take her in his arms again, smother her with kisses and comfort and soothe her. It was a hard struggle. She was clinging trustfully to him, and he was about to wound her sorely. Her slim white hand lay confidently in his, and he was about to fling it aside. He lifted his eyes to the starlit heavens and silently asked God to strengthen him. It was a sore trial, and he did not know whether love or duty was to gain the mastery. He had thought it all settled, until he met her. Now he was again undecided. No! he would drink the bitter draught. But Judith! Could he dare to bruise that trusting heart?

"Oh, God in heaven, help me!" he silently prayed in agony of spirit.

He knew now that he had made a great mistake in coming to see her. He should have written. He had thought himself a valiant giant, and he was a cowardly pigmy. He was aroused by hearing Judith say:

"Hal, why are you so silent? I fear you've bad news to tell me. I've had a premonition of coming evil all the afternoon. Yet what ill can befall me when I've you at my side? Let's be cheerful. You shall spend the night with us. How surprised and overjoyed father and Joanna will be to see you alive and well. But you haven't told me a word of your capture by the Indians."

"Let's hurry to the house; there I'll tell you everything," he answered briefly.

She looked up at him questioningly, but said no more. On nearing the cabin they were met by Mr. Sterling and Joanna. The father and sister had grown uneasy over Judith's prolonged absence, and had come out to look for her. When they were seated in front of the roaring fire, Hal shoved his feet toward the welcome blaze and began:

"I know how anxious all of you are to hear of my capture and escape. No doubt you gave me up for lost. But God in His infinite goodness and wisdom saw fit to let me live, to permit me to look again into the faces of those I love. I truly believe He spared me that I may rectify one great mistake of my life; that I may right a great wrong, so far as lies in my power. Please don't interrupt me with questions or exclamations. Let me hasten through with it."

His voice and countenance were sad; and he gazed into the heart of the fire as he spoke. Mr. Sterling and Joanna looked the wonder they felt;

while Judith clasped her hands and, with dilated pupils and bated breath, eagerly listened to every syllable that fell from her lover's lips.

Briefly Hal told them of the army as he left it; of Captain Axline; of Lew Wetzel, Rory and Jack; of Lieutenant Cartier's treachery and escape, and of his own adventures. Breathlessly his auditors drank in his words. A part of the tale they had heard from Captain Axline—still it was all new. Joanna could not entirely suppress little exclamations of surprise and incredulity. Mr. Sterling smoked his pipe in silence. When her lover spoke of the danger he had encountered and overcome, Judith dug her pink nails into the tender flesh of her palms and panted with excitement.

Barton paused in his recital. As yet he had made no mention of his wife. Now he shifted uneasily in his chair and sighed deeply. Silence fell upon the little group. Judith had known for days such an acute agony of suspense and fear, that she felt she must go mad were she not soon relieved. True, she had felt profound relief when she had first met her lover at the fort; but now the old pain was back in all its intensity. She could not say a word. Why did not Joanna or her father request Hal to proceed with his narrative? Oh, would he never speak? She started, caught her breath sharply, and placed her hand over her heart to still its tumultuous beating; for she heard Hal saying:

“And now for a confession. It's the story of my

life. Perhaps I should have told it to you when we first met. But I did not—I could not. Then it did not seem to matter whether you knew it or not. Now it's absolutely necessary that you know it. Unintentionally I've done you and yours a great wrong, Robert Sterling; but with God's help I mean to right it, so far as I'm able. Listen to what I have to say, but reserve your judgment until I've finished. I'll be brief, for the torture is more than I can bear, almost."

No one replied to his introductory words. Wiping the cold sweat from his brow, he began the story of his life, sparing no important fact nor detail. He traced its course from his childhood days in merry England to the meeting with his wife at the Indian village upon the Maumee. It was with a voice choked with emotion that he gave the sad recital. When he had finished, he buried his face in his great brown hands and remained motionless. Robert Sterling dropped his chin upon his breast and gazed moodily at the floor. Joanna wept silently. Judith—her countenance as pale as death, her black eyes burning, and her lips compressed—clutched the arms of her chair and stared stonily at the fire. For a moment silence reigned. Mr. Sterling was the first to speak.

"Hal Barton," he said slowly, "as you say, you've done me and mine an unintentional wrong. There's but one way to undo it. I needn't tell you what it is. Your duty 's plain. You must leave us, never

to see Judith again, and devote your life to the rescue and care of your wife. You've made a great mistake, considering your manly and honest confession, it cannot be called by a harsher name. You've wronged my daughter; you've wronged your wife more. You must right both wrongs. Your open confession has won my respect. No man could have done more than you've already done; but there's more for you to do. You must leave here at once. I believe that you've borne my daughter an honest love; your conduct shows it. And I know she loves you dearly. I pity both of you. But pity musn't stand in the way of right. May God help you to be strong and valiant! Here's my hand to show you that I bear you no ill will."

Silently and solemnly the two men clasped hands. Joanna was still weeping. Judith had not changed position nor expression. Hal's face showed pale under its coat of tan, but he kept a firm control of himself. Again Robert Sterling spoke:

"Come, Joanna, you and I will withdraw to the other room, while they bid each other farewell. It's hard, my daughter," and he laid his trembling hand affectionately upon Judith's dark hair—"but it must be so. Be a brave, true woman. If the time ever comes—but what I was going to say is better left unsaid. Hal Barton, I trust you. Bid her goodbye, as becomes an honest man. Leave neither promise nor pledge behind you. Come, Joanna."

The latter held out her hand to Hal, sobbing:

"I'm sorry, oh, so sorry, for you and Judith! Good-by!"

When Joanna had followed her father from the room, Hal turned to Judith saying:

"Judith, if you can forgive the injury I have wrought you, come to me."

Mechanically she arose and stood by his side.

"Do you forgive me?" he asked anxiously.

"I've nothing to forgive, Hal," she answered in a listless voice. "You didn't know that your wife was true; that she still lived——"

"I believed her false," he interrupted, "and I didn't stop to ask myself if she still lived. I loved *you*."

"And you love me still?"

"God help me, I do!"

It was a groan wrung from the heart of a strong man. Judith saw the intense suffering reflected in his voice. His agony roused her—melted her to tears. She flung herself into his arms, crying:

"Oh, Hal—my love! How *can* we part? How *can* I give you up?"

Forgetting everything but his overmastering love for her, he strained her to his heart and kissed her. She was the first to recover her self-possession.

"Loose me, Hal—loose me!" she panted. "We're only making the parting harder. It isn't wrong for us to love each other; that we cannot overcome. It came without our asking; and it will not depart at our bidding. But it's wrong for us to act thus."

Silently he obeyed her request. But, resting his hands upon her shoulders, he stood looking down at her.

"Now you must go," she murmured sadly, "and we must meet no more. My father's right. Your duty is to rescue your wife and devote your life to her. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" he answered in a whisper. "Forgive me for what I've brought upon you; and forget my weakness. And throughout the years that are to come, remember that I've loved you—that I love you still—with the holy love of a mature man for a pure woman. Strive to forget me; you will be happier. Good-by!"

A moment each held the other's hand and read the other's soul. Then he caught up his rifle from the corner where he had placed it, and sprang through the doorway. The door closed behind him; he had gone out of her life. A moment later Judith was sobbing out her distress on her father's shoulder and Hal was hammering at the gates of Fort Washington.

The next day he set out to return to Greenville.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I don't wonder at you bein' anxious to git y'r wife out o' the clutches o' the redskins an' such white men as Simon Girty an' that cousin o' yours. But the question is, how 're you goin' to do it?"

Lew Wetzel addressed these words to Hal Barton, as the two stood conversing in front of General Wayne's quarters at Greenville, a few days after Hal's return. The scout continued:

"It was simply one o' God's own miracles that you got away from the Injins, as you done. You n'r no other man could do it twice in a hundred times. It was Providence—that's all. If the stake hadn't been old an' shaky, you couldn't 'ave got loose; an' if help hadn't been at hand, you couldn't 'ave got away, anyhow. Then the Injins wan't expectin' anything o' the kind; now they're on the'r guard. You can't fool 'em twice with the same trick no more 'n you can a weasel. I slipped into the'r

village once, an' come out alive; but I don't want to try it a second time soon—not til they 've quieted down a bit, anyhow. Then another thing, Hal Barton. You was a strong man an' able to travel; y'r wife's a weakly an' sickly woman. If you got her out o' the village, how'd you git her to this place—an' finally to a settlement? I pity you, ol' man, I do; but I don't see no way to help you. I know you're mighty anxious to be doin' somethin'. You ain't no more like y'rself than day's like night; but what's to be done? I'll give you my 'pinion fer what it's worth. All you can do 's to wait till the army moves forward an' defeats the redskins in a pitched battle. Then ther' 'll be a chance to break in an' rescue a lot o' pris'ners—y'r wife among 'em, maybe. I don't see no other way."

With a gesture of impatience, Hal returned sharply:

"You, Lew Wetzel, are not like your old self. When I was a helpless prisoner you promptly set out to rescue me—counting your own life as nothing. I shouldn't be here to-day but for your alert courage. And now you ask me to permit my wife to die in captivity, to wait on the dilatory and indefinite movements of the army, to fret out my soul in inaction. I cannot do it; I *will* not do it. I mean to make an effort to save Margaret—and at once. If you don't care to accompany me, I'll go alone. That is, if I get the commander's permission."

"Hoity-toity!" Wetzel chuckled. "You mustn't git mad at an ol' comrade in that way, Hal Barton. I'm jest advisin' you fer y'r own good. But if you're bent on makin' a trip to the Maumee—an' nothin' else 'll do—here's a man that'll be with you. I'm jest as anxious to rescue that little woman as anybody can be. God knows she's suffered enough! I don't b'lieve it can be done, but we can die a-tryin'. Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"That you won't throw away y'r life recklessly, that you won't let y'r heart run away with y'r head."

"I will rely upon your judgment and guidance, Wetzel. You shall plan everything. If we fail, I'll await the movements of the army, as patiently as I can. But I must make an attempt; I cannot rest here. I should go mad."

"When do you think o' startin'?"

"At once."

"You hain't seen the Gener'l?"

"No."

"Better see him. An' if he says go, we'll be off in the mornin'. An' say! We want to keep mighty quiet 'bout our goin', 'r we'll 'ave that paddy an' that sailor taggin' after us."

"I understand."

At that moment an orderly came to them and said:

"General Wayne wants to see you at his quarters."

"Both of us?" Hal inquired.

"Yes."

As they entered the room, the commander arose and met them with outstretched hands, saying :

"I'm loath to ask you two men to undertake what I have in mind ; but you're the most skillful and trustworthy scouts in the service, and I place more reliance in you than in any of the others. You've just returned from the Maumee country ; but I'm compelled to ask you to retrace your steps thither. I've received a hint that the British and Indians are preparing a surprise for me. I want you to go to the vicinity of Fort Miami, learn all you can of the plans and movements of the savages and their abettors, and return to me, with the information, as quickly as possible. When can you start?"

"At once," replied Barton promptly and eagerly.

Wetzel grinned broadly. Noting which, the General quickly asked :

"Why do you smile, my forest friend?"

"I was jest thinkin' how lucky we was, General. An' it's better to be born lucky than good-lookin'."

"I fail to catch your meaning."

"Well, me an' Hal Barton was jest talkin' o' comin' to you an' askin' you to let us off fer a week 'r two, so's we could go on a trip to the Injin country——"

"You were?" ejaculated Wayne in surprise.

"Yes, we was. You see, Gener'l, Hal found his wife among the Injins when he was a pris'ner, an'——"

"His wife!"

"Yes, Gener'l."

Turning to the Englishman, the commander said briskly:

"Barton, I thought you an unmarried man."

"I'm married," was the quiet reply. "My wife's a captive among the savages, near Fort Miami. It's to attempt her rescue that we desire to return to that place."

"And you didn't know of her whereabouts until you were taken to the Indian village?"

"I did not."

"How long has she been gone from you—but there! I won't probe your private affairs. I've misjudged and wronged you, Barton. I thought you a single man, and the rival of Lieutenant Cartier in some love affair at Cincinnati. That was the main reason I didn't listen to the first warning I received of the Lieutenant's treachery. Captain Axline's your friend. He told me he got his information from you. And I thought you actuated by motives of jealousy and revenge. I made a terrific blunder. But it's all past, and no good comes of grieving over our past mistakes. I humbly beg your pardon. In regard to your present undertaking, I've but this to say: I don't believe you'll succeed in recovering your wife at present. But go, make the effort.



They reached camp in the cool of a summer's evening, and were safe under the protecting folds of Mad Anthony's banner

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However, do nothing rash; be cautious. Remember I'm depending upon you to perform a mission. If you don't regain possession of your wife now, you shall have her in due time, if I have to lead an army to Canada or the British Isles. Go, and the earnest wish and prayer of an old soldier follows you."

The next morning at gray daylight, Wetzel and Barton slipped quietly through the gate of the fortification, and set out upon their perilous mission. We shall not follow them. Let it suffice, that at the end of two weeks they returned to Greenville, weary and disappointed. The scout, in his quaint way told what they had accomplished, and explained why they had failed to rescue Hal's wife. He said to General Wayne:

"You see it's jest like this, Gener'l. You can't roast a coon till you ketch him; an' you can't find out much 'bout Injins 'nless you can git in among 'em. Fer some reason the tribes is mightily stirred up. The redskins is visitin' from village to village, an' powwowin' an' keepin' up a 'tarnal lot o' noise an' devilment day an' night. The young men o' the tribes—as near as we could learn by runnin' the risk o' losin' our hair, a creepin' 'round the edge o' the camps an' towns—is in favor o' givin' you battle at once. They want to s'prise you as they done St. Clair, an' not wait till you come to the Maumee. The chiefs an' medicine-men is o' the same notion; but they want to wait till spring opens up 'fore they

do any fightin'. The Britishers is urgin' the Injins on, but advisin' 'em to wait fer good weather. That infernal scalawag, Colonel McKee, an' his dog, Simon Girty, is runnin' from place to place, an' makin' speeches an' playin' the devil gener'ly. That's 'bout all I can tell you o' the way things 're goin'. You want to keep y'r eyes peeled, an' keep scouts out day an' night fer the devils is bound to s'prise you, if you don't. I don't think they 'll set out fer a couple o' months, if the weather keeps bad; but no one can tell. It's my 'pinion they 'll fall upon Fort Recovery, as that's y'r weakest post."

"And you got no opportunity to rescue Hal Barton's wife?" Wayne remarked.

"No," answered Wetzel with a sad shake of the head, "an' the lad's purty nigh crazy, too. It was all I could do to hold him in check an' keep him from throwin' his life away. I don't know what I'm to do with him if the army don't git on the move purty soon. We found out one thing 'bout his wife, that kind o' set his mind at rest, 'r I don't b'lieve I'd ever got him back here at all. Girty's got her in charge an' is usin' her first rate; though she's sick an' pinin' away fast. I squeezed that out of a squaw we run acrost in the woods near the town. If it ain't no secret, General, when do you think you'll open up the war in earnest?"

"I cannot say," Wayne answered candidly; "but just as soon as the weather permits and the army is fully supplied with necessities for the campaign."

"I jest thought it was no harm to ask you," Wetzel remarked casually as he started for the door. "'Cause Hal ain't feelin' well—he'd 'ave been here with me, if he was—an' may be it'll cheer him up a bit to know that there' 'll be some fightin' to do purty soon. Good mornin', Gener'l."

But winter merged into spring, and still the campaign did not open. The army remained cooped up at Greenville and Fort Recovery. The weather was wet, cold and disagreeable; and the roads and bridle paths through the woods became quagmires and were almost impassable. Supplies arrived very slowly. The dilatoriness of the government greatly provoked General Wayne. He was eager to strike a final blow; to crush the Indian confederacy for all time. The soldiers grew lazy and careless of the appearance and condition of their arms and clothing. Rory McFarlan was wont to remark to his comrade:

"Jack Keelson, yez 're gettin' lazier an' dirtier 'n a red naygur. Spruce up, mon. Look at y'r duds—all in rags an' tags. Dom this waitin' an' waitin'! It 'll be the ruination o' the army, jist. The loikes of it, Oi say! Wouldn't Oi be afther smellin' powdther ag'in? Bedad! An' that's the solemn truth, if an Oirishman iver tould it."

By the first of June the troops were in a fever of expectancy. In some way the report had become current among officers and men that the army would be in motion within a few days. But three

weeks passed, and they were still at Greenville. The enforced inactivity was telling upon Hal Barton. He grew thinner; and his handsome face wore a haggard expression of hopelessness. He did not sleep nor eat well. His sunny disposition was clouded. His comrades in arms noted the marked change in him, and wondered at it, for but a few very intimate friends knew his secret.

The bonny month was drawing to a close. The weather was dry and hot, and the skies were cloudless. In the dark-green forest surrounding Greenville the birds sang their songs all day long. Encouraged and stimulated by daily reports that they would soon be marching toward the Maumee country, the soldiers were on their mettle. Arms were scoured and burnished; clothing was overhauled and renovated. Drill was no longer irksome; guard duty was almost a pleasure. Comrade greeted comrade with merry jest and quip. The whole was a scene of animation and rejoicing.

On the twenty-sixth of the month a scout returned to the fortification and announced that he had discovered a large body of Indians and British redcoats in camp, about forty miles north of Greenville. The next day General Wayne sent Barton and Wetzels, accompanied by the man who had brought the news, to spy upon the movements of the advancing foe. On their return our friends reported that the British and Indians had broken

camp and were moving slowly in the direction of Fort Recovery.

"What's their number?" asked the commander.

"About three hundred," Barton answered.

"An immaterial force," was Wayne's comment. Then he inquired: "Who appeared to be in command?"

"Black Hoof, the Shawnee chief; but Captain McKee of the British army and Simon Girty are with him."

"Ah! How many British regulars have they with them?"

"About a score of regulars and another score of half-breeds and renegades."

General Wayne dropped his head in thought. Presently he looked up and said in a musing tone:

"I can't understand it. With so small a force they cannot hope to capture Fort Recovery, even though they should take our men by surprise—"

"Excuse me, Gener'l," Wetzel interrupted; "but I think I can 'xplain the whole matter to you."

"Please do so," the commander returned with a smile.

"Well, you see, Gener'l, it's jest like this. We didn't see *all* o' the snake. It's like a copperhead that's swallowed a toad—blunt at both ends an' big in the middle. We only saw its head."

"I fail to catch your meaning, my friend. I—"

"What Lew Wetzel means to tell you, General," Barton hastened to explain, "is that we saw but the

advance guard of a much larger body of the enemy that's moving southward from the Maumee."

"Ah!" ejaculated Wayne, his thin nostrils dilating as though he sniffed the smoke of battle. "What leads you to think so?"

"Heard the greasy varmints talkin' 'bout it, as they went past the place where we was hidin'," Wetzel replied quickly.

"And they were talking to the effect that a much larger body was following them?"

"They were," Hal answered.

And Wetzel and the other scout gave approving nods.

"You don't think," the commander suggested, "that the wily savages were talking for your benefit?"

"You don't know 'em, Gener'l," Wetzel laughed. "The red devils didn't know we was near, 'r they'd 'ave raised our scalps fer *the'r* benefit—that's what they'd 've done."

General Wayne smiled in a preoccupied manner, and was silent for some seconds. Then he asked suddenly:

"Men, have you anything further to communicate?"

Receiving a negative reply, he turned to Wetzel and said feelingly:

"My friend, you 've served me faithfully and well. In that you've done no more than your comrades. But I 've more faith in your knowledge of

woodcraft, and your acquaintance with the arts and wiles of the savages, than I have in that of any other man living. In saying this I don't mean to speak disparagingly of any scout in the service. To come to the point, I want your advice. I must warn Captain Gibson of the descent of the foe upon Fort Recovery. Shall I send an officer with a small detachment of soldiers, or shall I send a single messenger, a trained woodman? Which would stand the better chance of getting through safely? Word must be sent at once. And I confess I don't know which to do."

"You want my 'pinion, Gener'l?"

"I do."

"Then I'll give it. It 'ld be mighty risky to send a small squad o' soldiers, 'cause the redskins may be buzzin' all along the trail by this time. One man, if he knows his business, 'll stand a much better show o' gittin' to Fort Recovery alive an' deliverin' y'r message. What do you say, Hal Barton?"

"That's my opinion," was the giant's emphatic reply.

"Whom shall I send?" was Wayne's next question.

"Send Lew Wetzel and let me accompany him," was Hal's suggestion.

"I cannot spare both of you," answered the General with a positive shake of the head.

"I ain't 'fraid to go alone," Wetzel chuckled.

The General wrote a few words upon a slip of parchment, and, folding and sealing it, handed it to the scout, with the words :

“Lew Wetzel, I depend upon you to get this to Captain Gibson to-night. In it I’ve apprised him of the approaching foe, and urged him to make valiant resistance. Also, I’ve told him that a train of supplies and a convoy of troops will leave here for Fort Recovery to-morrow morning. Go at once. And good luck go with you.”

Then the commander arose and courteously bowed the three men from the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was the morning of the twenty-ninth of June, the morning after Lew Wetzel's departure for Fort Recovery. A wagon-and-pack-train was forming just without the walls of the fortification at Greenville, while within the inclosure Major McMahon was collecting a convoy of dragoons and volunteers.

The air was sultry, and blue-black clouds loomed up on the western horizon. Muttering thunder occasionally mingled with the sounds of clanking chains and creaking wheels. Horses pawed and scabbards jingled; officers shouted and teamsters cursed and bellowed. The Major galloped through the gate, and with a part of the dragoons and volunteers took up a position at the head of the line of wagons and pack-horses. The rest of the troop formed in the rear. Slowly the column moved forward and disappeared among the trees. Its destination was Fort Recovery, thirty miles away.

General Wayne watched its departure; then with thoughtful mien slowly retraced his steps to his quarters. Captain Axline and Hal Barton stood side by side, silently gazing at the spot where the last horseman had disappeared. Jack Keelson and Rory McFarlan sauntered up to them.

"They're off for a short voyage," the sailor volunteered, "but it may be a stormy one. Accordin' to my weather eye, we're goin' to have a squall."

"I think so," the Captain announced absent-mindedly.

"An' the wood may be full o' them dom red nays-gurs, too," Rory suggested.

Barton nodded but did not shift his gaze.

"Do you think it likely they'll have a brush with the savages before the train gets to Fort Recovery?" Axline asked Hal, a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"Yes; the woods 're swarming with redmen by this time."

"General Wayne's aware of the fact, of course?"

"Yes."

The Captain was silent for a moment; then he said musingly:

"McMahon has with him fifty dragoons and ninety volunteers, a part of them mounted. The force may prove sufficient; but I would have—"

He left the sentence unfinished. Two horsemen came dashing toward the open gate of the fortification, at full gallop. Axline's practiced eyes told

him that the approaching strangers wore the uniform of the American army. The Captain's companions saw the swiftly galloping figures.

"Who the devil's thot, now?" muttered McFarlan, in an alarmed tone.

"They don't belong to our convoy," Captain Axline remarked in an undertone to Barton; "they come from the wrong direction. See how recklessly they ride! Something's amiss somewhere."

"They come from the south, along the trail to Cincinnati," Hal replied. "They must be from Fort Washington."

By this time the two soldiers had reached the open gate of the fort. Without slackening speed, they spurred into the inclosure and sprang from their saddles. Their steeds, covered with foam and dust, stood with drooping heads and heaving flanks. The riders' faces were purple; and they were trembling from exertion and excitement. Swiftly, questioningly, they swept their eyes about the place, as though they were looking for some one. Quickly approaching them, Captain Axline cried:

"Whence do you come, comrades; and what's amiss?"

"From Fort Washington," one of the men panted; "and we want to see Captain Edward Axline, immediately."

"I'm the man," was the officer's tremulous reply. "What will you have?"

"Here's a note for you, then," the soldier said hurriedly.

Barton and his companions drew near. Soldiers began to gather from various parts of the inclosure, eager to ascertain the cause of the stir at the gate. With trembling fingers Axline unfolded the missive. He glanced at the writing and paled. As he read his jaw dropped and his lips grew ashen. When he had finished, he thrust the bit of paper into his pocket, and, turning to Barton, gasped:

"My God! Hal Barton, what are we to do? These men are from Fort Washington, and Joanna sends me word that Judith has been stolen by the Indians!"

"What!"

It was a groan of despair and a shout of anger and defiance in one that burst from the giant's chest. Springing forward he caught the young officer by his shoulders; and, holding him aloft and shaking him violently, he roared:

"Tell me, Captain Axline! Tell me all and at once!"

The assembled soldiers looked on in amazement. What was the meaning of the play that was enacting before them? Disengaging himself from Barton's vise-like grip, the Captain whispered soothingly:

"There—there, Hal! Don't be so rough. I'm in nowise to blame. And I'll tell you all I know. Joanna's note is brief. She says that Judith has

been taken captive by the Indians, and begs me to do all in my power to rescue her."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

Hal had partially recovered his composure. Now he turned to the man who had brought the missive, and said fiercely:

"You're a soldier from Fort Washington?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was Judith, Miss Sterling, captured by the savages?"—this in a milder tone.

"Some time during the forenoon of the day before yesterday. But her fate was not known until mid-afternoon, when the trail of the Indians was discovered. She was alone in the woods at the time of her capture."

"When did you start from Cincinnati?"

"The evening of the day she was captured."

"You two alone."

"Yes. We came directly here. Other soldiers and a number of settlers are upon the trail of the Indians."

"How many warriors were in the band?"

"A score or more, judging from the marks they left."

"Any of them mounted?"

"Yes; a number of them."

"Was their leader a white man?"

"I don't know."

Captain Axline started as Hal asked the ques-

tion, and Rory and Jack nodded sagely at each other.

Barton continued:

"What direction did the Indians take?"

"They bore due north."

"You saw nothing of them on your journey?"

"Nothing."

"And you've told me all you know?"

"I have."

"One other question. Where's the young woman's father?"

"At home with his other daughter. She's almost wild with grief."

"That's all. You'd better seek rest and refreshment."

Again Hal Barton was his calm self. But the tense lines about his mouth told of great mental suffering. Placing his hand upon Captain Axline's shoulder, he said earnestly:

"You've received an appeal for aid. What do you propose doing?"

With a look of downright perplexity upon his handsome face, the officer replied candidly:

"I don't know what to do. What *shall* I do? Give me your advice."

"Take a squad of mounted men and do your best to intercept Judith's captors."

"But I don't know what course they've taken, nor how far they've traveled," objected the Captain.

"That's it," assented several of the listening soldiers.

"It 'ld be loike lookin' fer a nadle in a haystack," muttered Rory, *sotto voce*.

"Shut up, you freckled-face' paddy," Keelson cried mischievously. "What do you know about Injins?"

"Oi knows a hape more 'bout 'em than Oi want to, jist," came the ready reply.

Barton was saying:

"The Indians will cross the trail from here to Fort Recovery at some point. They may have done so already. They're a part of the main body that contemplates an attack upon the post, I've no doubt; and are hurrying to rejoin their comrades."

Captain Axline took Hal by the arm and drew him away from the others. Then he said:

"What did you mean when you asked the messenger if a white man led the party?"

"It's my belief Cartier stole Judith, or had it done. He's at the bottom of the whole dastardly affair."

The officer groaned.

"Come, rouse yourself, Captain," Barton cried, irritably. "Mount your men and be off. You've no time to waste. I'll accompany you."

Axline brightened visibly. And, starting off at a brisk pace, he called back to Hal:

"I'll obtain the commander's permission and be ready in a few minutes."

"Look here, Cap'n," Rory bellowed after the retreating officer, "me an' Jack Keelson's goin' wid ye yez, jist. We ain't much on roidin', that's true; but we're *hell* on fioightin'! An' we're sp'ilin' fer a rumpus. We're goin' wid yez."

"That's the tune to whistle, Rory," Jack cried approvingly. And, giving his baggy trousers a hitch and shifting his quid from one cheek to the other, he smiled admiringly upon his Irish friend.

Captain Axline hurried away without deigning to look back or offer reply, and disappeared within General Wayne's quarters. In a few words he explained the situation of affairs, and asked the commander's permission to take a squad of men and go to the young woman's rescue. As the General listened his thin lips set themselves in a tense, straight line and his bright eyes flashed fire. He said not a word until the Captain had finished his short recital. Then the old soldier burst forth explosively:

"Yes—of course! Pick your men and go. Go at once and don't spare horseflesh, Axline. Trust to Hal Barton's judgment and counsel. I've no doubt that black-faced, black-hearted traitor and scoundrel, Cartier, is responsible for this outrage. If you meet with the villain, shoot him dead in his tracks as you would a mangy cur or a worthless redskin."

Captain Axline left Mad Anthony striding up and down the room and muttering to himself:

"I would to God the whole vile race of Indians and their illegitimate spawn were wiped off the face of the continent! As long as they exist there'll be naught for the American pioneer but anxiety and sorrow. Well, ere the leaves begin to change color, I shall have done my part toward bringing about a lasting peace."

Twenty minutes after he left the commander's quarters, Axline, at the head of a score of picked men, among whom were Barton, Keelson and McFarlan, passed out at the gate of the fortification and galloped away in the direction of Fort Recovery. An hour had passed since the departure of the supply-train. The sun was obscured by the advance guards of the storm that was rolling in from the west. The thunder boomed and reverberated unceasingly. The woods were in semi-darkness, except when illuminated by the flashing lightning. A smart breeze sprang up, increased to a gale, and moaned and soughed through the forest.

Captain Axline and his men rode at breakneck speed, two or three abreast, along the narrow winding way. Rory and Jack, who were unused to riding, found it difficult to keep their seats. For once their nimble tongues were silent; each was devoting his undivided attention to keeping his feet in the stirrups and guiding his flying steed. Once only the troop came to a halt. Then it was for Barton to dismount and examine the ground for traces of the band they were seeking.

They were off again ere Keelson and McFarlan could regain their breaths and rub the many aching parts of their anatomies. On they rode to meet the storm. It was upon them. A blinding flash—a rattling crash! And the rain poured down in torrents. It dripped through the dense foliage in streams, and saturated the garments of the dare-devil riders. As they crossed occasional prairie-like open spaces, they were so blinded by the down-pour that they could scarcely see the trail. But on they rode without slacking their headlong speed.

An obstacle appeared in their path. It was the wagon train. Horses were rearing and plunging; teamsters were cursing and whipping. Major McMahan and his men were huddled under the best shelters they could find, waiting for the storm to pass.

Barton and Axline were riding side by side.

"To the right!" shouted the former in his companion's ear.

The Captain nodded and obeyed. Into the thickest of the woods they dashed, their companions following them. They made a short detour, passed the supply-train, and again came out upon the trail. Rory and Jack were clinging desperately to their horses' manes with one hand and holding their guns with the other, leaving the half-frenzied animals to guide themselves. The storm had spent its fury. Little by little the rain ceased and the sky cleared. The sun came out bright and hot. The warm air

reeked with fragrant moisture; and raindrops sparkled upon the foliage. Clouds of vapor arose from the marshy land on either hand. The wet hides of the horses glistened and smoked in the sun. Still on and on the troopers rode.

At last Hal Barton again reigned in his steed and sprang to the ground. It was mid-forenoon and they were midway of the road leading to Fort Recovery.

After several minutes spent in silent search, he announced:

"I find no trace of their footprints, Captain. Please hold my horse while I scrutinize the earth on the other side of the path."

While Barton was prosecuting his search, the soldiers began to talk among themselves in low tones. Captain Axline alone maintained a sphinx-like silence.

"As Oi've often said," McFarlan grumbled, "Oi'd ruther foight than ate. But Oi'm dommed if Oi wouldn't ruther starve than roide horseback, jist. Ochone! but me body's stove up intoirely. Me heart's in me shoes an' me liver's in the crown o' me hat. How 're yez, Jack Keelson?"

"Stanch as a new fishin'-smack," answered Keelson with a grimace, as he shifted his position in the saddle. "I don't ask fer no better sport than a horseback ride—I don't. It all comes o' bein' used to the exercise. To me it's jest like swimmin', smooth an' easy. Of course, I was on my beam

ends a part of the time, an' my cargo's shifted some'at; but my riggin's all right an' every spar's a-standin'. I hain't no complaint to make."

And Keelson feelingly rubbed his stomach and essayed to look happy.

"May the ould Nick take yez fer a lyin' spal-pane!" snorted Rory in disgust. "Look at the lump o' salt horse-meat! He straddles a horse loike a toad on a p'rtaty hill, jist."

At that moment Barton hurried to Axline's side and said in a tone of suppressed excitement:

"I've found the trail. They've crossed here since the storm, and are moving northward. They can't be a mile away. But if they be the ones we are seeking, they've been joined by others."

"That fact shall not deter us from hotly pursuing them," the Captain answered sturdily. "Mount your horse and let's be off."

"Thot's somethin' loike," chuckled McFarlan, slapping the sailor upon the back. "Jack Keelson, we'll be afther smellin' powdther in two shakes of a billy goat's tail, jist. Hooray, Oi say!"

"Clear the deck fer action!" Jack shouted. "We'll capture the whole thievin' crew an' swing em' to the yardarm. Whooppee! A fair fight an' no quarter!"

"Stop your noise," Hal commanded sternly. "Would you defeat our purpose? The chances are that both of you will smell more powder than you want to smell, ere we're through with this affair."

"That's so, Hal Barton," cried several of the troopers in chorus.

"Forward," Captain Axline commanded.

They left the hoof-beaten road and plunged into the unbroken wood. The low limbs of the trees were closely interlocked and their progress was slow. With stooped form and bent head, Barton kept his eyes fixed upon the dim trail. Not a word was spoken. The moist, soft earth gave forth but a dull, faint sound beneath the horses' tread. The wet leaves swept the faces of the riders as they passed. Song birds hopped from twig to twig and chirped their delight that the storm was over. A red squirrel, chattering angrily, scampered across the trail, and, with a saucy whisk of his tail, sought the sheltering boughs of a great tree. A monster blacksnake flashed his shining length before them, and with darting tongue wriggled into the underbrush.

Presently the column halted. Hal Barton and Captain Axline conversed in low tones for some seconds. Then the Englishman slid from his saddle and glided away. Noiselessly dodging from tree to tree, he disappeared along the trail they were following. Five minutes passed. In breathless silence his comrades awaited his return. He did not come. Rory McFarlan essayed to speak; but Captain Axline with raised finger commanded silence. There was a slight stir in the underbrush. And Barton stood at the officer's side.

Again the two held a whispered conversation.

"Dismount," commanded the Captain, in a low tone. Silently the men obeyed.

"Look to the priming of your pieces; there's work before us," were Axline's next words.

The soldiers obeyed. McFarlan and Keelson grinned broadly. The devil-may-care chaps were eager for a fray. A few of the men fidgeted uneasily. Captain Axline raised his hand and said in a strident whisper:

"Listen, men. Hal Barton informs me the Indians we're seeking are but a short distance ahead of us. They're traveling slowly, and are unaware that we are upon their trail, apparently. They outnumber us—two to one. As you know, they're wily, desperate foes. We must take them by surprise, if we hope to defeat them and rescue the prisoner in their possession and save our own scalps. It's a desperate undertaking. Are you willing to risk it?"

To a man the soldiers vigorously nodded assent.

"Very well, then," the officer continued. "I detail the four rear men to remain here and look after the horses. The rest of you will follow Barton and me. Move cautiously and quietly, making as little noise as possible. And no matter what you hear or see, make no demonstration against the foe, until you receive the word of command. Attention! Dismount, forward, march!"

Like silent specters they moved along the trail,

Barton leading the way. The snapping of a dried twig or the rustling of the foliage alone betrayed their presence in the vast solitude. For a half hour they walked rapidly and noiselessly. Then Barton paused, and turning about whispered to Axline:

"We should have overtaken them ere this. I fear they've smelled danger and are on their guard. We must beware of an ambushade. I'll reconnoiter. Await my return, unless you hear my rifle speak. In that case come to my aid at once."

Again he quickly vanished among the trees, his moccasined feet scarcely stirring the dead leaves. Captain Axline and his men stood in their tracks, their hands upon their weapons. A minute passed, and another. Then the oppressive stillness was broken by the reverberating boom of a carbine. This was followed by a blood-curdling war-whoop that was cut in twain by the sharp crack of a rifle.

"Forward!" shouted Axline, in ringing tones. "To the aid of Hal Barton!"

Like hounds loosed from the leash, the troopers sprang to the front. The officer led the way. With compressed lips and pent breath, each man kept his finger upon the trigger of his gun and strove to outrun his companions. Through tangled copses and over fallen tree trunks, they skimmed. The first war-whoop was seconded by a chorus of others. Then Hal Barton's roar of rage and defiance awoke the echoes of the wood.

"This way, men!" shouted Captain Axline,

speeding toward the spot whence the giant's battle cry had come.

With lusty cheers, the soldiers followed their leader. They caught sight of the Englishman standing behind a tree, rapidly reloading his gun. Flying to his friend's side, Axline cried:

"Where are they, Barton?"

The rattling crash of a volley from the hidden foe came as an answer to the question. One soldier dropped to the ground, shot through the heart; and two others were wounded.

"Fire!" was the officer's command.

With alacrity the men obeyed, discharging their pieces full in the face of the dusky foe, that, with ear-splitting yells, was rushing upon them.

"To cover and re-load!"

The soldiers sought to obey; but the enemy in overwhelming numbers was upon them. From all sides painted braves sprang up. The forest was alive with them. It soon became a series of personal combats. Each man selected an adversary, and with knife or clubbed gun fought single-handed. The blue-gray powder smoke rolled in clouds through the leafy canopy overhead. The din of conflict filled the air. The curses and cries of the combatants and the wails and groans of the wounded and dying made a pandemonium. Startled birds flew screaming, and timid hares scampered away in affright.

Hal Barton saw a man mounted upon a powerful

black horse, and holding by the rein another beast upon the back of which was seated a woman. The man's dark, mocking face was turned toward the Englishman. It was Rudolphe Cartier! He was moving away from the scene of conflict with his prisoner, Judith Sterling. Hal caught a glimpse of Judith's sad, sweet face. The sight crazed him. Reckless of consequences, he sought to fight his way to her side. It was in vain. He was surrounded by a dozen warriors; but, fighting like a madman, he broke through them and succeeded in rejoining his comrades. When he could again look in the direction where he had seen Judith, she and her captor had disappeared.

"What shall we do?" Captain Axline asked breathlessly, as he ducked a blow aimed at his head and ran his adversary through with his sword.

"Order a retreat; soon it will be too late," was Hal's reply.

"And leave Judith to her fate?"

"For the present—yes; it's all we can do," Barton groaned.

Reluctantly the young officer gave the command, although he realized that further struggle was useless, suicidal. Already one-third of his little band was disabled. Two or three were dead and a number of others were seriously wounded. It was questionable whether they could save themselves even now. The Indians, emboldened by superior numbers, were pressing them hard. For-

tunately, the savages could not use their firearms to advantage without endangering the lives of their own braves.

Captain Axline gave the order to retreat. It was easier given than executed. However, the soldiers drew closely together and attempted to break through the living wall that surrounded them. Hal Barton saw a wounded trooper vainly endeavoring to escape from the deadly embrace of a burly red-man. The Englishman flew to the rescue. With a single blow he felled the warrior to the earth. Then he stooped to lift the wounded soldier to his feet. Another painted brave leaped forward, his tomahawk raised to brain the unsuspecting giant. But the instrument of death never descended. A rifle spoke; and its deadly message found lodgment in the Indian's heart. The brawny arm dropped palsied; the black eyes rolled wildly in their sockets, and the brave dropped to the ground, a corpse. Then above the din of battle, the exhausted and discouraged soldiers heard the stentorian voice of Lew Wetzel. It sent the hot blood back to their faint hearts and nerved them to renewed effort.

"This way, fellers!" the scout bawled at the top of his voice. "Seems you've stirred up a reg'lar yellershackets' nest, Hal Barton, an' got the whole swarm 'bout y'r ears. You needn't stop to 'xplain, I know all 'bout it. This way, men! Keep close together an' break fer the main trail. Me an' Hal

Barton 'll try to hold the red devils in check till you fellers can reload y'r pieces. Git out o' here quicker'n a bear can lick a sore paw, 'r you won't 'ave a lock o' hair left to give to y'r sweethearts—you won't, by thunder!"

The scout's presence sent terror to the hearts of the savages. They faltered, gave way before the impetuous charge of the little band and broke and fled. They believed that Wetzel and Barton bore charmed lives and were under the especial care and protection of the Great Spirit.

The soldiers were quick to take advantage of the temporary respite. Sheltering themselves behind trees and brush, they quickly reloaded their guns. Then they began a hurried retreat toward the place where they had left their horses. Wetzel and Barton followed them, hotly pursued by the howling savages, who by this time had in a measure recovered their courage. The scout and his comrade kept up a running fight, dodging from tree to tree, and firing and re-loading as they ran. The Indians, yelling and firing at random, followed the fugitives until they came in sight of the horses. Then, thinking that help for the whites was at hand, the redmen hastily withdrew.

The soldiers fired a parting volley at the retreating foe, and, securing their steeds, quickly made their way back to the main trail. Just as they emerged into the narrow road winding among the trees, Major McMahon and his command came into

view, followed by the rumbling wagon-train. Five of Captain Axline's little squad had lost their lives, and there was scarcely a man who was not wounded. Several were so badly injured they could not mount their horses. Those the Captain placed in the provision wagons to have them conveyed to Fort Recovery. Then, acting on Lew Wetzel's advice, he joined his party to Major McMahan's command, and the column moved toward its destination.

Lew Wetzel, mounted upon the horse of one of the dead troopers, rode between Captain Axline and Hal Barton. As they moved forward he remarked:

"No, Cap'n, 'twouldn't 've done fer you to try to go back to Greenville. By this time the trail's lined with redskins, thicker'n Spanish needles in a cornfield. They're not likely to jump onto as big a force as this—an', if they do, they'll jest have to jump off ag'in—but they'd 'ave been on your squad 'fore you'd gone a mile. The woods is jest *full* of 'em. An' I never saw 'em so all-fired bold an' sassy in my life. I was out on a little scout fer Cap'n Gibson, w'en I come to you fellers. I heard the sound o' y'r guns, an' knowed somebody was havin' a hot scrimmage; so I jest moseyed in the d'rection o' the' firin'. Jest 'fore I got to you, I passed that black scoundrel, Cartier"—Here Wetzel gritted his teeth in silent rage—"an' his pris'ner. I knowed at once what was up. But I didn't dare

to do nothin', fer he had a dozen half-breeds an' Injins with him. 'Twan't no use to try to fight that many single-handed. Though I had a right smart notion o' shootin' the mean cuss, an' trustin' to luck fer the balance. I'm right down glad neither o' you two men ain't bad hurt; though you're bruised an' busted-up some. Cheer up—both o' you. Ther' may be a chance o' rescuin' the young woman yit. The Injins is bent on makin' an attack on Fort Recovery, 'r I'm badly mistaken. Cartier won't leave the neighborhood till the fight's over; he'll want to go back to the Maumee, with the rest o' the murderin' pack. Cheer up. Lew Wetzel 'll do all he can to help you."

Axline silently nodded. Barton rode with bowed head and evinced no sign that he heard his friend. Late in the evening the wagon-train and its convoy arrived at Fort Recovery. After unloading the stores they had brought, Major McMahon and his men went into camp under the outer walls of the fortification.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The morning of the thirtieth of June, seventeen ninety-four, dawned clear and warm. Ere the purple mists had cleared from the eastern horizon Major McMahon's camp was astir. The Major, a giant in size, and a renowned Indian fighter, rivaling the Wetzels, the Bradys and the Poes, stalked about on a tour of inspection. He was anxious that everything should be in readiness for an early start. He gave little credence to the report that a large body of Indians were in the vicinity, contemplating a descent upon Fort Recovery, and believing that his services would not be needed in the defense of the little garrison, he meant to return immediately to his safe and comfortable quarters at Greenville. However, he was

too experienced a borderer to trust to appearances or his own preconceived opinions. As soon as it was light, he sent two scouts into the neighboring woods, ordering them to return when the sun was two hours high and report what they had discovered.

The sun's hot breath blew the mists from the eastern horizon. Campfires, that had glowed red in the murky light of dawn, paled; and the columns of blue-black smoke became tenuous haze lost in the dazzling vault above. The teamsters watered their beasts at the river near at hand; curried and fed them, and impatiently awaited their own breakfasts. The soldiers lolled upon the ground, smoked their pipes and chatted, and grumbled at the cooks' delay.

Breakfast was over; the sun was an hour high. The garrison was astir; the gates were open. Soldiers were passing in and out. The sun was two hours high; and the wagons were drawn up impatiently awaiting orders to move. Major McMahan, like an overgrown turkeycock, strutted and fumed and fretted because his scouts had not returned. Suddenly two men emerged from the timber, and at full speed approached the officer. They dashed through the line of pack-horses and wagons, elbowed aside the men, and in an exhausted condition reached the Major's side.

"What is it?" was McMahan's abrupt interrogatory.

"Indians!" gasped one of the men.

"Where are they?"

Both men panted and gurgled, but could say nothing. They were paralyzed from fright and exertion.

"Speak out—speak out!" the Major cried angrily. "You've seen Indians!"

"Y-e-s," one of the scouts managed to articulate.

"Where did you see them?"

"In the woods—a mile or two from here."

"How many of 'em?"

"Hundreds! hundreds!"

"You're excited!" sneered the Major. "Did you see one savage or a dozen?"

"We saw several hundred of them," the fellow insisted doggedly. Major McMahan looked grave as he asked:

"Were they in camp or on the march?"

"Marching in this direction—coming fast."

"And only a mile or two away?"

Both men nodded.

Major McMahan whirled about and said to Captain Axline, who was standing near:

"These men bring me word that a large body of Indians are approaching. See that the teams are unhitched and the carts and wagons formed into a barricade. We'll prepare to give them a hot welcome."

Then to Lieutenant Craig:

"You heard what I said to Captain Axline.

Carry the news to Captain Gibson within the walls."

Soon all was bustle and confusion within the fort and without. The gates of the fortification were closed and barred. McMahon's men made a semi-circular barricade of their vehicles, under the walls, and prepared to resist a vigorous attack. It was not long in coming. In fact, it came before the whites were fully prepared for it. Bellowing and whooping like demons, hundreds of Indians suddenly broke from the cover of the wood and began a lively fusillade upon the fort. Then they discovered McMahon's command behind the barricade. With fierce yells of delight they threw themselves upon the little company of whites and sought to annihilate them. The soldiers made a valiant and stubborn resistance. Wetzel and Barton fought side by side. It seemed that their guns were always loaded. McFarlan and Keelson were a host. Captain Axline rendered invaluable aid to Major McMahon, hurrying from point to point and encouraging the men by word and example.

The savages spread their force and surrounded the fort on all sides, still continuing their desperate attack upon the barricade. They tried to batter down the gates of the fortification; they sought to break through the barrier separating them from McMahon's heroic band. The soldiers under cover poured a deadly fire upon their frenzied foes and mowed them down by scores. The Indians

swarmed from the woods in increasing numbers, dancing and yelling like devils. By mere weight of numbers, they threatened to break through the barricade. Seeing this McMahan ordered a charge. The savages could not stand that. In spite of the efforts of their chiefs they wavered, broke, and fled to the shelter of the wood.

It was during this brief lull in the fighting that Wetzel remarked to Barton:

"If McMahan had listened to me last night, we could 'ave had everybody an' everything safe inside the walls o' the fort. Of course it 'ld 'ave cluttered things up a bit, but it 'ld 'ave been better 'n runnin' the risk o' losin' our scalps. It seems, though, that when a man swaps his coonskin cap fer an officer's hat, his head grows so he can't see n'r hear nobody but hisself. Will the Injins come at us ag'in, Hal Barton? You can bet y'r last shillin' they will. They've had one massacre of white soldiers on this spot; an' they won't rest contented till they've had another one. Our force all told don't number more 'n a hundred an' sixty men; an' Cap'n Gibson's only got 'bout two hundred. That makes three hundred an' sixty of us in all. The redskins outnumber us five to one. The odds is too big—I don't see much chance fer us. Howsomer, we'll fight as long as our powder holds out. Ther's nothin' else to do. To surrender means to be murdered on the spot—'r suffer torture at the stake. The soldiers all knows that; an' ther' ain't

a man of 'em won't fight as long as he can pull a trigger, Hello! Jest as I 'xpected, here they come ag'in thicker 'n flies 'round a molasses bar'l. Hear 'em whoop an' yell, Hal Barton. This is the kind o' sport I like! Watch me roll that big brave with the rings in his ears."

The second onslaught of the savages was fiercer even than the first. They recklessly exposed themselves to the galling fire of the whites; and Major McMahan was again compelled to charge them, ere they were put to flight.

During the day they made repeated attacks, attempting to break through the barricade, to batter down the gates of the fort, and to scale the pallisade. McMahan and his resolute men bore the brunt of each assault, and as a consequence suffered severely. When night settled down, black and foggy, the Indians reluctantly withdrew, leaving scores of their dead and wounded upon the field.

Then Captain Gibson threw open the gates; and the remnant of McMahan's command entered the fortification. Twenty of them lay dead without the walls and forty were wounded. Major McMahan and a number of other officers were among the dead or missing. Captain Gibson's command, sheltered as it was by the pallisade and the log walls of the blockhouse, had sustained but little loss. All night long the groans of the wounded disturbed the quiet of the warm summer night. Rory McFarlan had a bullet in his shoulder, and was suffering torture at

the hands of the post surgeon. Jack Keelson feelingly shook his head as he watched the doctor's efforts to extract the ball, and whispered in his comrade's ear:

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Rory, my mate. It ain't much of a wound anyhow. The ball ain't in ther' more 'n four 'r five inches, an'——"

"Kape a stiff upper lip y'rsilf, Jack Keelson," the other interrupted testily, "an' yez won't be talkin' such dom nonsinse, jist! L'ave me alone, Oi say. Oi can stand anything but y'r fool chatter. Be off wid yez. But say, Jack"—as the sailor was retiring disconsolately—"give me a chaw of y'r t'rbaccy."

Lew Wetzel and Hal Barton were uninjured. Supperless they threw themselves upon the bare ground, to sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion. Soon the hardy scout was in the land of dreams. But Hal tossed and fidgeted until long after midnight. When at last he sunk into slumber, he was beset by a host of vague, fantastic fancies. He was an Indian and wedded to both Margaret and Judith. Rudolphe Cartier, in the form of an immense scaly serpent, sought to bear them away. Then he was doing battle with the shining monster. He felt its coils tightening around his body; he was suffocating. He awoke with a start. His body was bathed in perspiration; his teeth were chattering. He could sleep no more.

One by one the dreary hours of the night passed.

The sufferers moaned themselves to sleep. The night wind whispered consolation to the dying. Occasionally the stillness was broken by the crack of a sentry's rifle, as he fired upon a band of the savages attempting to carry off their wounded, under cover of the fog and darkness.

Morning came. To the brave men within the walls of Fort Recovery, it brought a full realization of the fact that another day of battle was before them. Slowly they opened their eyes, stretched their cramped and aching limbs, and sauntered aimlessly about the inclosure. Ere it was fairly light, ere the soldiers had finished their scant breakfasts, the savages renewed the fight. All the forenoon it raged. The sun passed the meridian and began a descent of the western arc of the heavens. Repulsed repeatedly and greatly disheartened, still the Indians stoically fought on. But their ardor was gone; their fire was desultory and ineffective. At last they withdrew, leaving the ground covered with their slain.

"What does it mean?" Captain Axline asked Wetzel.

"Means they're gittin' ready fer a final charge—'r else they're up to some new devilment. I don't know which. But we ain't through with 'em yit."

The scout's opinion was soon confirmed. The Indians had rallied their forces, for one final effort. Forth from the timber they silently moved in a solid phalanx, their chiefs and principal war-

riors leading. They did not whoop and discharge their firearms at random, as they had done before. Like trained veterans, they marched to the attack. Simon Girty moved among them, encouraging them and urging them on.

"Some white man's planned the thing this time," Wetzel muttered. "Yes, Hal Barton, I see Simon Girty but it ain't him. He fights like an Injin—shoot an' run away. Ah!"—And the scout hissed the word between his teeth.—"Don't you see them scarlet coats out ther' 'mong the trees? Them's Britishers. I told you white men was directin' this charge."

The cannon mounted upon the walls of the fort, St. Clair's recovered pieces, belched flame. The plucky soldiers and backwoodsmen poured a rain of leaden missiles into the ranks of the advancing foe. The savages did not hesitate nor falter. Steadily they moved forward, the living closing up the gaps left by the dead and wounded. As yet they had not fired a gun. A tall, athletic young chief was leading them, his body defiantly erect.

"Tecumseh—by the big dipper!" Wetzel ejaculated.

"Where?" Barton asked quickly.

"Right in the very front—that strappin', tall young Injin with the eagle feathers in his hair," the scout answered. "He's becomin' one o'the most dangerous redskins on the border. He's a great speaker an' has a wonderful hold on his people.

Him an' his brother, the one the whites is beginnin' to call a prophet, 're goin' to play the very mischief w'en they git older. Ther' won't be no peace n'r safety fer white settlers while they live. Look at him, Hal Barton—jest as cool as a cucumber! He's got the grit, if he is an Injin. It may be a shame to kill him; but I'm goin' to do it."

Ere Barton could make reply, Wetzel lifted his rifle and fired. The eagle feathers flew from Tecumseh's crest. He staggered, caught himself, and coolly led the way toward the fort.

"Aimed a little too high," muttered the scout in an aggrieved tone, as he hastily rammed home another charge.

At that moment the savages developed their plan of attack. They assailed the fort on all sides and strove desperately to gain admittance to the inclosure. A battering ram thundered at the gate. Bare, brawny bodies scaled the pallisade, only to tumble lifeless to the ground. Flesh and blood could not stand the leaden hail the whites poured from loopholes and crevices. Inch by inch the redmen receded from the footholds they had gained. Panic seized them, and they gave ground rapidly. Of a sudden, a man upon a large black horse galloped from the edge of the wood, and sought to rally them. His sallow face was pale as death. He stormed in English, cursed in French, and gave orders in the Indian tongue. Like a madman he dashed here and there, heedless of the bullets that

whizzed past him, and returned to the assault. An ashen hue overspread Hal Barton's visage. The reckless rider of the black steed was Rudolphe Cartier!

A dozen guns belched death at the daring Frenchman. He rode unhurt through the storm of missiles. Barton's gun was empty. A moment the giant stood and stared. Then with the words—"The scoundrel possesses a kind of bravery"—the Englishman began to reload his rifle.

"Cartier!" bellowed Wetzel, his pock-marked face aflame with rage. "That traitorous devil shall die—an' at once!"

He struck the breech of his rifle a smart blow to prime it, and threw the piece to his shoulder. But ere his finger could press the trigger, a gun cracked at his side. He saw the Frenchman drop the reins, throw up his hands and roll from the saddle. The riderless horse galloped madly away. And the next moment the savages were scattering in all directions.

Lew Wetzel turned to see who had fired the shot, and looked into the smiling face of Jack Keelson. A smoking rifle was in the sailor's hands.

"I sent him to Davy Jones the first shot," Jack laconically replied to the scout's questioning look.

"Tumbled him as purty as you please," Wetzel replied smiling. "But I'm kind o' disapp'inted that I didn't git to do it."

"Thank God! I didn't have to kill him," Hal

Barton ejaculated as he walked toward the place where Rory McFarlan lay wounded.

The victory was with the whites. The Indians were in full retreat toward the Maumee, bearing a part of their wounded with them and leaving the rest to their fate. Their dead lay upon the ground, unburied. Among the dusky corpses were the bodies of a number of British soldiers and white renegades, including the traitor, Lieutenant Cartier. It was a terrific defeat to the savages, and for years the tribes engaged mourned their slain.

The whites lost sixty-five killed and wounded. Among the former were Major McMahan, Captain Hartshorn and Lieutenant Craig.

Two days after the battle, Captain Axline returned to Greenville. Procuring a short leave of absence, he went to Cincinnati to see Joanna and her father. He found them almost heartbroken over Judith's sad fate. Robert Sterling had aged ten years in a few days. He was a broken and trembling old man.

Lew Wetzel and Hal Barton followed the retreating foe to the banks of the Maumee, hoping to gain an opportunity to rescue the fair captive. Their hazardous journey was in vain. A number of times they saw her; but she was in Girty's care and closely guarded. When at last they made their way back to Greenville, there were tense lines about Hal's mouth that had not been there before. His form was erect; his step was elastic; but his face

was that of a middle-aged man. Melancholy rested upon him; a cloud that the sunshine of Rory McFarlan's happy-go-lucky disposition could not fathom nor dispel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

About the middle of July, General Scott and his Kentucky riflemen arrived at Greenville. Mad Anthony gleefully rubbed his hands, as he looked upon the trim and stalwart Kentuckians well-mounted, and went on making hasty preparations for the campaign. By the first of August everything was in readiness. On the eighth the army marched out of Greenville, leaving behind a sufficient garrison for the fort, and took up a position at Grand Glaize, seventy miles away.

This place was in the heart of the Indian country. Villages and cornfields stretched away on every hand. At the confluence of the Au Glaize and Maumee, General Wayne erected a strong fortification which he called Fort Defiance. Again he made

overtures of peace to the redmen; but his offers were scornfully rejected. The American army advanced from Fort Defiance on the fifteenth of the month, and on the eighteenth were encamped a few miles from Presque Isle, a short distance from the present village of Waterville.

On the evening of the nineteenth, the commander called Lew Wetzel and Hal Barton to his quarters and said:

"To-morroy I expect to attack the allied tribes and force them to decisive battle. I wish to know their exact position, their fighting force, what chiefs are in command, and how many white men, if any, are with them. Can I depend upon you two men to ascertain these facts and report to me before sunrise?"

"You can, Gener'l," was Wetzel's reply.

Barton stood with downcast eyes, and said nothing. The old soldier playfully tapped him upon the shoulder and said:

"Cheer up, my man. Ere a fortnight passes, your wife will be nestling in your arms."

Still Hal did not lift his eyes nor make reply.

"Come—rouse yourself," Wayne cried, gently shaking the giant. "What has come over you, Barton?"

"I'm ready to do your bidding, General," the Englishman impassively made answer.

"What ails him?" Mad Anthony inquired of the scout in a low tone.

"Got the dumps the worst kind, Gener'l," Wetzel whispered with a wink and a nod. "But nothin' 'll do him as much good as a little spice o' danger. Leave him to me. I'll work a cure on him. Come on, Hal Barton. Le's be off; the Gener'l's dependin' on us."

Like a child Hal obeyed his friend. General Wayne looking after them, as they disappeared in the dusk, murmured softly to himself:

"Poor fellow! It's little wonder. God grant I may be instrumental in restoring his wife to him."

"Giner'l."

The commander aroused from his reverie, turned to encounter the wistful gaze of Rory McFarlan.

"What is it, my man!" the old soldier kindly inquired.

"Sure, an' Jack Keelson's been tellin' me," the Irishman said hurriedly, "that there's goin' to be a battle the morry, jist. An' the spalpane said they'd be afther kapin' me out o' the foight on account o' me lame shoulder. Giner'l, Oi can't stand it—Oi can't."

"You were wounded at Fort Recovery?"

"Oi was."

"How does it happen you're here; that you weren't left at Greenville?"

"Bedad! An' Oi wouldn't *stay*, jist."

General Wayne smiled broadly as he said:

"And you wish to be in to-morrow's fight?"

"Oi do."

"Can you load and fire a gun?"

"Oi can, Giner'l. But me shoulder gits a divil of a kink in it once in a whoile, jist."

"Rest easy, my Irish friend; you shall take part in to-morrow's battle."

Bowing profoundly and volubly expressing his thanks, Rory moved away. General Wayne called a council of his officers that lasted until after midnight. Then he dropped down for a few hours' sleep. At two o'clock he was awakened by an orderly, who announced that Wetzels and Barton were waiting to see him. The General sprang to his feet, saying:

"Send them to me."

A few seconds later the two men stood in his presence.

"What have you to report?" were the commander's words.

Hal Barton stepped forward. His face was alight, his apathy was gone.

"General Wayne," he said, "the savages are encamped in the thick forest surrounding the British post, Fort Miami. A few miles farther down the river lies their largest village. The chiefs of the various tribes are holding a council tonight. They're aware of your presence and expect you to make an attack upon them soon. They've chosen a thick wood, full of fallen trees and underbrush, as the site of their present encampment."

Barton paused for breath, and Wayne asked quickly:

"What's their strength?"

"Fully two thousand able bodied warriors."

"What tribes are represented?"

"Miamis, Potawatamies, Delawares, Shawnees, Chippewas, Ottawas and Senecas. These allied tribes are reinforced by a large number of half-breeds and renegades and several companies of Detroit militia."

"Oh!" Mad Anthony exclaimed excitedly. "So the British are openly aiding the savages."

Barton and Wetzel both nodded.

"Well," the General continued rapidly, "if I have my way, the English shall pay for their meddling interference in our affairs. Are the Indians all on the northern bank of the stream?"

"They are."

"How did you learn all this?"

Hal actually smiled—a thing he had not done in days; and Wetzel chuckled in reply to the commander's question:

"By creepin' in 'mongst 'em."

"Wasn't that very risky?"

"Jest a little risky, Gener'l—jest a little risky. So much so that two 'r three times we shook hands an' bid each other good-by, thinkin' our scalps was as good as gone. But you wanted to know 'bout these things, Gener'l, an' we had to find out."

The old war horse was touched. Grasping a hand of each, he said feelingly:

"Both of you deserve to be rewarded for your unwavering devotion to your country's cause. And anything you may ask of me, that's in my power to grant, you shall have."

"We don't want nothin'," the scout answered gruffly, "'xcept this, Gener'l. If the Injins is whipped, we want you to let us have a squad o' soldiers to help us in rescuin' Hal Barton's wife an' that young woman Cartier carried off."

General Wayne started.

"Where is your wife, Barton?" he asked kindly.

"At the Indian village just beyond Fort Miami."

"And Miss Sterling? I had almost forgotten her."

"At the same place."

"You're certain?"

"I am."

"I'll do anything I can to rescue them, ere to-morrow's—to-day's—sun goes down. Now seek some rest. The camp will be astir in a few hours. Sunrise will see us on the move. By the way, who will command the allied tribes?"

"Blue Jacket, the Shawnee."

"A bold, reckless fighter," Mad Anthony remarked musingly.

"Yes, but not as cool-headed an' far-seein' as Little Turtle, the Miami," Wetzels volunteered. "If he was, ther' wouldn't be no battle. Little Turtle

knows they don't stand no chance ag'inst you, Gen-er'l; an' in the powwow to-night he was opposed to goin' into a fight. He called you 'The Wind'—an' told the rest of 'em that you never went to sleep."

A smile of gratification overspread General Wayne's clear-cut features. Then it was gone and again his face was hard and stern.

"To rest, men—to rest," he said brusquely. "You'll need all of your strength and nerve before you have a chance to rest again."

When the two scouts had withdrawn, Mad Anthony again threw himself upon the ground, to snatch a few winks of sleep. A dense, foul-smelling fog arising from river and swamp obscured the moon and stars. Millions of mosquitoes swarmed into camp to torment the weary soldiers. Horses neighed and pawed restlessly.

The first faint streaks of dawn saw the army astir. A little after sunrise the fog lifted and lazily floated away. The sun frowned fiercely from cloudless skies and promised a scorching day. Hasty preparations for the battle were begun. Camp equipage was left on the ground with a guard over it. At eight o'clock the army slowly moved forward. It traveled a few miles of black swamps and grassy hummocks, and arrived at the edge of the dense forest where the waiting foe was concealed. At intervals an Indian sprang from cover, fired a telling shot, and, with a whoop of defiance, darted into the almost impenetrable wood.

General Wayne ordered a halt and re-formed his troops in line of battle. Directly in front of the army was the dark wood, obstructed by fallen trees, trailing vines and thick undergrowth. To the right, lay the black waters of the Maumee, the surface of the sluggish stream shining hotly in the fierce rays of the morning sun. To the left, stretched the virgin forest gradually sloping upward to higher ground, its paths open and inviting. Three miles away was the British post; and about an equal distance beyond the fort was the large Indian village where Margaret Barton and Judith Sterling were prisoners. In the depths of the woods, directly in front of the American army, the savages lay concealed, expecting to surprise and annihilate General Wayne's forces as they had those of General St. Clair.

Mad Anthony arranged his troops as follows: A legion on the right flank, covered by the Maumee; a brigade of mounted volunteers on the left flank, commanded by General Todd; a brigade of mounted volunteers in the rear, under General Barbee; and a select battalion of mounted riflemen in front, led by Major Price. These latter troops were sufficiently advanced to prevent a surprise to the main body. The length of the lines of the army thus arranged was about two miles.

The order to advance was given. The lines moved forward. Boldly the Indians met the attack and sought to turn the left wing. Seeing this,

General Wayne gave orders for the second line of troops to move up rapidly and support the first. Also, he commanded General Scott to take the whole force of mounted volunteers, and, by a circuitous march through the woods, turn the right wing of the enemy.

The engagement became general. All along the battle front, the rattling crash of small arms resounded. An aid galloped to the General's side and said:

"A scout informs me that large numbers of the savages 're hiding along the river bank in the expectation that we'll pass them. Then they mean to fall suddenly upon our rear, to have us between two fires."

Wayne smiled grimly as he remarked:

"One of their old tricks, but it won't work this time. Who gave you the information?"

"Hal Barton."

"Then it's correct," the commander said positively.

And he gave orders that Captain Miss Campbell take his troop of legionary cavalry, rout the Indians from the shore, and attempt to turn their left flank.

Hotter and hotter waxed the fight. The first and second lines of infantry charged the enemy's center. The whites pressed the redmen so closely that the latter had no time to reload their empty pieces. Dense clouds of powder smoke rendered the dark woods darker. Scouts came and went; aids gal-

loped hither and thither. Mad Anthony ordered the infantry to charge the foe with fixed bayonets.

Then the old soldier, in his impetuosity, spurred his horse into the thick of the fight. Lieutenant William Henry Harrison, one of the aids, touched his superior on the shoulder and said respectfully:

“General, if you get so far in advance, in the midst of the fighting, what shall we do for field orders?”

Wayne reined in his horse so suddenly the animal was thrown upon his haunches, as, with flashing eyes, he replied:

“If you lose sight of me, or cannot gain my side, remember there is but one standing order for the day. And that is—give the rascals *hell* with the bayonet!”

A soldier of the first line of infantry overheard the remark. It passed from lip to lip. Cheers for Mad Anthony rent the sultry air. And the men charged so impetuously that they carried all before them. The right and left wings were scarcely in the engagement at all. And the second line of infantry but served as a support to the first. The Indians broke and fled. They could not stand the cold steel. In less than an hour the field was won. The victorious whites drove the demoralized savages for several miles, and shot them down under the walls of Fort Miami, even, where they had made a final stand, evidently expecting the British at the post to aid them.

The victory was cheaply won. The American loss in killed and wounded was about one hundred. That of the enemy was two or three times as heavy. The bodies of the red braves and their white auxiliaries strewed the tangled woods. The backbone of the Indian confederacy was broken. For years the allied tribes did not forget the lesson so dearly learned at Fallen Timbers.

The savages deserted their villages and fled in all directions, bearing their prisoners and effects with them. Well they knew General Wayne would not rest until he had destroyed every lodge in the Maumee country.

During the brief engagement Rory McFarlan and Jack Keelson fought valiantly in the front rank. Until the charge was ordered, Lew Wetzel and Hal Barton spied upon the movements of the savages, carried messages from one part of the field to another, and lent their knowledge of Indian wiles and warfare to the commander and his subordinates. When the command to charge the enemy was given the two comrades led the way. A dozen times they were surrounded by the cunning foe, and fought hand to hand combats until aid arrived. And it is but fair to state that their presence was as instrumental in terrorizing the redmen as were the bristling bayonets of the charging infantry.

The battle was over. The two woodmen stood side by side in a little glade a few hundred yards from Fort Miami. From their position they could

catch an occasional glimpse of a scarlet coat as some British officer mounted the pallisade of the fortification and looked about him. The blinding glare of the summer sun shone full upon our two friends. In the cloudless sky buzzards were already circling. At intervals the silence was broken by the murmur of voices or the moan of some wounded wretch in the tangled wood. Then the thunder of galloping hoofs came to the ears of the two men; grew muffled and indistinct, and died away in the distance. Barton was saying:

"I'm going at once, Lew Wetzel. To wait an hour may mean to wait too long, forever. The savages are deserting the village and bearing their prisoners with them. I must recover my wife and Miss Sterling. I'm going now, this moment, though I go alone."

"You'll not go alone, Hal Barton—you know that," Wetzel replied, softly. "But if you'll listen to the advice of an ol' friend, you'll wait till Cap'n Axline comes with his squad o' troopers. He's promised to come—an' Gener'l Wayne's promised to let him. It won't be long to wait, an'—"

The Englishman, with an impatient shake of the head, interrupted:

"I can wait no longer. My soul's sick of delay. I'm off to recover what to me is dearer than life."

"Then you'll find Lew Wetzel at your side," said the scout, as he affectionately patted his long rifle. "An' woe be to the cuss—red 'r white—that op-

poses y'r takin' what rightfully belongs to you. Come on."

The two shouldered their guns and silently strode away in the direction of the Indian village a short distance down the stream. They had gone but a few rods when the scout nudged his companion and whispered:

"I seen somethin' 'r somebody move in that clump o' bushes right over there. Probably it's a wounded Injin but maybe it 'ld be best to look an' see."

"We've no time to while away with wounded Indians," Hal returned half angrily, without slackening his pace.

An expression of mingled perplexity and sorrow rested upon the scout's disfigured visage. With an ominous shake of the head he followed his companion, muttering gloomily to himself:

"He ain't hisself at all. I'll be tarnation glad when this whole business 's settled—the war an' all—an' I can git off by myself ag'in. If Hal Barton gits back his wife he won't want to go with me no more; an' if he don't git her, he won't be fit to go. Fer he's gittin' more cantankerous 'n a wolf with a sore tooth. Never saw such a change in a man in my life. An' it all comes o' settin' his heart on a linsey-woolsey petticoat—'r two of 'em p'raps; an' that's worse an' more of it. He's made an everlastin' mistake o' life. A good gun's all the

sweetheart a man needs. But I'm sorry fer him—I am. I love the lad—an' I'm sorry fer him."

As the two men rapidly drew away from the clump of bushes Wetzel had indicated, the foliage parted and two black eyes, set in a dark face contorted with malignant hate, peered after them. When the scouts had disappeared among the trees the man in the thicket arose to his feet; and, stepping forth and shaking his fist in the direction they had gone, he sputtered in impotent rage:

"So you have the temerity to return, Hal Barton, cousin mine? Well, you're welcome, thrice welcome. You'll not escape me now! You think to recover your precious wife, your peerless Margaret! But I'll thwart you again. Girty's fleeing for his life. His day's over—he's not here to interfere with my plans. But I know where Black Hoof and a band of chosen warriors are hiding. A royal revenge shall be mine! And then for merry England and a final adieu to this land of swamps and bad liquor. Hal Barton, your loving cousin, Richard Holloway, will be present at the tender meeting between yourself and your darling. And in her presence, before her eyes, you shall die like a common cur!"

He caught up the carbine that lay at his feet, and, chuckling demoniacally, hurried away toward the north. Once he stopped, and, leaning against a sapling for support, panted:

"I'm dizzy and short of breath. What can these

attacks mean? I have them so often of late. I must get out of this damned climate; must get to a place where they have brandy fit for a gentleman to drink."

Then he took a strong pull at his pocket flask, and resumed his journey.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was midday when Barton and Wetzel reached the vicinity of the Indian village. Leaving the river, they made a wide detour to the left in order to approach from the rear. In so doing, they had to encircle a large swamp and cross an open glade or hummock. When they were midway of this treeless space, their steps were arrested by the sound of some heavy body crashing through the reeds and bushes on the side farthest from the river.

Instinctively both men paused and nervously fingered the triggers of their firearms. Suddenly a horseman broke into the open and galloped toward them. He bestrode a magnificent iron-gray horse and rode with the abandon of a bold and

reckless spirit. A glance told our friends he was a white man. As soon as Lew Wetzel's trained eye caught sight of the flaming silk handkerchief that encircled the stranger's head, he said in a low, intense voice:

"Simon Girty! An' he's met his final sickness, 'r I've fergot how to squint along a gun bar'l."

Like a flash the scout's rifle flew to his shoulder and he was taking deliberate aim at the oncoming rider. The glade was only a few hundred yards in diameter. Although the two woodmen were directly in his path, the horseman had not discovered them. On he came, like the wind, his horse's hoofs sinking deep into the spongy soil. Wetzel's finger was upon the trigger; his eye was sighting along the gleaming barrel. A hand was laid upon his arm; and Barton whispered in his ear:

"Wait!"

The scout dropped the muzzle of his weapon and turned toward his comrade, angrily. At that moment Simon Girty became aware of the proximity of the two men, and, with a strong pull, reined in his galloping steed. Again Wetzel's gun flew to his shoulder. But he did not fire. Instead, he cried in a voice of thunder:

"Don't make a move to escape, Simon Girty, 'r you're a dead man!"

Then, without changing his rigid position, he whispered to his companion:

"What was it you wanted me to wait fer, Hal

Barton? Speak quick—my finger's itchin' to send a ball through that renegadin' traitor's black heart."

Before the Englishman could offer an explanation, Girty, as though divining the meaning of Wetzels words—cried boldly:

"You have me in your power, Lew Wetzel. Kill me, if you will. But before you do so let me speak a few words."

"Out with them," answered the scout, in a low, passionate tone. "But you've got to talk fast—can't waste much time on such 'tarnal mean skunks as you."

"Lower your gun; you make me nervous. I promise you I won't try to get away."

"I won't do nothin' o' the kind," was the dogged reply. "If you've got anything to say, say it inside of half a minute, 'r you won't never *git* to say it."

"Then I'd better leave it unsaid and let you two men lose your lives, and Barton's wife die in captivity," was the renegade's cool rejoinder.

"You can't fool an ol' bird on chaff," Wetzel sneered. "An' if you know how to say a prayer, you'd better say it, fer in ten seconds' time your soul 'll be in etarnity."

Again the giant laid his heavy hand upon his friend's arm and said:

"Wait!"

Then he proceeded earnestly:

"I'm not anxious to spare his life, Lew Wetzel.

But let us hear what he has to say. Lower your gun; he cannot escape us."

"Maybe you're right," was the reluctant admission.

The scout dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground. Beckoning Wetzel to follow him, Hal strode to the outlaw's side and said briskly:

"We're upon urgent business as you well know. We've no time to waste. Lew Wetzel means to kill you, and I shan't interfere unless I have good cause to do so. You deserve to die for the many crimes you've committed against your race. Dilly-dallying won't save your life, I warn you. If you've anything to say, say it quickly."

A perceptible shadow of alarm swept over the renegade's sensual visage. He was pale as he answered:

"Hal Barton, have I not befriended you?"

"No!"

And the answer fell like a leaden bullet. Girty winced. He began to realize that the two men were desperately in earnest. He was not a coward at heart; he had braved death a thousand times. But he did not want to die; he was *afraid* to die. Now he said calmly, almost sadly:

"It's true I've sought both of your lives more than once. And when you stood at the black stake, Hal Barton, I didn't try to save you. I couldn't have done so if I would. But I didn't care to save you. You're my bitter enemy and I hated you

while I admired your strength and grit. But I've kept the promise I made—am keeping it yet."

"What promise?" Hal inquired coldly.

"I promised you I'd keep your wife out of Dick Holloway's clutches. I've done it."

"And where is my wife?"

"In the village just ahead of you—where you're bound for. She lives in the big lodge that stands on the river bank, a few yards from the place where you crossed on the ice."

At memory of the scene, a grim smile for the moment flickered over the renegade's brutal countenance.

"Are you done—is that all you've got to say?" Wetzel cried, impatiently.

"No—listen," Girty went on hurriedly, "I've lost favor with the treacherous redskins. They blame me for urging them on to defeat. They've been angry and sullen toward me ever since the battle at Fort Recovery. Since the defeat to-day, they've threatened to take my life. They're hunting me at this moment—as they've hunted you two men many times in the past. I deserve it. I've been a traitor to my country and my people. But whisky and gold are to blame for it. And to-day I'm getting my reward. When you two men stopped me I was hunting you."

Barton and Wetzel exchanged incredulous glances, but said nothing. Girty continued:

"You doubt my word. No wonder. And yet

I'm telling you God's solemn truth. Listen just a minute longer."—The scout was nervously shifting his position and impatiently fingering the trigger of his rifle.—"Then do with me as you see fit. An hour ago I was hid in the woods to the north of here, waiting a chance to slip into Fort Miami and put myself under the protection of the British. Dick Holloway passed near my hiding place, mumbling and talking to himself. From the few words I caught, I understood he was seeking Black Hoof and his band of Shawnees. He's aware of your coming to the village for your wife and he means to surprise and capture you. I took my life in my hands and rode here as fast as I could to tell you."

Again Barton and Wetzels exchanged glances. Amazement shown in the former's face, incredulity in the latter's.

"Where is Miss Sterling?" was Hal's sudden question. Girty replied promptly:

"When Lieutenant Cartier was killed at Fort Recovery, I took the young woman under my wing. I don't say what I intended to do with her;"—here Hal Barton convulsively clutched his rifle, until his nails dug into the polished stock—"but I saved her from Indian abuse and torture. She's in the same lodge with your wife, taking care of her. At least, they were both there this morning. I don't suppose anybody has removed them, for there has been too much of a panic among the redskins for them to think of meddling in my affairs,

except to kill me, if they can catch me. They've been busy trying to save their own property and prisoners. But I won't keep you. If you want to rescue the women, go at once; and hurry back to your camp as soon as you can. Holloway's hot upon your trail."

He ceased speaking. His horse restlessly pawed the soft earth. Wetzel gave Barton an inquiring look. Slowly and sternly the latter said:

"Simon Girty, if we spare your life, what is your purpose?"

"I mean to try to escape to Canada and lead an honest life. It has been a long time since I tried it."

The r enegade's rum-sodden face for the moment was illuminated by the light of noble resolve and honest purpose. How he forgot his solemn promise and returned to the savages to incite them to further acts of bloodshed history records.

Hal Barton riveted his keen blue eyes upon the dark face before him, as though he would read the inmost secret of the outlaw's soul. At last the giant said solemnly and impressively:

"I believe you. If you've deceived me, may the curse of God, whose every law you've broken, rest upon you. I spare your life."

Girty galloped away without so much as a backward glance.

"Maybe it's all right," Wetzel muttered, sullenly, "but it's my honest 'pinion he told us a pack o' lies

to save his life. Howsomever, it's done, an' can't be done over. We'd better be moseyin', Hal Barton."

The Englishman silently nodded, and again the two hastened in the direction of the village. They came upon it from the rear. Apparently it was entirely deserted. Not a sign of life was visible about the irregular collection of huts and lodges. As they peered from their leafy cover, however, a squaw staggering under a large bundle hurried from a cabin near at hand and trotted into the woods. Then two Indian lads bearing burdens sprang from the low doorway of another rude domicile; and, calling to a mangy cur that limped at their heels, made off in the direction the squaw had taken. The scouts waited and watched for some minutes; but no other savages put in an appearance.

"I guess it's all right," Wetzel whispered softly. "Ther' ain't no smoke comin' from the lodges—seems the 'whole kit-an'-posse of 'em's vamoosed. Ol' Mad Anthony's scared 'em clean out o' the'r moccasins this time."

And a chuckle rattled in the scout's throat.

"I fear your surmise is literally true," replied Hal with a shake of his leonine head, "and that those whom we seek are not here."

"We'll soon know 'bout that," was the decided answer.

And, suiting his action to his words, Wetzel set off at a rapid gait, toward the heart of the village.

Hal followed in his friend's footsteps. They cautiously peeped into huts as they passed; and made a circuit of the council-lodge. Finding no enemies at hand, they ran at full speed toward the cabin upon the river bank, that Girty had indicated. When they were within a few yards of it, a young woman suddenly emerged from its dark interior and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazed timidly about her. It was Judith Sterling!

Hal Barton stopped like one petrified. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Yes, it was Judith, but Judith pale and emaciated. Had Girty, then, told the truth, was Margaret in the cabin?

At that moment Judith caught sight of the two men, and with an inarticulate cry staggered back against the wall of the hut. Without realizing what he was doing, Hal sprang forward and threw his strong arms around her. For a moment she closed her dark eyes and permitted her head to rest upon his shoulder. As one in a dream, she heard him whisper:

"Judith, it's I—Hal. Don't faint. You're to return to home and kindred. Judith, look at me."

His words called her back from the state of unconsciousness into which she was sinking. Slowly she opened her eyes. She saw his gaze fastened upon her. Feebly but firmly she disengaged herself and stood erect. Then she said calmly, icily:

"There, Mr. Barton, I'm feeling better. The sense of relief and comfort I felt on recognizing you, on realizing that deliverance was at hand, almost overcame me. Your sick wife lies within the hut. She needs you. Go to her at once."

It was Judith's appearance that had caused Hal to lose control of himself. Had she appeared in good health, he could have greeted her formally. But her evident illness and threatened swoon had thrown him off his guard. His chest was heaving and his eyes were shining. By a strong effort of the will, he drew himself together and answered her calmly:

"You were about to faint. But you're much better now. Seat yourself upon this stump with your back against the wall. There, that'll do. Now I'll leave you in Wetzel's care, and go to my wife."

He bent his tall form and entered the cabin, taking his gun with him.

"Mr. Wetzel," Judith called softly to the scout who stood leaning upon his rifle and gazing out upon the placid bosom of the river.

At the sound of her voice, the woodman whirled and strode to her side, muttering as he did so:

"I've been called Lewis Wetzel, an' Lew Wetzel, an' plain Wetzel, an' purty much everything; but that's the first time in many moons I've been mis-tered. An' the funny thing about it, it sounds all right, comin' from *her*."

Then aloud: "Here's Lew Wetzel at y'r service, miss. 'What can he do fer you?"

"You and Mr. Barton have come to rescue us?"

"That's the reason of our sudden visit, miss. You see Hal Barton wanted to git his wife—he's been pinin' fer her fer months; an' then, too, he seemed 'bout as anxious to git *you*."—Here a peculiar twinkle danced in the scout's black eyes.—"So as soon as the fight was over, we set out an' come right here."

"There has been a battle between the army and the Indians?"

"W'y bless you, miss, yes! An' ol' Mad Anthony everlastin'ly lambasted 'em."

"And that was the cause of the savages deserting the village so suddenly and leaving us alone?"

"Of course, miss."

Judith was silent a moment, sitting with her head bowed upon her hands. Wetzel stood looking down upon her, pityingly. Intuitively he knew that her heart was torn and bleeding, and he guessed the cause. Of a sudden she arose to her feet and said:

"You've come to rescue us. Take us from here immediately."

Wetzel replied with a dubious shake of the head:

"I don't know 'bout that, miss. Hal Barton's wife 's sick, you say; an' I can see with one eye shut that you ain't very peart y'rself. It 'd be a purty big undertakin' to carry you both to Mad

Anthony's camp—an' maybe have to fight redskins on the road—"

"But *I* can walk," she interrupted.

"No, you can't walk that distance. It's sever'l miles. Better wait a little while. Cap'n Axline 'll be here purty soon, with a squad o' soldiers; an' then we can take both o' you to camp, easy an' safe. How does it come the Injins didn't pack you off with the other pris'ners, miss?"

"I don't know," she answered listlessly as she again seated herself. "We were Simon Girty's prisoners, but he has not been in the village since yesterday."

"So Girty took charge o' you after that black-hearted villain, Cartier, was killed?"

"Yes."

"Has he been kind to you?"

"I've seen little of him. He has been away from here a great deal of the time. When he brought me here, he placed me in this hut with Mrs. Barton, and left an old hag to guard us and attend to our wants."

"An' he hain't threatened you n'r tormented you?"

"No—nor did he permit others to do so."

Wetzel brought his hand down upon his thigh with a resounding slap, and ejaculated:

"Wolves an' catamounts! What's the world a-comin' to? Who'd 'ave thought it—Simon Girty bein' merciful to helpless pris'ners? So the rene-

gadin' scoundrel didn't lie to me an' Hal Barton, after all. Fer once in his wicked life he told the truth—"

He broke off abruptly and looked apprehensively around him. Then, without a word of explanation to Judith, who sat staring after him, he set off toward the forest near at hand, muttering as he went:

"An' if Simon Girty told the truth is *some* things, maybe he told it in *all*. Maybe that Dick Hollerway—'r whatever his name is—is up to the very devilment the renegade mentioned. I'll jest take a squint around—an' see how the land lays."

He reached the edge of the wood and disappeared from Judith's sight. Left alone, she covered her face with her hands and wept silently.

Within the mean hut another scene was enacting. When Hal, with some difficulty, gained entrance through the low doorway, he stood peering into the gloom that surrounded him. The interior was unlighted save for the few beams of sunlight that streamed in through the bark roof. At first he could see nothing. A low moan attracted his attention. Carefully he felt his way to the dark corner where Margaret lay upon a couch of skins, and dropped upon his knees at her side.

"Margaret, lass," he whispered tenderly.

"Hal," she replied faintly.

But there was more of sadness than gladness in the one feebly spoken word.

He sought her hand. It was so thin he could enfold it in his broad palm. He felt the fever pulsating in her arteries. As yet he could not see her face.

"Cheer up, lass," he said kindly. "I've come at last to take you away from this dark and noisome place. You shall be nursed back to life and health. Be brave, Margaret, my wife, your trials and hardships will soon be over."

"Yes, lad, they're almost over," she answered apathetically.

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly, genuine concern in his voice.

She did not reply immediately. Hal's eyes gradually became accustomed to the gloom. He noted how worn and emaciated she was. Her wan, forlorn face was ghastly in the semi-gloom. Her breath came short and fast; and a harsh, hacking cough racked her frail form. He realized how ill she was and his bruised heart bled afresh. At last she murmured very faintly:

"I mean, Hal, that you've come too late. Life for me is almost over."

Her words struck him a sharp blow. With a groan he crouched upon the earth at her side and buried his face in his hands. His great frame shook. His fair hair tumbled in a cataract of gold about his sunburned face. The salt tears trickled through his calloused fingers. Vain regret, keen remorse were tugging at his heartstrings.

Margaret dragged herself into his lap. She entwined her slim arms around him and imprinted kisses upon his face and hands.

"Don't grieve, Hal, my lad," she pleaded brokenly. "You didn't know—how *could* you know? It has all been a great mistake; but you couldn't help it. But, oh! the fates have been cruel—hard, Hal. For I loved you so—I loved you so!"

A sob choked her utterance. For several minutes they remained locked in each other's arms. And neither spoke. He held her to him, as though he would never let go. Again he loved her, but with a new love, a higher, holier love. It was a love that had in it naught of passion, a love more like that the mother has for her sick child. It was tenderness itself.

"Forgive me, Margaret," he murmured in a hoarse whisper.

"I have nothing to forgive," was the softly-breathed reply; and she caressingly patted his cheek.

She had soothed him—comforted him. Now she said coaxingly:

"That's it, my lad. Be brave. Miss Sterling—and oh! she has been so kind to me since she was brought here—has told me how you and your comrade came back here after your escape, in hope of rescuing me. And she informed me, too, how you risked your life in trying to snatch her from the base man who had her in his power. She admires

you very much, Hal,"—the giant started—"and thinks you the soul of honor and nobility. And I'm proud of you, my lad, and love you so fondly. It would be pleasant to stay with you——"

Her voice failed her; and she wept convulsively. He hugged her closer to his heart and cried almost fiercely:

"You shall *not* die, Margaret! I'm strong—I'll fight the battle for you. I cannot give you up, I *will* not give you up! What's my great bulk of bone and sinew worth, if it cannot aid in saving you from the grave? You shall live, I say!"

His great desire, his firm resolve, was mirrored in his handsome, manly face. She read it as one reads a printed page, in the faint light, and it lent her strength and courage. Drying her tears, she smiled as she asked timidly:

"Do you think I can live, Hal?"

"You *shall* live!"

"If I can escape from this horrid place and spend a few months with you, my dear lad, I shall be perfectly content to die."

"Already you're better," he cried joyfully. "Say no more. We must tarry no longer. Rest quietly until I call Lew Wetzel. We'll make a litter and carry you to the camp at once."

Very gently he laid her back upon her pallet of skins. Then he hurried into the outer air. Judith was still seated by the side of the hut. She was

gazing toward the dark forest back of the village; but a vacant, faraway look was in her eyes.

"Where's the scout?" Hal inquired as he looked about the place.

"He left me suddenly and hastened into the woods."

And she indicated the point of the compass with her finger.

"I can't understand it," Barton remarked in a musing tone. "But it doesn't matter. He's not far away and he'll return soon. Will you come into the cabin and help me to get my wife ready for the journey? I'll make a litter of poles and the skins of her bed. Then as soon as my friend returns, we can carry her to camp. Do you feel strong enough to walk several miles?"

"I can walk," she answered languidly as she arose and followed him into the hut.

Barton procured two strong light poles and commenced the construction of a litter, working in the open air, where he could better see what he was doing. When he had finished, he carried it through the low door and laid it upon the hard-packed earthen floor. Just as he was preparing to place Margaret upon it, Lew Wetzel sprang into the room, shouting:

"Black Hoof an' a score o' his red devils—led by that cussed Dick Hollerway—is upon us! Here, Barton, help me fasten up this door in some way.

They'll be whoopin' an' yellin' 'round the cabin in less 'n sixty seconds."

Margaret dropped back upon the ground, moaning pitifully. Judith pillowed the sick woman's head in her lap and spoke words of encouragement to her. The two men sprang to close the opening in the wall. A curtain of skins hung at the aperture. But in one corner of the room stood a puncheon door that did service in winter. This the two men seized and placed in position, propping it with the poles of the litter. Then they caught up their rifles and calmly awaited the attack they knew would not be long delayed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Several minutes passed, and those in the cabin heard nothing of their savage foes. Judith began to breathe easier. Margaret lay quiet and ceased to moan. Wetzel stalked about the small room, glueing his eyes to the chinks in the wall and muttering to himself, while Barton stood like a statue in the middle of the floor.

Presently the scout stole to Hal's side and whispered:

"I saw 'em in the woods, Barton; an' they was hurryin' in this direction. Simon Girty told the truth—an' the whole truth—fer once in his life. The red devils can't be far away; they ought to 'ave been here 'fore this. They think they're goin' to take us unawares an' capture the whole kit an'

b'ilin', without firin' a shot. But they'll find they've stirred up a den o' wildcats. They're sneakin' from one lodge to another, this very minute——”

Suddenly he stopped speaking and bent his head to listen. Hal did the same, but could hear nothing but the soft breathing of his companions. Not so with Wetzel. His keen ears had caught the faint sound of a moccasined footfall. He sprang to a crack between the logs and peeped out. In a few seconds he returned to Barton's side and said in a cautious undertone:

“It's jest as I thought. One o' the cunnin' varmints has been spyin' 'round the cabin. I got a glimpse o' him as he dodged behind some bushes on the river bank. He'll tell the others that we're onto their trick—an' then the whole squad of 'em 'll be down on us like a howlin' hurricane. We've got to keep 'em out o' here, Hal Barton, 'r lose our scalps; an' we've likely got a right smart job on our hands. Howsomever, I hain't got no heart-disease to speak of; an' I know you hain't. I wish the mean skunks 'ld set the log to rollin'; ther's nothin' makes me so fidgety as waitin'——”

The scout's loquacity was cut short by the sound of firearms, quickly followed by hideous whoops and yells. The leaden balls lodged in the log wall, but sent splinters and bits of bark flying into the room. Margaret uttered a feeble scream, and Judith sprang erect.

“Down, woman!” Wetzel commanded sternly.

"The Injins ain't goin' to waste much lead that way. They'll aim fer the cracks in the wall, next time—an' stray bullets 'll come buzzin' in here like bumblebees. Ther', that's it. An' whatever happens jest lay flat on the floor, an' don't say a word. Hal Barton, le's see if we can't pick off one 'r two of 'em."

But the wily savages had retired to cover, to reload. Presently, however, Hal saw a scalp-lock protruding from behind a neighboring hut. Then the painted face of an Indian came into full view. The Englishman took careful aim through a crack near the door, and fired. The brawny brave sprang into the air, and fell to earth a corpse.

"As purty a shot as I ever seen," chuckled Wetzel. "You took him right between the eyes. That's *one* less o' the mean wolf whelps, anyhow."

A few minutes later, the Indians discharged a second volley at the miniature fortress. Several of the leaden missiles whistled through crevices in the wall, passing dangerously near the defenders of the helpless and terrified women. Wetzel fired, and another brave bade a hasty farewell to earth. With howls of exasperation and rage, his comrades again sought shelter.

"That's another one o' the greasy reptiles gone to his fathers," the scout muttered.

And he tenderly caressed his long rifle, as he finished reloading it.

Then aloud to his companion:

"Hal Barton, you can tighten y'r belt an' git ready fer the hottest scrimmage you was ever in. Them cusses ain't so still out ther' fer nothin'. They're plannin' devilment. An' it's my humble 'pinion they'll come at us in a body, an' try to batter down the door, which won't be hard to do, seein' it's so flimsy. Are you ready to give 'em y'r best licks?"

"I'm ready," was the grim reply.

The two woodmen impatiently awaited the next move of their hidden enemies. The atmosphere of the small, dark room was hot and almost unendurable. Ten minutes passed, and still all was silent as the grave.

"Is it possible they've abandoned the attack?" Hal inquired of his companion, who, like a mouse at a hole, stood watching for the next movement of the cunning foe.

The scout shook his head so vigorously his long black hair whipped and fluttered like a piratical flag, as he made answer:

"No, 'tain't in 'em. They'll want revenge fer the two warriors we've sent to the happy-huntin'-grounds. Ther's no such good luck as the'r leavin' us."

"Can't we slip out and escape?" Judith suggested timidly.

"'Tain't to be thought of," was the quick reply. "You jest lay still, miss, an' let me an' Hal Barton do the plannin' an' fightin'."

Another five minutes passed. Suddenly Wetzel leaped back from his point of observation, crying:

"Jest as I 'xpected! Here they come with a log fer a batterin' ram. Now, Hal Barton, set y'r teeth an' fight as you never fit before!"

First came the rattling roar of firearms. This was immediately followed by a chorus of hideous howls and yells. Margaret lay prone upon the earth and moaned feebly. Judith placed her hands over her ears and scarcely dared to breathe. Four braves bearing a log were advancing on a run toward the cabin. Barton and Wetzel held their fire. With a thunderous crash the battering-ram struck the door. The poles that held it bent and sagged but did not give way. The four warriors drew back to repeat the blow, while their companions were rapidly re-loading their pieces. At that moment the scouts fired. One savage loosed his hold upon the log and dropped to earth, mortally wounded. Another fell, arose, and staggered out of sight. But two others threw down their guns and took the places of the wounded. The second blow upon the frail barricade fell with terrific force and effect. The green poles sprung from their places, and the door would have toppled from its position, had not Hal leaped forward and caught it.

"Load and fire the guns!" he cried to Wetzel. "I'll do my best to hold the door."

He braced his feet upon the earthen floor and threw his whole great weight and strength against

the flimsy barrier. A third blow and a fourth followed in quick succession. At each the giant was almost thrown from his feet. His head and shoulder were bruised and bleeding; but he maintained his place. Wetzel reloaded and discharged the fire-arms; but, owing to the fact that he had to fire through a narrow chink, at short range, he did little execution. The door was cracked and splintered. It could not withstand another blow. Both men were breathing hard and sweating profusely. Like lightning Wetzel once more reloaded his gun. The Indians again surged forward. The scout shoved the muzzle of his rifle through a crack and sent a ball into the breast of the foremost brave. Indian fortitude could stand no more. The log dropped and the savages fled to shelter.

Immediately Barton began to cast about for some means of repairing the damage done to the door, seeing which Wetzel remarked quietly:

"'Tain't no use, Hal Barton—it's too far gone. If they come at us ag'in, we've got to fight 'em in the open. I'm purty near smothered fer fresh air, anyhow—an' you're pantin' like a tired ox."

"What shall we do?" Hal cried hotly.

With a shake of his head, the scout replied:

"Ther' ain't nothin' to do fer the present, but wait an' trust to luck."

"Hal, my lad," Margaret called faintly.

"What is it, lass?" he answered as he hastened to her side.

"Can't you escape, if you leave us to our fate?"

"Yes, please—please go!" Judith seconded.

"Not another word from either of you!" he replied sternly. "We escape or die together!"

"Hark!" Wetzel commanded in a low tone.

Distinctly there came to their ears the sound of voices in angry altercation.

Wetzel grinned broadly as he said:

"That's Dick Hollerway an' Black Hoof quar'lin'. The white devil's urgin' another attack—an' the red devil ain't willin'. Now they're talkin' lower. That means they're plannin' mischief. Try to burn us out—more 'n likely."

Hal shuddered; and Margaret and Judith groaned in agony of spirit.

"What's to be done, Lew Wetzel?" the Englishman demanded fiercely. "Do you mean to remain here and let them roast us alive?"

"Can't roast us much more 'n we're roasted a'ready," the scout replied grimly, as he mopped the sweat from his swarthy face. "Anyway you can fix it, it'll be like jumpin' out o' the fryin'-pan into the fire, so far as I can see. Ther's nothin' to do but wait—an' hope that Cap'n Axline an' his squad 'll git here in time to save us."

The last remark revived Barton's flagging courage and had a reassuring effect upon the women. They felt they were already delivered from their great danger.

The minutes dragged slowly, endlessly. Hal

paced the close room, his loaded rifle hugged to his breast. Wetzel watched at the door. They heard nor saw nothing for some time. At last the Englishman stopped suddenly in the middle of the room, and whispered:

"Listen! What's that?"

An indistinct, crackling sound greeted the ears of all.

"I smell smoke," Judith gasped.

"It's fire, that's what it is," Wetzel said positively. "The mean, sneakin' varmints has slipped up in our rear an' touched a torch to the cabin. An' the ol' shack 'll go like a flash o' powder. Listen at 'em whoopin' an' shoutin', Hal Barton," he whispered. "We're gone this time. If we leave the hut, we'll be shot down; an' if we stay, we'll be roasted."

Hal's face paled. But he asked very quietly:

"Which shall we do?"

"You can do what you please," was the scout's reply, "but as fer me, I'm goin' to die fightin'—as a hunter should."

"But the women?"

"Ther's the rub. If we leave 'em, they'll fall into the hands o' the Injins 'r be burnt alive. If we try to tote 'em with us, they're sure to be killed."

Judith caught a part of the conversation. Now she said pleadingly:

"Please don't let us fall into the hands of our enemies! Better a thousand times to be burned

alive or meet death with you, than to be made captive again."

And she darted a look at Hal, that, owing to the gloom of the interior, he did not see. But he answered stoutly :

"As I've said, we escape or die together! Have no fear—we won't desert you."

Blue-black smoke was filling the room. The occupants could scarcely breathe. Red tongues of flame darted through crevices in wall and roof. The Indians, emboldened by the silence of our friends' guns, brandished their arms and danced in front of the cabin. Dick Holloway was among them, urging them to stand firm.

"Hal."

It was Margaret who spoke. He hurried to her side.

"Hal, lad, can't you escape, if you leave me to my fate?"

"Hush, Margaret!" he cried in agony. "I cannot—I *will* not!"

But she continued :

"I haven't long to live. What matters a few days or weeks? Life's all before you. Go! The fire's rapidly advancing. Already I can scarcely breathe, soon the smoke will suffocate me. I cannot walk, you cannot carry me and fight your way through. Leave me——"

He bent and tenderly kissed her, and, as he did so, he whispered in her ear :

"Say no more, lass. Once I left you—I'll never desert you again. There's no chance for any of us, but to die fighting, to meet death bravely."

"I'll take Margaret in my arms and meet death here," Judith said stoically. "If there's a fighting chance for you, go immediately."

In reply he flew to Wetzel's side, saying:

"We can stay here no longer."

"That's right, Hal Barton," was the laconic rejoinder.

"Then, you take Miss Sterling and I'll take my wife. We can use our knives with one hand, and fight as long as blood and strength last. But the women must die when we die. You understand?"

Wetzel nodded.

"Are you ready?"

"Ready an' waitin'."

"Very well. Let's shake hands and say good-by."

"Good-by, Hal Barton."

"Good-by, Lew Wetzel; you've been a true friend, a faithful——"

Hal did not finish his sentence. The sound of shots, the thunder of horses' hoofs, shouts and yells, and curses and groans, all fell upon the ears of the occupants of the burning hut.

"Cap'n Axline an' his troopers!" Wetzel shouted triumphantly. "Hurrah! Cap'n, give it to 'em. Lew Wetzel 'll be with you in a jiffy!"

He threw down the door, and, catching Judith by the arm, cried:

"Come on, miss. The air's better outside. Hal Barton, tote out y'r wife. Give it to 'em, Cap'n—don't leave a 'tarnal one of 'em to tell the tale!"

The scout hurried Judith to the outer air. Barton with his wife in his arms quickly followed. The cabin was a seething mass of flames. Black Hoof's braves were fleeing in all directions, hotly pursued by the victorious troopers. Captain Axline had dismounted and was running toward the cabin. When he saw the four emerge from the blazing pile, unharmed, he uttered a fervent "Thank God!"

Judith rushed forward and threw herself into his arms, sobbing joyfully. Hal placed his wife upon the ground and, returning to the burning cabin, brought out the poles and furs of the litter. "Bang—bang!" went the guns of the soldiers, in the distance. Lew Wetzel walked about, peering into the upturned faces of the dead Indians and talking to himself.

Suddenly a trooper galloped up to the spot where Hal was deftly fashioning the litter. The soldier's hat was off, his red and refractory hair was standing on end, and his freckled face was aglow with heat and excitement. Throwing a foot out of the stirrup, he awkwardly tumbled to the ground, shouting:

"Be all the powers o' darkness an' loight, Hal Barton, Oi'm glad to see yez aloive an' well, jist!"

Then the Irishman caught sight of Margaret ly-

ing upon the ground at Hal's side, and in a softer voice he asked:

"But who's the sick colleen, me bhoy?"

"My wife," was the curt reply.

"Arrah!" was all Rory could ejaculate.

His honest face mirrored the blank amazement he felt. However, he soon recovered himself and said:

"Hal, me bhoy, ther's a whoite naygur out here 'mong the red ones, thot wants to see yez. He ain't feelin' first rate—seein' Oi've sent a bullet through his bread-basket, jist—but he's proper anxious to see yez."

"A white man wants to see me?"

"The same, y'r riv'rance."—And McFarlan touched his shock of red hair and bowed awkwardly.—"He says he wants to talk wid yez, 'fore he dies. Wants to make a c'nfession, Oi'm thinkin'. An' sure, he has nade to—a mon thot's been in cahoots wid the red naygurs!"

Captain Axline and the others standing near overheard what Rory said.

"It's that Dick Hollerway," muttered Wetzel.

"Go to him, Hal," Margaret muttered. "He's dying."

"I'll stay with Mrs. Barton," Judith volunteered.

"An' I'll stay an' look after 'em both," said the scout with a nod.

One by one the troopers were returning from the chase after the redmen. Black Hoof and a half dozen of his braves only had escaped the slaughter.

Hal went slowly toward the spot indicated by the Irishman. He went solely because Margaret had asked him to do so. A few steps beyond the council lodge, he found his cousin lying in a contorted heap upon the ground. Holloway's flabby, bloated face was colorless; his breath was short and gasping. Bloody froth oozed from the corners of his mouth, and his black eyes were fast glazing in death. But his sense of hearing was alert and keen.

"Who—is—it?" he panted as Hal approached him.

"Hal Barton," was the crisp reply.

And the giant folded his brawny arms and looked down upon the dying man, unmoved.

"Come—come around—where I can—see you," Holloway requested whimperingly.

"I'm standing directly in front of you."

"Then why—why can't I see you? Why is everything so—so dark?"

"Because your sight is failing—you're dying."

"Dying!"

The one word came like a groan from the wounded man's inmost soul. He writhed in agony for a moment, then he said beseechingly:

"Oh! Say you—you don't mean it, Hal. I can't die—I—I—'m not fit—fit to—to die."

"Dick Holloway," Barton replied in a softened tone, "you're dying. You have but a few moments to live. You sent for me. What would you have?"

"I cannot—see—see you," whined the prostrate man. "Give me your—your hand, Hal."

"I—can—not!"

The words fell hard and cold. And Barton drew himself rigidly erect.

"Don't—don't say that, Hal," pleaded the dying man. "I've—wronged you—greatly, I know; but please—please take my hand—and say you forgive me."

"I will not act the hypocrite to console you in your dying moments," Hal answered sternly. "But a few minutes ago you sought my life and the lives of those I hold most dear. You're repentant now only because your capacity for evil 's at an end. You followed me to America; ruined my home and my life. The victim of your hellish cruelty even now lies at death's door. And you ask me to forgive you, Dick Holloway? I—can—not! God may be more merciful than I. You'd better ask his forgiveness for your many sins and your misspent life, ere it's too late."

"Oh! but I can't—I can't pray; I don't know how! And I'm so frightened—so terrified. All is blackness; and I'm dying—dying! And I shall never see merry England again—never again. Oh, God! It is—is too much! Hal—Hal, are you still there? No, he's gone. And I'm alone—alone with death—and in a strange land!"

"I'm by your side," Barton said kindly. "Dick, I

hate to see you die so. If I could forgive you, I would do so. But God help me! I cannot!"

The dying wretch paid no heed to the words. His voice grew thicker—fainter. Hal heard him mumble:

"I'm dying—dying in a land—I've despised. I cannot see—I cannot hear. Oh! What's that sound? Help! Hal, Hal Barton, save me—save me—save _____"

His words ceased suddenly. He sprang half erect, the blood gushing from his nose and mouth and his eyes staring from their sockets. Then he fell back upon the hard earth, a flaccid corpse.

Barton stood gazing into the face of his cousin for some minutes. The dead man's features were contorted and his eyes were wide and staring. At last the giant stooped and straightened the fast-stiffening limbs. Then he turned and slowly retraced his steps to the place where he had left his companions.

Margaret beckoned him to her side.

"He's dead?" she whispered shiveringly.

"Yes," Hal replied sadly. "He died the death of a knave and coward."

"Vengeance is mine," she murmured fervently.

"He asked me to forgive him. I could not."

"I know—I know!"

Captain Axline hastened to the Englishman's side, saying:

"It's mid-afternoon. We must be moving toward camp. Are you ready?"

"All ready," Hal answered.

And stooping he gently placed his wife upon the litter he had prepared.

Captain Axline took Judith upon his horse and gave the order to start. Lew Wetzel assisted Barton in carrying his wife.

Without mishap or adventure they reached camp, in the cool of the summer evening, and were safe under the protecting folds of Mad Anthony's banner.

Margaret rapidly gained in health and strength. Within a few days she was able to totter about. Unremitting care and loving-kindness were doing wonders for her.

A week later the two women, accompanied by Hal Barton and Captain Axline, and escorted and protected by a squad of troopers, were on their way to Greenville. From there, by easy stages, they journeyed to Cincinnati. Margaret stood the toilsome trip well, and hope sprang anew in her husband's breast.

General Wayne and his victorious army laid waste the Maumee country. Not a lodge nor a stalk of corn did he leave standing in his path. The Indians were disheartened and ready to sue for peace. The houses and stores of the British Indian agent, Colonel McKee, one of the principal insti-

gators of the war, were completely destroyed. Wayne would have attacked the British fort and razed it to the ground, had not the government at Philadelphia ordered otherwise.

On the seventeenth of September he returned to Greenville and went into winter quarters. Here, on the seventh of the following August, a treaty of peace was concluded with the various Indian tribes, and the savages turned over all white prisoners in their possession.

On the fifteenth day of December, while crossing Lake Erie on his way home, General Wayne died of infirmities begotten of his hard campaign. He sacrificed his life upon his country's altar. He never received full credit for all that he was, for all that he did. Mad Anthony was not only a bold and reckless warrior, he was more. He was a great organizer and a military tactician, of no mean ability. Long since, the bones of the old soldier have moldered to dust; but his memory should live forever in the minds of the people of the Northwest Territory.

After the campaign was ended, Lew Wetzel returned to his solitary life in the forest. Rory McFarlan and Jack Keelson disappeared, in quest of further excitement and adventure, and for years no news of them came to gladden the hearts of their friends. At last, however, they returned to the neighborhood of Cirtinnati and settled down to the

humdrum of a quiet, peaceable life. The two old cronies continued to banter and bicker to the end of their days.

In the fall following the treaty of peace at Greenville, Captain Axline and Joanna Sterling were married. The officer resigned his commission in the army and became a trader in the thriving village upon the banks of the Ohio. At that time Judith was at home, caring for her fast-aging father.

And now a final word as to Hal Barton and Margaret. On their arrival in Cincinnati, the husband fitted up a cottage and devoted his days and nights to the care and comfort of his invalid wife. For two years she was spared to him. Then one bright and beautiful spring day, when the wild flowers were in bloom and the birds were in song, the angel of death hovered for a moment over the humble cot, and Hal Barton was left alone.

His grief was real and poignant. She had been so much better—he had thought to have her with him always; and she was gone. Judith was in the same village. She had come frequently to see Margaret, but he did not think of her, did not turn to her for consolation. For the time he had no thoughts for any one but the gentle invalid who had gone from his side.

He had fallen heir to his cousin's fortune. The settlement of the estate required his presence in England. He could return in safety to the mother

country; for the charge against him had been canceled; his lawyers informed him. He made the journey; but he had no thought of staying there. He felt that America was his home. He turned the landed estate into gold, and returned to the wilds of the Northwest Territory. What was drawing him, what was impelling him? Let the words of Judith Sterling serve as an answer:

"I've loved you long, Hal; I love you still. I'll be your wife."

Hal Barton never had cause to regret the fact that he had won and kept her love while fighting under Mad Anthony's banner.

THE END.

