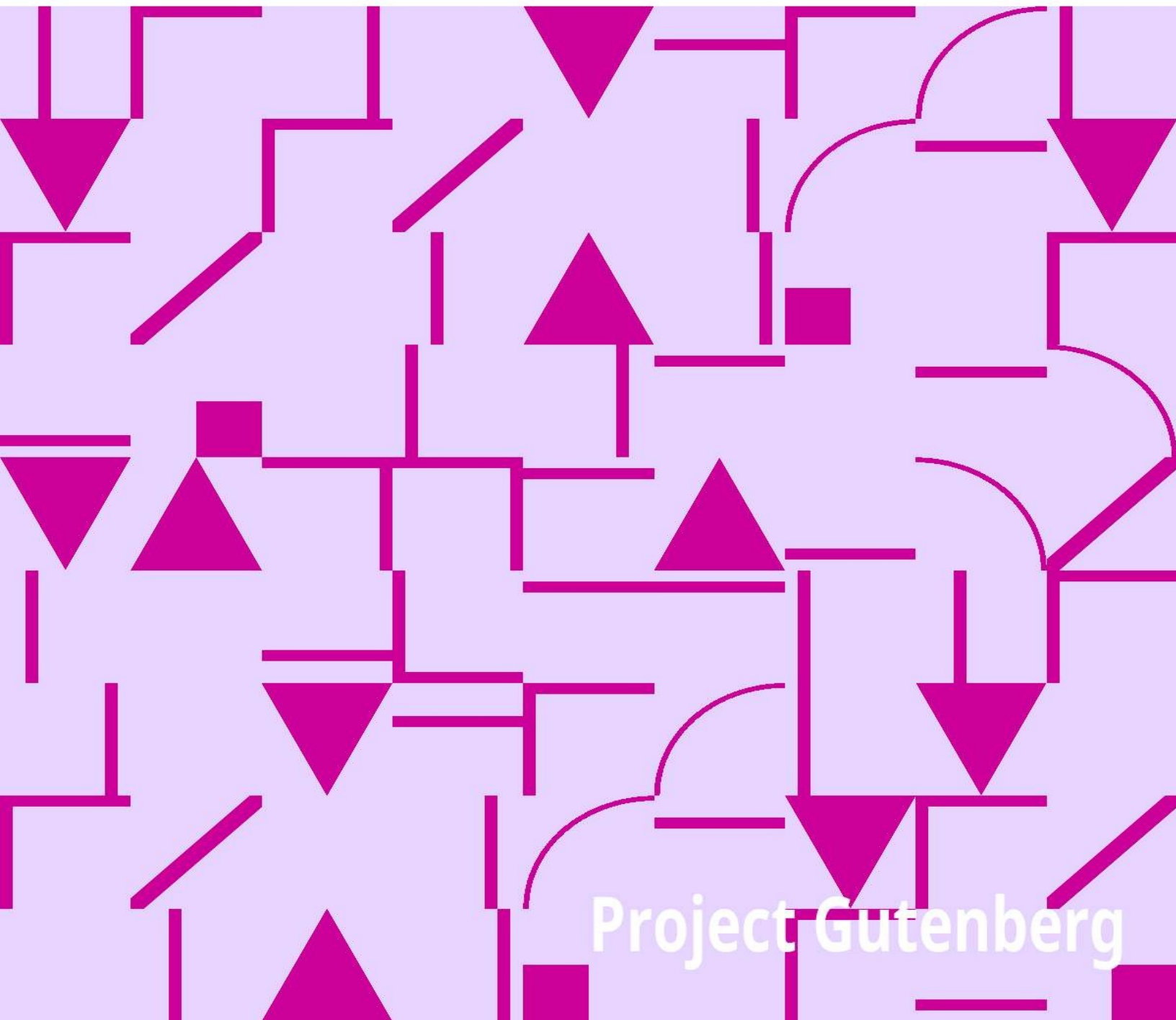


Boy Scouts on Hudson Bay; Or, The Disappearing Fleet

G. Harvey Ralphson



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The Disappearing Fleet

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BOY SCOUTS
ON HUDSON BAY

OR

*THE DISAPPEARING
FLEET*

By
G. HARVEY RALPHSON

Author of
BOY SCOUTS IN THE CANAL ZONE
BOY SCOUTS IN THE NORTHWEST
BOY SCOUTS IN A MOTOR BOAT
BOY SCOUTS IN A SUBMARINE

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**Boy Scouts on Hudson Bay;
or, The Disappearing Fleet.**

By G. HARVEY RALPHSON

CHAPTER I.

THE FIVE CHUMS IN CAMP.

"Sure it's me that hopes we've seen the last tough old carry on this same wild-goose chase up to the Frozen North!"

"Hello! there, is that you, Jimmy, letting out that yawp? I thought you had more sporting blood in you than to throw up your hands like that!"

"Oh! well I sometimes say things that don't come from the heart, you know, Jack. Wait, me boy, till I get good and rested up, and mebbe I'll sing a different tune. Ask Ned here if it's me that often shows the white flag when trouble comes."

"Well, I should say not, Jimmy McGraw. There never was a more stubborn nature in all New York than you, once you'd set your mind on anything. That talk of being discouraged is all on the surface. A thousand cataracts wouldn't keep *you* from getting to Hudson Bay in the end, if you'd said you meant to reach open water. And Jack Bosworth knows that as well as I do."

"That's right; I do," laughed the party mentioned as Jack, as he slapped Jimmy on the back. "I've seen him tested and tried out many the time, and never once did he squeal. I was only joking, Jimmy; you understand?"

"And sure that's what I was doing when I grunted about the carry. It was next door to a picnic down Coney Island way, and I don't care how many more times the lot of us have to pack canoes and duffle from one creek to another. But Francois here is after saying we're getting near the end of our long voyage, and Tamasjo, the red Injun, backs him up. So let's try and forget our troubles, and settle down for a decent night's rest."

"First of all, we'll get the tent up, because it looks a little like it might rain before morning," remarked the boy who had been designated as Ned, and whom the

other four seemed to look upon in the light of leader.

All of them were garbed in the familiar khaki of the Boy Scouts, and from their actions it would seem as though long familiarity with outdoor life had made this thing of pitching camp second nature with every one of the five well-grown lads.

These boys with their guides were a long way from home. Hundreds upon hundreds of miles separated them from the great metropolis of New York City, where the troop to which they belonged had its headquarters.

Those readers who have had the pleasure of meeting the five husky scouts in the pages of previous volumes of this series will not need any introduction to them. But for the sake of those who are not as yet acquainted with the chums, a few words of explanation may not come in amiss.

They all belonged to the same lively troop, but Ned Nestor and his shadow, Jimmy McGraw, were members of the Wolf Patrol, while Jack Bosworth, Frank Shaw and Teddy Green belonged to the patrol that proudly pointed to the head of an American black bear as its totem.

Ned Nestor had long been secretly in the employ of the United States Government, and had won considerable renown in carrying to a successful conclusion several difficult cases entrusted to his charge by the authorities in command of the Secret Service.

Jimmy, who had once been a typical Bowery newsboy, but now "reformed," fairly worshiped Jack, and had been his faithful henchman for a long time past. He was witty, brave, and as true as the needle to the pole.

Then there was Frank Shaw, whose father owned and edited one of the great daily papers in New York; he had long ago shown a desire to be a correspondent, and was always on the lookout for chances to visit far-off corners of the world which did not happen to be well known, and about which he might write interesting accounts for the columns of his father's paper. He was a great admirer of the celebrated Frank Carpenter, whom he had met many times in his father's office.

Jack Bosworth's father was a wealthy corporation lawyer and a capitalist as well, always ready to invest in promising schemes of a legitimate character. And it was really because of this venturesome nature of Mr. Bosworth that these five lads had undertaken this tremendous journey, away above the outskirts of Canadian civilization, many weary leagues beyond the northern limits of Lake Superior, and with the almost unknown shores of the great Hudson Bay as their

objective point.

The last boy was Teddy Green. He had a well-known Harvard professor as his father, and some day no doubt the lad anticipated following in the footsteps of his parent. Just now his greatest ambition was to be an explorer and endure some of the privations which such men as Stanley, Livingstone, Dr. Kane and other renowned characters in history were said to have met with in carrying out their tasks.

From the desolate character of their present surroundings it would seem that Teddy was in a fair way to realize his boyish dream. For days now they had not met with a living human being, even an Indian trapper far away from his tepee in search of game. Mountains and valleys, plains covered with scrub trees and seemingly endless bogs, and stretches of moss-covered land surrounded them day after day.

They had ascended one river until they could paddle their three canoes no further. At this point had come the first carry to another stream, and from that day on it had been the hardest kind of work as time passed on.

Already Jimmy had lost all track of direction, and often declared that it would not surprise him if they finally turned up somewhere over in Siberia, for to his mind it seemed as though they had come far enough to have passed the North Pole, even though they had seen no ice packs.

The taciturn Indian guide, who went under the name of Tamasjo, and the dusky voyageur, a French Canadian named Francois, assured them that all was well, whenever one of the boys ventured to voice a suspicion that they might have lost their way and wandered far past their objective point.

Both guides claimed to have hunted all over this country in times past, and the voyageur had even accompanied a noted explorer on a summer wandering up here. Hence their confidence reassured Ned, who often consulted a rude chart which had been placed in his hands before starting out on this journey, and thus verified the statements made by Francois.

Much paddling through rushing rapids and against the current of boisterous rivers had made the muscles of the boys' arms seem like iron. Every one of them appeared to be the picture of good health; because there is absolutely nothing equal to this outdoor life to build up sturdy constitutions.

Already all of them were at work. The tents went up so rapidly that it was plain to be seen these lads would easily take the prize offered for perfection in camp

making, in a contest between rival patrols.

The canoes had been safely drawn up on the shelving beach, and doubly secured; because it would be nothing short of a calamity to lose one of the handy vessels while so far from civilization, and with no suitable birch trees around from which another light boat might be fashioned by the craft of the guides.

The day was nearly done, and when presently the smoke of their campfire began to ascend in the still air, night crept slowly about them. As it was the summer season and the days were very long up here in the Far North, the hour was later than they had ever started in to make camp before.

Plenty of supplies had apparently been carried along, to judge from the fragrant odors that soon began to steal forth. All of these lads belonged to families of wealth, so that at no time were they reduced to limiting their outfit. Anything that money could buy, and which prudence would allow to carry with them, was always at their service.

So the guns owned by Ned and his chums were of the latest pattern, and capable of doing good service when properly handled. The boys, who had been through campaigns in many parts of their own country, as well as over the southern border, and in foreign lands as well, and for young fellows who had not yet attained their majority, all of the scouts had experienced thrills calculated to make men of mature age proud.

And yet in spite of all this they were genuine boys, with warm hearts, and fond of practical joking. Seated around the jolly fire after disposing of supper, while the two guides attended to cleaning up, Jimmy entertained his mates with a series of rollicking songs, accompanied by Teddy on his mandolin, which he had somehow managed to smuggle along, in spite of a careful watch on the part of Ned, who did not wish to take a single article that was not indispensable, for he knew the gigantic task that lay ahead of them.

Jimmy has as usual been overboard during the late afternoon. It was not a voluntary swim the comical chum had been enjoying, either; these plunges never were, but it seemed as though Jimmy must lose his balance once in so often just while the canoes were negotiating through some wild rapids, and in consequence he had to make the passage clinging to the gunwale.

His red sweater was hanging on a bush to dry in the heat of the fire. It looked unusually brilliant as seen in the glow of the leaping flames. Jimmy was very proud of that same old sweater, which had been with him through so many campaigns that it showed signs of wear and tear. But though he had another nice

navy-blue one in his waterproof clothes bag, Jimmy persisted in donning the ancient article every blessed day, in spite of the appeals of his chums.

Ned as usual was poring over his well-thumbed chart. Every day he marked the new ground they had covered, and very seldom had he found cause to doubt the correctness of the two guides. And whenever this had happened it turned out that they were right, and the map wrong.

"Well," Frank finally broke out with, "so far we haven't run across anything in the shape of a rival expedition, though Ned seemed to think in the start that was what would happen to us."

"I haven't changed my mind yet," observed the party mentioned, looking up from examining his chart. "We understood that the syndicate that is trying to unload this wonderful new mining tract they claim will be richer than Mesauba on Jack's father as a speculation, knew about our being sent up here on some secret mission. They could easily guess that we meant to find out if half of the big claim they made was true, and that on our report Mr. Bosworth would base any action he might take. Now it was to be such a tremendously big deal that under the conditions, if so be there was something crooked about the claims they made, you can understand that it would pay them handsomely to shunt us off the track, or else salt the mine, and make us think it would be as rich a proposition as their prospectus set out."

"But," interrupted Jack, "who could they get to do their crooked work away up here in this forlorn country, where we haven't run across a living being since we met that trapper going south with his winter's catch of pelts?"

"Oh! money will do lots of things," answered Ned. "Given a soft berth, with good pay, and plenty to eat, and scores of Indian half-breeds, timber cruisers, guides out of employment along the salmon fishing streams of the Dominion, and trappers loafing through an off season, would jump at the bait. There'd be plenty to enlist under the lead of a bold man hired by the syndicate; if, as we more than half believe, their claim is a great swindle which they mean to hang about Jack's father's neck."

"Francois says we will always have to be prepared, and as that is the motto of Boy Scouts all over the known world, it isn't likely to seem new to us," Frank Shaw remarked, a little boastfully it must be confessed, for having passed through so many strange happenings in times past had given him a touch of what Jimmy was inclined to call the "swelled head," though any one would have been justified for feeling proud of such a record of wonderful things accomplished.

The scouts having started on the subject of their mission continued to discuss it from various angles. In this way they often hit upon suggestions, because one remark would bring out another until some fellow chanced to open up a new field of conjecture.

They were deep in the matter, and all taking a hand in the discussion, when Francois, the dark-faced voyageur, suddenly started to his knees with a cry of warning. At the same time the boys became aware of the fact that a strange rushing and pounding noise was rapidly bearing down upon the little camp on the river bank.

Jimmy happened to be sitting cross-legged like a Turk, a favorite attitude of his, and becoming excited he could not get up as rapidly as his chums.

In consequence of this he seemed to be in the way of some huge body that rushed the camp, scattering the fire, and rending the branches of the tree under which the exploring party had settled for the night.

It was all over in a few seconds. The camp was in an uproar, one of the tents down flat, the fire in danger of communicating to the brush, and Jimmy squealing on his back, where the sudden rush of the mysterious monster had thrown him.



CHAPTER II.

A WILD CHARGE.

"Help! Help!" Jimmy was shouting, kicking wildly as he roared. "Keep off me, you wild elephant! Somebody shoot him, quick, before he steps on me!"

"Here, stop that kicking, if you want to be helped up, do you hear, Jimmy!" exclaimed Frank, who had hastened to the assistance of the comrade in distress. "Are you much hurt; and did the beast trample on you any?"

Jimmy began to feel of his legs and arms, and upon discovering himself apparently as sound as a dollar, grinned sheepishly. Meanwhile the two guides had hastened, with the help of Ned and Jack, to gather the fire together again. Teddy had snatched up the nearest rifle and was down on one knee, peering out through the semi-darkness as though anticipating a return rush on the part of the unknown monster that had created such confusion in the camp.

"No great damage done, after all, seems like, if Jimmy says he's all right," remarked Ned, now beginning to let a broad smile creep over his face, for seeing Jimmy doubled up had been a ludicrous spectacle not soon to be forgotten.

"But what in creation was it that put the kibosh all over me like that?" demanded the one who had been knocked over by the mad rush of the invader.

Ned glanced toward Francois, and the voyageur simply said:

"Bull moose—him very much mad, charge camp like that!"

"Well, I should think he must have been," Frank Shaw declared. "Why, if we'd had a little more warning we might have met him with a volley of hot lead that'd have laid him out dead. Now that Francois says so, I do believe he looked pretty much on the order of a monstrous moose bull. I certainly saw his horns, and they

were full grown, because the rutting season is long since past."

"But what makes a moose get his mad up?" Jack asked. "We didn't do a single thing to rile him, that I know of, but were sitting here as easy as you please, when all at once he charges through the camp. Why, say, he nearly carried off some of our property, when he knocked down that tent. Look at the rip his horns made in the tanned canvas, would you? Some more sewing for Teddy here, to mend the rip."

"Francois, do bull moose often act in that way?" asked Teddy, still gripping the repeating rifle, as though not fully convinced that there would be no repetition of the savage onslaught.

The guide shook his head.

"Know only few times when it happen, and then there be reason. He carry off on horns what makes him rush our camp. I saw the same with my own eyes. Bull moose much like farm bull, and hate ze red color ver' mooch."

At hearing this several of the boys gave a shout.

"There, see what you get, Jimmy, for keeping that silly red sweater around. The old bull saw it hanging there in the light of our fire, and it made him so furious, as it has us lots of times, that he lowered his head and just charged us."

"But he took it away with him, as sure as you live, fellows!" gasped Jimmy, as a sense of his deep affliction came over him. "My dear sweater that I loved so much."

"Bully for the moose!" cried Jack.

"He'd done us all a mighty good turn, even if he never meant to," added Frank, "now we've seen the last of that terrible old garment, and Jimmy'll just *have* to get out the nice new one he's been carrying in his bag."

"Just think of the old fool, would you, a-tearin' around the woods with that red flag hanging from his horns," Jimmy wailed. "Don't I hope it keeps him wild right along, so that he'll smash into a tree, and break his blessed neck! But I'm glad he didn't take a notion to carry me off along with my sweater, and that's no lie!"

The little excitement soon died away. Not much damage had been done after all by that mad charge of the infuriated bull moose. The rent in the canvas could be readily mended, and as for Jimmy's loss it was his companions' gain, so that there would be no lament made save by the late owner.

"I didn't know moose ever roamed as far north as this," remarked Ned.

"How about that, Francois?" asked Frank, who, it might be noticed, kept his gun close beside him now, as though meaning to be ready in case another cause for excitement arose.

"It is not often zat ze bull moose come up here," replied the French Canadian, in his queer patois; "but sometimes in summer zey wander far afield. I haf seen ze same so mooch as three hundred mile north from here."

"One thing sure, there are plenty of caribou around," Teddy went on to say; "and when the meat's tender, it suits me all right. I'm running across new things every day up here, and don't feel sorry I came, so far."

"New things seem to be running across us also," chuckled Frank; "for instance, the monster that just invaded our camp. But as our supply of red sweaters has given out now, we'll hope not to have a repeat of that charge in a hurry."

"Me for a tree if ever I hear anything on four legs heading this way again!" Jimmy told them. "Why, what would have happened to me if the old four flusher had set his hoofs square on my stomach? I'd be feeling pretty punk right now, believe me."

"I think I'll take to the tall timber myself if this thing gets common," was what Jack observed. "My stars! but he was a whopper. Looked like the side of a house to me when he sizzled past, scattering the fire, leveling our best tent, and kicking up a whole circus with a band wagon attached."

"What was it we were talking about when we had that unexpected call?" asked Teddy.

"Ned was telling us something more that trapper we met said to him about the queer things that happen away up here in this uninhabited country, which is so different from any other known land. Didn't he say something about a phantom fleet of vessels that kept bobbing up every now and then, only to speed away like ghosts. What did you make of that silly rot, Ned?"

"I've been puzzling my head over it ever since," Ned replied, "but for the life of me can't make head or tail of the story. I've almost come to the conclusion that the trapper was a little dippy, and just imagined he saw those vessels."

"Sounds like it to me, Ned," Jack declared. "Whatever would vessels of any kind want up in Hudson Bay, if not to fish, or hunt whales, or seals, or walrus? And why should they flit around like ghosts, as he said? Chances are the old chap was

using up his surplus stock of strong drink, and saw things where they didn't exist."

"Well, anyway," Jimmy ventured, reflectively, "it's me that hopes we'll run foul of this same queer disappearing fleet, because if we do it's a pipe cinch we'll scrape all the mystery off the story. We always manage that when we start into anything. It seems to be the scout way of doing things."

"For my part," declared Frank, "I take little stock in that yarn of the trapper. I imagine it's in a line with the big story of the mine syndicate that wants to unload on Mr. Bosworth. This is the country for whopping lies. Everything is on so big a scale up here, you know, stories have to keep along with them."

"And moose are as big as houses," added Jimmy.

"How is it we don't see you busy with your fish lines to-night, Jimmy?" asked Ned.

"Yes, it's been three mornings now since we had fresh fish for breakfast, and as that job was handed over to you, we all want to know what's gone wrong?" Jack added.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders, and made a wry face.

"I've soured on me job, if that's what you want to know," he replied. "I've pulled in so many fish since we started that me arm is sore with the work. Besides, I've lost me taste for fresh fish. Them that feel an itching for the diet c'n do the business. Here's me lines and hooks with pleasure."

No one, however, seemed anxious to undertake the task on this particular occasion. Truth to tell they were one and all pretty tired. It had been an unusually arduous day, so that shoulders and legs ached more or less, from packing all their possessions across country to the bank of the river on which they now found themselves, and which Francois, yes, and Tamasjo ditto, affirmed would carry them all the rest of the way to the great inland sea known on the maps as Hudson Bay, in honor of the famous explorer.

It felt good to lie there at their ease on blankets and enjoy the warmth of the cheery campfire. There was more or less of a tang in the air most of the time on account of being so far north; and this became more evident when the sun had set, and the short night commenced, so that the young explorers were glad to have tents and warm blankets along.

Once while they were talking Jack lifted his head and appeared to be listening.

"A wolf pack hunting through the muskegs!" remarked Ned.

"Just what it must be," declared Jack. "And wherever we go it seems as if there was no end to the hungry beasts. We ran up against them away out in California, you remember; and they've given us no end of trouble on this present trip."

"I only hope that swift bunch is hustling along on the trail of Mr. Bull Moose, and that they overhaul the beggar right soon," grumbled Jimmy viciously.

"What ails the little rascal now to make him feel so savage about that moose?" laughed Frank.

"Huh! if you had something you thought the world of carried away on the horns of a rotten old bull moose, mebbe it's you that would be feeling sore on him too, me boy," growled Jimmy.

"Well, they say that one man's food is another's poison," observed Frank; "and all of us feel that your loss is our gain. Red sweaters may be all very well on a baseball field, but in the woods they don't cut such a wide swath."

"Forget it," added Jack.

The two guides were looking after the canoes. It was their customary habit to attend to the craft every night before lying down, because they realized the great value that lay in the only means of making progress that the expedition possessed; while no one dreamed of robbery, still, the motto of a scout is to shut the door *before* the horse is stolen, and not afterwards. An ounce of prevention is always much better than a pound of cure, so Ned was accustomed to saying, and he was an experienced patrol leader.

While they left some things to the guides, still, the boys were pleased to keep constantly in touch with whatever was transpiring around them. Long ago they had learned to enjoy making fresh discoveries in the field and forest whenever abroad. And in this new and to them unexplored country they were running across numerous interesting things every day.

They had just two tents along, and as neither of the guides would consent to be under cover save in a rain storm, it allowed the five scouts a chance to sleep comfortably, three in one shelter and a couple in the other. Ned and Jack occupied the smaller tent, while Jimmy bunked with Teddy and Frank in the second one.

Presently the guides came into camp again, though they had been within sight all the time, as the canoes lay well inside the circle of light coming from the fire.

"All well with the boats, Francois?" asked Ned, who was hugging his knees now, and had been joking Frank over several weird pictures the photographer of the expedition had lately developed.

"Everything O. K.," replied the voyageur, as though satisfied with his labor. "No danger we lose same this night, zat is sure. Still, Francois, me, and ze ozzer guide we expect to sleep wiz ze one eye open."

"If you should happen to see some stranger meddling with our boats, Francois—what would you do?" asked Frank.

The voyageur shrugged his broad shoulders in a very Frenchy fashion as he replied.

"I sall call out and ask ze same what he do, sare; and if so be he try to run away, pouf; I ze gun will fire, taking aim to vound ze rascal in ze leg, and not kill."

"Sounds rather war-like, don't it, Ned?" remarked Jack.

"Well, you must remember that this is a wild country up here," the leader of the expedition went on to say, soberly; "and that men are accustomed to looking on all others as enemies until they prove to be friends. A man who would sneak up and hover over our boats, on being addressed, if he were honest would throw up his hand at once and come into camp. Only a sneak thief would try and cut for it. And from my way of looking at it Francois would be justified in giving him a bullet in the leg, or a charge of Number Sevens in the last place he could see as the man galloped away."

As several of the scouts were yawning at a prodigious rate it was now concluded that the time had come to crawl under their blankets and get some sleep. This going to bed was never a very long-drawn-out operation with the scouts when in the open. Each boy would remove his shoes, after taking off his leggings, then follow with his outer garments, and after that just snuggle down under his warm covering, and forgetting all his troubles until the summons came that breakfast was almost ready.

On this especial occasion they vanished inside the tents, leaving the guides at the fire smoking their last pipe of tobacco, which both of them had to indulge in before they could think of sleeping.

After that none of the boys knew a single thing until they were rudely awakened by hearing some one call out roughly.

Immediately afterwards there came a peremptory hail, and then a loud report that

must have come from a gun.

Of course there was a hustle in both tents, and it was astonishing how quickly each scout managed to get some of his clothes on. A professional fireman could hardly have shown more expedition about dressing than Ned and Jack did, though hampered more or less in the operation by the darkness.

They had been very careful to remember just where their guns had been placed, so that as soon as they donned clothes it was easy to snatch up these weapons, after which they burst out of the tent.

The fire was beginning to revive, showing that some one must have tossed fresh fuel upon the smouldering logs. One glance that way told Ned several hours must have elapsed since he lay down, and that it was even now long after midnight. He would have been able to tell within an hour what time of night it was, had he been given a few seconds to look up at the heavens to note the position of the new stars in sight.



CHAPTER III.

WAS IT A SPY?

The other fellows were coming crawling out from the larger tent when Ned and Jack reached the open air. All of them were carrying guns, as though laboring under an impression that the camp must be assailed by a rival force.

They found the two guides standing there, and peering out toward a certain quarter. Both were too old hands at this sort of thing to show the least sign of excitement, but Jimmy made up for any lack on their part.

"For the love of Mike where's the invader now? Did he trample all over you, Francois, and is that the brand of his cloven hoof on your hunting shirt now? Was it the same old bull moose, or a new kind of muskeg giant, as big as a church? Show him to me, and see how quick I'll bowl the critter over!"

"Keep still, will you, Jimmy, and let Ned do the talking," advised Jack.

"What did you fire at, Francois?" asked Ned, turning to the guide, for somehow he seemed to naturally guess that it was the French Canadian who had done the shooting, possibly because his voice had been heard raised in a challenge.

"Man, at all I know, sare," replied the other, still looking out into the semi-gloom wistfully.

"I heard you call out loud enough, just as you said you would do," Ned continued; "and instead of answering, did he turn and run away?"

"Zat is just what happen," replied the guide. "He act mooch like ze spy, and so I give heem ze shot."

"Do you think you hit him, Francois?" demanded Frank.

The other rolled up his shoulders, and made the usual "face" as he answered:

"I do not know for sure, sare. Ze light it was mos' uncertain like. I aim down low as I pull ze trigger. Zen he disappear, and I am unable to say if so be he drop down just to sneak away, or because he wounded."

"Well, we can soon find out," impulsive Jimmy exclaimed; "me to grab up a fine torch, and lead the way. Some of the rest of you form a bodyguard around me, and be ready to give 'em a volley if they so much as peep."

It was just what Ned had been about to propose, so as Jimmy thought of the plan first he was allowed to have his way.

The fagot which Jimmy picked out of the fire was burning briskly by now, at one end, and could be made to serve very well as a torch, if only one knew how to handle it. Jimmy had taken lessons in this art, and first of all he swung the brand swiftly around his head several times, so as to make it burn more briskly.

"There, that will do, Jimmy," Jack told him; "and now lead us out, you ferocious little monster. Hold the torch so it won't blind us, remember. And if they open fire you be sure to duck, so we won't be shooting you in the back."

"Oh! I'll side-step all right, if only you give me the tip," Jimmy went on to say.

He was already starting out with Francois to show him the way to the spot where the latter had his last glimpse of the supposed spy. All of the scouts were fairly quivering with eagerness; and at the same time a cold feeling began to creep over them at the thought of what they might discover the next minute.

Francois had shot low, and only meant to wound, but then his bullet might have glanced upward, and inflicted a fatal injury.

A dozen and more paces they went. Everyone was excited, and looking this way and that, for who could say what the adventure might not mean? If there was one prowler around there might be a dozen or a score. They remembered what Ned had said concerning the possibility of the reckless plotters composing the mining syndicate gathering together a lawless crowd, and meaning to chase the explorers out of that section of country, should they threaten to discover that a fraud was in the act of being perpetrated.

"Was it about here, Francois, that you saw him vanish?" asked Ned, who had been keeping an eye on the guide, and judged from his actions that they must have arrived close to the suspected spot.

"I am think so, ver' mooch," admitted Francois, eagerly, and then after taking a backward look toward the campfire, he added: "Yes, it ees so, sare. I gif you ze

word of a man zat ought to know, zat he was here when I fire ze shot."

"Well, it looks as though you didn't knock him over, Francois," observed Frank, "because there was nobody lying amidst the brush."

Without replying, the French Canadian and the Indian guide fell on their knees, and seemed to be closely examining the ground upon which none of the party had as yet set afoot.

"Tamasjo has found something," observed Teddy quickly, as he saw the Indian lower his head closer to the ground, and evidently examine some object with eagerness.

Ned was down beside him almost instantly.

"It's a plain footprint, all right," he announced as soon as he had been able to take a quick observation.

"That proves Francois *did* see a skulker then, and wasn't dreaming," Jack was heard to say, as though he may have been entertaining some doubt on the subject up to that moment.

"He scared him off, even if his lead was thrown away," Jimmy ventured, with a slight touch of scorn in his manner, as though he fancied he could have given a better account of himself, had the chance come his way.

"Hold on, don't be in such a rushing big hurry to say he wasted his lead," Ned warned him.

"What's that, Ned; did he hit the sneak after all?" Jack demanded.

"Well, spots of fresh blood don't grow on the bushes up here, even if we do seem to run across lots of queer things," Ned went on to say, as he pointed to where they could all see that it was so.

This fact added to the excitement. If the unknown whom they looked on as some species of spy, had been wounded, it looked like a serious piece of business for the little party of explorers. He must have friends not far away, and after the gantlet of defiance had been thrown down by this shot, these men might lose all restraint and show that they were disposed to act in an ugly way.

It meant that the former sense of security and indifference was a thing of the past. From this time on the scouts must keep constantly on the alert to guard against a sudden surprise. They must learn to watch for danger in every quarter, and not allow themselves to sleep on post.

All this change was caused by the discovery of that one small spot of shed blood. Even the usually talkative Jimmy seemed to have become dumb for the time being, as though realizing the gravity of the situation.

"Do we try to track the fellow, Ned?" asked Teddy.

"I don't think that would be a wise thing to attempt," came the reply. "In the first place we couldn't make any headway without a light; and that would expose the lot of us to his fire, if he found himself being overtaken, and was still smarting under the pain of his wound. Then again, we don't know who he may be, or what friends he may have close by. No, the best thing for us to do is to go back to our camp, and try to get a little more sleep. We'll put out the fire, and one of the guides will sit up for two hours with me. Then we'll wake another couple, and in that way pass the rest of the night."

"Sounds like business at the old stand," remarked Jimmy, "Many's the time the lot of us have done that same thing. And, Ned, I'm in hopes you'll be after lettin' me sit up with you. Never a bit of sleep is there in me eyes at this minute. I'm staring like any old hoot owl in a Virginia swamp. Don't tell me to beat it if you love me the least bit. My lamps won't go shut, that's flat, and I might as well sit up with you as lie down, and just stare and stare."

"Oh! suit yourself, Jimmy," Ned told the urgent one; "though of course I'll be only too glad to have your company, if, only you'll remember to keep still. When we have to serve as guards to the camp it's a still tongue that counts for the most."

"I'll promise to be as dumb as an oyster, Ned," pleaded the other; and so it was settled that he could help to stand the first watch.

The balance of the expedition once more settled down. Jack crawled alone into the smaller tent, while Frank and Teddy occupied the other. Francois and the Indian consulted with Ned, and then the fire was wholly extinguished. Tamasjo went over to sleep in one of the canoes, for if there should be any attack on the camp it was believed that it would begin in this quarter, as the frail craft might be reckoned their weakest and most vulnerable point.

Ned Nestor had often sat out a watch, and in the midst of a wilderness, too; but somehow the conditions seemed vastly different now from anything he had ever known before. In most other cases he could listen to the various well-known voices of the night—from katydids and crickets, to frogs in the marsh, night birds seeking their prey, or it might be the small animals of the forest barking or giving tongue.

Away up here in the vast Northern solitudes a dreadful silence seemed to hang upon all Nature. Insects there were none, of a species to cause a humming sound, and save for croaking of frogs some distance away the stillness remained unbroken for a long time.

The wolf pack broke loose again, doubtless hot on the track of a fleeing caribou, perhaps the unfortunate one that had been wounded by Jimmy on the preceding day when Frank knocked over the fine animal from which their late supper had come. Ned listened to the chorus, and allowed his thoughts to roam to other and more distant scenes, where he had had exciting experiences with the hungry animals himself, calculated to cause a shudder just to remember.

The time passed slowly. Several louder bursts of wolfish tongues told when the hunting pack chanced to draw nearer the camp, but only to grow fainter again in the distance, as the chase led the animals over barrens where the caribou herd fed, and across wild cranberry bogs, such as the boys could remember seeing up in Northern New York State when camping in the Adirondacks.

When Ned reckoned that his time was up he woke Jimmy, who had long ago gone to sleep as sweetly as you please, with his head leaning against the butt of a tree. Ned told him he might just as well crawl under the tent and get the benefit of a warm blanket; and after giving that advice called Frank and Jack out.

Teddy never so much as moved when Jimmy crept in to warm up under his woolen cover, for Teddy was a very good sleeper on any and all occasions, it seemed. Since there was no especial need of more sentries than the two, with the Indian and Francois to back them, Ned did not have the heart to arouse Teddy, even though he knew very well the other would reproach him for neglecting to do so.

There was no further alarm on that night, for which doubtless all of the boys were thankful, though Jimmy later on loudly bewailed the fact that he had been given no chance to make use of his faithful gun. Jimmy was not at all bloodthirsty, though any one hearing him talk, and not knowing his humorous nature, might be inclined to think so. But after a most venomous harangue he would very likely wink his eye drolly at the fellow scout he was addressing, and softly remark:

"But it isn't in my heart, and you know that!"

Jack declared that once during his watch he fancied he caught some sound out on the bosom of the dark river that might have been a big fish leaping, but which he was inclined to believe was made by a carelessly used paddle.

Of course there was no way of verifying this suspicion, because water unfortunately leaves no trail. Frank advanced the idea that it might have been the same spy who had been prowling around their camp.

"Suppose he had a canoe handy," he went on to suggest. "I can't imagine any living soul being away up in this country without some kind of a boat so as to get around. Now which way would he be likely to go, do you think, Ned?"

"If what Jack heard, and you didn't, was the sound of a working paddle," Ned told him, "I should say that the party went up the river. If moving with the current, you understand, there would be no need to swing his paddle at all, but simply let his boat float along till past our camp."

Francois, who had been listening to all this talk while cooking breakfast, nodded his head approvingly.

"Zat it so, sare," he ventured to observe. "Eef you ask me I haf to say ze same t'ing. Mebbe it was canoe, mebbe it was some seal zat come all ze way up zis rifer from zat big ocean zey call Hudson Bay, and which zey tell me ees six hundred mile from one shore to ze other."

"A real genuine seal, does he mean, Ned?" exclaimed Jimmy; "now I would like to set eyes on one of the glossy little chaps like those I've fed in the museum down at the Battery in little old New York."

"Made enough noise to have been a hippopotamus, if only such warm-blooded Nile amphibious animals lived in these Arctic rivers," Jack declared; "but after all it doesn't matter, only if the spy went up the stream we're better be off, because that would show his crowd would be found there, and not below."

"And I suppose that after this, while we sail on through cataracts, and along the smoother stretches we've got to keep our eyes peeled for signs of an ambuscade," Teddy observed. "Well, luckily we've got some pretty sharp-eyed fellows along with us; and then there are the experienced guides. Who cares for expenses? As long as I can poke into unknown sections where few white men have ever set foot, and Frank can write stunning letters to his paper about the strange things we run across, it doesn't matter a cookey. We'll get to our destination, and we're bound to find out all we came to see, because the scouts always do succeed."

It was in this same confident spirit that the little party embarked shortly afterwards. Not one of them felt faint-hearted as the unknown future loomed up before them. Nevertheless, could they have known just then of the astonishing

experiences through which they were shortly fated to pass, possibly their pulses must have quickened under the strain.

The sun was well above the far-eastern horizon when they entered the three canoes, having carefully loaded the same with an eye to rough rapids ahead, and pushing out, troling a Canadian boat song Francois had taught them, started on the day's voyage.



CHAPTER IV.

DOWN THE SWIFT RAPIDS.

"Sounds pretty wild ahead there!" bawled Jimmy, a couple of hours later.

He happened to be in the leading canoe at the time, along with the Cree Indian guide, Tamasjo, and also Frank Shaw. Ned and Jack paddled the second boat, and did it splendidly, too, for they had had considerable practice at this sort of thing, so that as Ned expressed it, both had "caught the hang of it." In the rear were the other two, Francois, and Teddy Green, the ambitious explorer of unknown lands.

All this time they had seen nothing in any quarter to indicate that there was a living human being in all that far-off country. Now and then they had glimpsed herds of caribou peacefully feeding where the grass grew most luxuriantly, or else like the reindeer of Lapland browsing off the Arctic moss that clung to the rocks in myriads of places, and contained the nourishment required. Birds were scarce, though in some places they had come upon countless numbers of ducks, geese and swan that seek these distant regions in summer to breed.

The others had possibly noticed that increasing murmur in the near distance, indicating the presence of a roaring cataract, even if they had not called attention to the same.

The Indian, seeing that the scouts would very likely want to hold a conference, dallied with his paddle, and Frank, who sat in the bow of the boat, followed suit. He did not altogether like the sound of that as yet unseen rough place in the river that flowed northward toward Hudson Bay; and felt that before trusting themselves in its clutch they should talk it over, getting what pointers they could from the two guides.

Accordingly the three canoes drifted along on the rather swift current, while those in them talked. From time to time the paddlers would delay their progress by well known means, so that they might not be carried on at too fast a pace, and find themselves in the surge of the rapids before their plans were fully matured.

"I bet you that one beats any we've struck yet, if sound goes for much!" Jimmy gave as his opinion.

"No question about that," added Jack.

"It sure makes a heap of noise," Teddy declared.

"And I can imagine the whitecaps jumping like crazy things as the current hits up against the sharp-pointed snags and rocks that stick up like horns all over!" Frank went on to say.

"Still, there are few rapids that don't have a safe channel through the worst places," Ned told them; "anyway, I've never seen one that didn't. How about that, Francois; you've been through here, you say, and in a canoe?"

"Twice, sare," came the answer.

"And didn't meet with an accident either time, I warrant," Jack avowed, confidently.

"Nevaire!" replied the guide, positively.

"And like as not, when you took the first plunge you had never seen the rapids before, Francois?" continued Ned, striving to reach a point he wanted to make.

"It was the first time I haf ever set eyes on ze same, as you say, sare."

"You just used your gumption, and tackled the job as you would any other rapids, depending on your quick eye, a firm wrist with the paddle, and general good sense, wasn't that it, Francois?" Ned asked him.

"I get through easy, but zere was a warm time of it," the other answered, shaking his head at the remembrance of difficulties overcome.

"Well, if you could pass through safely without ever having seen the rapids before it was much easier the second time, eh?" ventured the patrol leader.

"Oh! mooch easier, that time," the guide assured him.

"And now it's likely to become a habit with you," Ned remarked, smilingly. "Guess we needn't bother any great shakes, boys. Francois will take the lead, and Jack and myself bring up the rear."

"That leaves me in the middle, don't it?" asked Jimmy.

"Just what it does," Ned told him.

"You wouldn't think for a minute we'd allow you to lead, or much less come trailing along as the wind-up of the crowd," jeered Jack. "Chances are you'll be up to your old tricks again, and tumbling overboard. I've got the boathook ready to lay hold of you if that happens."

"For goodness sake, Jimmy, make up your mind to sit still and get through one of these husky rapids with a dry jacket," pleaded Teddy.

"Yes," added Frank, who, it may be remembered, was in the same boat with Jimmy; "you might upset us all if you get to wiggling around, or trying any of your silly pranks while we're in the middle of the push. And think of what we'd lose if an accident like that happened."

"You've got all the self-raising flour in your tub, Jimmy," Teddy continued, as a clinching argument; "and if that goes, good-bye to any more flapjacks while we're up around the Hudson Bay country."

"Hadn't you better transfer that stuff to one of the other boats, and give us something that won't spoil if it gets wet?" Jimmy had the impudence to suggest; at which Ned shook his finger at him, and, looking as severe as he could, went on to lay down the law, as he had a perfect right to do, being Jimmy's superior in the patrol; and besides, using the other as an assistant in his work for the Government.

"Unless you give me your solemn promise to reform, and sit as still as anything in that canoe, I'm going to have a halt called, and tie you in so you can't move. The only trouble is that if the boat does go over after all, you'd surely drown like a musk rat in a trap. Do you get that straight, Jimmy?"

Apparently the lively scout realized that his chums would not put up with any further pranks, especially when danger menaced them, as it always did at times when cataracts had to be negotiated. He threw up both hands in token of absolute surrender.

"I promise you on my word of honor as a true scout, Ned, not to budge an inch as long as the bally old boat stays on its keel. 'Course if Tamasjo pitches me out you'll let me swim for it, and get hold of your gunnel, won't you?"

"That's what we would expect you to do," Ned told him. "On the whole, as this rapid is much worse than anything we've tackled up to now, I reckon we'd better

run into shore for a short stay, while we overhaul our cargoes, and make sure everything is tied fast to the supports of the canoes."

"Good idea," grunted Frank. "I believe in locking the door while you've still got the horse. Lots of folks wait till the animal has been stolen, and then wake up to the necessity of putting up the bars."

Accordingly, they landed near by on a promising point. Here they busied themselves for some time minutely examining the way in which guns, provisions, blankets, tents, cooking utensils, and all other things going to make up the cargo of the three canoes was secured.

Of course they hardly anticipated an upset, but did this only as a sort of insurance, just as a man takes out a fire risk on his house, though never fancying for a single minute that it is going to go up in flames and smoke.

After that the start was made. Francois paddled along in the lead, with Teddy holding a position in the bow, for Teddy had learned to swing a paddle fairly well on this trip. Of course, the one who sat in the stern manipulated things as he wished, being the controlling power. Teddy's duties would for the most part be to fend off from threatening rocks.

It was intended that the other boats should follow close enough to give their pilots a chance to profit by the knowledge Francois had of the currents and most dangerous places. At the same time, they must not come within a certain distance lest they foul each other.

Faster and faster did the swift current bear them on its bosom. They could now see it surging on toward the abrupt bend, around which the dangerous rapid lay.

Every fellow shut his teeth hard together. Sleeves had been rolled up, so that nothing might interfere with the heavy work ahead of them.

Jimmy was the soul watcher, he alone having no part in making that perilous passage of the cataract. Gripping the two sides of the canoe, as he squatted amidships, Jimmy stared with bulging eyes as the bend was turned, and he could see that foamy track ahead. All of the way across the river the ugly jagged rocks thrust their sharp points above the surface of the swift water, and for a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile it seemed as though only by a miracle could a frail canoe safely pass among these evil genii of the rapids.

But a careful and practiced eye could pick out an avenue of comparatively smooth water that ran from top to bottom of the rapid. It often curved sharply, so that it made a very irregular line. Quick action would be necessary in many

instances, so as to avoid contact with some snag that lay in wait for a victim.

Francois went boldly in. He sat there like a carved statue, only that the upper part of his body was in constant action, as he drove his magical blade deeply into the water, and caused the canoe to obey his dominant will as he pleased.

After him came the bronzed Cree Indian guide, copying every movement of the other, much as Japanese workman would a design given into his hands to duplicate even to the minutest detail.

It was a glorious dash, and one the scouts would certainly never forget. Their blood leaped madly in their veins as they saw the tumbling, boiling water all about them, acting as though fairly wild to get them in its power.

Several times Ned and Jack found themselves put to their best efforts in order to stem the tide, and keep from meeting with shipwreck. Fortunately, their muscles were sound, and their heads clear, so that in every instance they recovered the advantage almost lost. When the foot of the cataract was reached nothing of a serious nature had happened, though all of the boys who had taken part in the labor of fighting the erratic current of the river were breathing heavily.

"Hurrah! that's the time we did it!" shouted Jimmy, apparently as proud as if he had handled a paddle himself; nor did any of the others begrudge him that slight satisfaction, since the glory was big enough to go around.

Ned gave the signal for a halt here.

"We want to rest up a bit," he explained; "and besides, didn't you hear Francois say that there were some dandy trout and grayling hanging about here at the foot of the rapids? Seems to me I'd like a mess for dinner to-day. Any objections?"

Not a single contrary word was heard, and apparently all of them were of the same mind. So they put in toward the shore again, Francois leading the way, since he had been here before, and "knew the ropes."

Tackle was soon made ready. Ned had even fetched a jointed rod along, for he liked to fish in a thoroughly sportsmanlike way, when the game was as royal in its nature as these big trout of the Canadian rivers. Grayling he had never caught, though told that they even exceed trout in desperate fighting tactics.

The fun soon became fast and furious, for there were plenty of fish, and the conditions seemed just right for them to jump at every sort of lure, from an artificial fly to a copy of an insect, or a phantom minnow such as Jimmy usually patronized, he not being equal to handling a fly rod with dexterity.

They soon had all the fish they could use. Ned continued the sport, because he was using his fly rod, and really did not injure the captures he made, so that he could toss them back after having had the fun of playing them, and seeing the desperate efforts the captives made to break away.

In the end, Ned had the luck to strike a good-sized grayling, that, making for a smaller rapid just below, gave the young sportsman all the excitement he could hope for before allowing itself to be netted. They all admired its build, and, as it was the only one of its kind taken just then, they decided to keep it, so as to say they had eaten grayling.

The interrupted voyage was thereupon resumed, and a while later they landed once more to cook a meal; for somehow all declared themselves hungry for trout, and Francois had admitted that one of the best camping places along the lower river invited them.

Jimmy, having had nothing else to do while they navigated the stream had amused himself preparing the catch for the frying pan. Nobody objected in the least; for although every scout dearly loved to eat trout, none of them ever seemed particularly anxious to clean the fish. Consequently that duty generally devolved upon good-natured Jimmy, who could be easily duped into believing that it was a high honor they were according him in allowing this privilege.

Ned, after halting by his canoe to attend to some little thing that happened to catch his attention, and which needed fixing, sauntered up the bank to find a fire had already been started by the guides.

"How is this, Francois, that you chose a place to make your fire that looks as if it might be second-best? According to my notion, over yonder is an ideal site for cooking fire."

When Ned said this the French-Canadian voyageur looked up and nodded.

"Eet is surely as you say heem be, but when I deescover zat zere haf been a pig party stop here mebbe last night, I tink you might vant me to look closer, and see vat ze signs say."

From his manner Ned understood that somehow Francois scented danger because of the presence of these men in this region. They might of course only prove to be miners sent up here by the syndicate that had obtained the right to the new mining region said to exceed in richness the famous Mesauba country. On the other hand, it was possible that they were minions of unscrupulous capitalists, sent here to block any effort on the part of the scouts to learn the truth

with regard to the nature of the great fraud, if the claim put up to Mr. Bosworth proved to be such.

And Ned knew that the guide had acted wisely in leaving the cold ashes alone.



CHAPTER V.

WOODCRAFT.

Nothing more was said about the ashes of the dead fire left behind by some party that had recently been there, until the trout had been deliciously cooked and eaten. All of them declared that they had never tasted finer flavored fish than those big gamey fellows of that Far North river. It really seemed that the further they journeyed toward the Arctic Circle the sweeter the trout became.

"They were pretty big fellows, too," Frank Shaw said, as they sat there filling up with dinner.

"Never saw larger ones, only in the Lake Superior region," Ned confessed; "and eight-pounders are common along the northern shore where several small rivers empty into the lake. I saw a bunch of that size at the Government fish hatchery at the Soo when I passed through there on a steamboat, and shot the rapids with the Indian guides. They were dandies, I tell you, boys. Think of it, genuine speckled trout weighing eight pounds, and every ounce of them fighting weight too."

Finally, when they were all ready to cry quits, having had a glorious meal, Ned thought of what the veteran guide had said about that dead fire.

"Now suppose you and Tamasjo take a good look at the ashes, and the lay of the land around, so as to tell us what you can read there," he told the voyageur.

At that some of the other boys began to stare, for they had heard nothing up to then about the late presence of others on the spot. But they knew Ned well enough to be sure that he had some good object in saying what he did; and accordingly all of them flocked after the two guides when they made for the nearby spot where even Jimmy had noticed the remains of a fire.

The scouts remained quiet while Francois and the Cree got down on hands and

knees the better to examine into the signs. Ned and some of his chums would themselves have been easily able to read certain things in connection with these ashes. For instance, remembering that it had rained most of the second day before, and there was no sign of water about the ashes, they would have set it down as positive that the fire had been made *afterwards*. That was an easy thing to make out; and perhaps there were others they could figure; but when in the presence of veterans Ned was only too willing to observe all that was done, and profit by it.

The two men did not confine themselves to sifting the ashes through their fingers, and comparing notes in a jargon which the boys could not understand, but which they imagined must be Cree talk.

They moved further away, and looked the ground over.

"I noticed that there were plenty of hoof tracks around here," Jimmy up and declared; "but say, it never flagged me that a fellow could learn a heap from just stickin' his nose down close to such. 'Tis a safe bet we'll know everything but the names of the gossoons before Francois and his red pal quit."

Some of the others were feeling the same way. They too had noticed that there were plenty of footprints around, but being more interested in the feast than being prepared, they had not thought fit to bother about giving the same more than a casual glance.

On Ned's part, he would have devoted some of his time to this business only for the promise of the voyageur to read the signs after they had eaten.

After some little time had passed Francois came and stood before them. His face was almost as inscrutable as that of the Sphinx, or a Cree Indian. Whatever the character of his finding, it did not show outwardly.

"Well, how about these men, Francois; they must have been here last night, you think, don't you?" Ned started to ask him.

"Eet is so, sare. Zey leave zis place just same time we be saying *bon jour* to our own camp up ze rivaire."

"How many were they?" was Ned's next question; for Francois could not tell his story at length, but seemed to wait to have it drawn from him piece-meal as though he might be a willing witness in the box.

"Thirteen, all men at zat."

"Hunters, trappers, miners, or prospectors?" demanded Ned.

That caused the other to give one of his suggestive shrugs.

"Nozzing like zat right now, sare," he went on to declare, so positively that it was evident he had found the Indian also agreed with him. "Some of zat crowd zey wear ze moccasin ze same as Tamasjo here. Ozzers have boots wiz ze heel. But zey carry no traps along wiz zem, I tell you zat, sare."

"And if they were miners intending to work in the holdings of the syndicate they would have carried tools along, picks, shovels and the like?" remarked Jack.

Francois shook his head in the negative.

"Nozzing like zat, pelieve me, sare," he urged.

"Well, go on and tell us what you think they may be," Ned pursued.

"I zink they pe a pad crowd," answered the guide. "Zis tells ze tale," and he held up some greasy cards which he must have gathered in the bushes behind the rocks near which the dead ashes lay.

Tamasjo also stooped and lifted something that glittered in the sunlight. When the scouts saw that it was a suspicious looking black bottle, they could guess as to what the nature of its recent contents had been. Nevertheless, it was passed around and every fellow had a chance to take a sniff at it.

"Deadly stuff, sure as you're born!" Jimmy pronounced, making a wry face.

"Whisky or old rye or something like that," Frank declared; and it spoke well for those five boys that no one was positively able to identify the odor, though well knowing its general character as an aid to drunkenness.

"That seems to settle it, so far as the tough kind of men they were," Ned continued; "and now we want to try and find out if they were looking for us to come down the river; and also, try and guess where they've gone to. They had boats, of course, Francois?"

The guide held up two fingers.

"Batteau, plenty room in same for all. Tamasjo and me, we tink zey haf gone down stream. Pig bay lie only half-day's journey zat way. Eef we go on, mebbe so we arrive zere by night. Better hold up, and make ze last part of ze trip in ze dark, so zat zey no see us."

"I understand what you mean, Francois," the patrol leader hastened to say; "and it sounds good to me, I admit. When we do go down to the salt water we will take advantage of your advice."

"What's that, Ned," broke in Jack; "you don't mean to say there's any doubt about our going down, sooner or later, do you?"

"Oh! no, we're bound to see the famous Hudson Bay before we leave this section," the other assured him; "but I've been thinking things over, and come to a certain conclusion."

"Let's hear what it is, won't you, Ned?" Jimmy besought him.

"Yes, that is if Francois is through telling us about these parties."

"How about that, Francois?" Ned asked, turning to the voyageur.

"Eet is about all zat is worth knowing, sare. Of course, we haf learn zat zis man who is captaine to ze bunch, he is mooch pig, a giant, and zere is sooch a man I know whose name eet is Sol. Greggs; heem it might be who is conducting zis gang. He is a pad man, a thief who robbed traps many times, and so he gif me zis scar on ze cheek when we fight eet out."

"That sounds just like the kind of a rascal the syndicate would send up here to run things, if they were trying to work a tremendous swindle and expected to keep curious people from investigating," Jack boldly declared.

"But how about you telling what your plans are, Ned?" queried Frank.

"It's only fair you should know," replied the other; "so listen to what my idea is. In the first place, according to the map we have of the country up here, we believe that this supposed-to-be-wonderful mine must lie somewhere to the left of the mouth of this very river. Now it struck me that perhaps we might carry out our plans better if we hid our boats somewhere near by, and took a scout off in that direction."

"That does sound mighty sensible, Ned!" admitted Jack Bosworth, after considering the suggestion for a brief time.

"Suppose we try it," Frank added.

"One thing I like about the plan," Jimmy spoke up, "is that it will give us a chance to stretch our legs some. To tell you the truth, I'm getting tired of squatting there like a squaw in the tepee, with little or nothing to do. I like to carry out my share of the work; but you somehow seem afraid to let me paddle, just as if a reformed joker like me would be careless, or actually *try* to upset the old canoe. So I put my vote in as wanting to look for the mine over land."

Each of the other scouts quickly let it be known that they were in full sympathy

with Ned's suddenly sprung plan. Of course, this would make some changes in their arrangements; but the more they looked it over, the better they all liked the idea.

"I'm chuckling to think how that bunch will keep on waiting for us to come down-stream," Frank observed, as they prepared to again enter the boats, since Ned did not mean to abandon the river craft until they had gone some distance further.

"There's only thing I hope won't happen," remarked Jack.

"And what might it be, if you don't mind telling?" Jimmy asked.

"We must be sure to hide our boats, so that there will be small chance of their being discovered by anybody," Jack continued, seriously. "Think what a dickens of a scrape we'd be in if we had to go back all the way afoot. It would take us many weeks, and chances are we'd be overtaken by winter before we got to civilization."

"Our ammunition wouldn't hold out that long," broke in Jimmy, visibly disturbed at the thought "and glory be, whatever would we do for grub to eat? It may be true that the rivers are full of fine trout, but me stomach would go back on me if so be I had to eat them every solitary day, week in and out."

"Oh! what would be the use of our being scouts if we didn't know how to trap animals and birds," Ned told him, reprovingly. "In fact, while, of course, I wouldn't say I'd like to have the experience, there's no doubt in my mind but that it would be a great education to the lot of us. And if we pulled through we'd feel as if we were fitted to go anywhere, under any conditions."

"Huh! after all we've experienced on our little trips," said Frank, "seems to me as if that would be only a walkover. For one, it doesn't faze me a whit. If Ned gave the word I'd start out with him to walk around the world, and with never a single cent in our pockets to begin with. Chances are we'd land back in New York inside of two years millionaires. That would be just like it. All the same I think we ought to cover our canoes, and keep them from falling into the hands of enemies. It is a pretty husky tramp from here to Montreal, and over tough country at that, with rivers to cross, and bogs miles around to avoid."

"Excuse me, if you please," muttered Jimmy, whose desire for a chance to stretch his legs did not contemplate such an extended trip as walking all the way to the metropolis on the St. Lawrence.

They were soon speeding down-stream again. Other small rapids they came

upon, but none of the same dimensions as the cataract lately passed.

Jimmy was presently observed making gestures, and having drawn the attention of those in the nearby canoes to himself, he called out:

"Sure it's a connecting link with home!"

"What is?" demanded Jack.

"Be after dipping your hand over the side, and tastin' the water!" replied the scout who was in the boat with Tamasjo and Frank.

Upon doing so, Ned, who had quickly guessed what Jimmy meant, found that there was indeed a brackish taste to the water, as though the influence of the great tides of Hudson Bay might be felt this far up the stream; it would have gone much further only for the numerous rifts that told of a descent of several feet in the drop of the river.

Ned concluded that they had gone quite far enough for the present. Upon asking the voyageur, he learned that they could reach the mouth of the river inside of a couple of hours, if they chose to use their paddles in addition to the set of the now sluggish current of the widening stream.

"Keep on the watch for a suitable hiding place for the boats," he told the others, "and remember, it must be on the larboard side, because that's the way we expect to tramp in search of the wonderful copper mine."

Every one after that kept on the alert for such a place as would be suitable for the purpose to which they intended to put it. Of all the five scouts, it seemed the irony of fate that Jimmy should actually be the one to first make a discovery.

"I'm only a dub at this business, I know," he said after a while, with a grin on his freckled face, that was almost as red as his hair, thanks to the action of the summer sun and the winds they had encountered; "yes, only a tyro, so to speak; but d'ye know it strikes me that over yonder amongst the canes the canoes would lie so snug and unbeknown that nothin'd bring harm to the same, while we chanct to be awanderin' around."

Ned being close by gave one look and then laughed.

"Jimmy, I want to tell you right now," he remarked, "that if you'd only devote more of your time to scout lore you'd be a wonder. That growth of thick reeds is just a dandy place to do the business, and on the proper side of the river at that. We can push in, each following exactly in the wake of the preceding boat. Jack and myself will bring up the rear, and carefully fix the reeds again, so that no one

on the river ten feet away would dream that boats had made a passage there. Head in, fellows, and pick out your way carefully, making only one track or channel."

This, those in the foremost canoe did, and close behind them came the second boat, the paddler using his blade with extreme caution, so as not to disturb the reeds more than was absolutely necessary. Finally, Jack and Ned wound up the procession, the latter kneeling in the stern of the canoe, where he could use his hands dextrously and swiftly cause the bent-over canes to resume their former position. In this fashion then they finally came to the land, still surrounded by the little wilderness of reeds, out of which they could emerge as soon as the boats were securely fastened.



CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SHORE OF THE SALTY SEA.

"Tell me about that, will you?" remarked Jimmy, as he carefully stepped ashore; "according to my mind it was cleverly done, if I do say it that oughtn't."

You would certainly have thought the little chap had covered himself with glory, and that the success of the whole undertaking depended on him. But then the other scouts knew Jimmy from the ground up, and seldom took offense at anything he said, because they realized that much of his bragging and "joshing" did not "spring from the heart," as he naively confessed many a time.

Ned was wise enough to see that each canoe, before being abandoned there amidst the friendly rushes, was securely staked, so that it could not drift away, through the action of wind or current.

"Seems to me that is about all we have to do here," Jack remarked, after these matters had been carefully attended to.

"And the next thing on the programme is to hike out in search of a wonderful old copper mine that, chances are, doesn't exist at all outside the minds of that lot of fakirs," Frank observed; for he had never taken much stock in the alleged "proofs" shown to Jack's father by the parties who were exploiting this new and sensational discovery of amazingly rich ore.

Ned gave a last look around. He was careful at all times to make doubly sure; and, since they intended cutting loose from their boats for a while at least, he wanted to make no mistake that would cost them dearly.

"It's all right," he told his mates, "and we seem to have everything necessary. Of course we're going as light as we can, and no blankets are allowed, or tents either; but we've looked after the eating part of the game; and besides, we've got

our guns, in case we have to knock over a caribou or other game to help out."

"Then say the word, governor, and we'll be beating it," Jimmy advised.

So Ned raised his hand, and made a sign that the others easily understood. In the scout language it meant "go ahead!" Even Francois and the Cree chief so interpreted the sign, for they immediately started forth.

They left the reed patch in a sinuous line, each stepping directly into the tracks of the one preceding him. In this fashion their passage caused very little disturbance amongst the "bullrushes," as Jimmy persisted in calling the thick growth. And Tamasjo, coming now in the rear, did much to smooth over the trail, so that it would take a pair of unusually keen eyes to have guessed that one or more persons had issued forth at this point.

Having left the tall reeds behind them, the little party now found the woods in front. The ground rose abruptly, and they were standing where they could have a fair view of the river.

Ned gave a last look up and down the stream. As far as he could see there was not a sign of human life in either direction, only the calm peaceful flow of water moving majestically toward the great bay that undoubtedly lay not a great distance away.

Thus they started off, Ned having arranged his plan of campaign so as to confuse the enemy, possibly awaiting their coming further down the stream.

It was no idle saunter through the Northern woods. The leader of the Wolf Patrol had conferred with Francois, and arranged matters so that they would be able to return this way when ready.

Under ordinary conditions this might be easily accomplished by using a camp hatchet, and "blazing" a tree occasionally. In this manner the pilgrim would be able to always sight a white mark ahead, and pick his way without difficulty. But for numerous reasons they did not wish to attempt this well-known method now; since it might excite the curiosity of any one chancing to run across a freshly blazed tree, causing him to start in and follow the cuts all the way to the concealed canoes.

Consequently, Francois picked out certain features of the landscape which he occasionally pointed out to Ned, who in turn impressed them on the attention of his chums.

An odd looking bunch of birches that could not be easily mistaken told them in

the first place that the reed bed was only a few hundred feet away. Then, shortly afterwards, it was a rock that had the appearance of "round table," which Jimmy insisted on calling it. They jotted this down on the tablets of their memories, as the second striking feature of the trail.

So it went on. Scouts as a rule have good memories, because they have been shown early in their career when joining the organization how useful it is to be able to recollect a host of things without confusion. Indeed, one of the requisites to gaining advance marks in the patrol is the possession of this faculty. A tenderfoot will be given a chance to stand in front of a window containing hundreds of small objects, possibly connected with a hardware establishment in town. After impressing the picture on his mind, after a certain fashion for a full minute or so, he must walk away, and later on write out a list of every object he can remember.

Practicing after this manner boys have learned to widen the scope of their memories so that they become able to describe an array of things never seen before to an extent that is astonishing.

This was the practice that became valuable to Ned and his chums as soon as they started through that Canadian "bush." Each fellow began in a systematic way to make a list of the various "signs," so that when called upon to give his opinion he would be able to repeat the entire assortment, just as a sailor, forward or backward, is able to rattle off the thirty-two points of the mariner's compass.

There were many other features connected with that hike, which brought out their knowledge of scoutcraft. They noticed everything around them, as they moved along in a steady fashion. Never an arctic hare sprang up and bounded away, but the eye of every scout was instantly fastened on the little animal; and each boy mentally figured out how it must have been peaceful in this section of the woods, or that timid little creature would not have been lying asleep there, to be disturbed by their coming.

"We're heading almost due north, ain't we?" Jimmy asked, when some twenty minutes had elapsed since the start.

"About as near that as we can go," answered Ned.

"I knew it by the lay of the sun, and the way the moss hangs to one side of nearly all the trees, the northwest, where most every storm comes from," was what Jimmy went on to say, as though desirous of letting the leader know he had never forgotten valuable lessons learned long ago.

"You can tell direction from the general slant of the trees, if you notice them close enough," Jack Bosworth ventured; "because in the long run they are bound to show some deviation from a straight perpendicular, on account of these same storms. There's a good example of what I say right before you, Jimmy; that big tree standing high up above all the rest. See what I mean?"

"'Tis an easy mark you'd be taking me for, Jack, if I couldn't grab that idea and pull it down," the other remarked.

"Fact is," put in Frank, "a wide-awake scout need never get lost, if only he keeps his wits about him. I've even told direction by using my watch. And there isn't one of the bunch but who carries some sort of a compass along with him, unless Jimmy here, who forgets so many times, has left his with the duffle in the boats."

"You're off your trolley there if you think that, Frank," chuckled the scout in question, as he tapped his pocket suggestively. "I've experienced the fun of gettin' lost twice in me life, and I don't mean to ever take chances again. Goin' without a bite of grub from one sunset to the next was a lesson to me I'll not soon forget. I thought I was bound to starve to death."

"Well, let's talk less and look more," advised Ned, who knew how easily Jimmy could be drawn into an argument, or be induced to start one of his stories that concerned strange things experienced in the past.

After that they moved along almost in silence. Once in a while, Ned would think it the part of wisdom to call their attention to something that was apt to impress itself on their memories, so as to be easily recalled later on. He did this in a quiet way, for Ned disliked any show of authority. As the leader of the strange expedition into these Northern wilds, he was in complete charge of the little party; but, then, these other young fellows were boon comrades, with whom he had encountered numerous perils in times gone by, so that he hid the iron hand under the velvet glove as much as possible.

All of them could speedily see that the character of the country was gradually changing as they continued to advance. This gave Ned assurance that his theory was founded on correct lines, and that they must be drawing very near the shore of the great bay to which his mission had drawn him.

Up to now they had not discovered the first actual trace of others besides themselves in that region; though twice the Indian had hovered over half-washed-out footprints, showing that at least they were not the first ones to pass along under these trees.

Ned was all this time observing the nature of the land, with the design of making up his mind concerning the chances of rich copper deposits being found there.

It did not seem altogether unlikely, from what he knew of such things. Before he left home he had been shown all sorts of copper ore; and on the way the patrol leader had stored up in his mind many minute descriptions he had read of the famous country north of Superior, where such valuable mines were being worked. Thus, he was pretty well posted on the subject, though, of course, one who had had actual practical experience in copper mines might have put him in possession of many other useful facts.

So far as he could tell the rocks looked very like those around the MESAUBA region, and samples of which he carried along with him for comparison when the proper time arrived.

If this affair were indeed a gigantic swindle, then those who were running the game had been smart enough to pick out as the field of their operations a country that at least gave outward evidences of being capable of producing a high grade of copper ore. Ned had at one time fancied the whole thing was a myth, but now he realized that the supposed owners of the new discovery had at least been on the ground. They had carefully selected their site to conform with such conditions as would at least be required, should an expert secretly visit the scene.

Ned was satisfied with the way things were working. If only he could find where the mine was located, and make his investigations secretly, without the others being aware of his presence, he believed he would have no complaint to foster.

An encounter with armed guards who would be hostile to his mission was the last thing he wanted to have happen; though, of course, should this come about he believed he could depend on his chums to give a good account of themselves. They had in the past stuck to him on many occasions through thick and thin. Not one of them but who had done his part manfully, in season and out. The record of their past achievements had been one of almost unbroken successes. He had every reason to expect that this latest enterprise would be along the same order, and that the little party of explorers might return again to the metropolis, bearing with them such a concise and complete report, that Mr. Bosworth, and those interested in the proposed new mine, would have all the information required in order to know just how to act.

Most of the scouts were by this time beginning to look ahead with the idea of being the first to discover the big water that they knew must lie near by. Ned could have undoubtedly made the discovery some time back, because he carried

his field glasses slung over his shoulder, by means of a strap; but he preferred to let one of his chums enjoy the sensation.

Jimmy was craning his neck more or less, for being shorter than any of his companions he felt that he labored under a disadvantage. The growth of trees was of a nature to hide what lay beyond, yet all of them could actually feel the presence of salt water. Besides, if other evidences were lacking, their ears told them of waves running up on the shore, to gently break there; though the breeze was from a poor quarter to carry these sounds to them.

All of these lads, living in New York, were accustomed to seeing the ocean, and familiar with the "tang" that usually accompanies the presence of an arm of the sea. For weeks now they had been moving over the interior, and the prospect of sighting this Northern sea, that had ever been the home of mystery to all mariners, thrilled every boyish heart.

In the course of their various travels they had gazed upon strange scenes. Once not so very long before, fortune had been kind enough to take them to the regions of the Polar ice, in carrying out a mission entrusted to their charge; so that this would not be their first introduction to the Northern ocean. But they had heard so much about the unexplained things that took place in Hudson Bay, that one and all grew more anxious, the nearer they drew to their destination.

Ned had already made a discovery that gave him a thrill. He had found that some of the landmarks set down in the description of the wonderful mine were right before his eyes, and this fact gave him renewed confidence in his plan of campaign. The climax must be close *at hand*. Before many hours had passed by, he would be in a position to know the truth; whether this affair were a gigantic swindle gotten up and engineered by the combine, with the idea of loading a worthless property on Mr. Bosworth; or, actually what it claimed to be—a rich deposit of copper ore that seemed to lie in vast quantities among the rocks above the shore of Hudson Bay, and with shipping facilities at the very door of the proposed mine.

After all it was Teddy, the explorer, who turned out to be the fortunate one fated to be the first to glimpse the water. He happened to see a small opening to one side and ahead, to which he immediately called the attention of his mates.

"There's the sun glinting on something out there, boys," was the way he put it, "that looks mighty like water to me. Yes, you can see it seems to move up and down, just like we've often seen the ocean do over Long Island way. How about it, Ned; do I count first blood?"

"It's the bay, all right, Teddy," remarked the other, quietly, after giving one look in the direction Teddy was pointing.

Five minutes later and they stood on the border of the tree line, staring out over the vast heaving salty sea that they knew must be the far-famed Hudson Bay.



CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS BLUR ON THE HORIZON.

"I just thought it'd turn out to be a whopper of a yarn!" said Jimmy, frowning as if grievously disappointed all the same.

"What's that?" asked Frank.

"Why, all that tommyrot about the queer old fleet of boats that vanished right before your eyes, and then bobbed up somewhere else, like a flock of submarines, or a school of blooming porpoises," returned the disgusted one.

At that Jack laughed.

"Why, it sounds like Jimmy really believed the whole thing," he remarked; "and has been expecting the mysterious fleet at anchor the very minute he glimpsed Hudson Bay."

"But I did expect to hit on something different from this," said Jimmy. "Somebody, tell me, would you please, what's so remarkable about this thing? I've seen many a stretch of salt water that looked just like it, shore line and all."

"Why not?" observed Ned; "I never thought we'd find Hudson Bay country any different from other Northern lands. There are the same trees, moss-covered rocks, peculiar sedge grass, and the like. But don't be so quick to jump at conclusions, Jimmy. Give me half a chance to take a look through my field glasses here, and perhaps I can tell you something interesting."

With those words Ned unslung the glasses, and adjusted the same to his eyes. The others of the party, standing there knee-deep in the rank grass that grew along the border of the woods, watched him with renewed interest. They even forgot about the wild fowl that were sporting in flocks out where the waves

broke upon a line of rocks, with a subdued roar.

Carefully did Ned train his powerful field-glasses on a certain part of the horizon. Looking in that quarter some of the others began to rub their eyes.

"Seems to me there is something there," remarked Frank, straining his eyes in the endeavor to make sure.

"It may be a low-lying cloud on the water-line of the horizon," Teddy added.

"Anyhow, it's too far away for us to tell with the naked eye," Jack announced; "and so we'll have to depend on Ned to give us the information."

Just then the leader lowered the glasses.

"Take a look for yourself, Jack," he said; and there was a slight smile on his face while speaking, that told of a discovery of some sort.

While Jack was fixing the glasses to suit his needs, for everybody's eyes are not just alike, Jimmy was trying to make use of his doubled-up hands in order to help his vision.

"'Tis meself that believes it's smoke!" he declared, with animation.

"How about it, Jack?" demanded Teddy.

The one indicated did not keep them in suspense needlessly.

"Yes, Jimmy hit the bull's-eye that time," he remarked.

"Then it *is* smoke?" queried Frank.

"Not only that, but I can make out what seem to be a number of small objects that must be vessels of some sort," Jack went on to say.

"The disappearing fleet!" gasped Jimmy.

"Well, they haven't skipped out of sight yet," continued Jack, chuckling as he handed the glasses over to Frank to have a try.

In turn all of them took a look, and no one found reason to differ from what Jack had ventured to declare in the beginning. They were, without question, looking then and there on the clump of boats about which there had been so much talk made. Of course, at that distance there was no way of finding out the character of the several boats, or more than guess at what they were doing, away out from the shore.

"Strikes me that it might be some queer sort of mirage, like that you sometimes

see on the sandy desert." Teddy suggested, after he had gazed intently at the picture for a full minute through the lenses of the field-glasses.

"Oh! they have the same sort of deception at sea," declared Jack; "only sailors call it the *fata morgana*. When you're on the desert, it generally takes the form of a lovely running stream of water, which you're crazy to reach and suck up. But the shipwrecked tar always sees a vessel coming to his relief, which keeps on rushing through the water, right up over reef and everything and disappears over the island leaving him broken-hearted at the deception caused by conditions in the atmosphere."

Jack knew considerable about these things, for he had been in strange lands, even before he took to roaming around with Ned, when the latter entered the employ of the Government Secret Service.

"All you say is true enough, Jack," the patrol leader told him, "but in this case it isn't a deception. All of us can see the smoke hanging low down, that tells of steam vessels of some type out there, possibly trawlers, fishing. But we didn't enlist in this business intending to solve any riddles connected with Hudson Bay. I've been told that there is no place in Northern latitudes where so many strange stories have originated, as this same big sheet of salt water. Four-fifths of it have never been fully explored, so that they do not yet know what may be here."

Jimmy had been silent while all this talk was going on. But it could be readily believed that his restless mind was not inactive. He proved this by suddenly nodding his head, and looking up at Ned in that shrewd way he had of doing, whenever a particularly brilliant idea appealed to him.

"Chances are they're a blooming bad lot, that's what," he went on to say, as if he meant every word of it. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they turned out to be bloody pirates after all."

"Oh! perhaps Captain Kidd and his men come back to life again, eh, Jimmy?" suggested Teddy, with a laugh.

Jimmy turned and gave the speaker a scornful look.

"Think you're smart to get that off on me, don't you, Teddy?" he remarked; "but how're you goin' to prove that it ain't even as bad as that? Don't they say this here fleet comes and goes like ghosts of the past? Mebbe they are the spirits of Kidd, Blackbeard, Morgan, Lafitte, and all that gay crowd of buccaneers that flourished in the early days of our country. Supposin' I said I believed that way, it'd be up to you to prove me wrong, wouldn't it? Let's see you do it. Call 'em up

on the wireless limited or the telephone and interview the commodore. Bah! don't be so quick to poke fun at everybody that's got an idea you happen to think stretched. I'll even say that I've got half a sneakin' notion that it might be old Kidd himself, come back to see how the pickings are these fine days."

When Jimmy showed this fighting disposition the others were generally careful not to knock the chip off his shoulder. He had acquired habits when living on the Bowery long ago as a bootblack that could not be easily shaken off; though any one formerly acquainted with Jimmy would never have recognized him nowadays.

"It would be worth coming all the way up here if we could run across something like that, wouldn't it now?" remarked Jack, trying to look sober. "Think of how we could take the breath away from the rest of the troop at home, when we told them of meeting up with a lot of those old huskies, we've all read about in history. Jimmy's been devouring one of Clark Russell's stories, '*The Frozen Pirate*,' while on the train coming through Canada, and that's what makes him think of that crowd. But as we haven't any boats, and the smoke keeps on hanging miles away, likely enough we won't get any chance to know what kind of men are aboard those vessels out yonder."

"Besides," put in Ned, "we mustn't forget that we've got some serious business on hand of a different character from looking up pirates. Land sharks are enough for me to tackle just now. I'm wondering whether we'll be lucky enough to find where this mine is located near here. Once we get on the track of that and things are likely to warm up a bit."

"Then I reckon we'll just have to comb the whole country roundabout, so as to learn what's what," suggested Jack, always a hard one to give up anything on which he had set his mind.

"The sooner we begin that job the better," added Frank, anxious to be doing something that would count.

That was the way with these energetic fellows. Whenever they had a charge committed to their care, they were eager to get it moving. Ned often had to hold them in check, for fear lest they show too much ambition.

He looked around in the endeavor to decide which direction they had better choose, in order to seek traces of the working which was marked on the map so plainly. It was given such prominence that one might easily believe he would find all manner of shafts, sunk, with machinery throbbing busily, and scores of brawny miners hard at work, bringing out the rich deposit of copper ore.

Ned, however, did not deceive himself into such a belief. He had had some little experience with stories of this type, and knew the vast difference between the reality and the wonderful things prospective sellers were apt to mark upon the maps they had prepared. These usually described things as they might appear in case all went well, and the mine turned out a splendid success.

So far as indications went, Ned believed that they would have a better chance of success, if they turned abruptly to the left and made up the shore. At least, the character of the rocky country favored this idea. As far as he could see, it grew more and more inviting, looked at from the viewpoint of a miner, or a prospector for precious minerals.

The others were watching him closely. They guessed something of the nature of what must be passing through Ned's mind, for both Jack and Teddy followed his gaze up the uneven shore. Jimmy had the glasses again, and was busily engaged in scrutinizing the blur on the distant horizon, which all of them had agreed must be smoke hovering close to the water. Perhaps he half-believed the fanciful suggestion made by Teddy, with reference to Captain Kidd, and was wildly hoping to discover some positive sign that would stamp this fairy story with truth. All the previous adventures that had befallen himself and chums would sink into utter insignificance, could they go back home and show evidences of having made such a romantic discovery up there in the Hudson Bay country.

"See the feather they say he always wore in his hat, Jimmy?" asked Frank.

"Nothing doin' yet that way," replied the other, without allowing even the ghost of a smile to appear on his freckled face; "so if you please, we'll let the matter drop for the time bein'. Who knows what may happen before we get back to New York? 'Tis a great old country, so they say, for all sorts of queer things to crop up. You needn't be surprised at anything here, they tell me. And I've made up me mind to take it as it comes, and not let anything faze me. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Teddy."

"And I'm wondering," mused the one particularly addressed, "what that ancient but bold explorer, Hendrick Hudson, said when he had sailed all the way around this great bay, and found that it was after all a land-locked arm of the sea. When he first entered it, history tells us he had great hopes that he had found what Columbus was searching for when he made his western voyage, a way of reaching the East Indies by a water route. It must have been a keen disappointment when Hendrick had to turn north, and then east again, always fended off by the land."

Ned had by now determined that they ought to turn to the left in continuing the forward movement. He next looked for some landmark, by means of which on their return that they might know just where they should plunge into the woods, so as to follow their trail back to where the precious canoes were secreted.

As though he found nothing in the arrangement of the shore or the trees themselves to stamp it different from other places, Ned stooped down and placed several stones upon each other at the foot of a stunted oak.

That was an old trick among the scouts. Many such a stone cairn had they fashioned when playing some game of fox and geese, to serve as a sign to those who were following in their wake.

"We ought to see this, and remember that it tells us where we struck the beach," he explained to his chums, as he rose up again after completing his work.

Both guides had been watching what he did with more or less interest. Of course, they understood that the scouts had learned many of the ways practiced by woodsmen, for by now the real meaning of the khaki uniforms worn by the boys had been fully grasped by Francois and the Cree; though for a long time they had had hard work to understand why Ned and his chums were not to be looked upon as soldiers.

"Zere ees nozzing better zan a pile of stones to mark ze way," admitted the voyageur. "I haf myself used zat many times. But be sure zat you notice other things besides. It may be, an enemy he move ze stones some ozzer place, and if zat be so you all get twist up when you try to come back."

Ned nodded, as though he had already covered this ground.

"I had thought of that very same thing, Francois," he said, "and see, here is where I made a little gash in the trunk of the tree. I expected to look for that on the return trip. If I failed to find it I should understand there was something gone wrong."

"Zat ees well, sare; ze one who gets ze better of you must wake up early in ze morning, I am think!" he said softly, but in a way that told he meant every word.

"So say we all of us," added Jack.

"Ned generally looks out for snags!" Frank declared.

"We'd have met up with many a wreck only for his watchfulness," came from Teddy.

Jimmy did not like to be left out when there was any exchange of sentiments. He had a great admiration for the gifts of Ned Nestor, and wanted every one to understand what his sentiments were. So he started to open his mouth to say something, when Ned lifted a hand and gave a low sibilant hiss.

"Sh! don't say anything more, but drop down in this grass and lie low; because I'm sure I heard voices right then, also a husky cigarette cough. Down it is, boys!"

He set them a good example by dropping flat and hugging the ground. They had at the time been standing more than knee deep in lush grass that grew beyond the woods, and where the salt water never reached, save in flying spray possibly. All that was necessary, therefore, in order to conceal themselves, was to fall on their knees and then straighten out at full length. Even the two guides did this same thing, for they must have caught the sound of approaching voices at about the same time Ned Nestor did.



CHAPTER VIII.

TWO KINDS OF WOODCRAFT.

All of them lay there motionless. Long practice in this trick had made the boys almost perfect. What they had learned in play when in camp came into good service under other and more strenuous conditions, as is often the case. No boy can ever tell when the information he picks up day by day as a scout may prove a valuable asset, determining some knotty problem he faces.

As Ned had said, the sound of voices could be plainly heard now. It came in the shape of a murmur that differed from the noise of the fretting sea near by. And no doubt each scout made up his mind that it must be carried to their ears with the breeze, which, coming from almost behind them, would indicate that the unknown parties were advancing from that quarter.

Louder grew the sounds. Then there was a plain rustling of the undergrowth; and when Jack cautiously raised his head just a little, he was enabled to glimpse a trio of men standing there on the border of the wood, looking seaward.

Perhaps they, too, had seen the far-distant blur that marked the position of the mysterious fleet, and were exchanging comments about it. None of the concealed boys could say as to this, because, while they could hear the murmur of their heavy voices, it was next to impossible to make out more than a word here and there.

One thing pleased Ned very much. When he first noted the direction from whence these three rough men had come, he feared lest they may have run upon the trail of his party and were following the same. He now knew that in so far as this was concerned his fears were without foundation, and that the strangers did not dream of others being in the near vicinity.

One seemed to be the boss of the lot. He was an unusually big man, with a way of striking his fist into the palm of his other hand that told of authority. His face was covered with a heavy black beard that gave him a sinister appearance. Indeed, as Jack admitted to himself, put this man in some of the queer garments of the old times, when Kidd flourished along the Atlantic seacoast, and he would make an ideal buccaneer. His face was cruel, his manner that of a tyrant, and besides he seemed to be carrying a whole arsenal of weapons around with him.

Jimmy lay there, with his neck stretched to a fearful extent, for he was bound to see whatever was going on around him. He was possibly sizing this giant up, and trying to decide in his own mind, whether the dead ever do come back to revisit the scenes of their long-past triumphs and struggles; and if so, could this man with the hair all over his face be the noted Blackbeard?

Just then Ned gave a low signal. It was only the chirp of a cricket, and might pass unnoticed by any one not in the secret; but Jack and the other three scouts understood what it meant.

Ned was warning them to be careful and duck their heads again, because he fancied the men were about to start their way.

Hardly had the boys flattened themselves out again, than they heard the crunch of passing footsteps. It was lucky that the three strangers chose to pass by on the beach, as the walking was better there than close to the trees. Because of this fact the presence of the concealed adventurers was not discovered; and to their satisfaction the party passed by.

Each scout had gripped his gun, as he shut his jaws hard together, under the belief that discovery was very close. Had it come they would be compelled to spring out and try to hold up the trio of desperate looking characters. Such men will, as a rule, manifest a disposition to fight "at the drop of the hat;" and Ned, therefore, was just as well satisfied to see their backs. They were not up there to do any fighting if it could possibly be avoided. The rules of the organization to which they belonged positively forbade their seeking trouble along such lines; though allowing scouts the privilege of defending themselves if attacked, and there seemed to be no honorable way of escaping without a fight.

"What's the next word, governor?" whispered Jimmy, his voice trembling with the nervous tension.

The men had by now gone far enough along the beach to prevent any chance of low conversation being overheard; though Ned kept on the alert all the while, lest by some mischance there might others come along, who would take them by

surprise.

"We must follow them up," said Ned, without hesitation.

"Not out on the open beach, of course, when the woods are handy?" observed Jack.

"Move back into shelter, and we'll get busy," the leader told them.

Stooping so as to run less risk of being seen, in case one of the men happened to turn his head from any reason, the little party of seven hardy souls again entered among the trees.

They did not linger, because the men were making up the shore at a fair rate of speed, and they did not wish to lose track of them.

While no one had taken the trouble to ask Ned what his plan of campaign might be, they saw indications all around to give them a pretty good idea as to what he hoped to gain by thus following in the wake of the three strangers.

The men looked like hard cases, of that all the scouts were determined. One had the appearance of a miner; a second wore moccasins and was dressed after the manner of a woodsman, possibly a trapper, Indian trader, or something in the line of a hunter; while the big man struck Jack as a logger, or a timber cruiser, one of those spies who roam far and wide seeking new investments for some lumber company, or else a chance to steal valuable Government timber that is unwatched.

In talking matters over the comrades had made up their minds that these types represented the class of men they might expect to find gathered in this region, paid by the money of the mine syndicate, and ready to carry out the will of the swindlers, if such the operators proved to be.

As before, the guides led the way. Both men had taken a great fancy to Ned and his lively chums, and in case any trouble developed, as the result of their venture into this unknown country, Francois and Tamasjo might be counted on as ready and willing to back the boys up to the limit.

They pushed resolutely on, across fallen trees, through tangled thickets, and even climbing over rocks that lay in the way. The men ahead knew what they were about in choosing the beach to make their advance.

Often partly out of breath, with the effort to keep a certain distance behind those they were pursuing, the scouts pressed on. Jimmy seemed to have a harder time than any of the others, but then that was nearly always the way; for if there was

any hole to flounder into, or thorny thicket to get stuck in, Jimmy could be depended on to do his share of the adventure. Not that he purposely chose to get mixed up in all these skirmishes with unpleasant things; but he was one of those unlucky chaps whose blundering feet so often led him into a peck of troubles.

It would have taken much more than this to have discouraged Jimmy, however. He was made of stubborn material. Difficulties played fast and loose with him, but they never daunted the boy, who would only close those firm jaws of his more tightly than ever, and say that "after fifty-nine comes sixty," and if he had to go to twice that number he'd get there in the end.

One good thing about all this hustle, was the fact that, as Jimmy found himself, for the most part in the rear, he could not make any excuse to start in talking, because he did not dare call out, after what Ned had said.

They could hear him muttering savagely to himself every time a root tripped him up, or he found a swinging vine trying to lift him off his feet by means of his neck. That was a small matter, because, of course, Jimmy had to have some way of letting off superfluous steam, and it really did no harm.

Ned looked around quite frequently. He did not wish Jimmy to get into any serious trouble, because, in spite of his weakness for blundering, the McGraw boy was a faithful companion, who could always be depended on to stick to his friends, no matter what threatened. And he and Ned had seen some pretty lively times all told, in times gone by. This association in peril does more to cement the bonds of real friendship than anything else known. And that was why Ned wanted Jimmy along on this trip, also why he kept a wary eye out after the safety of the other.

Now and then Francois would step aside. On these occasions they knew he was making sure that the two men were still going on ahead, and had not either halted or turned aside into the rocky shore recesses.

They had kept up this sort of thing for nearly half an hour, and some of the boys were secretly telling themselves they had about reached the limit of their endurance, when Francois made motions with his hands to tell them that some sort of change had occurred since last he took an observation.

"Say, they're gone!" muttered Jimmy, coming up just then; and from the mystified look on his face, one would half believe he thought the men had taken wings and flown away, or else the ground had opened up and swallowed them; for a fellow who could put the least shred of faith in the reincarnation of Captain Kidd, dead for several centuries, would believe anything, Teddy privately told

himself.

"Did they turn aside and enter the woods, Francois?" questioned Ned, at the same time holding up a warning finger toward Jimmy, by this means seeking to remind him they were in no position to enter into any discussion.

"Zat iss what zey haf do," replied the French Canadian voyageur, promptly.

"You don't think they're lying low to wait for us—that it is a trap?" continued the patrol leader.

"Zere iss no reason to zink so," answered Francois. "I do not belief zey haf see us; and if not, zen why lay trap? But it iss always better to be sure zat ze road it be clear; so let ze chief heem go on and find trail."

It was a good suggestion. None could do that duty quite so well as the red brother, even though those boys had learned many bright things in connection with woodcraft, since joining the ranks of the scouts. They hardly felt like being able to enter into competition with a son of the forest, who from infancy had been taught in the wide fields of actual experience what they had of late been learning, partly from crude theory.

"Go on ahead, Tamasjo, and find the trail," said Ned to the waiting Cree.

"Find same, give blue-jay cry," Tamasjo told them; and it was so rarely he ever spoke at all, that the other scouts had to smile and nod to each other; for Jimmy had on one occasion even gone so far as to declare his belief that the Indian must be a genuine "dummy" and unable to articulate at all, which, of course, was not true.

They waited for him there, being in no particular hurry. If the trail of the three men could be picked up that was all they wanted. They could hardly have ventured to keep on the heels of those men through the woods, where sounds might be carried to their ears that would put them on the alert, and bring about a sudden climax, perhaps a battle royal.

The Cree vanished from their sight. So silently did he go that afterwards the scouts exchanged views concerning the way in which he had done it; nor could they fully understand how he could move deftly along, without making the least sound.

But Tamasjo had been born and bred in the woods, and did not have to overcome the barriers that civilization hampers its votaries with. He had learned all he knew from watching the creeping wildcat leap upon its prey; or else observing

how the hungry wolf followed the wounded deer over hill and through valley.

He had not been gone more than five minutes, when they plainly heard the angry discordant note of the blue-jay.

"That means everything is lovely, and the goose hangs high," muttered Jimmy, not daring to speak much above a whisper, while he saw Ned keeping a wary eye in his direction.

The leader at once gave the signal for an immediate advance, and the entire party started off. Even then, Ned and Francois, possibly Jack also, turned from side to side, determined that they should not be taken by surprise through any shrewd trick played by the men they had been tracking.

Upon coming up with the dusky son of the Northern forests, they were assured by him in a breath that all was well, and that the strangers had swung directly into the woods, following what seemed to be a well-beaten trail. This told the story, and went far to convince Ned that they had nothing to fear just then through discovery by these parties.

So the Indian, backed by the other guide, was put on the trail. The boys could have followed this with utmost ease, and even Jimmy would have found little real trouble in keeping to that broad track.

Every once in so often, Tamasjo would stop, to get down close to the ground. His actions excited the deepest curiosity of Jimmy, who, pulling Ned's head close down to his own lips, asked softly:

"Now, what in the mischief is the feller doin' when he stoops low like that? If you asked me, I'd say he was smellin' of the tracks of the three men; but since when was a heathen Injun given a scent like a hound, tell me, Ned."

"If you watch closer, Jimmy," replied the other scout, "you'll see that each time he bends down he is watching some blade of grass spring back to place; or else a small root that has been pressed down under the foot of that giant righting itself again. He can read those signs like a book. They tell him accurately just how long ago the foot pressed that root or blade of grass down. And so he knows what time has elapsed since the enemy passed along here."

"Gee! it would take me a week to learn that sort of readin' signs," Jimmy confessed; and Teddy, who was close enough to catch all that passed, snickered as he muttered, as though talking to himself:

"A week? Just one little stretch of seven days? Huh! you mean a year, rather."

Winding in and out in this way, the party bore deeper into the woods. The trail led among the rocks that were now piled up on every hand. Ned, on hastily examining some of these he passed, was forced to admit that at least they bore all the "ear-marks" of containing copper. If the syndicate had engineered a big swindle, at least, they must be given credit for picking out a likely site for a mine.

But there was Tamasjo pointing ahead, and giving his young employer to understand that they had arrived at the end of the broad trail leading from the shore of Hudson Bay into this wild stretch of rocky territory.

CHAPTER IX.

"SALTING" THE MINE.

The Cree Indian showed by his manner that there was need of great care in advancing any further. When the boys came creeping up to where he crouched, they understood the meaning of his gestures of warning.

Smoke was rising, and they could see a number of dingy tents grouped in a depression among the rocks. Evidently it was a camp of some sort, though just then besides the three men they had tracked there hardly seemed to be anybody around.

It was plain enough to Ned why this should be so, for he remembered about the dozen men who had spent the preceding night at the river camp, waiting for the coming of the canoes with the explorers. Those parties undoubtedly belonged here, and were even now in hiding further down the river, intending to play some prearranged scheme, with the idea of either frightening the scouts off, or else hoodwinking the investigators in some fashion.

"Ginger! but that was a good move of yours, Ned, to think of quitting the boats and coming across lots to find the old mine," said Frank, in a voice that could not be heard ten feet away.

The miners' camp was located on a brawling stream that came noisily down the rough face of the rocks. This created more or less racket, so that there was small danger of any hostile ears discovering the intruders through any sound they were likely to make.

"I second the motion," added Jack. "Think how neat we left the crowd in the lurch, and now we've found where the opening of this wonderful mine is, we can take a look in, while the bunch is waiting for us to drop down the river."

"That's what I meant to do when I started on this flank movement," Ned assured them. "And I only hope we'll be able to learn all we want, before the main lot make a change of base. It wouldn't be nice to have them come tumbling in on us while we were inside the workings—if there *is* any hole in the ground at all."

"I reckon we'll find there is, all right," said Jack, confidently.

"Why d'ye say that, Jack?" asked Jimmy, who never allowed an opportunity to quiz his chums pass by unimproved.

"Because I can see where a heap of rock has been dumped down a slide, so chances are they've been doing some little work up here, enough to make a showing, in case a party is sent up to investigate before buying shares," was what Jack explained.

"You're right there," admitted Teddy, as he took another look toward the side of the rocky hill close to the tent colony; "and after they'd opened up the mine, it wouldn't be a hard job to shoot it, I should think."

"What's that, shoot the mine, do you say?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh! that's only a term they use in mining countries when dishonest men want to salt a mine, so as to deceive a prospective customer. Some say they shoot gold or copper ore into crevices, where it will be taken out later and shown."

At this point Ned gave them to understand that it was no time to enter into any discussion concerning the methods of conducting frauds in mining. They had work before them, and had better be about it without any more delay, since there could be no telling at what time the absent men might show up. Once they returned to the camp, of course, the chances of the scouts accomplishing much began to dwindle enormously.

From where they lay, screened by some thin brush, the scouts were able to observe the ground, and Ned could form his plan of campaign. He never wasted much time when his hand had been placed to the plow. Following the line of loose rock that had undoubtedly been carried out of some working in the hillside, he believed he could settle on the exact position of the opening.

They would have to make a detour and approach from above. Here it was to be hoped they would find enough cover to enable them to make what Jimmy called a "grand sneak" into the mouth of the mine.

In as few words as possible Ned explained this to the others, as they clustered around him, hanging upon his every word. Jimmy could hardly be restrained

from hurrying off at once, so anxious did he seem to get started. But when Ned took hold of his assistant's arm, and gave him one of those looks which Jimmy knew so well, the little fellow subsided immediately.

"Oh! I'm on to the curves, all right, Ned, sure I am," he hastened to mutter. "I want to scratch gravel as soon as anybody else, but I'm not going to get off my base while the other feller's got the ball, not much. My place is to follow wherever *you* lead; and I understand my business too, believe me."

They crawled back some little distance, until there seemed to be a good chance to climb the hillside without being discovered. Now and then the Indian, who led the column again, would pause to take his bearings, and cast a quick, apprehensive look all around him. Plainly, Tamasjo did not mean to forfeit the confidence which he knew the young white commander placed in his ability as a cautious guide.

When they had gone far enough along the side of the rough hill, made up for the most part of rocks that the Cree led them around as a rule, rather than to attempt to scale them at the risk of being seen, they once more changed their course, and headed to strike the place where all that loose stone had come from.

A signal from Ned caused the other four scouts to take particular notice of what they were coming to. It was certainly a black opening among the rocks, with all the signs of a mine before it, even to some discarded picks and shovels lying in confusion close by.

They could just see the tent colony below. Some of the boys were anxious to get inside that opening, so as to find out what its secret might be; Ned, however, did not wholly like the looks of things.

"I wish I knew where those three men had gone," he muttered so that Jack heard, and looked at him inquiringly.

"Why, what's gone wrong now?" he inquired.

"Those men we tracked here have disappeared since we started to pass around the camp," said the other. "I've been looking to get a glimpse of them, and so far without any success."

"H'm! so much the better," whispered Jimmy, who was, of course, hovering near, anxious to know everything that was going on. "I must say I didn't like their looks, and particularly old Blackbeard. He had an iron jaw and a scowl that would send a cold chill to your heart. Oh! if they've gone away, let's laugh in our sleeves. I'd call it a good riddance of very bad rubbish."

"And so far as I'm concerned," added Frank, "I wouldn't drop a single tear if the whole shooting match of rascals dropped into Hudson Bay, and couldn't swim a stroke."

"What's to pay, Ned?" persisted Jack, who knew that the other would not feel the way he did without some good cause.

"It's only this," continued the leader of the explorers, "we're bound to enter the mine, now that we've come so many hundred miles, just to find out the truth. Well, if those men are in there working, we stand a chance of running across the lot, and that would spell trouble, you know."

"For them, yes," remarked Jimmy, as he fondled the repeating rifle he was carrying so proudly.

"Well," admitted Jack, "seems to me that we'll have to take the chances. We certainly don't mean to throw up the sponge, when we're so near the end of the race."

"I should say not!" breathed Teddy, who had considerable pugnacity in his makeup, although not really what you would call a fighter, like Jimmy.

"What's the use hanging around here, when that black opening invites us to come on in?" Jimmy wanted to know.

"We'd better carry out our scheme, and trust to luck to see us through," Frank gave as his opinion.

Ned saw that all of his chums were apparently of one mind. Really, he himself had not the least idea of backing down; his only thought had been to consider what they were likely to run across, so as to be prepared, like true scouts.

"You are all right," he observed, "and while we don't want to run up against any new trouble, we mustn't let that stand in our way. Francois, you and the chief lead off. And remember, everybody, to get down low enough, so that you can't see a single tent. That's the only way to make sure that some one in their camp won't see us."

Jimmy nodded his head, as if pleased that they did not mean to back down; though he should have known Ned better than to suspect the other of timidity.

The two guides started for the opening, with the rest trailing after them, so that the column looked very much like a long snake in motion.

Of course, every fellow felt his nerves on edge with apprehension. It was

impossible to foretell what might happen. For all they knew, the three men may have suspected that they had been followed, and were now laying a clever trap, in order to take the explorers off their guard.

As they drew closer to the yawning mouth of the mine among the rocks, Jimmy fancied that he saw a slight movement there. He could not make sure, nor did he find it possible to prove his suspicion, and on this account dared not try to attract the attention of Ned.

Perhaps, after all it was only some loose stone falling, or a small animal brushing past, that had caught his eye. While Jimmy thus reassured his rapidly beating heart, and gripped his gun with feverish zeal; at the same time, he breathed a sigh of relief after they had really gained the shelter of the grim opening, and there was no wild crash of guns, or hoarse demand for their surrender, with threats of terrible consequences in case of refusal.

And now they were sheltered by the mouth of the mine, so that they felt more confident of being able to take care of themselves, in case anything violent came to pass.

Ned, always on the alert to notice things, saw at once that the opening was partly natural. It looked as though the men who claimed to have made this wonderful discovery of rich copper-bearing quartz had also found a fissure in the rocks splendidly fitted for their purposes, since it allowed them to pass far into the side of the hill before they were compelled to blast and hew passages.

So much for a starter, Ned thought. He was taking note of all such things, thinking to incorporate them in his report. Although they might seem trifling in a way, he realized that they would have considerable bearing in settling the matter with Mr. Bosworth, and those associated with him in the big company that proposed to purchase a controlling interest in these new mines, should the report seem favorable.

The next thing was to pass into the mine.

Ned had come well prepared for this venture. Just as he and his chums carried guns with which to defend themselves in case of an attack—just as he had produced field-glasses when they were sorely needed—in the same way the scouts now had a clever means at hand for lighting their road, once they left the sunlight behind them.

Not only Ned, but every one of the five, produced a splendid little pocket searchlight. Extra batteries were also carried, so that they need not worry over

the possibility of the power giving out at a critical moment.

The two guides were evidently well pleased when they saw this display of illumination; though they must have known something about it before then. Ned concluded that there was really no need of so much light, which would only add to the danger of discovery. One light, or two at most, would give them ample means for seeing the way, and avoiding any pitfalls.

Accordingly he asked the others to shut off their batteries and follow him. Now that the guides had done their part in bringing the party into the mine, Ned meant to resume his natural place in the van, as the leader of the expedition.

As they moved along it was seen that very little labor had been required thus far to make an opening quite large enough for all practical purposes. The mass of rock that lay in the dump outside was probably ore that showed signs of being valuable. It was intended to impress any one with an exalted idea of the fabulous richness of the discovery, and had doubtless been well planted for that purpose.

Ned stopped every little while to examine the walls close by. He was looking for signs of unusual wealth, because the company owning the mine had declared in no uncertain way that even the sides of the passages were rich, beyond all conception, in copper.

His examinations thus far did not justify such extravagant terms of description. There were to be sure signs of the mineral in the rock, and possibly in quantities that might have paid for mining under ordinary conditions; but when the vast distance from civilization was taken into consideration, there would be nothing in the business, unless ore at least three times more sustaining were shown.

More and more was Ned coming to the conclusion that the affair was a gigantic swindle, and that the company which Mr. Bosworth headed was in for a grand plucking, unless warned in time. These men were playing for high stakes, and squandering lots of money, fully expecting to recoup themselves a dozen times.

The boys had been moving along in this leisurely fashion for possibly five minutes, and so far nothing had occurred to break the monotony. Ned had even begun to fancy that the inspection of the wonderful copper lode was going to be an easy matter when, as they started to turn a bend in the passage, he made a discovery that caused him to instantly press the button of his hand electric light, causing darkness to instantly surround them.

This gave them an opportunity for observing the movements of several men who by the light of lanterns seemed to be busily working a short distance ahead.

Even though the illumination did not seem very good, all of the scouts could see that these were the trio of miners whom they had tracked from the shore of the bay.

"Whatever are they doing, Ned?" whispered the irrepressible Jimmy, apparently greatly perplexed by the strange actions of the men who, unconscious of the fact that they were being watched, continued their labors.

"They are hurrying to do just what I said they might," Ned replied, also in the lowest of tones. "Perhaps the order has gone out to get things ready for us, in case we managed to slip by the river guard and arrived here unexpectedly. In other words, Jimmy, they are salting the mine with rich copper ore!"

CHAPTER X.

SCOUT TACTICS.

"Gee! that ought to settle the business!" breathed Jimmy, as he continued to stare at the three workers.

These men seemed as busy as beavers, passing from crevice to crevice, and managing in some way to insert what were very likely pieces of rich copper ore, brought from some distant and well-known mine, for the purpose of deceiving any one sent up to inspect this new venture.

Ned himself felt that he could have no better evidence of fraud than was exhibited in the actions of these laborers. He knew that if this scene was incorporated in his report, it would sound the doom of the intended big deal, whereby a million, perhaps many of them, was to pass into the hands of the swindlers.

And knowing this, Ned was also aware of the fact that should the employees of the company running the game learn that the scouts had actually been inside the mine, and watched its being so beautifully "salted," they would realize that desperate tactics must be employed in order to silence the spies.

That might mean either their speedy dispatch, or being kept prisoners in that region so far away from civilization until the deal had been put through, and the vast amount of cash changed hands.

He could easily enough imagine these desperate scoundrels making him sign a glowing report declaring that the property was fabulously rich. Plainly, then, it would be greatly to the advantage of the scouts to get out of the mine without being discovered.

"Well, do we go on and see what the fellows have to say for themselves?" asked

Frank, chafing under the delay.

"If we have to do that, please let me take care of old Blackbeard, Ned," urged Jimmy, who seemed to have taken an especial dislike toward the giant, whom he had been comparing with the old-time pirate.

"We'll back out!" said Ned, shortly.

"Seem to have seen enough, eh?" Jack whispered, with a little vein of disappointment back of his words, just as though he had really been hoping they might see some lively action, while up in this "neck of the woods."

"When your father learns about this job, he'll want to throw up his hands and wash them of the whole business," the other assured him.

"Then it's no use going deeper," admitted Jack.

Of course, all this conversation was carried on very cautiously. No one dared to raise his voice above the softest sort of whisper; and usually spoke directly into the ear of the chum he wanted to address. On this account, the workers not far away did not suspect the presence of interlopers, or that their actions were being carefully noted.

Ned managed to let the two guides know that it was now up to the party to execute a masterly retreat. If they could quit the mine as easily as they had entered, it would be a big feather in their caps.

All of them were immediately in motion, and after the bend in the passage had been negotiated they could once more use a light. As before, Ned brought his means of illumination into service, and guided by the soft white glow ahead, that showed up all inequalities of the path, they set out for the exit.

They had gone perhaps half-way, when Ned stopped to listen. All of them could hear what had come to his ears. Shouts without were sounding the alarm. Plainly, something must have occurred to excite the few who had been in the tented settlement. Perhaps after all some one witnessed their entrance to the mine, and had hurried to the camp with the news. There were two or three men there, as Ned had noted before; and these were now trying to communicate their discovery to the three miners engaged in "salting" the works.

There seemed to be only one course open to the scouts, and this was to make all haste possible to attain the exit. Here, they might sally forth, and by taking advantage of the confusion cause the few guards to disperse, by firing a volley over their heads.

This plan flashed into the head of the young leader of the explorers, as he listened to the shouts that were ringing forth.

"Hurry along, fellows!" he urged his companions, knowing only too well the value of prompt action in a case like this. "We must rush the opening, and scatter that howling bunch like wolves. Shoot to frighten, then if that doesn't work, try to cut them in the legs. Understand?"

They all answered in the affirmative, even Jimmy showing that he had caught the idea. And bent upon carrying it out, without the loss of even a second, the party pressed forward eagerly.

Just for another minute, and then they met with a sudden surprise, that came as unexpectedly as lightning might from a clear sky.

As though some giant hand had brushed them all over into a heap, so the five scouts and their two husky guides were sent headlong to the rocks, some of them receiving bumps that would prove more or less painful later on.

There was no mystery about the matter, because accompanying their upset had come a loud explosion that sounded doubly severe to them, since they were underground.

Plainly the conspirators had looked far enough ahead to make ready to entomb any prowling visitors who might succeed in gaining access to the mine, and learn something of its secrets. They had a charge of blasting powder, or possibly a dynamite cartridge, placed so that it could be fired with ease.

"Wow!" exclaimed Jimmy, struggling half erect, "who hit me with that brick?"

"What happened, Ned?" asked Teddy, almost dazed from the way his head had collided with a hard rock, causing him to see about a million flashing stars in that one second of time.

"They've fired some sort of explosive, to seal up the exit of the mine!" broke from Jack, who was quick to guess the appalling truth.

"Then we're shut up here like rats in a trap, is that it?" persisted Jimmy, now so astonished that he even forgot to rub the back of his head where the seat of the pain seemed to be located.

"I don't know," said Ned, "but we can soon settle that by pushing on."

"What if another bomb lets go?" Teddy inquired.

"Small danger of that happening," the leader assured him; "but anyhow we'll

have to take the chances. Come along, everybody!"

That was Ned's way of doing things, and proved him to be the right type of leader, capable of winning the respect of his patrol. Seldom had any of the scouts heard him tell them to "go on" when there was a spice of peril in the air.

They were not long in finding out the dismal truth. Indeed, as they advanced along the tortuous passage, the air became more and more foul with the odor of burnt powder. And, finally, the light from the several electric hand-torches disclosed the presence ahead of a mass of fallen rock and dirt that effectually filled the narrow passage.

The boys stared at the barrier in more or less dismay. It effectually cut them off from making their exit, and so far as they knew there was no other means of leaving the mine.

Jimmy started in to lifting several of the rocks and tossing them aside. With his customary zeal, he fancied that if they all got to work they might in a short time bore through the barrier.

"Be careful there!" warned Jack, as the action of the "busy bee" dislodged several other masses of rock, and Jimmy had a narrow escape from being crushed.

"Yes," added Ned, hastily, "better leave that alone for the present, Jimmy. For every pound you take away three will drop down, because you can see how the shock has loosened everything above you."

"But my stars! we ain't goin' to stand for being sealed up here like a lot of old mummies, are we?" gasped Jimmy. "Why, whatever would we do for grub; and then a feller wants to have a fresh drink every once in a while? Ned, we've just *got* to break out of this!"

"You bet we do!" added Frank, who did not like the bitter prospect any more than the one who was putting up such a savage protest.

"Tell me, how you're going to do it then," said Teddy.

Neither of the scouts answered. The fact of the matter was that while they were so vehement in their declaration not to stand, they did not have the least idea how the trouble might be remedied.

As usually happened, it became more and more evident that they must depend on Ned to lead them out of the wilderness. Instead of talking he had been doing some hard thinking; and was now able to suggest a plan.

"I don't know whether there can be anything in it boys," Ned started in to say, "but it seems queer that they should shut their companions up in here with us, if there wasn't some other means for escaping. Our plan then is to hurry back, and try to get in touch with that giant and his bunch. By now they'll have taken warning, and be hustling for the open air."

"Whee! then we'd better be on the jump," Jimmy jerked out.

All of them saw the necessity for prompt action. Now that Ned had suggested such a possibility they could understand how it might be just as he said. And if those toilers were already making in hot haste for the second exit, the sooner the scouts got close in touch with them the better.

They had already been over this ground two times, so that they should know it fairly by now. Every fellow had his electric light in service, gripping it in one hand, while his gun was held in the other.

In this fashion, then, they reached the bend around which they had peered at the trio of industrious "salt" workers.

All was as black as a pocket there now.

"Why, they're gone!" burst out Jimmy, just as though he had an idea the miners, after hearing the horrible crash of the explosion, would be kind enough to linger there, so as to show the intruders the back door of the mine.

"Keep right on going," said Ned, "we've got to overtake them, if we can do it."

"Guess, that'll save more or less trouble in the end," admitted Jack; while Teddy and Frank were heard to mutter their approval of the scheme.

Indeed, it was a rare occurrence for any of the scouts to radically differ from their leader. Somehow, Ned Nestor seemed capable of judging things just right, and these comrades tried and true had come to rely on his way of looking at the solving of knotty problems as well nigh perfect.

They passed the place where the men had been working. Perhaps some of the lads might have been glad of a chance to stop and see how this clever trick of making a mine appear ten times more valuable than it really was, could be carried out; but there was no time for delay now.

On they rushed.

The channel seemed to be so fashioned up to now that they were not compelled to make any choice between rival passages. There had been no such thing as

going astray. But shortly afterwards they came to a fork, where a second fissure gaped before them.

Now came the question, which way had the three men gone in order to reach the friendly exit they were acquainted with? Jimmy would have perhaps thrown up a copper cent and trusted to "heads or tails" to settle the matter for him; but this was not the happy-go-lucky way Ned had of deciding.

Of course, it would have been an easy thing for him to have settled in his mind which way the workings of the mine lay. All that was necessary was to look and see which passage showed many marks of loads of ore having been carried along it, portions of which had fallen from the wheel-barrows.

But this would not tell them whether the men had fled by that passage or along the other one. Just then they were bent on chasing after the three miners, and not hunting for the spot from which ore had been taken.

Ned had an idea. These usually came to him like flashes of light, and might almost be called happy inspirations.

He remembered that just after the tremendous crash several of the boys had been half choked by the cloud of dust in the air. He himself had had some difficulty in breathing, and refraining with an effort from coughing. That gave him the thought upon which he hastened to act; and it was here that his Boy Scout training stood him in good stead.

Immediately bending down he held his electric torch to the flat rock that constituted the floor of the passage where it forked, and just as he suspected would be the case, he discovered that a very thin layer of dust had covered the place after the explosion.

While there was not much of this, at the same time, it would allow a pair of keen eyes to discover footprints, providing they had been made *after* the layer had settled.

Ned's chums watched his every move almost breathlessly. They immediately understood what he expected to do, and while not very sanguine of success, still they hoped for the best.

They saw Ned start to move slowly along. He continued to hold his light close to the rock, and waved it slightly from side to side, as though bent on covering as much ground as possible. But the fact that he did advance showed them that he must be meeting with some success.

Another step did Ned take, then a third and a fourth. The boys began to breathe freely again, for hope had once more taken root in their breasts. They saw that he was showing confidence, as though he had no longer any doubt of his ability to decide the enigma.

Even Jimmy remembered reading about the visit of the Queen of Sheba to the wise Solomon, when he ruled as king, bearing a wreath of natural flowers in one hand and another that was artificial, but so skilfully done that no eye could detect the difference, and then asked him to decide. The wise king had simply ordered a window to be opened, and a lot of bees, searching for honey, soon settled on the right flowers.

That was the commonsense way in which Ned Nestor usually settled knotty problems.

"The trail in the dust runs along the smaller passage, that does not lead to the worked part of the mine," he said; "and so it's up to us to hustle after the three men. So come on boys, and let's hope we get to the open air soon!"



CHAPTER XI.

A SUCCESSFUL SORTIE.

The success which had attended Ned's efforts thus far encouraged the scouts very much indeed. Little things often carry considerable weight, especially when boys are concerned. Besides, there are times when even a thistle down will point to the way the wind is blowing. And a small success spelled greater things in store for them.

Accordingly, they all hurried as fast as the conditions would allow. Fortunately, there were few obstructions in the way to give them cause for trouble. Here and there they discovered a slight fissure, in which Ned warned them to be careful not to catch a foot, lest they get a bad wrench that might even amount to a sprain.

Once or twice Ned thought it best to make doubly sure by halting long enough to lower his light, and take another quick look at the floor. What he saw appeared to encourage him greatly; at least the other scouts knew when he once more continued the forward progress, that it was all right.

And it may be easily believed that the two experienced guides had watched all these goings-on with considerable curiosity, as well as satisfaction. It was in a line with their practical woods education, so that they could appreciate what Ned set out to accomplish.

The Indian had grunted his approval as soon as he saw the boy get down on his knees to look for a trail in the slight layer of dust; while Francois could have been heard chuckling to himself at a great rate, showing how tickled he felt over the smartness of the patrol leader.

"Say, don't you feel something like a breath of fresh air?" asked Jimmy, when

they had been pushing along for several minutes in this rapid manner.

"Yes, you're right about that," admitted Jack.

"Oh, I felt it before Jimmy said a single word," Teddy remarked. "I was sucking it in for all I was worth, because after that dust got to going, it's been hard to breathe at all."

"Must be the outlet, don't you think, Ned?" questioned Frank.

"We'll all hope so," came the reply from the leader.

"P'raps the three men may be hanging around meaning to keep us from rushing the exit, if we happen to come along that way?" Jimmy next advanced; for his mind was so fashioned that he could think of more objections in a minute than would occur to any one else in an hour.

"Well, they'll wish they had'nt, then," said Jack, belligerently. "All told, we're seven against three; and what with our guns, we ought to put up a pretty stiff sort of a battle."

"Well, I guess so," grunted Jimmy, immediately appeased by the prospect of action, which always satisfied a certain longing in his soul; for doubtless the ancestors of the Irish boy had once fought at Donnybrook Fair in the Old Country.

The atmosphere certainly grew fresher as they continued to push forward. This fact told them they must be approaching an opening where the outer air managed to gain ingress to the fissure.

Then they noticed that it was no longer so intensely dark as it had heretofore been. Ned concluded that it would be policy for them to lessen the illumination they were making with their torches.

"Shut off your light, Jimmy, Teddy and Frank," he told them.

Nobody asked why this must be done. They had learned the lesson of implicit obedience to those in authority, as every scout has to do before he can qualify for any honors, or medals, or rise from being a tenderfoot to the place of a second or first-class scout.

Indeed, doubtless, most of the boys guessed the answer as soon as Ned gave the order, for they were a quick-witted lot. They could reason it out that the less illumination they caused, the more chance for them to attain their end, which was to burst out of the back door of the mine, and make their escape.

"I see it!" Jack exclaimed, as he caught sight of a dazzling mark ahead, which must be the sunlight shining beyond the black tunnel or fissure.

The prospect of a speedy release cheered them wonderfully. It served to even quicken their steps, though they had already been making fair progress.

"Only one thing to bother about now, eh, Ned?" Frank asked.

"That's all," came the terse reply, for Ned was busily engaged keeping his eyes fixed on the opening, that was gradually growing wider, and possibly trying to make up his mind what chance there was of finding it unguarded.

"If those three huskies are waiting beyond, ready to give us a volley when we poke our noses out, we'll have a battle royal on our hands, let me tell you," Teddy announced as his opinion.

There was nothing new in that, for all the others had guessed the same thing, before he spoke. At the same time it caused them to clutch their weapons with more determination than ever, after Teddy had voiced their sentiments in this way. They were now so near the exit that Ned first asked Jack to "douse his glim," and shortly afterwards followed suit himself.

There was no further necessity for artificial light, since enough of the natural kind sifted in through that opening.

Ned gave a word of caution just then.

"Carefully, now!"

They fairly crept up to the gap in the rocks, and looked out. It was possible to see for some little distance beyond the opening. They saw bushes, and piled-up rocks in abundance, behind which there might be enemies hiding.

Ned turned to Francois.

"Find out if there is anybody waiting there, Francois!" he simply said, knowing that the other was perfectly capable of doing what he was told.

It pleased the old voyageur to be called upon in a crisis. He immediately crept forward on hands and knees. They saw him take his slouch hat from his head and fix it on the end of his gun barrel; after which he thrust it forward until it was in plain sight without the exit of the mine.

A prompt response met this challenge. They heard the sudden spiteful crack of a gun, but as Ned had cautioned them to seek shelter behind various outcropping spurs of rock, no damage was done.

"Gee! it knocked Francois' hat off all right, believe me!" exclaimed Jimmy, after he had raised his head cautiously, much as a turtle would have done.

The guide made no effort to recover his headgear. He had instantly looked out after the shot came, as meaning to learn where the marksman was located, so that he could return the compliment of his fire.

A puff of gray smoke told him this fact, and without even waiting for orders Francois leveled his own gun and blazed away.

"Oh! listen to that, would you?" cried Jimmy, as they heard a bellow of mingled pain and rage break forth from the thicket into which the bullet from the voyageur's rifle had sped like a flash.

"Down again, mebbe more shoot!" the Cree guide was heard to call out; and *apparently* he read the signs correctly, for hardly had the scouts "ducked" once more than there was a crash of two guns, telling that the entire force of the enemy must be opposed to them.

This time Jimmy could not be restrained. He had been fairly burning to get in some active work, and without even waiting for orders, he began to rattle off the shots from his repeating gun, in rapid-fire style.

He had taken pattern from the method adopted by Francois, and sent his lead in the direction where he saw wreaths of smoke curling forth. Teddy and Frank also felt savage enough at being fired on without warning to give back a single shot apiece, but the other two held their ammunition.

If they meant to rush the exit now was the time to do it, Ned knew. It would be folly to wait until the enemy had recovered from the confusion into which they may have been thrown by this volley.

"Now, charge, and scatter all you can; so as to keep from being hit!" called out Ned, as he sprang for the opening.

They burst out with a cheer, as though under the impression that in this way it might be possible to send further dismay into the hearts of the three men who had, of course, been compelled to either fly, or else lie low while the shooting was going on.

There were a couple of shots, but sent in under such conditions that they failed to find a billet, and were wasted. Those who fired were possibly more concerned about their own safety just then, than the chances of cutting down any of the exploring party.

Led by Ned, they swept over the open space and plunged into the wilderness of rocks and scraggy brush beyond. One look the patrol leader gave, after they found themselves in the shelter of the screening bushes.

"Anybody hit?" he asked, anxiously.

"Don't know for sure," spoke up Frank, "but something seemed to burn my leg, at the time they fired; and, by George! look what happened to my fine kahki trousers, would you?"

He pointed to a tear that could be plainly seen, showing where a bullet had gashed the tough material in passing.

"Sure you're not badly hurt, Frank?" asked Jack, solicitously.

"Hardly brought blood!" declared the wounded scout, with a tinge of delight in his voice, for it was worth while to know that you had been touched by a bullet, and even have the evidence to show for it, without any painful consequences to follow.

"Lucky feller!" said Jimmy, somewhat jealous of the honor this was going to bestow upon the other, when the story of the raid was told later on.

"But we mustn't stay here," Ned told them. "Keep your eyes all around, and if you are sure you glimpse anybody following after us, give him your compliments; only remember that you're scouts, and make it as easy as you can for the poor wretch."

"He won't know it if I hit him!" Jimmy went on to say; nor did anybody stop to ask him to explain more fully what he meant.

The fact that they were leaving the mine for good did not seem to cause any of the party the least distress of mind. They had come and looked it over, and Ned had learned all he wanted, in order to make a comprehensive report. The sooner they left the vicinity, the better all of them would be pleased.

To reach their canoes again, they would have to cover considerable ground; and that caused Jimmy to wince, for he was not reckoned as good a walker as most of his mates.

Secretly, he was hoping that some other plan might appeal to Ned, such as hiding their trail, and resting up in some snug retreat over night, when they would be in good shape to complete the journey in the morning.

It was now a question as to just how they were to conduct their retreat so as to

avoid the risk of being pelted with bullets by the three miners, reinforced by any others who may have been in the tent village.

Ned was only too glad to leave this pretty much in the hands of Francois, whose practical experience was worth much more than any theory that could be studied out of scout books.

The French Canadian voyageur quickly understood what was expected of him, after he had received the signal. Although the boys had been in his company for weeks now, they had never seen him so alert and active. He seemed to be watching every angle of the compass at the same moment, and twice raised his gun and fired backward, as though he had discovered some lurking foe.

That this was far from imagination they saw when the second shot came; for hardly had it echoed through the hills than a form was seen to rush into view, and a man in rough clothes flashed across an open space, holding to his left arm, as though he might have received the guide's lead in that shoulder.

"You pinked him, Francois, sure you did that time!" cried Jimmy excitedly; "don't I just wish I had your quick eyes, though? I didn't see a single thing moving up there; but you did, Francois. Old Eagle Eye I'm going to call you after this. Oh! why don't one of 'em step out, and let me take a snapshot at him?"

It seemed as though the others were not that obliging, for while several shots were fired, without doing the explorers any damage, Jimmy could see nothing of the men who used their guns. He, finally, being unable to stand it any longer, sent a couple of shots at the spot where he saw smoke rising, after another fusilade had come.

"Guess I'm on the blink when it comes to sharpshooting," bemoaned Jimmy; "why, at this rate, I'll never get the stock of my trusty rifle covered with notches, to show the number of ferocious pirates I've bowled over. It's a measly shame, that's all."

At any rate, they seemed to be making a successful "getaway," as Jack called it; because they were gradually leaving these hidden marksmen further and further behind. The next shot showed that the handler of the gun was quite some distance away. He must have taken more pains to aim, however, than up to now had been the case, for immediately the "ping" of the bullet was plainly heard as it winged its flight only a short distance above their heads, flattening out against the face of the rock beyond.

This thing of being under fire was no new experience with these scouts. They

had on several occasions heard lead sing past their ears; but, all the same, none of them enjoyed the sensation very much. It was apt to cause a shiver or a feeling as of being put in connection with a galvanic battery.

"Seems like we've left that crowd in the lurch," Teddy remarked, a few minutes later, as they began to reach more regular ground, where the going promised to be considerably easier.

"Yes," added Jack, "and the most we have to fear after this is meeting up with the other lot that waited for us on the lower river. They may have grown tired of laying around, or else got wind of our change of plans, so that right now they are crossing to the mine!"

"Look!" said the Cree guide, pointing backward; and immediately the scouts saw three columns of very black smoke ascending straight toward the sky.



CHAPTER XII.

THE TALKING SMOKE.

"Well, I declare if they don't use the same sort of signals the scouts do down our way!" exclaimed Jimmy, looking rather disgusted, as though he had caught some one stealing his thunder.

Ned had to laugh at the blank expression of his assistant's face.

"Why, Jimmy," he said, "you forget that the scout movement is only half a dozen years old. It began after the Boer war, when General Baden-Powell saw what a great thing it would be for the whole British Nation, if every boy learned a thousand things about all creation, useful things at that. And, Jimmy, don't forget that smoke was used to signal with for hundreds of years before ever the white man landed on the shores of America."

"Say, that's right, Ned, they always made fires with their flints, didn't they? And these men up here, hunters, trappers, or whatever they may be, inherited the Injun way of sending messages. Sure, I knew it all along. The only trouble with me is I go and forget things. But what d'ye think they are doin' sending out that old smoke signal?"

"They've got friends within seeing distance, because smoke can be sighted many miles away, especially when it rises as straight as it's doing now," Jack ventured to interpose.

"The crowd over on the Harricanaw River, you mean?" demanded Jimmy.

"Yes."

"Then they'll be apt to know we gave 'em the slip, won't they?" the freckled faced scout continued.

"I suppose they will, because you notice that every now and then the smoke seems to stop," Ned answered. "As a scout in good standing, Jimmy, you ought to know how that's done."

"Two fellers swing a blanket over the smoking wood and smother it for a bit, to send up another big puff. Yes, that's what they call talking. Letters are formed by the puffs of smoke, just as we do the same with the wigwag flags, or the piece of looking-glass in the sun, when we heliograph."

"And right now, somewhere or other, one or more of those men must be reading out the message, letter by letter," said the patrol leader seriously, while they continued to walk on.

"It won't take long to tell how we happened to show up at the mine, and took a nice little saunter through the same, seeing how fine it was being cured—I mean salted," Teddy interrupted, thinking that Jimmy had done more than his full share of the cross questioning, and ought to give place to some one else.

"I shouldn't think it would," agreed Ned.

"I wonder now if the men over on the river will guess what happened, and how we must have left our boats secreted somewhere above?" ventured Frank.

"That is something we have no means of telling," Ned informed him; "but since it might happen, we'll have to keep a sharp lookout on the way across country. We might fall into ambush, and either be shot down or else made prisoners."

"I don't know which would be worse," grumbled Jimmy.

"Whew! what if they should happen on our, canoes, after all the trouble we took to hide the same?" suggested Jack, looking as solemn as an owl.

"The walking is fairly decent all the way from Hudson Bay to Montreal, barring a dozen rivers to cross, a score of bogs miles and miles around, some pretty hefty mountain chains to pass over, and some more troubles too silly to mention," was the way Jimmy made light of the possible calamity.

Ned himself knew that it would be a terrible mishap should anything like this come to pass. He had thought it all over more than once, and even mapped out several plans for their guidance in case of such an event.

Walking back was next to an utter impossibility. They might manage with the aid of Francios and the Cree Indian to manufacture some sort of canoes, providing the proper kind of bark was to be procured this far north, which he doubted very much. Besides this, there was a slender chance that they might signal to some

whaling vessel on the great bay and procure a berth for each of them aboard, so as to be landed at Halifax or Montreal, anywhere so that they could use the telegraph, and keep Mr. Bosworth and his company from investing a dollar in the wonderful copper mine, until the scouts reached home again.

So Ned, having looked further ahead than any of his chums, was not so much impressed by the gravity of the threatening evil, in case they did lose their highly valued canoes. He would begrudge the loss of his blanket and some other articles more than anything else, as they had memories connected with them of dead and gone events, in which he and some of the other boys of the trip had figured.

As they pushed on every little while they could catch glimpses of the talking smoke signals in the rear. Doubtless the fire that was supplying the smoke for this method of communicating with the distant posse had been built on the side of the hill in which the mine lay. That would account for their being able to see it for such length of time.

"Must be giving a whole history of the *awful* disaster," Jimmy muttered, after he had turned for the sixth time to see the smoke still waving in fantastic wreaths against the sky.

"Slow-pokes, that's what," ventured Teddy. "Why, when I was a mere tenderfoot I could send messages better than that."

"Don't find fault," advised Jack. "The longer it takes the signal man to send on his news, the better chance we'll have of slipping away before any trap can be laid or sprung, don't you see?"

"And as we're first-class scouts," said Jimmy, boastfully, "why, we're able to beat such dubs, with one hand tied behind our backs."

Perhaps all the others agreed with the speaker, even though no one voiced his sentiments just then. Jimmy was well calculated to do all the boasting for an entire party on occasion; but then he meant all he said.

Pretty soon Frank made a discovery that caused him to break loose and voice his surprise.

"Why, Ned, we don't seem to be heading down towards the big bay?" he observed.

"That's right, Frank," came the quiet answer.

"But I thought we'd surely have to follow the trail back there, just as we came?" Frank continued, as though sorely perplexed.

"We would," the patrol leader informed him, "if we were going back the same way we came, because it would be necessary to get in touch with our blazed trail, meaning all those landmarks we noted so carefully when coming on."

"What's that, did we have all that trouble for nixey?" blurted out Jimmy.

"Don't say for nothing, Jimmy," urged Ned; "because when you've gone to work and stored a lot of things up in your mind like we did, you've been exercising your memory, and that's always a splendid thing to do. We certainly noticed a bunch of queer growths in the woods as we came along, though it's hardly likely any of us will ever set eyes on them again."

"But why the change, Ned, if you don't object to telling us?" asked Jack.

"It's only right you should know why I took it on myself to do this," replied the other, modestly; "and then if anybody objects, and explains on what grounds he bases his kick, perhaps it won't be too late to turn out and find the blazed trail yet."

"Proceed, please," urged Frank.

"I thought that since our presence here is known, that those at the mine would be able in some way to communicate with the dozen or more rascals over at the river. And there would always be a pretty strong chance of our being waylaid while on the road back to the boats. If any one found our trail that would make it a foregone conclusion. And so I thought we'd be wise to start in fresh."

"I saw you consulting your compass many times, while on the way over, Ned," and this remark from Frank caused the patrol leader to smile and nod in the affirmative.

"Which tells me you've got your location all down pat," continued Frank, energetically. "Right now, if I asked you, chances are you'd be able to point straight in the direction where the river lies; yes, and straight at our boats. Is that correct, Ned?"

For answer, the other raised his hand and pointed.

"What direction would you say lies right there, Frank?" he asked.

Frank had to turn his head and observe the position of the sun, as well as do considerable mental figuring, before feeling able to make answer; which would indicate that he had been caught napping, and was not so well prepared as a wide-awake scout should always be.

"Let's see," he went on to say, slowly; "according to my calculations that ought to be not more than a point away from due east."

"It is exactly east, and the river lies there;" Ned pursued, confidently; and no one had ever been able to catch him in an error when it came to topography, for the patrol leader had very few equals in studying the lay of the land. "Of course, our canoes lie some little distance above; so that pretty soon we'll begin to shift our line of travel more to the southeast. I have strong hopes that when we do strike the Harricanaw, it will be close to the boats."

"And going this way is shorter than following the back trail away down to the bay, and then picking up our other course from there?" Teddy ventured to say; nor was his proposition disputed by even the one who objected so often, Jimmy.

"I'm only sorry for one thing," this latter scout said, presently.

"I bet you now he's going to tip off that silly, old story again about the vanishing fleet of vessels out on Hudson Bay, and say he did hope we might crack that hard nut while we were up here," Frank told them, whereat Jimmy slapped him vigorously on the back, and exclaimed:

"You'd better get a punkin and hollow out half for a skull cap, Frank. Then you could go and sit in the market-place and pass for a seer; because now and then you do have a bright thought, and actually guess something. That was just what bothered Jimmy McGraw, sure it was. If we go away from here and leave that mystery unsolved, who's ever agoin' to do it, tell me that? Don't they kinder look to the scouts to do anything and everything these here days, that other folks can't just manage. Huh! ain't ever a child wanders away from home and gets lost in the woods, but what they send out a call, not for the fire company, like they used to do; but it's 'the scouts c'n find poor little Jennie; let the scouts get on the track, and in three shakes of a lamb's tail, they'll have the child safe at home!'"

"Well, there's a whole lot of truth in what you say, Jimmy, though none of us ought to be given to boasting," Jack declared, proudly; "I've helped find *three lost children*, *two old men* who were out of their minds and had wandered away from home, about sixteen stray cows, a horse, too, and even had a hand in killing that big mad dog that came down the street of the Long Island town where I spent one of my vacations some years ago."

"Good for the Black Bear Patrol," said Jimmy; "which makes me feel sicker than ever, because we've got to go back home, without having a shot at that punk old mystery of Hudson Bay. We could find out all about it, you take my word for it, Jack. Put five fellers as smart as this bunch onto anything that's cooked up, for

some reason or other, and they're bound to unearth the game. Once I helped gather in the biggest lot of bogus money-makers, with Ned here, that you ever set your lamps on. D'ye know, deep down in my heart, I've got a hunch that this queer fleet that comes and goes like it was made up of ghost craft, will turn out to be something like that. You'll sure find that men are back of it that don't want to be seen at too close range; though what under the sun they're adoin' away up here gets me."

About this time Ned gave the signal that called for less noise; and Jimmy was, in consequence, compelled to bottle up some of wonder and disappointment. He had perhaps, hoped to get a "rise" after his dextrous cast, and in this way learn what one or more of his mates thought about the matter. As it was he continued to ponder, look solemn, and occasionally shake his head, as though unable to decide on any settled course.

"Don't believe we'll have any more jogging from those three men we tracked," Teddy went on to say, a little later; "because two of them must have got hurt, if yells speak for anything. I wonder if Jimmy's black pirate chieftain was one of the potted victims."

"He wasn't that one we saw come out holding on to his arm, like he thought he'd be likely to lose the same," Jimmy informed him. "That was the man dressed like a hunter, wearing a buckskin coat and fringed trousers. Gee! I thought that sort of stuff had all gone up the spout since khaki came in for woods' use?"

"Oh! well," Jack reminded him, "just remember where you are, and that there are men up here who still think Queen Victoria is sitting on the English throne, because they never get in touch with civilization. Life with them is only eat and sleep, and sell a few furs in the spring, to the factor at a post of the Hudson Bay Company, which they spend for ammunition, whiskey and such necessities. The skins they take, furnish them with clothes, moccasins, and even caps. Can you beat it, for a life without worry?"

"Give me the white man's burden, every time; if a lot of other things go with it, like we get at a supper down at Coney Island in the good old summer time," was Frank's idea.

Strange, how boys will let their thoughts stray back to other fields, even when facing peril in the Canada bush. To hear these lads talk, one would never think that they were at the same time keeping a constant lookout for enemies, who would be apt to deal harshly with them because Ned and his chums had outwitted the shrewd schemers owning the fake mine.

It was nearly half an hour later, when they discovered that smoke was also rising directly in the east. Evidently some of the men, over on the Harricanaw, were sending back an answer to the message in smoke, which had been thrown out against the sky, by those guarding the mine.

"Mebbe I don't wish I could read their old signals," declared Jimmy; "but, I just can't. They've got a different code to the one the scouts use, which makes it all Chocktaw to me. If anybody can give a guess what they're saying, put us wise, please."



CHAPTER XIII.

A DREADFUL CALAMITY.

Apparently, no one among the scouts was able to favor Jimmy with regard to telling what the smoke signals meant. Whoever might be responsible for the code used by all scouts, it had evidently not been founded on that in use up here in the Far North, by these trappers and woodsrangers.

"I've been trying to get the hang of it myself," Jack acknowledged; "but must say, I'm like a man up a tree. When I begin to think I'm coming on, there's a slip, and it's all off again. How about you, Ned?"

They had stopped to talk it over. All of them were in need of a breathing spell, at any rate; and this might turn out to be a matter well worth investigating.

The patrol leader shook his head in the negative.

"Just the same with me, Jack," he returned. "I'm mixed up enough not to be able to say what it means, though I've got an idea they may be telling the parties at the mine what they expect to do. But we haven't thought of one chance we've got to read the message."

"What might that be, Ned?" asked Frank.

"I don't reckon that you're carrying a lovely little code book along with you, now; that'll tell all about the different ways people have of signaling with smoke puffs?" Jimmy wanted to know.

"Perhaps Tamasjo might tell us," was all Ned said; and his simple explanation caused a general look of eager curiosity to be turned in the direction of the Cree Indian.

Why, to be sure, Tamasjo had been born and raised in this Northern country, and

very likely he had communicated with his own people many a time, when returning from a hunt, and by just such means as those men over on the Harricanaw were now using.

How silly that some one had not thought of the old Cree before. It was as simple as turning one's hand over. Jack chuckled when he heard Teddy mutter to that effect; because he remembered that when Columbus returned, after discovering the Western Hemisphere, the envious Spanish courtiers made remarks along the same lines. It is always easy to see a thing *after* it has been pointed out.

Frank was already turning toward Tamasjo. He found the Indian standing there calmly watching the floating columns of smoke that were interrupted frequently, as those responsible for their existence manipulated the blankets over the fires.

"What do they say, Tamasjo?" asked Frank.

The Cree guide talked fairly good English, though with something of an effort. When indulging in any extended conversation with Francois, he invariably resorted to his native tongue.

Turning to Francois now, he rattled off a lot of talk that sounded almost like gibberish to the scouts, who waited for the voyageur to translate it.

"He says zat ze smoke tell heem most of ze men haf already started over to ze mine. Eet also say zat zey will have us all in ze trap soon," explained the French Canadian.

The boys looked at each other blankly.

"The dickens they do!" burst out Jimmy. "They'll have to get up right early in the morning to find us asleep. Say, he didn't tell what they expected to do when they sprung that fine trap, did he, Francois?"

"Nozzings, sare," responded the other, with a negative shake of his head. "I myself haf also read ze signs pret well, but zey do not tell vat it ees zey haf do to cage us. Zere, you see ze smoke ett haf done. I zink zey must be put ze fires out."

"That leaves us nearly as much in the air as before, don't it, Ned?" Jack complained.

"Only that we've learned the men are on the way across somewhere," Frank objected.

"And that they think they've got us up a tree, though we haven't the least notion what kind of tree," added Teddy, thoughtfully.

Ned looked serious, but if he had ideas of his own, he did not mention them just then. Perhaps he thought his chums had troubles enough as it was, without assuming any imaginary ones that might turn out to be false alarms.

"We'd better be pushing on again, boys," he remarked, "if all of you have swallowed what water you want from this fine spring here."

Apparently they had, for presently the column was in motion again. Somehow, even Jimmy had sobered more or less. Something about the passing back and forth of the smoke communications must have put a damper on his spirits; though, a short time before, he had been fairly bubbling over with joy, because of the success that had recently come their way.

It would have been all very well for the scouts to have depended wholly on themselves had they been alone at this time; but having two experienced guides along, Ned was not conceited enough to think that he knew it all, and could utterly dispense with their advice.

Consequently, he did not hesitate to ask questions of Francois whenever a situation confronted them that seemed to offer two solutions. A mistake, at this stage of the game, was likely to cost them dear; and they could really not afford to take chances of such a slip-up.

On this account, then, he kept Francois close by, and was frequently seen to be exchanging words with the voyageur.

It was apparent to all of them when the change of direction was made, for the sun began to loom up more to the rear, as they headed into the southeast.

This meant that the river must lie straight ahead now, and if their calculation did not go amiss, they should strike it in the vicinity of the place where the growth of friendly reeds concealed their boats.

Habit was strong with the boys. They had for a long time now accustomed themselves to noticing everything of interest around them on all occasions. So it was that while they paid some attention to what lay in front much of the time, they kept pointing out objects of interest to one another as they walked along.

Now it might be a splendid chance to bag a feeding caribou, seen in a glade off to the right, and to windward, which accounted for his not having scented the presence of human enemies.

A little later some frisky squirrel, or it might be a sly Arctic fox, was pointed out. Birds were few in number, and consisted for the most part of the species of

partridge that can be found up in this far-away region. Not a single song-bird did they see or hear, and a silence like unto death lay upon the "bush," as the wilderness is always called throughout Canada.

Far up in some of the trees, noisy crows had sometimes been seen, holding a caucus; but just then even these seemed strangely absent.

These boys had known what it was to pass through a tropical jungle with its confusion of sounds that at times almost deafened one; so that the contrast was very strong. They could understand what was meant when explorers talked of the "silent North;" and told how painfully quiet it was at all times, save when some Arctic storm caused the ice floes to grind together, and portions of the bergs to crash down from their lofty heights.

"Seems to me we must be getting somewhere near that old stream," Jimmy finally remarked, with a half-hidden groan, for he was undoubtedly beginning to feel exceedingly tired.

Somehow, the boys turned inquiring eyes on Ned. They knew that he had all the while been keeping a record of the distance covered, and could, therefore, give some sort of estimate as to how far away the river might lie.

Seeing that he was expected to make an announcement, the patrol leader appeared to do some mental calculating before giving his opinion.

"If you can keep going for about ten or fifteen minutes longer, Jimmy," he finally remarked, cheerily, "I think, you'll find that we've arrived. Once or twice, I noticed something in the lay of things ahead, when an opening came, that seemed to tell of the river. The trees always grow higher along the course of such a stream, you know, and often you can follow the direction of the river, without ever glimpsing the water itself once."

"That's good news, Ned, and I'm going to get a new hustle on for the last lap," Jimmy announced, heaving a sigh of relief that swelled from the very depths of his heart.

Their progress after that was not quite so rapid. This in itself was convincing proof to Ned that his prediction was going to be fulfilled, because, as they gradually reached the lowlands, vegetation increased, making it more difficult to push through.

"The ten minutes are up, Ned," announced Teddy, who had been taking sly peeps at his little nickel watch from time to time.

"Well, what would you call that over there through the break in the trees?" asked Jack, triumphantly, just as though it was his prediction that was being fulfilled.

"The river, as sure as anything!" admitted Teddy.

"Thank goodness!" sighed Jimmy. "The only thing that's been helping me keep up is the picture I've been drawing of a feller about my heft, squattin' amidships in that bully canoe, and bucking up against the current of the old Harricanaw. How far do you think we ought to go, before making our first camp, Ned; and will we be able to cook any supper, before turning in under our warm blankets?"

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched!" said Frank.

"Now, what makes you try to throw cold water on a feller all the time?" complained Jimmy. "I like to see the silver linin' of the cloud, and think of things going good. Besides, we've got to eat, haven't we; and we left a pile of good grub along with the boats? If Ned says the word, I'm meanin' to dish up a supper that'll make us forget we're tired to death. We c'n hide the fire, like Injuns do when in a hostile country, by makin' the same in a hole, so the light won't show any distance. How's that, Ned; am I on?"

"Wait and see," was the only comfort the other would give the enthusiastic one, and with this, Jimmy had to rest content.

With the river in plain sight, they hurried their steps. The presence of the water acted like an inspiration to every scout; so that no one would believe they had just been complaining of weariness.

Ned grew more wary the closer they came to the river. All he wanted to make sure of was the location, so that he might be able to know whether they were above or below the place of the reeds.

Constant practice makes perfect, and Ned had so accustomed himself to fastening the prominent features of the landscape upon his memory that once he saw a place he never forgot it again.

In this case, if he failed to recognize anything along the bank of the river it would prove conclusively that he had never set eyes on it before. In that event, they could take it for granted that this was below the place where they had left the canoes.

Finally the others stopping, watched Ned scrutinizing the shore of the stream. Of course, they understood what his object must be, and nervously awaited his verdict, hoping, meanwhile, that it would be favorable, and that they were near

the objects of their search.

He was only a fraction of a minute in deciding, for presently he turned to his companions and nodded.

"We've struck the river just above the reeds," he went on to say. "I remember noticing that tree leaning over the water. A kingfisher was sitting on it, when we came along, and flew off with a screech. And, according to my mind, the reeds will show up just around that bend there."

"Oh! joy, bliss, and everything else that spells happiness!" declared Jimmy, waxing enthusiastic all of a sudden, when the suspense seemed to be at an end.

They pushed on, full of hope, for after this long hike it would be something worth while to find themselves once more seated in the canoes and gliding over the surface of the river, homeward bound, their great mission completed.

"There they are!" exclaimed Frank, who had impetuously pushed along ahead of the rest, in his desire to be the first to glimpse the reeds.

There could be no mistake about it, for all of them recognized the conformation of the ground in the immediate neighborhood, since they had taken particular pains to impress the same on their minds before leaving the spot.

Presently they had reached the border of the reed bed, with Frank still leading, though the rest of the scouts pressed close on his heels.

Already was the first of the explorers commencing to separate the reeds, under the impression that he could take them straight to the spot where they had left the boats.

But Frank soon began to think he had started on the wrong tack, for he failed to make the anticipated discovery. He stopped and looked blankly around him.

"Well, I declare!" he emitted, with a grunt. "I sure thought I knew this old place, and could take you straight to the canoes; but seems like I've got twisted around some. Things look different when you start to observe them from the back."

"Perhaps it isn't just what you think," said Ned, quietly.

"Is there anything wrong?" demanded Jack, while poor Jimmy's lower jaw fell, and he could only stand there and stare.

"The worst almost that could have happened to us," Ned replied sadly.

"The boats were here then, and have been stolen?" asked Frank breathlessly, while he as well as the other boys turned pale with apprehension, for it was a

genuine calamity that faced them now.

"Look there and there, and you'll see where they rested among the reeds," Ned told them. "Yes, and here's a piece of greasy paper I remember seeing Jimmy toss overboard, when he was getting out of his boat. We've struck our one bad streak, after all, boys, I'm sorry to say. They ran on our boats, and we're left in the lurch up here, five hundred miles from anywhere!"



CHAPTER XIV.

BLINDING THE TRAIL.

For almost a full minute nobody said a word. Indeed, the tremendous nature of this discovery seemed to have very nearly paralyzed them, so that one and all could only stand there and stare at the places where they could tell their prized canoes had recently rested.

Jimmy was the first one to arouse himself, and it was hot anger that caused him to show so much activity.

"P'raps they haven't gone far, Ned, and if we got a hustle on we might manage to ketch up with the measly skunks. If they try to pack our boats through the woods, they'll have a time of it, let me tell you. Are we agoin' to give chase? Oh! I'm as fresh as a daisy right now. Seems like I could run for hours, if I had an idea I'd overtake the canoe thieves."

Ned shook his head.

"No use, Jimmy," he told the furious scout; "because they haven't carried our boats ashore. If you look, you'll see where they paddled out on to the river. You remember, we hid all traces of our own passage, yet here you can see a wide swath among the reeds, bending them back."

They saw that he spoke the truth, even Jimmy admitting the sad facts with a groan that seemed to well up from his shoes, it was so disconsolate.

"Five hundred miles—*five* hundred of 'em! Gosh!" he was heard to tell himself, as he stood there, rubbing the side of his head, as though he felt like one in a stupor or a dream.

"And as we haven't a single boat, of course we can't pursue them," remarked

Jack between his clinched teeth, while his eyes glittered angrily.

"Oh! what wouldn't I have given to have come on the rascals just in the act of getting away with our boats!" breathed Frank, as he shook his rifle, after the manner of a scout who has thrown discretion to the winds.

"Well, let's not whimper and cry over spilt milk, anyway," said Ned, who could always be depended on to bring the boys to their proper senses.

"That's so," echoed Jack, quick to see the importance of keeping their senses about them in this dilemma. "We've got to do *something*, that's sure, and so let's get to talking it over sensibly."

"But, what can we do?" pleaded Teddy, who was not apt to prove equal to a sudden strain like this, and must depend on others more vigorous of mind.

"Oh! before we're done considering things," promised Ned, "you'll find that we've got a choice of a whole lot of plans. I hope we're all made of sterner stuff than to throw out the white flag of surrender, just because something has gone wrong."

"Well, I should say not," declared Frank, grinding his teeth together. "We're like the Old Guard, we can die, but never surrender."

"That's the stuff!" cried Jimmy, suddenly beginning to brighten up again, as the stunning effect of the first rude shock passed away. "Remember what Phil Sheridan did at Cedar Creek, when he met his army, smashed and running away? What was it he told 'em as he galloped along the road, headed for the battlefield? 'Face the other way, boys; face the other way! We'll lick 'em out of their boots! We'll get back those camps again!' All right, and it's me that says it; well get back our boats again, by hook or crook!"

"I hope you turn out to be a true prophet, Jimmy," said Ned. "That's one of the plans I spoke about. Another would be to make for the shore of the big bay, and try to get in touch with some vessel passing, that might carry us to Halifax, or some other northern port, where we could send a message to Jack's father not to put a dollar into these fake mines."

"Sounds good to me," Teddy remarked, sucking it all in eagerly.

"Then there's another thing we might manage to do if the worst came," proceeded Ned. "Up here there are lonely trading posts run by the Hudson Bay Company, at each of which you'll find a factor in charge. If we could only run across one of these posts, I reckon, there would be some way found for getting

us down to civilization inside of a month or so."

"That long?" observed Teddy.

"What would it matter, so that we didn't have to do the grand hike?" Jimmy asked, afflicted with dizzy visions of five hundred miles of tramping over rough country, supporting themselves, meanwhile, in the most primitive fashion by shooting game, and cooking the same over fires made with flint and steel, or the bow and stick method known to scouts generally.

"Of course," added Frank, somewhat satirically, "Teddy would like to have one of those Zeppelin airships come along and give us a lift. I guess all of us would be glad if that happened; but the chances are so small, we don't want to consider 'em, do we, Ned? So here we are, facing a puzzle that's going to give us no end of trouble and work. If it was hard to get in, it's going to be a much bigger job to get out again."

"It's getting late, as it is," remarked Jack, as he looked toward the west where the sun was hovering over the horizon, and ready to take the final plunge, though, of course, it would not be dark for a long time afterwards, thanks to the length of the Northern twilight in midsummer.

"First, let's get where we can look up and down the river, principally down," was Ned's advice, "though there's a mighty slim chance that we'll see anything of our stolen canoes."

This proved to be the case, for when they had found an elevated position, where it was possible to see far down the stream, there was not a thing in sight, save a mother duck teaching her little brood to swim and find food.

"No use, seems like; they've gone a long time back," said Jimmy.

"I wonder if that was what they told the fellows over at the mine, when they mentioned a trap?" observed Frank, seriously, glancing hastily around him at the same time, as though half expecting to see a dozen ugly-faced men appear from the bushes and rocks.

"Not while Tamasjo was reading the smoke signs," Ned assured him, "or he would have learned enough to tell us what to expect when we got here. But, first of all, we ought to move off."

"You think they'll come here later on, when they learn how we got out of the old mine and headed across country—is that it, Ned?" Jack queried.

"I expect it is about like this," the patrol leader replied; "one or two men must

have found our boats. For the life of me, I don't understand how it happened, except that they were paddling along on the river, and wanting to go ashore took exactly the same notion we did—that the reeds would make a good hiding place for their craft. And, as luck would have it, they ran on our canoes."

"No signs here to tell Francois or the Cree about how long back this thing happened, I reckon?" Frank put in just then.

"That's where we get a hard knock," Ned continued, with a tinge of regret in his voice; "because, as you all know, water leaves no trace. When men are fleeing from enemies, the first thing they think of is to get into a creek, and throw their pursuers, dogs and all, off the scent. So, even as clever a trailer as Tamasjo couldn't tell any better than Jimmy here whether this robbery occurred an hour ago or three of the same."

"We're sure enough up against it this time, boys," Teddy affirmed.

"And have been on other occasions, remember, when things came out all right, and we won in the end." Jack reminded the doubter.

"Let's make up our minds we're going to beat these chaps at their own game, and that'll be half the battle," Frank told them.

"But I think Ned is all right when he says, 'we ought to cut stick and get away from here as soon as we can,'" Jack gave as his opinion.

In fact, the guides were manifesting more or less impatience. They apparently understood that the enemy would be apt to turn up here again, sooner or later; and could not comprehend why the scouts should always want to compare notes, before doing anything like making a change of base. Francois and the Cree were accustomed to making most of their moves through instinct; while with the scouts those same things did not come naturally, but had to be reasoned out, which made considerable difference.

One last look did they give toward the reeds that had promised to be so friendly, only to betray the confidence the boys had placed in them; and after that the little party moved off.

"But say, won't they follow after us, Ned?" asked Jimmy, when he failed to see the guides getting busy with trying to destroy all evidences of their passage, as he had fully expected would be the case.

Some of the other scouts showed by their expectant manner that they were also wondering what it all meant. Ned took it upon himself to enlighten them.

"If I read their meaning right," he ventured, "that is just what they want to do at first, make the men believe we've started to tramp back over all those hundreds of miles of ground. Before long, they'll do something to hide the trail so only a wolf's keen scent could find it; and then we'll turn around again, so as to face toward Hudson Bay. How, Francois?"

The old voyageur had listened to the explanation offered by Ned. He grinned and wagged his head, as though quite tickled at the idea of the boy understanding so well what the little game was.

"Zat ees so, sare," he said. "If Jimmy he be able hold out so long, mebbe we also eat supper far away from zis place."

Hearing his name mentioned, Jimmy was up in arms. He had a reserve stock of nerve for occasions like this, which could be summoned to the fore.

"Don't bother about Jimmy, please," he told them. "Sure, when it comes to a pinch, don't he always get there with the goods? My feet can ache all they want to; but, all the same, they'll do what I say. If it's a mile or six of the same, I'm good for it. But I wish I had something to gnaw on meanwhile, because I'm as hungry as a starved wolf, so I am."

Frank produced a handful of crackers from his little pack, which he willingly turned over to the other. This seemed to satisfy Jimmy; at least, he stopped groaning and telling of his aches and pains. When they could get his jaws to working in this fashion, he seldom allowed himself to enter any complaint. Jimmy could be bribed to do a good many things by the promise of a feast at the other end.

They continued on for some little time, and then it became apparent that Francois and the Cree had decided the blind trail had been carried far enough.

They were seen to confer, after which the leader stepped upon a long log that lay conveniently near by. Walking part way along this, the Indian suddenly leaped upon a bare rock, stepped its length, found another log, passed along it and so continued, leaving not the slightest trace of a trail that could be followed, unless dogs were placed upon the scent.

"You go next, Jack," urged Ned, who wished to satisfy himself that all of the scouts were able to qualify in this round of concealing the trail; though they had practiced it many a time when in camp.

Jack had observed every move of the agile old Indian, so that once he started over the same course he made short work of it.

"Teddy, you're next!" the scout leader announced.

Possibly it was with more or less trepidation that the one singled out began to cover the ground. But then Teddy was not a tenderfoot, even if he did not know as much as some of the others about woodcraft. He walked along the log, made the jump successfully, though falling flat on his face when he gained the rock; managed to gain the second tree trunk, and conducted himself so cleverly on the whole that Ned gave him a wave of approval after he had joined the others some distance away.

Frank and Jimmy copied the actions of those who had gone before, and so far as could be seen they did not leave any trace of their passage, though, of course, the old voyageur would look out for all that when he came to cross, and examine the ground carefully in so doing.

Ned found no difficulty in following the rest, and then they stood on a stone foundation, watching with considerable interest, while Francois scrutinized the track to make sure they had not left some sort of footprint, or disturbed any object, however small, that might catch a trained eye and betray their little game to the enemy.

As far as possible for some little time, they were instructed to take advantage of every opportunity that cropped up to advance, without leaving tell-tale imprints behind them. That is the measure of success in "blinding a trail," and if anybody ever had it down to a science, surely a Cree Indian might be expected to. Still there was no telling what might happen. Discovery was always in the air, and they must be forever on their guard against it.

Jimmy did seem to revive under the influence of his little bite, for he kept resolutely on, with set jaws and a look of grim determination written large upon his freckled and rosy face.

They were heading straight toward salt water now, all of them knew; because stars had crept into view, and these boys had long since learned to tell direction, by means of the lights in the sky, by day or night. The Polar Star shone dimly, as always, nearly directly ahead of them. Other stars they could see, such as are never gazed upon by people living in the temperate climes, constellations peculiar to the northern region of ice and snow.

"Eet is here we rest and eat!" announced Francois, after a long and arduous siege of this tramping and stumbling had been endured.

Jimmy wanted very much to make out that it was a matter of small importance to

him whether they stopped or continued right on; but nevertheless he could not keep back the happy sigh that would well forth; and they could hear him champing his jaws, as though trying to learn whether they were still in condition for service, because that one word "eat" had told him they expected to break their fast. Shortly afterwards they were making themselves as comfortable as possible, though destitute of blankets and many other things; while the two guides started a little cooking fire in a depression where it could not be seen thirty feet away.



CHAPTER XV.

THE BRUSH SHELTER.

"After all, this isn't so bad!" Teddy was saying, after they had got the supper started, and most of them were lying around in comfortable attitudes, enjoying the cheery conditions, for the air was a bit cool, and even the warmth of the small cooking fire felt good.

"It might be worse," admitted Jimmy, sniffing the fragrant air, as a war horse might the pungent powder-smoke of battle—Jimmy was always ready for the fray in the line of disposing of surplus "grub."

They did not have a very extensive meal. The conditions hardly warranted their trying to put on any "style," as Jimmy called it. So as appetites were appeased, and the food tasted good, nobody was apt to complain. Indeed, these fellows had been through so much in times gone by that they knew how to make the most of a bad bargain, and adapt themselves to circumstances as they found them.

When a Boy Scout can do that he has achieved the best that any one could expect of him, for he has conquered himself, always the hardest fight of all.

Presently Francois announced that the simple bill-of-fare was ready. It consisted of hard-tack, coffee, and some caribou meat cooked in regular camp style. What mattered it if in places the venison was slightly scorched, or underdone; the wood smoke gave it a flavor all its own, and there were vigorous appetites on hand to overlook these minor faults.

Quantity appeals to boys more than quality, generally speaking, and never a single complaint was heard as they munched away.

"Getting off better than we expected, ain't we?" Jimmy observed, with his mouth so full that his words were fairly mumbled.

"Oh! this is just prime!" Frank declared. "I'm more bothered about not having my good blanket to snuggle down into than anything else."

"Please don't mention it till we've done eating, anyway," pleaded Teddy. "Makes a cold chill run up and down my spinal column every time I think what we've got to face, with tents and blankets all gone."

"Another experience, that's all," remarked Jack, trying to look cheerful, as if these things should not bother any one worthy of calling himself a scout.

"Well, we've seen a heap of 'em, all told," was the consoling remark of Jimmy, "and we're still in the circus ring, right side up with care. Fact is, it takes an awful lot to knock a scout out, because he's learned so many ways to dodge, just like a cat does."

"There you go, comparing us to a bunch of tomcats," chuckled Frank.

"I do hope, though," Teddy went on to say, with a sigh, as he contemplated the little blaze before him, "that later on we'll be able to have jolly camp fires every night. There is a chance of that happening, ain't there, Ned?"

"Why, I should hope so, Teddy," replied the other; "I'd hate to think that we'd have to stand for this sort of thing long. As soon as it looks like we've dropped that crowd, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't have all the fire we want, so long as we don't start the bush to burning. And as every scout knows how to get sparks from flint and steel, not to mention other ways of doing the same, why, we needn't bother ourselves about matches."

In this way they chatted in low tones, and their spirits were kept from drooping. Association does considerable toward making boys, or men, see the bright lining to the cloud. It is like rubbing metal fragments together in a turning cylinder, with the result that every separate piece receives more or less of a luster from the constant friction. So difficulties brighten the minds of scouts who know enough to take advantage of their opportunities.

All sorts of suggestions were being made from time to time, looking to the betterment of their conditions. Some of these did not seem practical, and were immediately dropped. Others deserved more careful consideration, and, in these cases, the boys gave each other the benefit of their opinions.

During the course of this talk, Jack brought up the subject of bettering their sleeping quarters.

"As we don't expect to keep this little fire going through the whole night," he

told them, "and so won't get the benefit of its warmth, what's to hinder out looking around to find a place where the brush is thick enough to let us stack up a woods' shelter?"

"A good idea, Jack!" was the comment of the patrol leader.

"It would shelter us from the night breeze, anyway," Teddy observed.

"And, say, I think I can put you on to the very place," Jimmy unexpectedly announced; which remark, so unlike Jimmy, caused the others to "sit up and take notice," under the impression that their comrade must certainly be waking up to the occasion.

"Show me!" said Frank, scrambling to his feet; "because I'm getting sleepy right now, sitting here so close to the fire; and, according to my mind, we can't fix up our beds any too soon."

"Oh! how can we talk about beds, when we haven't got any blankets?" wailed Teddy.

"Like as not, we'll find some hemlock trees around, for they grow away up here, we know," Jack argued. "And by laying close to each other we'll manage to keep half-way warm, let's hope."

Teddy began to laugh softly to himself.

"What ails you now?" demanded Jimmy; "because it strikes me the prospect ain't so very cheerful as to make a feller laugh."

"Oh! excuse me," replied Teddy, "but I just happened to think how funny it would seem for the whole five of us to be lying like sardines in a box, every fellow's knees doubled up, and stuck in the back of the next one. Then, whenever one got tired of lying on his right side, he'd call out 'turn!' and the whole line would have to wiggle around, so as to flop over on their left sides."

"Just about what we'll have to do," Jack assured him.

"And you won't think it so very funny either after a while," said Frank.

Jimmy led them back a little way, and sure enough they found just the conditions they required for making a bough and brush shelter. Ned immediately told the observant one that he had done well to notice the conditions, with an eye to future possibilities.

"While we're at it," Ned continued, "perhaps we'd better make as rain-proof a shelter as we can."

"Gee whiz! I hope you don't think it's going to come down on us to-night, and me with my raincoat which was left in the canoe?" Teddy exclaimed.

"Feels sort of damp to me," Frank admitted.

"Let's hope for the best," added Jack. "But I think that what Ned said would be the proper caper for us. And now get busy, everybody. Show what you know about constructing a bough shelter, for if ever we needed one, it's right now."

They worked like a pack of beavers. Indeed, Jimmy declared that it seemed like a shame they all belonged to two patrols known as the Wolf and Black Bear, when they were such an industrious lot, and deserved better totems.

The guides also entered into the spirit of the thing, though apparently more careless or indifferent about their comfort than the boys. Still, they appreciated the prospect of having a shelter, in case of a heavy downpour, and added their contributions towards making it a worth-while affair.

When, finally, it was pronounced finished, all of them were of the opinion that it did their knowledge of woodcraft credit.

"Show me the scouts who could have done a better job, under the same conditions, will you?" demanded Frank, proudly.

"They would be hard to find!" declared Ned.

"Next thing is to hustle and find some sort of browse to make beds out of," Jack told them, "and the thicker it is for a mattress the better, because it causes a certain amount of warmth, and keeps the dampness of the ground off."

"Yes, and if there happen to be a few old roots sticking up under you, they don't hurt," added Jimmy, who had been through the experience he described many times in the past, and ought to know the inconvenience resulting from it.

When five lively fellows get busy, they can gather quite a quantity of browse, in case the right sort of trees are handy; and before long Frank threw himself down on the mattress, with a grunt of satisfaction.

"How does she go?" asked Teddy, solicitously.

"Bunkum," came the answer, accompanied with a mighty yawn; "try it for yourself."

"Guess I will, Frank," and Teddy accordingly stretched himself out at full length, alongside the other scout.

So they all found a place, and there was room enough also for the guides. These

worthies insisted upon taking the outermost nooks. The voyageur explained that they might want to be up several times before dawn, to look around and make sure that all was well; nor could the scouts find any objection to this programme, since it was intended to add to their comfort and security.

If they had not all been so very drowsy, possibly the boys might have found considerable difficulty in forgetting themselves, under such unusual conditions; but as a rule, the average boy can sleep under abnormal surroundings that would keep an older person awake all night; for trouble sets lightly on their minds, fortunately enough.

Ned was the only one who knew how Francois and the Cree had agreed between themselves to keep "watch and watch" throughout the whole night. After the scouts had apparently managed to get to sleep, the voyageur silently arose, and removing to a little distance, placed his back against a tree. There he sat, like a dim statue as time crept on, his rifle on his knees, and doubtless all his senses constantly on the alert for signs that would indicate the coming of the enemy.

When, according to his way of thinking, he had stood watch for half of the night, Francois crept around to the other end of the shelter, and touched the form of the old Cree. Not a single word was exchanged between them, but Tamasjo, crawling out, took the other's place, as though it were a part of his business to sit up nights.

What if there was no alarm, the boys enjoyed better security while they slept, and secured more energy for the following day's work. Men do not always anticipate trouble when they place a guard over the camp; but, in case it does come, there is always the consciousness of having taken all needful precautions. It is on the same principle that a wise man insures his house, though never believing that a fire is going to visit him. He wants to make sure, that is all.

Had some of the scouts been on post during that night, they might have experienced several little alarms, through noises they would hear, which were strange to their ears. Not so the guides, who had spent all their lives amidst these Northern scenes, so that every minute denizen of the woods was as familiar to them as the game of baseball might be to Jimmy, versed, as he was, in all its fine points.

To them the various fretful voices of the little animals, who doubtless wondered what business these two-legged pilgrims had stopping on their preserves, were to be looked on as only a means of safety. So long as they continued to hear them near by, they knew that all was well. A sudden silence would have made either

one of the guides suspicious, because these sharp-eared rodents could catch the movement of creeping men much sooner than any biped was capable of doing; and hence, a cessation of their complaining would indicate danger to the sleeping camp.

When Jimmy opened his eyes he saw that the morning had come. It did not look as cheerful as he would have liked, for the sky was threatening, and what seemed like a cold fog was stealing through the woods, drifting in probably from the great salty bay, so near at hand.

Of course, the waking of one was the signal for the entire five to be stirring. Indeed, once they opened their eyes, the boys were only too glad to creep out from their shelter and stretch their cramped limbs.

"It didn't rain, after all," Jimmy remarked; and there was something of a grievance in his tone, as though he rather begrudged going to all that useless labor for nothing.

"Well, if we'd known as much last night as we do now," commented Jack, "perhaps we wouldn't have bothered about this shelter. I often wonder what a lot of things some fellows would shirk if their foresight was as good as their hindsight."

"For one thing," spoke up Teddy, briskly, "we'd be having our bully canoes and blankets, and tents, and all that raft of grub right now, instead of having to do without it."

"That's so, we would," Jimmy echoed, making a comical face. "And let me tell you fellers, after this I'm going to devote a lot of time tryin' to see into the future. My father was a seventh son, and they say that makes a weather-sharp. I've tried it a few times, and hit the truth once out of three."

"I'd call that a poor percentage," Teddy sneered. "Why, any happy-go-lucky guess ought to strike it half the time, anyway."

"Do we eat again this morning, or is it a case of saving the grub?" Jimmy asked, turning to Ned.

"It's too early yet to go on half-rations," the patrol leader assured him. "What we're going to come to after a little is another question. So let's get busy and have a cooking fire started."

Jimmy hastened to be the one to attend to this. Truth to tell, he was shivering in the raw morning air, and wanted heat almost as much as hot food, in order to

make himself feel comfortable.

"No changes in our plans overnight, are there, Ned?" inquired Jack, as they hovered around the blaze after it had been started, each fellow apparently anxious to have a hand in the simple preparation of breakfast, though really wanting to warm his hands.

"No," came the reply, "we'll keep straight on, and reach the bay before changing our course. Then we'll have to head to the west, and do what we can to reach the nearest trading post, unless we have the good luck to strike some sealer or whaling vessel that will take us aboard."



CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEA FOG.

"I wonder if we'll see anything of that mystery of Hudson Bay?" Teddy chanced to remark, while they were eating later on.

"'Tis me that cares mighty little whether we do or not," Jimmy admitted, which change of tone caused the other to turn upon him and say:

"What's all this mean, Jimmy? A little while back you were telling us that you sure hoped we'd run up against a mystery, because we've always been so lucky in solving such things in the days gone by. Now you seem to have changed your song."

"Lots of things have changed since you heard me pipe up that way," suggested Jimmy, as he poured himself another cup of coffee, which was taken black, since they had no milk, all of the condensed kind having gone with the canoes.

"But don't you feel anxious about that queer, disappearing fleet?" demanded Teddy.

"I'm a heap sight more concerned right now about the disappearing grub," he was informed. "The shape we're putting it away tells how soon it'll be down to the last crumb. If we keep on as we're doing, I figure we've got just enough for, say two more days. Then it's going to be a case of hustle, or go hungry."

"Oh! with our bully guns, and such clever shots along, we'll get all the meat we want, I shouldn't wonder. Coffee we'll have to do without; likewise, lots of other good things. But we won't starve, Jimmy."

"As an explorer, Teddy, I reckon you've read that often Dr. Kane and his Arctic expedition had to cut up their deerskin boots, and make soup out of the same.

S'pose'n we had to come to that now, how'd you like it?" and Jimmy chuckled, as he saw the other shudder.

The meal ended, and the small fire was extinguished, for these scouts had long ago learned never under any circumstances to leave a smouldering fire when breaking camp. They knew only too well that often a sudden wind arising has carried live coals from such into the dead leaves near by, and started most disastrous conflagrations.

"One good thing about this hike is that we go light," Ned told them, as they began to gather their few belongings together.

"Nothing like seeing the silver lining to the cloud," added Jack; "though, if it was put to a vote right now, I rather think every scout would agree to tote even a tent on his back, if we could in that way get our belongings again."

"Just try me, that's what," said Jimmy. "All that fine grub wasted on a measly lot of half-breeds, who can't appreciate a jar of orange marmalade any more'n they can olives or imported cheese. But then there's no use crying over spilt milk, and it might have been worse."

"Yes, think of what a pickle we'd be in right now, if they'd managed to hook our guns as well as the boats and blankets?" suggested Teddy. "We'd just have to throw up our hands and surrender, then, I suppose."

"Not till we'd tried everything we could think up to beat them at their game," was Frank's way of showing his determined nature.

Of course, once they had finished eating, there was really nothing to keep them there; and as they had no tents to take down, or dunnage to pack, it was an easy task to get started.

Francois led them straight into the south. They felt sure that they must arrive on the shore of the bay before a great while, for there was a decided salty tang to the air that greeted them, very gratifying to boys who had been brought up near the ocean, as these scouts had.

So far nothing had been seen or heard of the miners, whom they looked upon as their enemies. At the same time, the boys believed that the others must be diligently searching for them, and should they happen to come across their trail, a warm pursuit must follow.

In consequence of this fact, they were advised by Ned to keep on the alert.

"Let every fellow have his eyes open to discover suspicious movements," he told

them, "and report the same to me without a second's delay. There's no telling how serious it might turn out to be. But, Jimmy, don't fancy every frisky squirrel or curious old coon, if you glimpse any, is a spy hiding behind a tree, and ready to let loose on us with his battery."

"You'll find that when I sound the alarm, it's going to mean business," Jimmy retorted, drawing himself up proudly.

It was hard to entirely crush their boyish spirits, and while the future did not look so very bright, still they felt that they had accomplished the main object that had drawn the expedition to these parts, and could not complain. So every now and then some half-humorous remark would be made calculated to draw out an answer. Thus, in a measure their troubles were forgotten, though no one ventured to troll a ditty, as might have been the case under ordinary conditions.

The character of the country was changing again, and from what they had noticed on the former occasion, they knew that they must be drawing near the water.

There was no air stirring to blow away the damp fog wave that grew more and more dense as they advanced.

"If it rains down on us here we'll just have to grin and bear it," Jimmy was saying, as he tripped along beside the other scouts.

"No hollow trees to crawl in, because none of these would be nearly big enough, even if we found one that was partly rotten," added Teddy.

"Make up your minds that it isn't going to rain any until the wind comes up and drives this mist away," Jack informed them, and as he claimed to be something of a weather prophet they believed him.

"I'm wet, as it is, from the fog," said Frank.

"Listen!" exclaimed Jack, just then.

Jimmy started to turn his head around so fast that it seemed in danger of coming loose.

"Where, what, why, how?" he spluttered, as he half-raised his rifle, as though taking the alarm.

"Oh! I only meant that I could get the lazy wash of the water rolling up on the sandy beach," replied Jack, grinning to see how his innocent exclamation had excited Jimmy.

"Next time," mumbled the other, "I'd thank you to tell what you mean right away. It would save a poor feller from havin' palpitation of the heart, which they tell me is bad for the appetite."

"Then let's all get it, Jimmy," chuckled Frank, "because no appetite means that we wouldn't have to bother looking up new supplies of grub. But that is the sea you hear running up on the shore, Jack, which shows how close we are to the bay."

A minute later and they could see signs of the salt water, though the fog was so dense that it was impossible to look out further than a dozen or two yards.

"I suppose that happens quite a lot of times up here?" remarked Jack, as they stood on the bank and stared out into that sea of mist, which hid everything as with a blanket.

"They have fogs along off the coast of New Foundland, where the cod banks lie," Ned observed, "which comes from the fact that the cold currents of air from the Arctic meet with the warm Gulf Stream there, as it turns and heads toward Europe. That makes the fog, you know; but I never ran across a thicker one than this."

"Huh! looks like pea soup to me," suggested Teddy.

"Well, pea soup is a mighty fine dish, don't you forget it," retorted Jimmy, "and if I could get a bucket of the same as easy as I can this old fog, I wouldn't be doin' any kicking, believe me, boys."

"You said we must turn to the left, didn't you, Ned?" inquired Frank, who did not see the sense of wasting any time in standing there and staring into that impenetrable sea of gray fog.

"That would seem to be our best and only course," was the reply. "In the first place, it will save our crossing the mouth of the Harricanaw, and, as we have no boat, that counts for something. Then, from what I can see on my chart, by crossing one small river, called the Masakany, we ought to reach a place called Moose Factory. I don't know positively, but I've reasons to think that we'll find some sort of post there where we can get help. It's situated on a bay that several other rivers empty into. I believe that's our one best chance, and that's why I'm taking it."

"If you say it's so, we believe it, Ned," remarked Jack, with emphasis; and it was such confidence as this, placed in him by his chums, that had helped Ned accomplish so many things in the past.

"That mining camp was situated on a creek, wasn't it?" asked Frank.

"Yes, I haven't forgotten that, and I see what you mean, Frank," the patrol leader assured him; "but it was only a narrow affair, and I figure on finding a fallen tree trunk that we could throw across to serve us as a bridge."

"Always a way where there's a will," chanted Teddy, as they once more started off, with the mist-shrouded bay on their right.

The going was not all that heart could have wished. Lots of obstacles arose to give them trouble, though as a rule these were of a minor character, and easily surmounted. In some places the land was inclined to be marshy, so that they were compelled to go back some distance in order to get around. Then, again, they found that the ground rose into rocky elevations, with the bay lapping their bases; and here again the scouts were put to more or less exertions, in order to keep moving toward the west.

On one of these elevations they paused for a brief rest. The fog held as densely as ever, and out there where the great body of salt water lay it was an utter impossibility to see any distance. A whole armada of vessels might be anchored, not half a mile from the shore, and no one be any the wiser for it.

"Is this the real Hudson Bay proper?" asked Frank, while they stood thus, recovering their breath, after the last climb.

"Well, it's the lower part of it," explained Ned, "and called James Bay. There are a great many islands to be run across in this section, and I've heard that seals have rookeries on some of them, if they haven't all been killed off."

"Well, we've seen seals and Polar bears and the big walrus—all in their native haunts, haven't we?" remarked Jimmy, turning to Frank, who with Ned had been on a long jaunt through Arctic ice floes some time before.

"And all of us stand a fair chance to see some more of the same, unless we get out of this country before the summer ends," Teddy chimed in.

"We'll find a way, all right," Jack told him; for it was always a hard thing to crush the spirit of the boy who could write such glowing accounts of trips and things for the readers of his father's big paper.

"Since we've rested up, suppose we make a fresh start," proposed Ned.

"We ought to soon come to where we followed that creek up and reached the tent colony about the mine opening," Jack was saying, as they started walking again.

"Unless I'm mighty much mistaken," Ned remarked, "we'll run across the same when we get to the bottom of this rise. I think I remember seeing this place before as we came along."

It turned out that Ned was right, for ere much more time had passed, the little expedition stood on the bank of the creek.

"Broader than you thought, ain't it, Ned?" questioned Frank, as he eyed the stretch of water dubiously.

"Oh! we wouldn't expect to bridge it over here," was the answer the patrol leader made. "By following it up for a little ways, we'll find that it narrows considerably; and that's where we want to look sharp for a log that'll come in handy."

"Yes, I remember now that it wasn't over ten or twenty feet across at most, where we struck it last time," Teddy piped up, for he was keeping an accurate account of all that occurred, and hence had the figures down pat.

As soon as they found that the creek bed had come down to respectable proportions, the scouts began to scurry around, hunting for a fallen tree that might be made to answer for a bridge. This was soon found and carried to the spot selected, as the most suitable for their purpose.

There was only one way in which they could drop the bridge over and find an anchorage on the other shore. This was by raising it to a perpendicular position on the near bank and, then giving it a shove, have it fall on the other.

It required the combined strength of the scouts, backed up by the more powerful guides, to accomplish this feat in bridge building. Ned had figured to a fraction, it seemed, for when the log fell it rested at least a foot on either bank.

After that it was easy for them to cross over, though Teddy had to get down and crawl, he being addicted to dizzy spells when at any height, and not in the humor for taking a dip in the cold water of the creek.

The boys were for starting on immediately; first of all, Ned had them shove the friendly log from its mooring ashore, so that it floated on the surface of the creek.

"You see," he went on to explain, "if any of those men happened along here and saw that bridge spanning the creek, they'd know we'd come this way. Now that we've thrown it into the water, it will float off and never give us away, anyhow."

They began to make more satisfactory progress after getting on the western side

of the creek. All of them felt much encouraged though the morning remained dull and heavy, and there was always a chance that it might begin to rain.

Many times did they turn curious glances toward the mist-covered bay, as though speculating on what mysteries that fog might conceal.

As a rule it was seldom Teddy who made any discovery; but on this occasion the credit belonged to him. He suddenly drew the attention of the rest to something strange that had attracted his attention.

"I may be off my base, fellows," was the way he put it, "but I'm sure I heard people talking right then. And it came from out there, too, sure it did," with which he pointed straight toward the bay.

Jimmy might have laughed at such a suggestion, but before he could think to do anything like this, all of them plainly heard a human voice well up from the fog.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON BOARD THE WRECK.

Everybody could hear the sounds now. The conditions must have been favorable for carrying a human voice far over the water, because fog is a good conductor of sound.

Men were talking apparently, though the rumble of their voices alone came over the surface of the water, and no actual words could be distinguished.

"What's that other noise?" asked Teddy, as though puzzled.

"Must be oars working in the rowlocks," suggested Jack.

"Of course," declared the explorer, "how foolish of me to ask such a silly question. But seems I don't get the give-away sounds as clear as I did a minute or so ago."

"Good reason then," Frank told him; "because the boat they're rowing is heading out on to the bay."

"Then you think there must be some sort of vessel there, do you, Frank?" asked Teddy, eagerly, as he tried in vain to penetrate the blanket of mist.

"I reckon there might be," replied Frank, "though, of course, we can't see anything of the same right now. That rowboat wouldn't be setting out into the big sheet of water, unless heading for a vessel."

"Could it have anything to do with that wonderful fleet that is always on the move, coming and going, according to the weather? How about that, Ned?" demanded Teddy.

Ned shook his head, to indicate that he did not know. There were some things calculated to spring up from time to time, which, as leader of the Wolf Patrol, he

did not claim to know. This was one of them.

Fainter grew the rumble of voices belonging to the unseen sailors; and the click-clack of oars working in the rowlocks also began to die away.

Francois had listened with the rest. Being only an ignorant voyageur, with very little knowledge save along his chosen lines, of course the French Canadian was apt to have more or less superstition in his system. It was a heritage he had imbibed with his mother's milk.

Francois had heard more or less about this weird, disappearing fleet of vessels that, for some time now, had been acting so mysteriously along the coast of the big bay. Like most of his class, he believed that they were unreal, and possibly but the ghosts of brave vessels that in years gone by may have ploughed the green waters of Hudson Bay.

Although he said little or nothing on the subject, Francois did considerable thinking along those lines. He cast frequent uneasy looks away out through the mist, as though fearful lest he suddenly come face to face with some terrible mystery.

To him those voices were anything but natural. Possibly, he even pictured some ghostly figures sitting in a phantom boat, and speeding over the surface of the historical sheet of water, about which so much that is remarkable has been written, and, also, handed down from father to son, among the rangers and caribou hunters of the Canadian bush.

It had died away completely by now. To the scouts, this simply signified that the men in the boat had probably drawn so far away from the shore that their voices no longer carried across the water as before; but to Francois it meant that the phantoms had chosen to withdraw, it might be sinking beneath the surface of the bay.

After this little adventure the boys fell to thinking again about the stories they had heard about the fleet that seemed to continually hover along the shore of Hudson Bay, now appearing, and then vanishing in the most remarkable manner.

Just because Ned did not seem fit to announce that they would come to a halt and endeavor to get in communication with the vessel, to which the men in the rowboat undoubtedly belonged, Teddy and Jimmy jumped to the conclusion that he, too, must be uneasy about the character of that ship.

The truth of the matter was that Ned had begun to notice certain signs going to tell him there was soon about to come a change in the conditions of the weather.

He felt a slight puff of air on his cheek, and coming from the south at that. It was only a breath, but straws show which way the wind blows, they say; and when the next puff marked a slight increase, Ned knew what would happen before a great while.

Once the wind did rise, and the fog would be blown out to sea, so that in all probability they would be able to discover what manner of vessel it was that had sent a boat ashore, for some purpose or other.

But Ned knew that when this came to pass, the rain would also start in. It was his hope to discover some sort of retreat as they went along, such as might serve them as a shelter against the storm.

Once, when a gun was fired at some little distance away and further in shore, Jimmy ducked his head in a ludicrous fashion.

"Whee! that nearly got me!" he remarked, looking a little uneasy.

The others stared at him in bewilderment; but Ned quickly took him in hand.

"See here, Jimmy, are you saying that just to make us think you had a narrow escape, or did a bullet really swing past you?" he demanded.

The freckled-faced boy looked a little confused. When Ned took him to task, in this way, Jimmy could never hold out. He would first of all hedge, and then, if the accusation continued, his next step would be to throw out the white flag of complete surrender.

"Why, you see, I thought I sure heard the whine of something like a bullet, when I took the count," he started in to say.

"But was it a bullet passing that you heard?" persisted the patrol leader, who knew that this was the only sure way to pin Jimmy down to facts.

"Well, er, since you put it to me that way, Ned, I guess, after all it must have been imagination. You see my brain was filled with all sorts of stuff, and when that gun went bang! it struck me I was being fired at, so I ducked and something went 'sh! 'sh! just then, so's to make me get mixed up for a minute, and think it was flying lead. I know now it was one of them little snipe zipping past. They fooled me a few times a while ago, too."

"I knew that it must be a mistake," said Ned, "for a very good reason. You noticed that shot was a long ways off, perhaps as far as a quarter of a mile. Well, how in all creation could the shooter see us down here, when we can't glimpse a solitary thing sixty yards off? It was some hunter, more than likely, getting meat

for the mining camp."

"Another narrow squeak for you, Jimmy," remarked Teddy, with a touch of fine scorn in his voice. "Everything seems to be coming your way nowadays."

"Huh! then let's hope those canoes and blankets and grub will follow suit; for it'd sure tickle me to be able to restore the same to the right owners. I keep on hopin' that Ned here won't think of leavin' this neck of the woods without makin' a real des'prate effort to recover what we lost."

Ned did not take the bait, and proclaim what his intentions might be; though it went without saying that he would have been just as glad to see their stolen property returned as the next one.

"If that 'coon' happened to come down to the bay along here, wouldn't he run across our trail?" asked Frank.

"Perhaps so," Ned replied, "but we have to take our chances there. You see we couldn't waste the time to try and hide it all the while. Let's hope that if he does come on our tracks, he'll think they've been made by some of his friends up at the camp."

"All the same," advised Jimmy, "I'm going to keep my eye peeled for any sign of the chappie. After doing the great stunts we have already, it'd be a shame to have our plans knocked galley-west through a blunder, or an accident."

"No shooting at anything you happen to think must be a man aiming a gun," was what the leader told Jimmie; for such a thing had really happened on a former occasion, causing much embarrassment to Jimmy, and almost breaking up the clever plan of his superior.

"Wish I may die if I do," mumbled the other, always ready to give all the assurance desired, even though unable to sustain the position thus taken.

The forward progress was resumed. No more shots floated to their ears, which was pretty good evidence that none were fired; because that south wind, constantly rising, must surely have carried the sounds to their ears.

"The dickens!" exclaimed Jack, presently.

"Ha! you felt it too, did you?" observed Teddy. "When I went to look up to see how the fog was lifting, a drop hit me square in the eye, but I waited to see if anybody else caught on."

"It's begun to rain, for a fact!" exclaimed Frank, dejectedly.

"And say, look where we are, would you?" Jimmy added. "Down on the flat shore, with only a growth of stunted oaks growing above us. Wherever d'ye believe we'll be able to find a sign of shelter, I'd like to know?"

"In for a ducking, boys, looks like," said Teddy. "And the worst of it is, you always feel so terribly cold when your clothes stick to your back. We'll just have to take chances, and make a heaping fire. Who cares if those men do see it, and come sneaking around? What've we carried guns up here for, if we can't defend ourselves in a pinch? Seems to me, I'd rather get in a hot box with that crowd, than shake to pieces with a chill. I had pneumonia once, and don't hanker after trying it again, if I know it."

Still Ned said not a word, only increased his pace, if such a thing were possible. The others came trailing along after him, almost out of breath with trying to talk, and at the same time keep pace with their leader.

There was no longer any doubt but that the rain was starting in. The breeze had increased imperceptibly, so that it was now blowing quite stiffly. Looking out over the water, they found that the fog was quickly thinning out. Already could they see several times as far as before, and the distance was widening constantly.

"There is a vessel out there!" cried Teddy. "I saw her as plain as your hat just then, when the fog lifted a little. Watch over there, and see. How's that, Ned? Was I right?"

"She's there, without a question, Teddy, and I give you credit for having sharper eyes than anybody believed," the patrol leader told him, only too well pleased to find an opportunity to compliment the explorer.

"What kind of a vessel would you call her, Ned?" asked Jimmy; while Francois stood and stared and listened, still believing that the boat must be a phantom, such as was likely to vanish before their very eyes, as might a wisp of trailing fog.

"I've seen whalers and sealers built like her," was the verdict of the leader.

The fog was being carried away more rapidly now, and the boys soon made another discovery that interested them. This was nothing more nor less than the fact that a second, yes, a third and even a fourth vessel of apparently the same tonnage lay at anchor further away, possibly a couple of miles from shore.

"Take a good look while you can, fellows," Ned told them "because I reckon that the wonderful disappearing fleet is before you right now. We can say we've set eyes on the mystery of Hudson Bay, even if we never learn what the answer is."

They all stared as hard as they could.

Meanwhile, Ned had unslung his glasses and was adjusting them to his eyes. There was enough of the fog still floating around to make seeing something of a labor; so that he did not get much satisfaction from the observation taken.

"I can see men aboard of all the vessels," he announced; "and there is a boat being taken up on the davits of the nearest craft, which must have been ashore in the fog, for some reason or other."

"Why can't we signal to them to come in and take us off?" asked Teddy, struck with a brilliant idea.

"There's the answer," replied Ned, when all of the vessels making up the anchored fleet vanished utterly from view, as another bank of fog crept up.

He turned and swept the shore beyond with the glasses.

"Just what we want," they heard him say; and looking in the quarter that had chained his attention they discovered some dark object half-hidden in the wisps of blowing mist.

"What is it, Ned; a fishing shanty, a stranded whale, or what?" demanded Teddy.

At that Jimmy laughed in scorn.

"You must think you're down on the Jamaica marshes near Brooklyn, where they do happen to have fishing shanties. Bet you now that's an old wreck!" he exclaimed.

"Just what it is," admitted Ned, as he led them along the shore. "Some whaler or sealer has gone ashore a while back. Perhaps she was crushed by the ice, and carried up on the land when the spring break-up came. But there's a chance we may be able to find some sort of shelter from this rain that's coming down on us."

"Hurry up, then," said Teddy, "and we may be able to save our jackets yet. I don't want to get soaked, unless I have to."

"I'd like to know who does?" asked Jimmy; "though for the matter of that, none of us are made of salt. And with a camp hatchet, I reckon now we'll be able to chop away enough wood aboard the wreck to have a decent fire going."

"If there's going to be any sort of storm, you don't think we'll be in danger of getting carried out to sea, do you, Ned?" questioned Teddy. "Not that I'd object to a cruise through this five-hundred-mile bay, the biggest thing of its kind in all

the world; but I'd want to have something sound under me, and not a wreck of a boat, ready to sink any old time."

"Don't waste so much breath talking, but hurry!" advised Jack.

At that they put on an additional spurt, and drew closer to the wreck, which was half out of the water. Reaching the stern, part way up the beach, the boys found that a break allowed them an easy chance to climb aboard; and with hope beating high in their breasts, they hastened to clamber up the rough passage, glad of the opportunity to find possible shelter from the coming rain.



CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE STORM.

"Sure she's deserted, are you?" asked the cautious Teddy, as he followed the other members of the little party aboard, the old Cree Indian guide bringing up the rear.

"Not a sign of any living thing here," came the answer, as Ned peered about.

"Sometimes, I understand, that you can run across all sorts of horrible sights on one of these same wrecks," continued Teddy. "Sailors get drowned, you know, down in the hold or in the forecastle. I hope we don't discover anything like that now. I never did fancy sights as ghastly as that."

"And I don't think you need bother your head about it," Ned told him, "because, in the first place, this wreck has been here quite some time; and, then again, you can see that wreckers have been aboard and stripped nearly all the iron and brass and copper out, because it was valuable. Perhaps there may be some Esquimaux living along the shore of Hudson Bay; or else it was the men up at the mine who did it. What we want to do is to find out what state the cabin happens to be in. A dry roof would be about the best we could ask to-day."

They made a rush toward the stairs that led down, which in most vessels would be known as the companionway. A shout went up as they looked into the cabin. It was almost destitute of anything that might serve as a comfort, but a broken stove gave promise of a fire, with all the delight that this carried in its train.

"We bunk here, all right," said Frank, as soon as he had sighted that stove; it was really a sorry object, but then everything depends on the conditions surrounding one when rendering judgment—at home, they would have never given such a dilapidated thing house room; but shipwrecked mariners are not likely to be

critical, and that broken stove was still capable of carrying fire.

"Get busy with your hatchets, those who have them, and lay in a supply of wood for burning," Jack called out, suiting his own actions to the words, and beginning to chop away vigorously.

"I don't suppose it matters a cent where you bang," remarked Jimmy, following the example set by the other scout; "and if we stay here long enough, we might burn up the whole bally ship. All she's good for, anyhow, to give a bunch of fellers that have lost their blankets a lift in a rain storm. Whack away, boys; nobody ain't goin' to say a word what you do, only cut wood."

"We didn't get in here any too soon," Frank told them; and upon listening they could hear the rain falling heavily on the broken deck of the derelict.

When one is securely sheltered that sound never strikes awe to the soul; in fact, it seems almost a merry tune, like that played upon the attic roof, in the good old days when you visited grandpa out on the farm, and could lie in bed, feeling glad you were not out in that downpour.

"Let her rain all she wants to," said Teddy; "it can't hurt us, because I don't think any kind of a downpour would raise the whole bay enough to float us off this sandy beach."

The others laughed at his remark. Teddy was so ready to conjure up troubles that never could have any real excuse for existing.

"What I'm provoked about," Jack ventured, "is that we didn't get a chance to signal to that nearest vessel before the fog cut her out again. But let's hope they'll hang around somewhere till the rain's over, and we can let them know the fix we're in."

"Huh! s'pose they don't know anything about wigwagging with the flags?" Jimmy put in. "Vessels have a way of talking across miles of water, but then their code is a whole lot different from the one scouts use ashore. We might be able to let 'em know we wanted some help, and would pay well for it. Money talks when a lot of other things are like mud."

Willing hands made light work, and a fire was soon burning in the old remnant of a stove that had once done duty in the midst of ice-packs, when the wreck was a gallant vessel in search of oil or, perhaps, sealskins.

After all, they had little reason to complain. The rain pattered on the deck, and, in a few places, leaked through; but there was plenty of dry space, so that none

of the boys need get sprinkled. As for fuel, they had abundance of it, so long as their camp hatchets kept an edge, and their muscles held out for service.

"Not so bad, is it, Jimmy?" Teddy wanted to know, as they tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible, by hunting up all sorts of things capable of being turned into rough seats.

Of course, these were of no value whatever, for in frequent raids on the part of wreckers, whoever they may have been, everything worth taking had long since been carried away. Indeed, Frank declared he was puzzled to know why they had overlooked the broken stove; and all of them agreed it must have been by mistake.

"Well, I should say not," was the reply, on the part of the freckled-face lad, as he sighed and looked around him. "D'ye know I was just thinking how happy we could be in this palace if only we had those lovely blankets along; yes, and all that good stuff to eat. I think I'd be apt to pick up some weight here, if we had a cinch like that. But now every meal we enjoy means we're that much closer to the end. Mebbe we'll have to do what shipwrecked sailors do, draw lots for a sacrifice. I see my finish, if ever it comes to that, because I always get the wrong end of the deal or the stick."

"I pity the one who has to take a bite out of such a tough case as you," Teddy frankly told him; and somehow Jimmy seemed to consider that he had been given a bouquet, for he bowed and smiled and looked pleased.

"Tell the rest that," he whispered to Teddy "and I'll be safe."

The rain kept coming down steadily as the hours wore on.

"Tell me about your tropical showers," Jimmy remarked, as noon came and found no change in the conditions, "right up here on the border of the Arctic regions, when it takes a notion to rain, it does make up for lost time. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if it kept the plug out of the rain barrel for a week now."

"It's bound to make the going worse for us," Frank grumbled.

"Why, all the marshes will be flooded, and we'll have a high old time trying to navigate through the same. What do you think, Ned?" Teddy wanted to know.

The patrol leader looked at them, and smiled.

"I think history is repeating itself, and that you fellows are crossing bridges again before you get to them," he replied.

"Do you mean that there's a chance we won't have to tramp through these bogs and cross the salt water marshes?" demanded Jimmy.

"Well, we're here right now, and fairly comfortable," Ned told him. "What will happen next is something none of us can more than guess; but, as long as some of those vessels keep hovering around out on the bay, I'll hug a hope that we'll find some way of getting in touch with them."

"Which I take it means you firmly believe they're real, and not Flying Dutchmen, like they tell about in yarns of the sea?" Jimmy asked.

"I believe what my eyes tell me," answered the other, "and through the glass I saw men on those vessels, going about their regular daily tasks. Whatever they may be doing up here in Hudson Bay, take my word for it, there's nothing of the phantom about that fleet. They have some good reason for coming and going so mysteriously. Perhaps we'll know what it is before we get away from here."

Jimmy and Teddy, the pair of doubters, seemed to feel somewhat better after this little heart-to-heart talk with Ned. The leader of the Wolf Patrol had a happy faculty for inspiring others with some of his own confidence, which is one of the finest qualities a scout can possess.

There was a watch being kept to guard against any unexpected happening. As was to be expected, the two guides took it upon themselves to look after this part of the business. One of them was on duty at a time, and it could be so arranged that the sentry did not necessarily have to expose himself to the inclemency of the weather, in order to stand guard.

Nothing came to pass, and the long, dreary day gradually neared its end.

"Never knew such a terribly monotonous time in all me life," Jimmy grumbled; for he would not have been happy unless he could find an occasional chance to "let off steam," as Teddy called it.

"Well," said Jack, "it's nearly night now, and let me tell you a great secret."

"Go on!" exclaimed the other, looking interested.

"The rain's stopped!" Jack explained.

"Well, I declare, if that isn't true for you, Jack!" cried Jimmy; "and to think that after me waiting for hours to be the first to tell the joyful tidings, I had to get thinking so deeply about our affairs that I clean forgot all about it. But it may not last. Sometimes there's a break, and then the old storm comes back again, worse nor ever."

"Clouds zey be break right now, over zere," and Francois, who had just come in from the sheltered nook where watch was kept, pointed as he spoke toward the southwest, where the storm had been coming from.

"Oh! if that's the case," added Jimmy, thinking it best to cheer up, "I'll take back what I said. And let's hope a lot of this water'll soak away before we have to put our best foot forward again in the morning."

"I suppose we'll have to eat again," remarked Frank.

"Please don't force yourself," Jimmy told him. "It's a bad plan to eat when you don't feel like it. And, by the same token, your loss will be our gain."

It was a good thing that the scouts could joke among themselves, even when facing desperate conditions. They had enough of gloom around them without allowing it to seize upon their spirits.

By this time their stock of food was getting down to such a low ebb that there was little choice when it came to preparing a meal. True, Jimmy would run over a long list of things that appealed especially to his clamorous appetite; but after all was said and done, it might be noticed that each meal was very much a repetition of those that had gone before.

Indeed, even at that, no one would have complained of the sameness of their food, if only the supply looked more promising.

Jimmy, who helped get supper ready, heaved many a heavy sigh, as he figured that at this rate the larder would be bare by the next evening.

"And after that, what?" he went around asking every one; but they only laughed at his fears, and told him to remember that in the past luck always came their way when the skies looked darkest.

"Something will happen, see if it don't," Frank observed, with a faith that had solid foundation; because they had just been talking of many occasions when circumstances had suddenly arisen to bring them a glorious success.

"And, anyhow, we'll often look back to this hotel on the beach with a smile," was what Teddy observed, as he turned his head and glanced at the dilapidated cabin of the wrecked whaling vessel, seen by the fitful flashes of light from the fire, at which Francois was cooking supper.

"We'll miss the mattress of hemlock browse to-night, I reckon," Ned hinted, as he looked down at the hard floor of the cabin.

"Look out for lame limbs to-morrow morning, then," Jack chuckled. "I expect to see a lot of limping cripples start out the first thing. Sleeping on boards may be better than nothing, but it's little rest I expect to get."

"I've heard of fellers sleepin' standin' up," Jimmy informed him. "There's that old veteran, Daddy Spellmire, who tells such yarns about the old days when he 'fit in the war with Siegel.' He says some of them were so dead tired that when they were marching they'd press close up together; and often he's slept while moving his legs in a mechanical way, held up by his comrades all around."

"We might try that if everything else fails," said Frank.

Supper being ready they started in and enjoyed it. Boys are not prone to worry very much about the future. The present is enough in their estimation to look after. What might happen was for them to handle when it came to pass; only Jimmy, at times, liked to grumble and complain that he was not getting a square deal.

When they had finished eating, it was night. Though stars had peeped out here and there, it still looked somewhat gloomy, even if the mist was clearing away to seaward. The breeze had shifted around, so that with the incoming tide the waves ran far up on the beach now, and there was considerable of a roar in the air as these curled over and broke upon reaching shallow places.

Time was beginning to hang heavy on the hands of the five scouts. They missed the delightful surroundings which they had enjoyed while camping each night, during the time they were moving northward in the canoes. It was so different here in this dingy old cabin, when they would have enjoyed seeing the trees waving above their heads, and felt the springing turf underneath their bodies, as the time came to seek their blankets under the shelter of the khaki-colored waterproof tents, now alas, gone no doubt forever.

Frank, seeing that his chums were not feeling in a very merry mood as they tried to settle down as comfortably as they could, wandered outside to the sloping deck to talk with Francois, who had taken the Indian guide's place on watch.

He had hardly been gone three minutes when they heard him coming down the companionway in great haste. Somehow, everyone of the others seemed to understand that the terrible stagnation was about to be broken up.

When Frank burst into the cabin his face told the story. He was bringing them news of some sort, for his eyes were glowing and his face flushed.

"What ails you, Frank?" asked Jack, as they scrambled to their feet.

"After all, it begins to look like we needn't bother about how we're going to sleep to-night, standing or sitting!" the newcomer announced, breathlessly.

"How is that?" asked Jimmy.

"Why, there are lights coming along the shore right now—lanterns I should say, at a rough guess," Frank went on; "chances are the miners have learned about our being aboard this old wreck, and mean to gather us in before morning!"



CHAPTER XIX.

THE BATTLE OF THE HULK.

There was an immediate rush for the guns, which had been placed in a corner of the cabin. From the actions of the scouts, it could be imagined that no one dreamed of giving in, without a desperate resistance.

"If we do have to stand 'em off," declared Jimmy, as he examined his repeating rifle, in order to make sure that it was in condition for business; "sure we couldn't ask for a better fort than this same old wreck. Seven of us, all told, and well armed at that, ought to be able to do the work. If they know what's good for them, they'll go mighty slow about trying to storm this place."

"Why," said Teddy, "it'd be pretty hard to climb up the sides anywhere, so all we have to do is to defend the break in the stern where we got aboard."

They all looked to Ned to find out what his opinion might be.

"I'm not thinking so much about the chances of keeping them out," the scout leader went on to say, "as what will happen afterwards."

"Do you mean when we try to leave here to-morrow, Ned?" questioned Frank.

"I mean that the chances are, after they've had a good try and find they can't rush the wreck, with so many guns defending it, those men will start in to keep us in a state of siege."

"Holy smoke!" burst from Jimmy, as he looked horrified; "and us with only grub enough on hand for two skimpy meals. What under the sun will we do? No chance to knock over a caribou or a moose, and fill up the empty larder! Was there ever such hard luck?"

"Many times, Jimmy," replied Ned, "and we always managed to pull through,

somehow or other. We will again, as sure as anything, even if I can't tell you just how it's going to happen. Besides a scarcity of food, we have to face a water famine, you must remember."

"With all the sea knockin' at our door, too," groaned Jimmy. "And think of the amount that's been runnin' to waste off our deck all day. What a pity we didn't think to find a cask, and fill the same when we had the chance. To tell you the truth, I'm getting more and more thirsty as I think of how we'll suffer."

"Well, the men with the lanterns are coming right along all the time you fellows are talking here," Frank advised them.

"And our first duty is to get on deck, so as to be ready to repel boarders," Ned declared.

"Boarders!" echoed Jimmy, "well, I should say we ought to repel them, when right now we ain't got enough food for our own family table."

They hurried out of the cabin, Ned making sure that the fire in the stove was so far extinguished that its light might not betray the fact of the wreck being peopled.

As soon as they arrived on deck they had no difficulty in discovering the approaching peril. Indeed, the moving lanterns were close by, and coming right along, as though those who were carrying them had arrived at the conclusion that the exploring party might have taken temporary refuge from the rain aboard the old wreck.

Doubtless its possibilities as a shelter were well known to them; and they could easily understand how the boys would eagerly welcome a chance to keep their jackets dry.

"There are three of the lanterns, Ned," Jack was saying, as all of them strained their eyes to see.

"Yes, and back of the same, I can get glimpses of other fellers walkin' along at a smart clip," Jimmy announced.

"Yes, there must be nearly a dozen in that bunch," Frank gave as his opinion.

"Enough to give us two apiece all around," Jimmy told them, just as though he might be a very bloodthirsty individual, instead of a peace-loving scout, if let alone. "And it'd be a saving of ammunition, if we could fix things so that one bullet would do for both. Because I take it you mean to open fire, if so be they persist in tryin' to board with us, eh, Ned?"

"We have no other course open to us," replied the leader of the scouts, sadly; for he did not at all fancy being forced into a fight against his will. "But everybody, remember to be as careful as you can, and not shed blood unless there is nothing else to be done. Then aim to wound all you can. I'd hate to have to think I'd taken any man's life, no matter how much he deserved it."

"H'm! mebbe that's all right," grumbled Jimmy; "but when your back's up agin the wall, and you got to do it, or go under yourself, what's to hinder? We want to be let alone, and go our way. If they won't agree, but try to knock us over, or make us prisoners, so they can keep us here month in and month out on a steady diet of fish and water why, for one, I ain't agoin' to stand for it, you hear me. Ned, you tell that bad lot they'd better hold up if they know what's good for 'em; because I've got me gun ready, and there's light enough for us to see where to aim."

The men with the lanterns had by this time come so close to the wreck lying half out on the beach, and with the incoming waves lapping the rest of the bulk, that another minute would have seen them starting to clamber aboard.

They were heading straight for the break in the stern, which would indicate that all of them must be familiar with their surroundings. No doubt, they had been on the stranded whaler many a time since it was cast up there on the beach.

So Ned called out, trying to throw as much of authority in his voice as was possible at the time.

"Stop where you are, men!" he shouted, abruptly.

The lanterns no longer advanced. Evidently those who carried them were trying to see the party who had given this peremptory command. They could be heard talking together in low and husky tones, some urging a precipitate rush, others counseling caution and diplomacy, in order to accomplish their ends.

"Hello! there, on the wreck!" some one, doubtless vested with authority, called out.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Ned.

"Are you the party that was up at the mine, and did you come here in canoes?" continued the unseen leader of the group below.

"We had our boats stolen, and now we're about to head to the south on foot," was what the patrol leader announced, possibly thinking that it might influence these hardy men somewhat, if they knew that the scouts intended to quit that region

without delay.

Some more low talking went on below on the beach.

"Be ready, boys," warned Jack; "there's a movement on foot, and like as not they'll start to try and rush the gangway. Keep low down, because they might start firing on us!"

"That's right, Jack," said Ned, who had just been about to issue the same sort of warning himself. "When you're dealing with men like these, look out for treachery."

Just then the man below shouted again. He had a very rough, raspy voice, and seemed to be of an ugly disposition, though possibly he was hoping to impress the boy with the idea that he would brook no foolishness.

"Well, you've got to surrender to us, that's all," he went on to say. "You went and spied on what mining was being done up here, and we've orders not to let you get away till the word comes. Might as well make up your minds to that, youngsters, and it'll save ye lots of trouble. Throw down what guns ye got."

At that Jimmy burst out into a loud laugh.

"Will ye be after hearin' him give his orders, fellers?" he exclaimed. "Just like he was the boss of the barnyard, too. Listen to me, you down there! We are seven, all told, and with as many guns of the latest model that can throw lead through ten inches of hard wood. If ye want the guns, come up and take the same. I give ye my word, it'll be the hottest time any of ye ever struck in the course of your lives. A dozen of ye, are there? Well, after the first volley, we'll cut the count down just one-half. Don't all speak at once, but pull the latchstring, and come on into our little parlor!"

It was simply impossible to stop Jimmy, once he got started, unless you took him in hand and clapped a gag over his mouth. As there was no chance of doing this now, Ned let him have his say. It could do little harm, after all; in fact, perhaps, it might even do some good, since the men on the beach would have received ample warning, with regard to the intentions of the scouts, and if they ventured to try and clamber aboard the wreck, it would be at their own peril.

Apparently, more talking was going on below.

"That may all be a blind," Jack ventured to say, as they lined up along the side of the wreck, with their guns ready.

"Yes, because unless I miss my guess several of the bunch slipped away, as if

they had their orders," Frank declared.

"It may be they know of another way to get aboard," said Ned, "and while the rest keep on parleying with us, they mean to try and slip around, so as to take us by surprise. Jack, you and Teddy keep tabs of the rear, and shoot if you see the least suspicious movement."

"Ay, ay! sir!" said Jack, immediately wheeling so as to keep his rifle pointed toward the threatened spot. "Drop low down, Teddy, so as not to show against the sky-line. And when I say, 'let drive,' give several shots. The noise of the bombardment will help scare 'em off, I reckon."

The man who seemed to be leader again hailed them.

"You can't get away from here, and you might's well know that same first as last," he went on to say, positively. "You learned too much for yer own good that time, an' we ain't going to allow of your getting out of this region in a hurry. If ye surrender, we'll treat ye white, give ye my word on that. All we want is that ye shouldn't get to Montreal till we hears from the boss. Show your good sense, boys, by makin' the best of a bad bargain."

"You might as well save your breath, whoever you are," said Ned, firmly; "we know what it all means, and why you want to hold us here prisoners, without any right to do the same. And understand now that we refuse to stand for it. Try and rush this wreck, and some of you will get hurt. The same applies to the three men you sent around to try and take us in the rear. We're on to your tricks, mister, and, if you know what's good for you, just turn around and leave us alone. We mean to fight, and fight hard! That's the last word of warning I'm going to give you, and the next move will call for lead. Do you get that straight?"

Ned could be quite belligerent when he chose. He realized that he was dealing with hard characters in these men, and that any sign of weakness on his part was only going to make things the more difficult for himself and chums.

He understood that what he had just said must be looked on as a sort of challenge by the miners on the beach. There could be no more parleying after that defiance had been given. It meant war.

Consequently, Ned was not at all surprised to hear the dimly seen men break out into an angry roar of shouts, and to see them start toward the stern of the wreck, with the evident intention of swarming aboard.

There were several flashes as firearms sounded, so that altogether it looked as if the battle had opened.

After that it was folly to dream that they could pull through peaceably, when these hired minions of the fraudulent mining corporation were so bent on carrying out their own plans and which consisted of making the boys prisoners.

Ned gave the word, and immediately the scouts commenced shooting. They could see the advancing figures fairly well in the half darkness, and at such short range it would have had to be a pretty poor marksman who could not have hit his target had he really wanted to do so. But the scouts were not ferociously inclined. Ned had begged them not to resort to stern measures, unless it were absolutely necessary, and something desperate had to be done in order to prevent the enemy from accomplishing the capture of the old hulk.

So while they rattled away merrily with their repeating guns, they took care not to mow the advancing men down. This was easily accomplished by shooting so as to send their bullets into the sand of the beach; and as the assailants could not tell what the sanguinary result of the furious fire might be, they no doubt imagined that terrible execution was being wrought in their ranks.

Some of them managed to reach the stern of the wreck; others stumbling over flotsam and jetsam on the beach were crawling around, seeking shelter from the blaze of fire that leaped all along the bulwarks above.

It was a pretty warm time while it lasted, and even Jack and Teddy seemed to be engaged, for the roar of their guns chimed in with the rest. If those three men, who had slipped away from the rest, had managed to climb aboard, by means of some dangling rope, they, doubtless, speedily realized that it was not a safe place in which to linger.

"Stop firing!" cried Ned, suddenly, "they've fallen back, and the first round goes to us."

"That was the easiest licked squad I ever ran across!" boasted Jimmy; "and, while I'm about it, I might as well confess that I had to crease one feller in the leg, for he was pushing right into the opening. Sure he fell back, and the last I saw of the bog trotter, he was crawling away, draggin' that left leg after him."

Ned sighed. He had hoped to accomplish this business for Mr Bosworth without being compelled to do violence; but it seemed that this could not be. As scouts, he and his chums objected to such things; but, as a last resort, even members of the organization must be allowed the liberty of defending themselves against the assaults of hired ruffians.

"Do you know where those three men got aboard, Jack?" he asked.

"I think we'll find a piece of rope hanging over the side," replied the other; yes, "here it is, Ned. Shall I cut it loose, so as to stop that gap?"

"Of course," came the answer; "and then take one of the electric torches and see if any of them stayed aboard, after the firing was over. Jimmy, you go along; and be careful not to get held up. We don't want to have a treacherous foe hiding near us, and ready to do something desperate at any minute. Sing out, if you find one, and want any help to throw him overboard!"



CHAPTER XX.

BESIEGED.

The two scouts hurried away to execute the orders of their chief. They were so accustomed to having Ned tell them what to do that any command he might give was always cheerfully carried out.

The balance of the party remained there where they could command the break in the stern of the wreck, and which the enemy had once vainly attempted to rush. If presently another attack were made they would be in position to pour down a hot fire on the assailants; and perhaps taking pattern by Jimmy, the rest of the defenders might begin to give wounds that would gradually put the miners out of the game.

Before three minutes had passed Ned and those with him heard a tremendous row going on down the deck. This was followed by a great scrambling, and then came a loud splash.

"Say, they must have found one of the three sneaks!" exclaimed Teddy, jubilantly.

"Here comes Jack now to report," added Frank.

Jack was breathing hard, but chuckling at the same time, as he came up.

"I have the honor to report, sir, that we discovered a spy aboard, and made him walk the plank," he started in to say, with all the airs of a second officer aboard a liner, giving in his account of duties performed. "He didn't want to make the jump but Jimmy helped him over the side, while I covered him and kept his hands up. We've looked everywhere now, and think he was the only one that stayed aboard."

"I hope you didn't drown the fellow, Jack," said Ned.

"Small danger of that," laughed the other; "where he fell the water was only a few feet deep, even with a wave rolling in. He's ashore long before now, and can report how we do things aboard the Old Reliable. Anything else you want done, sir, while we've got our hands in?"

"Nothing but keep an eye out for any creeper along the sides. They may think to try it over again," Ned told him.

"And next time perhaps we'll do something worse than tossing the fellow overboard," Jack declared. "I half believe that scoundrel meant to do us an ugly turn. Why, he had a wicked looking knife in his hand just when we cornered him, and even raised it as if meaning to strike, when I knocked it out of his grasp with the barrel of my gun, and then Jimmy jumped on him like a monkey."

"A good job all around," was Ned's comment; "and it ought to show these parties that we mean what we say. I'm only hoping they'll get sick of the business and conclude to let us alone. That is all we ask of them, to keep their hands off, and allow us to pull out."

"Small chance of that happening, I'm afraid," Jack went on to say. "If we *get away from here it'll be because we've gone and licked the lot* of them, as Jimmy was remarking, out of their boots. I say that, because we know what it would mean to this fake concern to let the story of the mine get to New York City."

After that for a while everything seemed very quiet. Watch as they might they could see nothing of the enemy on the beach below. The waves crept up higher, as the tide came in, and the sound of their curling over with a long roll grew more and more boisterous; but ashore all seemed as silent as death.

"You don't think then they've had enough of fight, and gone away, eh, Ned?" was what Teddy asked, as he crept to where the patrol leader stood, looking over the bulwarks, and keenly on the alert.

"Not a bit of it, Teddy," came the prompt reply. "You ought to know that men like that give up only as the tiger does, grudgingly. They've felt of our claws, and found that we can scratch; so next time they'll try and work some other sort of game that may pay them better."

"I don't see how it can be done," urged Teddy. "If there were any trees overhanging our fortress I might begin to think they'd climb up, and try to drop in on us. And so far as we know they haven't got an aeroplane to take the place of the same trees. They can only make a charge through that gap in the stern and

we're able to guard that, all right, ain't we, Ned?"

"It seems so," the other told him; "but you mustn't be too sure about there being no other way of getting aboard. We might have said that before, and yet there was the dangling rope that three of them climbed. Now, there may be another route; and while we don't know about it, the only way to make sure is to keep on the alert every minute of the time."

Possibly half an hour passed in this way. The strain was beginning to tell on some of the boys, for they felt that it was necessary to keep keyed up to a high tension all the time. They did not know at what moment loud yells would indicate that the battle had been resumed and under new conditions.

"Whew! and to think that we've just got to keep this up all night long," Teddy lamented, as he shifted from one foot to the other, for, as he said, they were trying to play tricks with him, by going to sleep on post.

"Yes, and mebbe a whole lot longer," Jimmy told him; "because, while I haven't been saying much about the same, I'm of the opinion that Ned hit the right nail on the head when he said they'd try to starve us out. Oh! I could stand nearly anything, but to go hungry. I've often thought that would be my wind-up some of these fine days, to starve to death. And I can't imagine a more terrible fate."

"Enough for two decent meals in the larder yet, Jimmy," said Frank. "And before we get to the jumping-off place, we'll make a move out of this, let me tell you. I think you'll be able to eat your three meals a day this long while yet."

"Well, it's kind of you to say so, Frank," Jimmy went on; "but just now I was thinking how neat we could give these fellers the slip, if only we had a boat of some sort. There's plenty of water at the bow, with the tide still comin' in like fun. My kingdom for a boat; any old hooker'd do to fill the bill, because we ain't particular."

"Could we manage to make a raft, do you think?" asked Teddy.

"There's plenty of loose stuff around," Ned remarked; "but while a boat might help us out, I don't think we could do anything with a clumsy raft, even if we had a chance to launch the same, without being found out. I had considered whether we might get overboard at the bow and make off up the shore, but the chances of being discovered seemed too great."

"And besides we'd be apt to get our guns wet, and that might keep us from using the same, when they were badly needed," Jack suggested. "So it seems as though we'll have to give up the idea of leaving the fort by the water door."

This started them to canvassing the whole situation over again, and several ingenious schemes were proposed. Unfortunately, on entering deeper into the same, they showed weakness in one particular or another, so that all of them had to be cast aside.

What made it doubly irritating was the knowledge that if they waited until the dawn came, their position would be doubly dangerous, since they might not even show themselves along the side of the wreck, without inviting a shot. As to escaping, it was not to be thought of while the sun remained above the horizon.

"We've got to do something to-night, that's flat!" urged Teddy, possibly in the hope that Ned might have a plan of his own, which he was holding back, just to ascertain what his chums could do along those lines.

"I've got a hunch that they're nearly ready to give us another whirl," Jimmy was remarking, as he leaned over the rail of the vessel, as though to see better.

"What makes you say that?" questioned Jack.

"There's a suspicious movement below that makes me believe some of the bog-trotters are creeping along close beside the boat. I think they must have come out of the water, where it slaps up against the wreck. Right down underneath us they are, Ned. If I had a kettle of scaldin' water, I could start the biggest yelping chorus ye ever heard right now."

A few sharp words from Ned put them all on the alert. Each one had a station assigned to him, which he was expected to hold, in case of a renewal of hostilities; while Jimmy might bemoan the fact that he could not have a bucket of boiling water with which to startle the intended boarders, he evidently did not intend to let that deficiency keep him from doing his duty. Crouching there at a point where he could fire through the breach in the stern of the wreck, he only waited for the word to be given, when he evidently meant to start some others among the enemy to limping on one leg.

"Gee!" Jack heard him saying softly to himself, with a chuckle, "wouldn't it be a funny thing now, if we went and crippled the whole shooting match, by tapping every one in the left leg. Think of how they'd go hobbling around here, like a bunch of old pensioners comin' after their money. Watch my smoke, now, and see how I fix 'em."

When everything was prepared in this way it made the boys nervous to wait, for minutes passed and nothing happened. All the while they were imagining the enemy creeping up the sides of the old hulk, grimly bent on doing them injury.

Ned passed from one point to another, trying to discover just what kind of peril it might be that menaced them. Did the miners have some way of springing on board at a given signal, so that they might attack from all sides at once?

When a full hour had gone and still there was no attack, Ned began to wonder if after all any assault had been intended. Surely these men knew by now that those on board the wreck were well armed, and that they could hardly hope to carry the fort by assault. Perhaps they had come to the wise conclusion that there was a far better means at their disposal than bloodshed. Famine could accomplish what violence failed to do. All they had to figure on was keeping the scouts there just so long, when, lacking food and fresh water, they must give in.

After the chances for another desperate charge through the breach had begun to grow fainter, Ned started to figuring again how he might get his comrades and himself out of so uncomfortable a scrape.

As Jimmy had said, since they had no airship, they could not fly in that way; and lacking boats, the sea offered no solution to the puzzle. All that was left then, apparently, was the land, with those fierce foes lying in wait to attack them the minute they quitted their fortress.

Ned believed that he had the most difficult problem to solve that had come his way this many a day. From every side he viewed it, the puzzle seemed as unanswerable as ever. If only they could manage to slip away along about an hour or so after midnight, when the darkness was densest; but there was only the one way to leave, and that was evidently watched closely, if those silent figures flitting hither and thither on the beach stood for anything.

But was the breach the only means for leaving? Ned remembered that those three men had climbed aboard through the aid of a dangling rope. What was sauce for the goose might be sauce for the gander, too; and if only they could discover more rope they might also slide down it to safety.

He moved over to where Jimmy was squatted like a big toad, with his gun resting on his knee, and aimed straight at the frowning breach in the stern.

"You told us about those three men climbing aboard by means of a rope that was dangling over the side; am I right, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Just what they did, sir," came the reply.

"You didn't leave that rope there, did you?" continued Ned.

"I should say not," Jimmy answered with emphasis. "Jack pulled it up on deck,

after I'd helped the feller make his getaway jump."

"And you think it's there still?" the patrol leader asked.

"Must be, unless somebody's been and gone and cut it loose to throw it overboard," was the answer Jimmy made. "But what's a rope got to do with us now, Ned? Want it to string up one of the dubs in case we get our hooks on the same? Now, that might be a good scheme. It'd sure warn 'em that we meant business, and didn't expect to stand for any foolishness."

"Well, you've guessed wrong that time, because it wasn't hanging I had in mind, Jimmy!" declared Ned. "I was only trying to figure what chance we'd have to get away, if later on in the night, one by one, we managed to drop down by means of that rope."

"Gee! that is an idea, now, Ned. And say, it'd give us a chance to skip out in the dark. Once clear of this pack, we could do some huntin' and lay in a stock of meat. Oh! I hope you can make it work, Ned. Looks like it might be our last hope, don't it?"

"I've been thinking right along, and, so far, it's the only idea I've struck; but we couldn't dream of starting for some hours yet. So keep on the watch, and don't let the enemy rush us."

"Count on me to hold 'em in check," said Jimmy, with a touch of his old boastfulness. "I'm Leander at the Bridge, or Leonidas holding that pass at Thermopylæ.** I'm here like a rock and can't be budged. Oh! you mutts down there, I'm sorry for the feller that tries to run the gauntlet of my fire; because my finger's on the trigger all the while, and just itchin' to press harder."

Thinking to make sure about that rope, on which it now seemed so much might depend, the patrol leader passed on down the slanting deck of the stranded old hulk.

He met some one coming from the other end of the wreck; and it turned out to be Frank, who, on finding out that he had run upon Ned, took hold of his sleeve.

"Come down here with me," he said, "I want you to see something."

Curious to know what the other scout meant, Ned readily accompanied him; but in passing the place where Jack and Jimmy had met with their adventure, he made sure that the rope was still where the former had tossed it after drawing it up.

"There, what d'ye think of that?" asked Frank.

He was pointing out toward the great bay, as he said this; and, looking, Ned discovered that the last of the sea fog and mist had cleared away, leaving the air as clear as a bell. Far away over the water he saw several strange lights. They seemed to rise and fall in a mysterious fashion; and yet Ned knew that there was nothing at all queer about this.

"The phantom fleet at anchor!" said Frank, and it was hard to tell from his manner whether he meant all his words implied or not.

"Yes," said Ned, soberly, "whatever those vessels are, they might help us out of this scrape, if only we could get in communication with them," and he stood there for some time, staring reflectively out toward the twinkling lights on the swelling sea.



CHAPTER XXI.

UNEXPECTED HELP.

"They're coming, Ned!" whispered Jack, in a hoarse tone.

"But that sound surely came from seaward, Jack?" expostulated the other.

"I know it did, and must have been the sneeze of a man at that," replied the second scout. "But what of it, Ned? We must remember they've got other boats besides our canoes, and it might be possible for them to row around from the mouth of the Harricanaw to this place."

"Yes, possibly," said Ned, "but hardly probable in so short a time. But like you, I believe it was a man who sneezed, and that he was out there on the water. Look again, and see if you can pick up a boat moving, Jack."

For a full minute the pair stood and strained their eyes to the utmost, gazing minutely over the rolling waters, from the place where the white foam could be seen, far out to sea. Ned even noted which way the night breeze held, and in that quarter he kept his eyes glued the longest time, as though instinct told him the mysterious sound must have been carried on the wings of the wind.

There were all those twinkling riding-lights on the vessels composing the fleet of whaling or sealing craft, which had come to obtain such a strange reputation for appearing and vanishing so wonderfully. Perhaps, as Ned observed them again, he unconsciously connected the sneeze with their presence; but then this thought quickly gave way to the other. It was more natural that they should expect those men of the fake mine to be afloat near by, endeavoring to find some vulnerable part of the stranded wreck, where they could deliver a successful attack.

"I see it, Ned!" suddenly said Jack, triumphantly.

"Show me!" observed the patrol leader, quickly moving his head so that it came alongside that of his chum, whose hand was extended, with the quivering forefinger pointing almost in a line with the nearest of all the vessels.

"There, watch when the wave rises again, and you'll—there, did you get it, Ned?"

"Yes, and as you say, it was a boat with several men in the same," replied the other scout, hastily; "and more than that, they seem to be heading straight for this old wreck. You see, they're coming down the coast, and as like as not, they've rowed all the way from the river."

"Could they do it on the bay?" asked Jack, dubiously.

"I don't see any reason against it, if they happen to have strong enough muscles, and know how to manage a boat on the big waves," Ned went on to say.

"But hadn't we better tell the rest?" asked Jack. "If we're going to get a side wipe, it might be as well for all of us to be ready to meet the rascals when they try to get aboard from their boat."

"Yes, let two stay to watch the break in the stern—the Cree and Frank might handle that end of the business—bring the rest here with you, Jack. I'll try and keep tabs of the boat, while you're gone."

"Be back in a jiffy, Ned," and with that Jack shot away.

He could not have taken much time to tell the others what they were wanted for, because he quickly appeared again at Ned's elbow, bringing Jimmy, Teddy and Francois along with him.

"What's the matter, Ned?" asked the first named, as he looked all about him, evidently half expecting that he would see the head of a "boarder" rising into view over the gunwale of the wreck.

"Jack discovered a boat coming in, and we think it must hold several of our enemies," the other told them. "Look where I point and you'll see it rising on the next roller."

Immediately exclamations of astonishment announced that the others had sighted the alarming spectacle.

"They're expecting to take us by surprise, because we'd never think of standing guard along that side of the old tub," Jimmy declared as his opinion.

"It wasn't such a bad scheme, either," added Teddy. "Only for that man sneezing

when he shouldn't, neither of you two might have discovered the boat."

"That's as true as anything you ever said, old man," assented Jack, who never wanted to claim honors he had not fairly won. "But you know it's the old Black Bear and Wolf luck.

"We're always running slap up against the greatest things ever heard of."

"And first chance I find," muttered Teddy, "I'm going to get transferred from the old Eagle into one of the other patrols. Whoever heard of an Eagle having any special luck? That's because they went and named their patrol after a bald-headed old pirate, who loves to rob the hard working fish-hawk of his dinner, time in and time out."

Nobody was paying any particular attention to Teddy's lament, however, and so he started in to take a second and more particular look at the dancing object that could be seen one moment, as it rose on a wave, and then vanishing from view again.

"Can you all make it out?" asked Jack.

Even Francois said there was no difficulty now; while Jimmy, as if to prove that his sight was good, went on to say:

"It seems to be a pretty hefty boat, too, fellers?"

"Yes, that's what I thought," Jack answered him.

"And I reckon you noticed that only two men are in the same; that is, a pair handling the oars; and, if there are any others, they must be lying flat on their backs in the bottom of the old thing. Which gives me a smart little idea, Ned."

"Glad to hear you say so, Jimmy; and if you don't mind we'll all listen to what you've got ailing you," the patrol leader told him.

"Why, it's just like this, you see," continued the other, pleased beyond words to find himself in the limelight, for that bit of luck did not come the way of Jimmy often enough to suit him. "There are just two of the fellers, that's right, and when they step up on deck, where it slopes near the water-line, why, we'll jump them like a toad hops over a mushroom. Before they know what's struck 'em, they'll be our prisoners, see?"

"Yes, but what good will they be to us, Jimmy; you don't lay out to eat them, I hope?" demanded Teddy, unable to grasp a thing that had not yet been fully explained.

"Shucks! don't you see—when we've got 'em tied up good and tight, why, what's to hinder the whole bunch of us stepping into their bully boat, and go slidin' off as slick as you please, heading for the nearest vessel at anchor out yonder?"

Jimmy put this question boldly, as though he realized that he had struck a chord that was bound to evoke the highest praise from his mates. And he was right, for Ned slapped him heartily on the back, Jack wrung his hand, while Teddy, who had lost his breath in amazement, at least managed to stroke his sleeve affectionately.

"A great scheme, I give you my word, it is, Jimmy; and one that does you credit," said Ned. "If only we can carry it out, we've got the biggest chance for escaping that could ever come our way. It all depends on whether they really mean to try and board the wreck. We're not so dead sure of that yet, you know."

The spirits of the others, buoyed up so suddenly by the prospect of a speedy release from their predicament, underwent a drop. It was as though the temperature had fallen from blood heat to freezing.

"Oh! but we were all certain they meant to try and board us a minute ago, Ned; and let's see if they are still on the same course," with which Jack, as well as the others sought to again catch a fleeting sight of the oncoming boat.

It was not the easiest thing in the world to glimpse such a dusky looking object in such uncertain light, and with the waves rising and falling. But it happened that while they had been talking, Francois managed to keep his eye fixed on the boat, and so he was able to point it out to them.

"Oh! joy, she is still heading right for us!" said Jimmy, who had felt the slump worse than any of the others, because of the fact that the idea was his own.

What he said was true, and all of them could see that the two men in the boat were pulling hard to come along with the sweep of the sea.

"Better get ready to lay the trap, hadn't we?" asked Jack, nervously.

"Oh! that will be easy enough when we make sure of where they expect to board," the patrol leader told him; but, at the same time, he knew full well that the boat would naturally have to swing around to the sheltered side of the wreck, before those in it could hope to pull in.

All of them watched, with their hearts beating like trip-hammers, so excited had the sudden hope made them.

The seconds seemed to pass on leaden wings to Jimmy. Several times he moved

uneasily, and Ned could hear the sigh that welled up from the depths of his heart. This happened when, to his excited fancy, the oncoming boat seemed to remain motionless on the swelling wave for a brief period. Possibly at such times the rowers ceased their labors, for the purpose of scrutinizing the dark hulk, which they were then approaching, as though to make sure that they would find all well.

Each time, however, they started to rowing again, and as they drew nearer to the shore, of course, they had to put more strength into their strokes, because of the suction of the eddies that surged around the bow of the derelict, standing at this time of nearly full tide, well in the water.

When they changed their course, so as to swing around to leeward of the wreck, Ned considered that it was time he and his comrades crept along in the shelter of the bulwark, and made ready to receive the uninvited guests.

First of all, they must allow them to come aboard, and also secure the boat. Any premature action was bound to ruin the whole affair. If one of the men got away, or the boat was set adrift, it would avail the prisoners of the hulk nothing. They wanted a means for leaving the hostile land, and the mere capture of these two men, who evidently intended to take them by surprise, would not satisfy them at all.

So Ned and his mates made themselves as small as they could, crouching there in the gloom of the night. They could hear the splash of the waves beating against the other side of the old vessel, and these constant sounds served to hide all else in the way of noise. When the boat collided with the planking of the wreck, they only knew of its arrival through the slight quiver that was conveyed to their alert senses.

And now they saw one of the dark figures clambering hurriedly over the broken bulwarks. Strange to say, he did not seem to be at all particular as to what he was doing. There was no skulking movement, no crouching, and looking about, such as one would expect to observe under the circumstances. Ned noted this with surprise. He even began to entertain serious doubts concerning the absolute truth of the theory he had previously formed regarding the identity of the two men. Surely, if they belonged to the force that had once before been repulsed when trying to board the wreck, they would know of the presence of the scouts there, and do everything within their power not to let the defenders know of their secret coming.

"All right, Captain Bill!" they heard the man who had jumped aboard say; and

that too was a strange thing; had they believed the wreck to be utterly abandoned, these mysterious parties could not have acted in a more singular manner.

Now the second man was climbing over, in which act he was assisted by the one who had come first, and who seemed to be a more agile chap.

At least the boat was secure, for Ned could see that the first visitor was engaged in fastening the painter to a cleat that chanced to be near by, and which he seemed to find in a remarkably able manner, as though he might be quite familiar from past associations with the lay of things aboard that hulk.

Ned had his little hand-electric torch ready, and when he believed that the proper instant had come for action, he suddenly pressed the button that caused a flash to dazzle the eyes of the men.

"Surrender! Don't try to make a single move, or you'll be shot down. We've got you covered by our guns, so throw up your hands, both of you!" was what he exclaimed, and at the same instant, the others stood up with leveled rifles.

It was evidently a complete surprise for the invading force. They elevated both hands as ordered, mechanically perhaps, for at the same time they were uttering exclamations of bewilderment and wonder.

"Make sure of the boat, Jimmy!" said Ned, with an eye to their great need; and only too gladly did the other scout jump forward to where the rope had been passed around that cleat under the rail.

"*Who are you, anyway, and what d'ye mean by holding us up this way?*" finally asked the older of the two prisoners; and now that he found time to look closer, Ned was himself amazed to discover that both of them had the appearance of seafaring men, in regards to garments and bronzed faces.

"I'm going to ask you that same question," he managed to say. "Who are you, and what do you want coming ashore in the night to board this wreck?"

The men turned and looked at each other.

"What d'ye think of that, now, Captain Bill?" asked the younger man. "Me to be asked that, as has lived and cruised aboard this old whaler *Comet* for six years and more, till she was wrecked in the ice last season, and they carried me away, out o' my head from exposure? Ain't I got a right aboard here, if anybody has? 'Twas only lately that I learned she was ashore 'stead of bein' at the bottom of Hudson Bay; and as I had some valuable papers hid in a bulkhead that I thought

was lost to me for good and all, why, I got Captain Bill, whose mate I am this trip, to come ashore along with me, so's to see if they be here still. We knowed there was a wild crowd prospectin' for copper up around these parts, and didn't dare try to land in daylight. There was other reasons besides. But now we've told you who and what we are, s'pose you turn around and enlighten us. Seems like I seen them sort o' suits afore now, on the Boy Scouts o' Swamsscot, where I hail from in New England. Be you members of the same organization, boys?"

For a minute almost, none of the three lads could find his breath to answer. The astonishing truth actually stunned them. They saw liberty and safety looming up within their reach. There was no longer any doubt concerning their chances for leaving this inhospitable land, and carrying the answer which would mean so much to Mr. Bosworth and those capitalists associated with him.

It was Jimmy who recovered first, and his ringing cheer that went peeling forth over the heaving waters of Hudson Bay.



CHAPTER XXII.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED—CONCLUSION.

"Hooray for the greatest thing that ever happened!" Jimmy roared, as he swung his campaign hat wildly about his head, and even started a jig, such was his exuberant condition. "The luck of the Wolf Patrol holds as good as ever! In the nick of time, the villain gets his dope and we pull off a brilliant victory. Hooray!"

Indeed, the other boys felt almost as exultant as Jimmy; and hearing all this racket, both Frank and the Cree chief came hurrying over, wondering what it could stand for.

Many questions were poured upon Captain Bill and his younger companion, who gave his name as Asa Plunkett, once captain of the very vessel upon whose sloping deck they were then standing.

"A plenty of room for the whole kit of ye in our whale-boat, lads," said the older man, "and I reckons as haow we kin find grub for the lot, aboard the *Grampus*, which will soon be headin' for the home port, since there ain't nawthin more to be picked up on this ere cruise into foreign waters, and arunnin' risks all the time o' being hauled up by a Canadian cruiser."

"Just gimme about ten minutes to bust open the bulkhead, and see if my papers has stood all the exposure of months alyin' here on the beach," remarked Mate Plunkett.

"You bet we will, sir!" exclaimed Jimmy, "and if you want any help, just sing out for me. I'm a champion hand to smash things. The habit's gone and got me into lots of trouble before now. And here's an old, rusty marlin-spike that might come in handy."

"We took pains to fetch a hatchet along for that purpose," the mate informed

him, as he hurried toward the companionway, meaning doubtless to seek the cabin.

They soon heard him pounding away at a great rate, he having lighted a lantern that had been fetched from the whaling vessel anchored a mile or so away.

"Get your things together, fellows," Ned advised, "because we're expecting to be afloat on Hudson Bay before many minutes."

"Seeing how we've been robbed of our most cherished possessions," declared Teddy, sadly, "that job isn't going to take us very long, I'm sorry to say."

"To think that the chance has come to snap our fingers in the faces of that ugly crowd!" observed Jimmy, who could hardly keep his feet still through joy.

"They'll be as mad as anything when they come aboard in the morning to find us gone," Frank remarked.

"And as they've got sentries posted, like as not, to give the alarm, if we try to slip away, up or down the shore, they'll never be able to guess what became of us all," Jack gave as his opinion, at which they all laughed again, feeling in a particularly merry mood.

Then up came Mate Plunkett, waving some yellow papers in his hand.

"Found 'em all right, Captain Bill!" he called out; "a little tough lookin', to be sure; but wuth the same money to me, all the same. And now, lads, if so be you're ready to quit this old wreck, say the word, and we'll clear out."

There was not a single dissenting vote, for while the hulk had offered them an acceptable asylum during the downpour and had proved to be a pretty serviceable fort when Sol Griggs and the men connected with the fake copper mine had attempted to effect their capture, none of them cared to remain a minute longer aboard the old whaler than was necessary.

So they embarked, not finding it very difficult, while the boat lay on the leeward side of the stranded wreck. There was plenty of room for all, just as the men had stated; and after starting away the scouts saw the last of their late refuge merged with the dim outlines of the shore.

Apparently, the miners could not have had any suspicion with regard to what was transpiring; for they made no move. This would make their surprise all the more overpowering, when they found in the morning that their birds had slipped out of the trap.

As all of the boys had often been upon the sea before in various places, there was no particular novelty about their sensations now. The relief from the recent strain was so great that Jimmy insisted on shaking hands all around several times, while they were moving over the mile that separated them from the first of the floating lights, aboard the anchored vessels of the fleet.

"Mebbe, we'll be apt to learn all about this wonderful disappearing fleet now, since we expect to be aboard one of the vessels till we reach some port, where we can telegraph and take a train," Teddy went on to say, as they drew near the *Comet*, looming up out of the night gloom to seaward.

At hearing his remark Mate Plunkett chuckled.

"So that's what they been calling us, is it?" he said, as he shifted his quid to the other cheek. "Well, the way we've been dodgin' around lately, hardly gettin' settled in one anchorage before we'd hear an alarm raised that a cruiser was comin' down on us, so we'd have to skip out like the wind from the three-mile limit, I don't wonder at it."

His words enlightened Ned, who had already been entertaining certain suspicions with regard to the possible explanation of the mystery.

"Are you after whales or seals?" he asked, plainly.

"This time, it's seals we been takin'," replied the mate. "You see, word was fetched to us, some months back, that a whopping big herd of seal had taken to some of these here islands in old Hudson Bay, and there was a rush of vessels to scoop in the same, our hooker along with the rest. I wanted to come up here again, to find out if anything had ever been heard of the poor old *Comet* that I was captain of last season, and so I took the berth of mate to my old friend, Captain Bill, here."

"What luck have you had?" asked Jimmy, eagerly.

"Nawthin' to brag about," came the reply from the old skipper. "I reckons that it'll pay me nigh as well to go back to whalin' agin; and there needn't be sech risks of havin' your ship and cargo confiscated by revenue vessels, as this seal huntin' in Hudson Bay turns out to be."

"But they say it's nearly five hundred miles across in its widest part," Frank broke in with; "and how can Canada claim jurisdiction over an ocean like that? Why, you might as well say, that the Mediterranean was a closed sea."

"That's the trouble," remarked Mate Plunkett; "always has been a pesky lot of

trouble about this here place. Because the two roadways of getting into Hudson Bay happen to be only a certain number of miles wide, Canada has always tried to claim it as her private preserves. Lots of whalers has been chased for darin' to ply their trade in these same waters. Course, they got the right to that three-mile from shore limit, but they want the whole hog up here. We been keepin' a lookout right along, while we sent boats out after the seal. It's late in the season for the work, but skins is so skeerce that we got to take 'em any old time. But the game's hardly worth the candle, and next year you won't see many sealers up this way."

"Then we were in great luck to have you around just when we needed help most," declared Ned; who had already arranged with Captain Bill to carry the whole party down to Halifax, where they could be landed; Francois and the Cree to head for their home country, well paid for their services, and the scouts starting for New York by the first steamer, after wiring to Jack's father about the success of their great expedition.

They were soon aboard the *Grampus*, where their coming was a surprise to the crew. Their astonishment increased, however, when Captain Bill at once gave orders for getting the mudhook up, and leaving their anchorage, as well as preceding all the other sealers on the homeward bound trip.

The boys were willing to put up with such accommodation as might be looked for on board a Yankee sealing vessel. Of course, steam was the propelling power, for sailing vessels belong to a by-gone age; and they were soon making good time out to sea.

That was the last Ned and his chums were likely to ever see of the inhospitable shores of the famous Hudson Bay. They had found it the home of more than one mystery, and would often recall some of their strange experiences there, while investigating the facts connected with the wonderful mining find that had been offered to Jack's father, and other capitalists, for investment.

When the next morning came along, they were out of sight of land, and bowling on at a ten knot an hour clip. Look which way they might, there was nothing but a vast expanse of heaving, tumbling water around them; and yet Mate Plunkett told them they were still in Hudson Bay, and would be for two days, even under the most favorable conditions, such was the extent of the inland sea.

Fortunately, the boys all proved to be good sailors, so that they felt very little bad effects from the motion of the vessel, as she ploughed her way through the rolling billows, throwing the spray high in the air.

It would have been difficult to have found a happier and more care-free group of scouts than those five lads from the great metropolis, as day followed day, and they enjoyed one of the most wonderful voyages they had ever had the good fortune to embark upon.

The weather proved to be splendid, and besides, they were just brimming over with joy, because of the great success that had followed their long journey up into the Far Northland.

It would be weeks before those in charge of the mining enterprise could get any word to the head officials down in New York. Ned expected to be home long before this would come about, for he knew how tedious it was journeying for hundreds of miles over long stretches of waste land, following the course of rivers, and often not covering twenty miles from sun-up to the setting of the same.

During those long sunny days, it was a great pleasure to loll around on deck and watch the wonderful ocean, over which the steam sealer was steadily passing, headed toward Halifax, where the boys meant to disembark.

They discussed every phase of the adventure, and many little matters which had seemed a bit strange were cleared up when they could exchange views. Ned also prepared his full report, showing just what was going on up there in the wilds. He had ample proof of all he meant to relate, even to samples of the real ore, and also of the "salted" stuff that was being placed around the mine, in order to deceive any investigator, should one be sent up to look about.

Of course, Mr. Bosworth would wash his hands of the entire business, and the sly swindlers must look elsewhere, in order to unload their property. The extravagant claims they had made for its richness could not be justified, because it was after all a very mediocre discovery, which would never pay for the working, so far away from railroad facilities.

In due time, they arrived at the Nova Scotia port, where the boys were taken ashore in one of the whale boats, because Captain Bill did not want to risk seizure by entering the place.

They were sorry to have to say good-bye to the friendly skipper and his mate, and promised to let them hear how things turned out.

Once ashore, the first thing Ned did was to send a cable to Mr. Bosworth, telling him not to do anything until they got home, which would be as soon as a ship sailed heading south.

Francois and the old Cree Indian left them here, after being loaded down with presents, in addition to the wages promised them. The boys felt that they could afford to be generous, because, as they had saved the capitalists possibly a million or more dollars, the chances were that quite a tidy sum of money would be coming their way soon, from the grateful gentlemen forming the clique.

The balance of their trip was uneventful, and one day they came in through the new Ambrose Channel and up past Liberty Island, making the steamer's dock just as the sun was sinking behind the distant Jersey hills.

That night there was the greatest talking match at the Bosworth home ever known, and it kept up until nearly midnight. Jimmy had such a share in the telling of their adventures that he was as hoarse as a crow afterwards, and could hardly raise his voice above a whisper.

When the rest of the troop gathered in their lodge-room at the called meeting, and heard a detailed account of what had happened in that far-away land along the shores of the greatest bay in all the world, they united in declaring that Ned and his four chums had done the whole organization credit, in finding out the truth in connection with the supposed mine.

It was voted that the adventure was by long odds one of the most thrilling that had ever come to any scouts belonging to the New York troop; and some of the boys even went so far as to declare that in all probability it would never be equaled. But when they made such a rash prediction as this, they did not know how soon Ned and his chums would be called upon to once more take part in another series of hazards that would try their courage, as few scenes had ever done before; as well as bring to the front their knowledge of woodcraft and other things that scouts should know.

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THE END

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