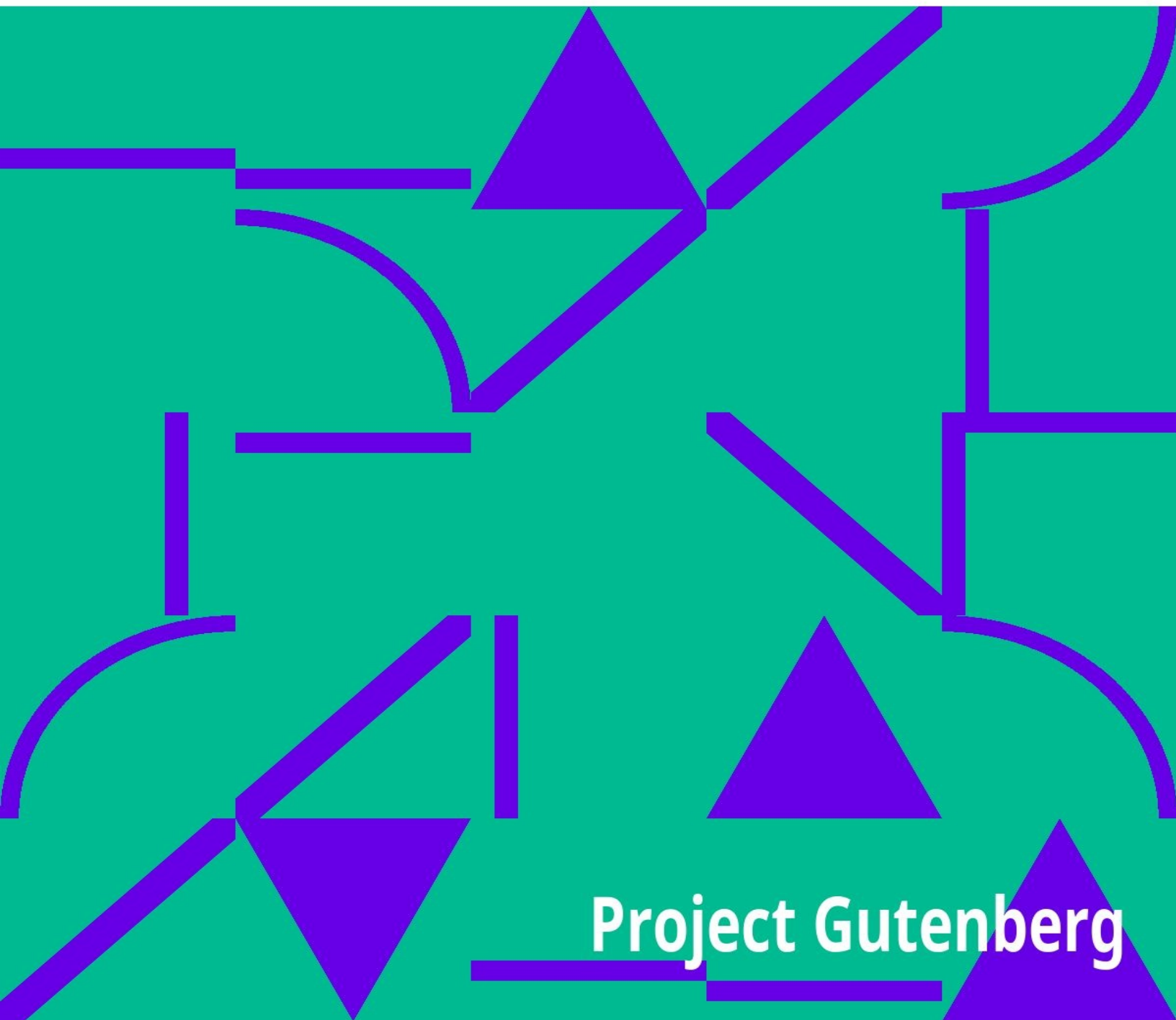


Frank in the Mountains

Harry Castlemon

The background of the lower half of the page is a teal color. Overlaid on this is an abstract pattern of thick purple lines and shapes. These include straight lines of various lengths and orientations, as well as several triangles and curved segments. The pattern is dense and geometric, creating a modern, abstract design.

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THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES.

**FRANK
IN THE MOUNTAINS.**

BY HARRY CASTLEMON,
AUTHOR OF "THE GUN-BOAT SERIES,"
"THE GO-AHEAD SERIES," ETC.

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FRANK IN THE MOUNTAINS.



CHAPTER I.

THE FOOT-RACE.

One sultry afternoon in September, about four weeks after the occurrence of the events we have attempted to describe in the second volume of this series, Frank and Archie found themselves comfortably settled in new quarters, hundreds of miles from the scene of their recent exploits. According to arrangement, they accompanied Captain Porter on his expedition, and in due time encamped a short distance from an old Indian trading-post, in the very heart of the Rocky Mountains.

The journey across the plains, from Fort Yuma on the Colorado to the headwaters of the Missouri, was accomplished without danger or difficulty. The expedition traveled rapidly, and the only incidents that occurred to relieve the monotony of the ride were a buffalo hunt and a chase after a drove of wild horses. On these occasions the cousins gained hearty applause from the trappers—Frank by his skill with the rifle, and Archie by his persevering but unsuccessful efforts to capture one of the wild steeds.

Had a stranger been dropped suddenly into the midst of the scenes with which the boys were now surrounded, he could scarcely have realized that he was miles and miles outside of a fence, and in the heart of a wilderness which but a few years before had been in undisputed possession of savages. The boys could hardly believe it themselves. If the fort, the trappers, and the Indian camp had been removed, Frank and Archie could easily have imagined that they were in the midst of a thriving farming region, and that they had only to cross to the other side of the mountains to find themselves in the streets of a prosperous and growing city. The country looked civilized. There were well-filled barns, rich fields of grain waiting to be harvested, and a herd of cattle standing under the shade of the trees on the banks of the clear dancing trout brook, which flowed by within a stone's throw of the house. There were wagons moving to and fro, between the barns and the fields, flocks of noisy ducks and hens wandering about, and Archie said he was every moment expecting to see a company of school-children come trooping by, with their dinner-baskets on their arms.

There was one thing that did not look exactly right, and that was the farm-house.

It was built of sun-dried bricks, its walls were thick, and provided with loopholes, and around it were the ruins of the palisade that had once served it as a protection against the Indians.

The farm-house was situated in the center of a delightful valley, which was surrounded on all sides by lofty mountains. In one corner of the valley, and in plain view of the house, was Fort Stockton, the trading-post of which we have spoken. Outside the walls a band of Indians, about a hundred in number, was encamped. They had come there to dispose of their furs, and were now having a glorious time among themselves, being engaged in various sports, such as running, wrestling, jumping, riding, and shooting at a mark. In a little grove between the house and the fort the trappers belonging to Captain Porter's expedition had made their camp, and the Captain himself sat on the porch, smoking his long Indian pipe, and conversing with Mr. Brent, the owner of the rancho. These gentlemen were old acquaintances and friends, having formerly been engaged in the fur trade together; and when the expedition made its appearance in the valley, Mr. Brent insisted that the Captain and his young friends should make their headquarters at his house, until they were ready to resume their journey. The boys willingly accepted the invitation—Frank for the reason that there was a well-filled library in the house, and Archie because he wanted to be near a new acquaintance he had made.

Close beside the stairs which led to the porch, Dick and old Bob lay stretched out on their blankets, listening to the yells of the Indians, and watching all that was going on in the camp; and, if one might judge by their looks and actions, they were not at all pleased with the state of affairs. Indeed, they had kept up a constant grumbling ever since they came into the valley, and had repeatedly declared that they had never expected to see the day that Indians would be permitted to come into a white settlement and carry things with so high a hand.

"Times aint as they used to be, Bob," said Dick, knocking the ashes from his pipe, and filling up for a fresh smoke. "When me an' ole Bill Lawson trapped in this yere valley, years ago, I never thought that I should set here, as I do now, an' let a hul tribe of screechin' varlets jump about afore my very eyes, without drawin' a bead on some of 'em. This country is ruined; I can see that easy enough."

"Dick is growling again," said Archie. "If he could have his own way, there wouldn't be an Indian in the world by this time to-morrow."

The cousins occupied an elevated position on the porch, from which they could observe the proceedings in the Indian camp. Near them stood the son of the owner of the rancho, Adam Brent. He was about Archie's age and size, only a little more thick-set and muscular; and with his brown, almost copper-colored complexion, dark eyes, and long black hair, might easily have passed for an Indian. His dress consisted of a hunting shirt of heavy cloth, buckskin leggins and moccasins, and a fur cap, which he wore both summer and winter.

Our heroes had made some alterations in their costumes since we last saw them. They had worn the Mexican dress while in California, because it was particularly adapted to the warm climate; but now they had discarded their wide pants for buckskin trowsers and leggins, although they still held to their sombreros, light shoes, and jackets.

The boys had spent but three days at Mr. Brent's rancho, but they were already famous, for Dick and Bob had never neglected an opportunity to relate the story of their adventures and exploits in California. When they visited the fort, the officers and soldiers looked at them as though they had been some curious wild animals; the trappers belonging to the expedition treated them with a great deal of respect; and their new acquaintance, Adam Brent, acknowledged that he had been greatly mistaken in the opinions he had formed concerning boys from the States. They arose still higher in his estimation before he bade them good-by.

When Archie spoke, Bob and Dick raised themselves on their elbows and looked at him.

"Yes, little un, I am growlin' agin," said the latter; "an' I reckon you'd growl too, if you knowed as much about them Injuns as I do. I'll allow that if I could have my way thar wouldn't be as many of 'em by this time to-morrow as thar are now, but I wouldn't like to sweep 'em out of the world by any onnateral means. I'll tell you what I'd do," he added, pointing to the grove in which the trappers were encamped. "Thar are twenty fine fellers layin' around under them trees, an' I like 'em, 'cause they're honest men, an' hate Injuns as bad as I do. I'd say to 'em: 'Boys, get up an' show them ar' red skins what sort of stuff you're made of!' They'd do it in a minit, an' be glad of the chance; an' thar'd be a thinnin' out of them Injun's ranks that would do your eyes good to look at."

"Perhaps some of you would get thinned out too," said Frank. "Those Indians are all well armed."

"I know that; but I, fur one, would be willin' to run the risk. I don't like to see 'em

playin' about that ar way. When I walk through their camp, it is as hard fur me to keep from pitchin' into one of 'em as it is for a duck to keep out of the water."

"Let's go down there," said Archie. "I'd like to see what is going on."

Frank replied by picking up his hat; while Adam looked toward his father, who shook his head very decidedly. The cousins were a good deal surprised at this, and they had been surprised at the same thing more than once during their short stay at the rancho. Adam was never allowed to go anywhere, unless his father went with him. Mr. Brent kept watch of him night and day, and never appeared to be at ease if his son was out of his sight. He seemed to be afraid that some mischief would befall him unless he kept him constantly under his eye.

"You will have to go without me," said Adam, with some disappointment in his tone.

"Don't you get tired of staying about the house all the time?" asked Archie. "I'd dry up like a mummy, for want of some jolly exercise to stir up my blood."

"I do get very tired of it," replied Adam, "but I can't help it. It would be as much as my life is worth to go out of sight of this house. If I should go down to that camp, I might never come back again. I'll tell you a story before you leave us."

Frank and Archie would have been glad to postpone their visit to the camp, and to listen to the story then and there; but Adam left them, and entered the house. Dick and Bob accompanied them to the fort, and while on the way the boys talked over what Adam had said to them, and speculated upon the causes that rendered it necessary for him to be kept so close a prisoner; but that was a mystery, and would probably remain so until Adam saw fit to enlighten them.

After a few minutes' walk they reached the camp, and seated themselves upon a little knoll, under the shade of a spreading oak, to watch the games. The principal sport, among the younger members of the tribe, seemed to be running foot-races; and, in this, one youthful savage excelled all his companions. He was a tall, active fellow, apparently about Frank's age, as straight as an arrow, and very muscular. He easily distanced every one of his competitors, and finally he stepped up to the visitors, and fastening his eyes upon Frank, asked him if he could run.

"I reckon he can," replied Dick, before Frank could speak. "Fur one of his years he is about the liveliest feller on his legs I ever seed; an' I've met a heap of smart

youngsters in my day, I tell you. You haint got no business with him. He would go ahead of you like a bird on the wing."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the young Indian.

"It's a fact; an' that aint all he can do, nuther. He can not only beat you runnin', but he can out-ride, out-shoot, an' out-jump you; an' he can take your measure on the ground as fast as you can get up."

The Indian listened attentively to all the trapper had to say, and then turned and surveyed Frank from head to foot. A white boy would have thought twice before selecting so formidable an opponent; but the Indian, evidently having great confidence in his powers, stepped back, and motioned to the young hunter to follow him—an invitation which Frank had no desire to accept. He would not have been at all averse to a friendly trial of speed and skill with the young warrior, if Dick had not been so lavish in his praises; but what if he should be beaten after all the complimentary things the trapper had said about him? The Indian had shown himself to be a great braggart. Whenever he won a race, he announced the fact by a series of hideous yells, that were heard all over the camp; and if he should chance to distance Frank, how he would crow over him!

"I believe I won't try it, Dick," said the latter.

"What!" exclaimed old Bob, in great amazement. "Are you goin' to set thar an' take a banter like that, an' from an Injun, too? I haint been fooled in you, have I? Come on, and show the red skins what you can do."

"Yes, go Frank," chimed in Archie, "and take some of the conceit out of that fellow. I know you can beat him. See how impudent he looks!"

Frank glanced toward the Indian, who stood patiently awaiting a response to his challenge, and meeting with a sneering smile, which told him as plainly as words that he was believed to be a coward, he sprang to his feet, and accompanied by his cousin and the trappers, followed the Indian toward the race-course. The latter kept up a loud shouting as he walked along, and Frank noticed, with no little uneasiness, that the Indians, old and young, abandoned their own sports and fell in behind.

"They 're goin' out to see the race," said Dick. "That boaster is tellin' 'em how bad he is goin' to beat you. I reckon he'll be about the wust fooled man them Injuns ever seed."

The prospect of a contest between a white boy and one of their own number, created quite a commotion among the savages; and by the time Frank and his companions reached the race-course, the village had been deserted. Among the spectators were the officers of the fort, and four white trappers who made their home among the Indians. In these last, if Frank had noticed them, he would have recognized old acquaintances, whom he had good reason to remember; but as they did not make themselves very conspicuous, he did not see them. They did not seem to care much about the race, but they appeared to be greatly interested in Dick and Bob, and their young friends. They looked at Frank, then held a whispered consultation, and one of them left his companions, and, mounting a small gray horse, rode off toward the mountains; while the others devoted their entire attention to Archie, whom they watched as closely as ever a cat watched a mouse. If Frank could have seen that horse, it is possible that there would have been an uproar in that camp immediately; and if Archie had known what the men were saying about him, and what they were intending to do with him, he would have wished himself safe back in California again.

When Frank reached the race-course, and looked back at the cloud of spectators that hung upon the outskirts of the village, his heart failed him; but it was only for a moment. It was too late to think of backing out, and with a firm determination to win the race, he began preparing for it by throwing off his hat and jacket, and tying his handkerchief around his waist. At this moment the principal chief of the band appeared upon the ground, and assumed the management of affairs. He was a very dignified looking Indian, stood more than six feet in his moccasins, wore a profusion of feathers in his hair, a red blanket over his shoulders, and was altogether the finest specimen of a savage the boys had ever met. Frank was very much interested in him; but before many hours had passed over his head, he had reason to wish he had never seen him.

"He is my beau ideal of a warrior," whispered Archie. "He looks exactly as I imagined all Indians looked before I knew as much about them as I do now. Isn't he splendid, Dick?"

"Sartin," replied the trapper. "I'd like to meet him alone in the mountains, an' show him how easy I can raise that har of his'n. Now, youngsters, if you are all ready, I am. I see that some of the Injuns are goin' to run the race too—jest to encourage their man, you know—an' I am goin' with you. Do your level best, now."

The race-course was about half a mile long. At the end of it was a tree which the

runners were to double, terminating the race at the place from which they started. This the chief explained to Frank in broken English, and, after placing the rival runners side by side, and glancing up and down the course to satisfy himself that the way was clear, he raised a yell as the signal to start. Before his lips were fairly opened the race was begun.



CHAPTER II.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

No sooner had the chief's yell died away than the whole tribe took it up; and such a din as that which rung in Frank's ears during the next few seconds, he had never heard before. The yells did not express delight, but surprise and indignation; for their youthful champion was being left behind at the very commencement of the race. Frank took the lead at the start. The instant the signal was given, he bounded forward like an arrow from a bow, and was well under way before the Indian had made a step.

"Whoop!" yelled Dick, his stentorian voice ringing out loud and clear above the noise made by the excited savages; "if that wasn't well done may I never draw a bead on an Injun agin." The trapper was following close at Frank's heels, swinging along with an easy, graceful motion, and moving over the ground so lightly that he scarcely seemed to touch it. "Don't be in too big a hurry," said he, as Frank continued to increase his speed. "Save some of your wind for the finish. Come along, thar," he added, looking over his shoulder at the young Indian. "If you can't keep up, come here an' I'll tote you."

The savage, however, was not yet beaten. Quickly recovering from his surprise, and spurred on by the yells of derision which his friends sent after him, he exerted himself to the utmost; and before they reached the end of the course, he had overtaken Frank, and was running side by side with him; but he could not pass him. Indeed, it was quite as much as he could do to keep pace with him; while Frank was running well within himself, with plenty of power held in reserve, and ready, at a word from the trapper, to put on a fresh burst of speed, and leave his rival far in the rear. They reached the tree at the end of the course, swung round it like two flashes of light, and sped along the home stretch with unabated speed, the Indian beginning to feel the effects of his rapid run, and Frank apparently as fresh as when he started.

"He aint half the runner I thought he was," said the trapper, to encourage his young friend. "He's blowing his bellows already. I say, Injun! I reckon you're a little out of practice, aint you? The next time you banter a white feller to race with you, you had better pick out a good hoss to carry you. We haint begun to

run yet. Let out just the least bit, youngster."

Frank "let out" a good deal; and although the Indian made desperate attempts to keep pace with him, he quickly left him behind, and finally flew past the place where the chief was standing, the winner by fifty yards.

"Whoop! Whoop!" shouted Dick, who seemed to be almost beside himself with delight. "I say, chief! If you've got any young fellers in camp, who think themselves something great at ridin', jumpin', throwin' the lasso, an' handlin' the rifle, jest trot 'em out. We've beat you runnin', an' now that we have got our blood up, we are ready for a'most any thing."

The issue of the race greatly astonished the Indians. Frank, as he passed the chief, was welcomed with cheers from the officers of the fort, the trappers, and from Archie, who hurried up to him, and shook his hand as though he had not met him for months; while the defeated runner was greeted with jeers and ridicule. No one, not even Dick, seemed more delighted than the chief. He approached the place where Frank was standing, patted him on the back, and looked at him with as much curiosity and admiration as he would have bestowed upon a steamboat or a locomotive, had one suddenly made its appearance in the valley. "Good boy!" said he, approvingly. "Ought to be Injun."

"He had oughter be a trapper," said old Bob. "A boy who can run like that is wasting his time by living in the States. If you would stay out here among the mountains fur a few years, Master Frank, you might get to be the leader of a band of trappers, or the captain of a wagon train."

Frank, flushed with excitement and exercise, turned to look for his rival. He saw him standing at a little distance from the other members of the tribe, leaning against a tree, with his arms folded, and a fierce scowl on his face. His defeat, and the reception he had met with from his friends, had made him very angry. Now and then some one jeered at him, but the majority of the tribe took no notice of him whatever. They seemed to think that an Indian who would allow a white boy to run faster than he did, was not worth noticing.

"You've give him a big back-set, Frank," said Dick; "an' my advice to you is to keep your eyes open as long as we stay in the valley. You've made an enemy of that feller, an' I know, by the squint in his eye, that he wouldn't think no more of slippin' a ball or arrer into you, than he would of eatin' a piece of jerked buffaler. You see these Injuns are mighty wild yet; they haint been whipped enough to make 'em tame. They seem friendly enough now, but they've no great love fur

white folks; an', if they thought they could do it without bringin' harm to themselves, they would massacree the last one of us afore they are an hour older. I don't like the way they act, any how; an', mark what I say, youngster, we're goin' to have trouble with 'em. Bars an' buffaler! What's up now?"

The trapper was not long in finding out what was up, and neither was Frank. The young Indian, smarting under his defeat, and stung by the ridicule of his friends, had determined to retrieve his lost reputation. If he could not distance the white boy in a foot-race, he could perhaps beat him at something else, and so regain some of the laurels that had been wrested from him. He resolved to try it; and before Frank knew what was going on, the Indian stepped up behind him, and clasping his sinewy arms around his body, lifted him from his feet, and attempted to throw him to the ground. He took Frank by surprise, and caught him in such a manner that his arms were pinned to his side, thus placing him at great disadvantage.

"That's a cowardly way of doing business," shouted Archie, indignantly. "Why don't you give a fellow a fair chance? If he throws you, Frank, get up and try it again, for this won't be a fair test."

"He aint a goin' to be throwed," said the trapper. "That Injun will have to eat a heap of dried buffaler meat afore he can get Frank off his pins. Show him what you can do, youngster."

The young Indian speedily found that he had got his hands full, and that one hundred and sixty pounds of bone and muscle was an exceedingly unhandy weight to manage, especially when backed up by such skill and courage as Frank possessed. The latter positively refused to be thrown. The Indian, although he exerted himself to the utmost, could not force him from an upright position, for Frank, like a cat, always fell feet foremost. The excitement ran high as the young athletes struggled over the ground. Yells of delight and encouragement from the friends of both parties arose in deafening chorus, and Indians, officers, and trappers pushed and elbowed one another to obtain a position from which they could view the contest, which was decided in Frank's favor much more easily and quickly than the foot-race. After a few ineffectual attempts, he succeeded in freeing his arms; and catching the Indian around the body, broke his hold in an instant, and sent him headlong to the ground. The ease with which it was done astonished every one who witnessed it, and had a very chilling effect upon the ardor of the Indian, who jumped to his feet and stole off toward the village, looking exceedingly humiliated and crestfallen.

Frank, although he was proud of his victories, as any other boy would have been under the same circumstances, was almost sorry that he had allowed himself to be persuaded into contesting the Indian's claims to superiority. The expression he saw on the face of his rival told him that he was almost beside himself with fury; and Frank did not relish the thought that any one, even an Indian, whom he never expected to see again, should be angry at him for any thing he had done. He would have been astonished had he known what was to be the result of this morning's work. He was destined to see and know a great deal more of his rival, and also of the chief, whose interest in him now seemed to be redoubled; and this foot-race and wrestling match were the preludes to more than one exciting and disagreeable event that was to happen before he saw California again.

"Youngster, I am proud of you," exclaimed Dick, seizing Frank's hand, and giving it a grip and a shake that made the boy double up like a jack-knife; "but I say agin, that you had better keep a good lookout as long as them red skins stay about here. They're mighty onsartin, an' thar's no knowin' what they may do. Let's go home."

Frank put on his jacket and hat, and followed the trappers toward the house. He found Captain Porter, Mr. Brent, and Adam impatiently awaiting his arrival, for they had witnessed the race, and were anxious to know all about it. Dick, as usual, acted as spokesman; and Frank afterward said that he had not the least idea how swift a runner he was, or what an astonishing victory he had won, until he heard the trapper relate the particulars. If one might judge by what he said, Frank could beat any mustang in Mr. Brent's stables.

The listeners were all as highly elated as the trapper. Adam shook his new friend warmly by the hand, and the Captain laughed until he shook all over like a big bowl of jelly. Frank was once more a hero, and during the next half hour the race formed the chief topic of conversation; but even that grew tiresome at last, and the cousins, who could not remain long inactive, strolled off toward the camp of the trappers. Shortly afterward they emerged from the grove, mounted on their horses, and rode toward the mountains.

They had not decided where they were going, or what they would do; but, as far as the sport they were likely to meet with was concerned, that made little difference. In that wilderness they could not run amiss of something to excite and amuse them, let them go in what direction they would. If they preferred quiet sport, there was plenty of it to be found in the brook that ran through the valley. No city fishermen, with their jointed poles and artificial flies, had ever

invaded this retired spot; and having no enemies except an occasional fishhawk, and a few straggling Indians and trappers to contend with, the trout had increased and multiplied until the stream fairly swarmed with them. If they decided to try their rifles, and engage in some more active and exhilarating sport than fishing, there were the mountains, which abounded in game of every description. If they felt so inclined they might, within less than half an hour, make the acquaintance of a panther or two, or renew their intimacy with the grizzlies. Archie did not deny that he was afraid of grizzly bears, and, for that reason, he thought it best to give them and their haunts a wide berth. He picked out a shady spot on the bank of the brook, and said he would stop there and try his luck at fishing; while Frank, who had heard that elk were plenty in the mountains, thought he would ride farther on and see if he could find one. "I shall not go far," said he, "for not being acquainted with the country, I might get lost; and I shouldn't like the idea of being obliged to stay in the mountains all night."

"Nor I either," replied Archie; "and for that reason I am going to stay here, where I know I am safe. Hold on a minute, and see me catch a fish."

Archie dismounted from his horse, and after tying the animal to a neighboring tree, cut from the thicket a long, slender sapling, which, on being stripped of its branches, promised to answer the purpose for which it was intended, and to pull out a trout as well as any twenty-five-dollar rod. Then he produced a fish-line from his pocket, and in a short time his pole was rigged. The bait was dropped carefully over the bank, and no sooner had it touched the water than it was seized by a ravenous trout, which found itself struggling on the ground in a twinkling.

"He is rather larger than those we used to catch about Lawrence, isn't he?" said Frank. "Now, if I am fortunate enough to knock over an elk, we'll have a supper such as people in the cities do not often enjoy."

Archie, intent upon securing his fish before it floundered back into the water, did not reply; and when he looked up again, his cousin was out of sight.

Frank urged Roderick into a gallop, and soon had left the valley behind, and was threading his way through a thickly-wooded ravine that led into the mountains. Here he became more cautious in his movements, and allowed his horse to walk leisurely along, while he peered through the trees on every side of him, in the hope of meeting with one of the numerous elk which every evening descended from the mountains into the valley to crop the grass and slake their thirst at the

brook. His chances for a shot at one of these animals would have been greatly increased if he had left his horse behind; but grizzlies were plenty, and Frank did not like the idea of encountering one while on foot. On this particular evening, however, the mountains seemed to be deserted. Not a living animal of any description did he see, during the hour and a half that he continued on his course up the ravine; and becoming discouraged at last, he turned Roderick about and rode toward the rancho.

"I wish I could see just one squirrel," said Frank, who, like all young hunters, considered it his duty to empty his gun at something before he returned home. "What's that?"

A slight movement in the bushes in advance of him attracted his attention; then a twig snapped behind him, and a yell, so sudden and appalling that it made Frank's blood run cold, echoed through the ravine; and before he could look about him to see what was the matter, he was pulled from his saddle and thrown to the ground. In a twinkling his rifle was torn from his grasp, his hands bound behind his back, and he was helped to his feet to find himself surrounded by a party of Indians in war costume.



CHAPTER III.

FRANK LEARNS SOMETHING.

Frank was as frightened as a boy could be. Amazed at the suddenness of the assault, he gazed in stupid wonder at the savages, winked his eyes hard to make sure that he was not dreaming, and looked again. But there was no dreaming about it—it was all a reality; and as he stood there powerless among his captors, and looked at their glittering weapons, and painted, scowling faces, all the stories he had heard the trappers relate of their experience among the Indians, came fresh to his memory. He recognized one of the savages, and that was the chief. His blanket and buckskin hunting shirt were gone, he wore the tomahawk and scalping knife in his belt, his face was covered with paint, and altogether he looked fierce enough to frighten any boy who had never seen Indians in war costume before.

Frank took these things in at a glance; and while he was wondering what object the Indians could have in view in capturing him, and what they intended to do with him, he was trying hard to summon all his courage to his aid, and to appear as unconcerned as possible. If there had been any hostile Indians in that part of the country, he could have understood the matter; but he had been told that they were all friendly.

"Look here, chief," said he, "I'd like to know what this means. You have made a mistake."

The savage paid no more attention to his words than if he had not spoken at all. He gave a few orders in his native tongue to his companions, two of whom placed Frank on Roderick's back and held him there, while a third seized the horse by the bridle, and followed after the chief, who led the way down the ravine. How far they went, or in what direction, Frank could not have told, for his mind was in too great confusion. He was trying to arrive at some satisfactory explanation concerning the Indians' conduct. He had expected that the first action on their part would be to pull his hair, strike at him with their knives and tomahawks, point their guns and arrows at him, and try, by every means in their power, to frighten him. That was the way they always served their prisoners; but thus far he had no reason to complain of their treatment. He wished the chief

would explain matters to him, and thus relieve him of suspense.

At the end of half an hour, during which time Frank made several unsuccessful attempts to induce some of the Indians to talk to him, the chief emerged from the ravine, and led the way into a little valley, similar to the one in which Mr. Brent's rancho was located. The sight that here met Frank's gaze astonished him. The valley was filled with lodges, and Frank saw more Indians at the single glance he swept about the camp than he had ever seen before in all his life. Children were playing about in front of the lodges, the women were engaged in various occupations, and the braves, all of whom were in their war-paint, smoked their pipes, and lounged in the shade. Frank was greatly relieved to find that no one noticed the chief and his party. When he first came in sight of the village, he had screwed up all his courage again, expecting no very friendly reception. Bob and Dick had told him that when they were carried into an Indian camp as prisoners, every man, woman, and child turned out to meet them, and to amuse themselves by beating them with switches and clubs; but nothing of the kind was attempted now. Those who looked at Frank at all, merely took one glance at him; and the most of them did not even look up when he passed.

The chief walked straight through the village, and stopped in front of a large wigwam that stood a little apart from the others. At a sign from him, Frank was pulled from his horse, and after his hands had been unbound, a corner of the wigwam, which served as a door, was lifted up, and he was pushed under it. Then the door was dropped to its place, and Frank heard the Indians moving off with Roderick.

The light was all shut out from the inside of the lodge, and as soon as the prisoner's eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he began to look about him. The lodge was about fifteen feet in diameter, and was built of neatly-dressed skins, supported on a frame-work of saplings. Weapons of all kinds were suspended from the walls, the chiefs blanket, bridle, spear, and head-dress occupied one corner, and several buffalo robes, which doubtless served him for a bed, were piled in another. There was no one in the lodge, and Frank, being no longer compelled to wear the appearance of unconcern he had assumed while in the presence of the Indians, gave full vent to his pent-up feelings. His forced calmness forsook him, a feeling of desolation such as he had never before experienced came over him, and covering his face with his hands, he staggered toward the buffalo robes, and threw himself upon them.

"If I only knew what they intend to do with me," sobbed Frank, "I should not

feel so badly about it. If they have made up their minds to tie me to the stake, or to compel me to run the gauntlet, why don't they tell me so, and give me a chance to prepare for it? Can it be possible that that race and wrestling match have any thing to do with my capture? The Indians seemed friendly enough when I first visited their camp at the trading-post, and I'd like to know what they mean by taking me prisoner when I wasn't doing any thing to them! What could have induced them to change their camp so suddenly, any how? A few hours ago there were not more than a hundred in the band; now there must be five times as many, and the braves are all in war-paint, too? I can't understand it."

A step outside the lodge, and a rustling among the skins which formed the door, aroused Frank, and he once more made a strong effort to compose himself. The door was raised, and a face appeared at the opening—a dark, scarred, scowling face, which was almost concealed by a fur cap and thick bushy whiskers. Frank was thunderstruck. He leaned forward to examine the face more closely, and then his heart seemed to stop beating, and with a cry of alarm he sprang to his feet. As much as he feared the Indians, he feared this man more.

"Ah, my young cub, are you thar?" growled the visitor, as he stepped into the lodge.

"*Black Bill!*" exclaimed Frank, in dismay.

"Ay! That's what they call me. 'Member me, don't you? Heered all about me, most likely, from ole Bob and Dick Lewis. They didn't tell you nothin' good of me, I reckon."

Frank tried to speak, but he seemed to have lost all control over his tongue. He had trembled every time he thought of the night he had passed in the camp of the outlaws, and he had hoped that he should never meet them again; but here he was, face to face with one of them, when he least expected it.

"I didn't kalkerlate on seein' you agin," said the outlaw, with a savage smile, "an' I aint agoin' to say that I'm glad to see you now, 'cause I aint. I hate any body that's a friend to Bob an' Dick, an' if I could have my way I'd split your wizen fur you in a minit. But you b'long to the chief, an' I don't reckon he would see harm come to you."

"To the chief!" repeated Frank, drawing a long breath as if a heavy load had been removed from his shoulders. It was a great satisfaction to him to know that this man could not do as he pleased with him.

"That's what I said," replied the visitor.

"But what does he want to do with me? What is his object in taking me prisoner?" asked Frank.

"He's goin' to make an Injun of you."

"What! I—you don't mean——"

"Sartin I do. It's a fact. He's goin' to take you into the tribe an' make an Injun of you," said the outlaw, in a louder tone.

"And never let me go home again, but keep me here always?" demanded Frank, growing more and more astonished.

"Exactly!"

"Well, he can't do it—he shan't. I don't want to be adopted into the tribe, and I won't be, either."

"I don't reckon you can help yourself, can you?" said the outlaw, with a grin. "You see, the chief used to have a son just about your age—an' a smart, lively young Injun he was, too; but he was killed a little while ago in a scrimmage with the Blackfeet, an' the chief wants another. You're an amazin' chap fur runnin' an' wrastlin' fur one of your years, an' that's the reason he picked you out."

"I don't care if it is; he sha'n't have me. I won't stay here and be his son. Why, I never heard of such a thing. Why don't he select some Indian boy?"

"That's his business, an' not mine. But if you only knowed it, youngster, it's lucky fur you that the chief tuk sich a monstrous fancy fur you, 'cause if you had stayed at the fort, you would have been massacred with the rest."

"Massacred!" echoed Frank. "Killed!"

"Yes; killed an' scalped. You'll hear of some fun at that tradin'-post afore you are two days older, an' then, if you go down thar, you won't see nothin' but the ashes of it. It would have been done last night if that ar fur trader had kept away from thar. We had to send off arter more help. I don't mind tellin' you this, 'cause 'taint no ways likely that you'll ever have a chance to blab it. But I come in here to ax you about Adam Brent. Where does he sleep?"

Frank did not reply; indeed, he scarcely heard the question, his mind was so busy

with what the outlaw had said to him. He knew now where all those Indians came from, and why they were there. The information he had received almost paralyzed him, and he shuddered when he pictured to himself the scenes of horror that would be enacted in that quiet valley, if the savages were permitted to carry out their designs. What would become of his cousin, of the trappers, of Captain Porter, and of himself? Of course his friends would all be included in the massacre, and he, having no one to look to for help, would be compelled to drag out a miserable existence among those savages. But Frank determined that the massacre should not take place. At the risk of his own life he would do something to stop it. His courage always increased in proportion to the number of obstacles he found in his way, and the danger he was in, and now he was thoroughly reckless and determined.

"I axed you do you know where Adam Brent sleeps?" said the outlaw, who had grown tired of waiting for an answer to his question.

"He sleeps in the house, of course," replied Frank.

"Wal, I reckon I knowed that much afore you told me; but what part of the house?"

"I can't tell. I haven't taken the trouble to inquire into Mr. Brent's family matters."

"I'll allow that you tell the truth thar; 'cause if you had axed any questions, you would know that Brent is my own brother, an' that Adam is my nephew. Aint I a nice lookin' uncle?"

"I don't believe a word of it. What do you want with Adam?"

"I reckon that's my business, aint it? I only axed you where he sleeps 'cause I've got something to say to him to-night, an' I shouldn't care to have his father hear me blunderin' about the house. I've got a leetle business with ole Bob Kelly, too."

"If you will take my advice you will let him alone," said Frank. "Dick Lewis is his chum now."

"That don't make no sort of difference to me. I'm half hoss an' half buffaler, with a leetle sprinklin' of catamounts, grizzly bars, an' sich like varmints throwed in. I'm one of them kind of fellers as don't stand no nonsense from nobody; an' I'm the wust man in a rough-an'-tumble this side of the States. I aint afeered of Dick Lewis."

Having said this, the outlaw took his departure, and Frank, who had gone through this interview like one in a dream, again seated himself on the buffalo robes to think over what he had heard, and to determine upon some course of action. He had little imagined that he would ever be placed in a situation like this, and he did not wonder now at the hatred which Dick and old Bob cherished toward the Indians. Here they were, awaiting the arrival of reinforcements, and preparing for a descent on the fort; and there were his friends in the valley, all unconscious of the danger hanging over them. There had been no Indian depredations in that section for a long time, and the officers of the fort and the settlers had been lulled into a feeling of security that promised to be fatal to them. They did not dream of such a thing as an attack; the fortifications had not been kept in a state of defense; and unless they were warned of their danger, the success of the Indians would be complete.

"Oh, if they only knew what is going on here!" cried Frank, springing to his feet, and pacing restlessly up and down the lodge. "If I could see them for just one minute, wouldn't these savages meet with a warm reception when they make the attack on the fort? But how will they find it out unless I carry them the information; and how can I effect my escape, surrounded as I am by enemies?"

This thought made Frank almost beside himself. It rendered him desperate; and he resolved that if he could see the least chance for escape, he would make the attempt at once—that very moment. There was not a single instant to be lost, for there was no telling when the Indians would be ready to make the attack. He rushed to the door, tore it open, and looked out. The first object that met his gaze was a warrior standing close beside the lodge, leaning on his spear. He was undoubtedly a sentry, and had been placed there to watch the prisoner. Frank took one glance at him, and then dropped the door to its place, and hurrying to the other side of the lodge pulled up the skins and looked under them. He saw now what he had not noticed before—that the lodge in which he was confined was in the very center of the village. The nearest wigwams were pitched about fifty yards from it, leaving a clear space on each side that was devoted to the holding of councils and dances. Frank knew that he could never cross that space in broad daylight without being discovered and recaptured, and with a look of disappointment on his face, he dropped the skins and crawled back to his seat on the buffalo robes.



CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAPPER A PRISONER.

If Frank was disappointed in one respect, he was greatly encouraged in another. He had discovered something that went a long way toward strengthening his hopes of escape, and that was that the Indians were not watching him very closely. The guard at the door had not noticed him when he looked out, and this induced the belief that the chief had placed him there simply to keep Frank from roaming about the village, and not because he feared that his prisoner might attempt to escape. That idea had probably never occurred to him. But the chief did not know much about boys, especially such boys as Frank Nelson. He had yet to learn that the young hunter possessed a goodly share of courage and determination, as well as speed and activity.

Frank lay there on the pile of buffalo robes until dark, and then the door opened, and an old Indian woman came in with a small camp-kettle, which she placed upon the ground in the middle of the lodge, and went out again. The contents of the kettle were smoking hot, and the odor that filled the lodge reminded Frank that he had not lost his appetite, and that he was as hungry as a wolf, in spite of all the excitements of the afternoon. An examination of the kettle showed that it contained buffalo meat. Taking his knife from his pocket, Frank seated himself on the ground and began his supper. It was not quite as good as some he had eaten at his quiet little home on the banks of Glen's Creek, but the buffalo meat was nourishing, and when the last vestige of it had disappeared, Frank arose to his feet, put his knife into his pocket, and declared that he felt better.

"I could run, now, if these Indians would only give me half a chance," said he, to himself. "I may yet show them what I can do, unless they station a sentry at the back of this lodge. Now if I only had a drink of water!"

As Frank said this he went to the door again, and there was the guard, standing in the same position in which he had seen him before, leaning on his spear, and gazing off into vacancy. Frank did not believe that he had moved a muscle during the last two hours.

"I say, old fellow!" he exclaimed, "is there any water about here?" Then, fearing

that the savage might not understand him, he made a motion with his hand as though he were drinking from a cup.

The guard did not reply, but beckoned to the prisoner to follow him, and led the way through the village toward the ravine from which the chief and his party had entered the valley. Frank, ever on the alert, exulted at this. He knew that the guard was conducting him to a spring, and he sincerely hoped that it would prove to be outside the village. In that event, one Indian, even though he was armed with a spear, could not prevent him from making at least an attempt at escape. If he could get but two feet the start of the sentry, he believed that he could elude him in the darkness. Unfortunately for the success of these plans, however, the spring was not outside the village. It was but a short distance from the place where he had been confined, and all around it were lodges, beside which stalwart warriors lay upon their blankets, smoking their pipes. The least attempt at escape would have brought them around him like a cloud of mosquitoes. He must wait until some more favorable opportunity.

Frank knelt down beside the spring, and took a long and refreshing drink, and then quietly followed the guard back to his prison. He looked into the wigwams as he passed along, and now that he had in some measure recovered his usual spirits, he began to be interested in what was going on around him; but he did not see any thing to induce him to give up home and friends, and turn Indian. The idea was a novel one to him, and he could have smiled at it, had it not been for the preparations for battle that were every-where visible in the camp—the horses saddled and waiting, the weapons hung upon the poles of the lodge, where they could be seized at a moment's warning, and the braves in war-paint, ready to move at the word. Frank noticed these things, and thought of his friends at the fort. If the expected reinforcements arrived in time, the savages might make the attack that very night.

When Frank found himself once more inside his prison, he stretched himself on the buffalo robes, and waited impatiently for the Indians to go to sleep. How wearily the hours dragged by, and how Frank alternated between hope and fear, can be imagined better than we can describe it. Sometimes he looked upon his escape as an assured thing. When the Indians were all asleep, it would be a matter of but little difficulty for him to creep out of the lodge, and make his way through the village to the ravine. It was easy enough for him to sit there on the buffalo robes and think about it, but when he imagined himself *doing* it, and pictured to himself the dangers in his way, his hopes fell again; and then, had it not been for the remembrance of what the outlaw had told him, he would have

been tempted to abandon all thoughts of escape. If it would have required all the skill and cunning that Dick and Bob possessed to outwit the savages in a case like this, what could an inexperienced boy of sixteen do?

Frank thought the Indians did not intend to go to sleep at all that night. He heard them moving about until a late hour, and it was midnight before the silence that reigned in the camp told him that if he ever intended to carry out the plans he had determined upon, the time had come to do it. His heart beat fast and furiously as he pulled off his shoes, and moved noiselessly across the lodge toward the corner in which the chief had deposited his blanket and spear. He was very deliberate in his movements, and there was need of all his caution; for the guard stood almost within reach of him, and the slightest noise inside the lodge would have brought him in there immediately. Frank threw the chief's blanket over his shoulders, put on the head-dress, picked up the spear, and crept cautiously across the lodge. He threw himself upon his hands and knees, and after listening a moment to assure himself that the guard had not been alarmed, he lifted up the skins which formed the wall of the lodge, and looked out. The camp was as silent as though it had been deserted. On every hand he could see the smoldering embers of the fires by which the savages had cooked their suppers, but not a living being was in sight. Drawing in a long breath he crawled slowly out of the lodge, and after lingering a moment to arrange the blanket about his shoulders, he grasped the spear firmly in his hand, and stole away into the darkness, looking back now and then to make sure that he was keeping the lodge between him and the guard. An intervening row of wigwams finally shut his prison from his sight, and Frank began to congratulate himself on having accomplished the most difficult part of his undertaking.

"When the chiefs reinforcements arrive, and he makes the attack on the fort, and finds the trappers and soldiers ready to receive him, he will wish he had taken a little more pains to watch me," thought Frank, as, with a step that would not have awakened a cricket, he made his way through the village toward the ravine. "If Dick and Bob had been his prisoners he would, no doubt, have kept them bound hand and foot; but I'm a boy, and he thought he had nothing to fear from me. I'll teach him something."

The tall figure of an Indian glided suddenly across the path in front of him, and interrupted his soliloquy. Frank's first impulse was to throw down the spear and blanket, and take to his heels; but remembering in time that he was personating an Indian, and that every thing depended upon his getting out of the village before the guard at the chief's wigwam discovered his flight, he straightened up

and boldly approached the Indian, who merely turned his head and looked at Frank, and then disappeared among the lodges. That was another danger passed; and commending the forethought that had induced him to use the chief's clothing as a disguise, he kept on with increased speed toward the mountains, which, to his impatient eye, seemed as far off as when he left his prison. But he was gradually nearing them all the while, and when the last lodge had been left behind, and was concealed from his view by the thick shrubbery and trees that lined the banks of the ravine, his fear and trembling vanished, and it was all he could do to refrain from giving vent to his jubilant feelings. He sat down on the ground to put on his shoes, which he had been thoughtful enough to bring with him, then took the blanket under his arm, and never stopping to think that there might be Indians in front of him as well as behind, he broke into a run and flew down the ravine like the wind.

"I haven't done much to brag of, seeing that I was not very closely watched," thought he, "but still I think I have played those savages a pretty sharp trick. Now, if I only had Dick's speed and experience!"

If Frank had possessed the trapper's experience, he would have been much more cautious in his movements, and might, perhaps, have succeeded in reaching the valley in safety. He would have curbed his eagerness which proved fatal to his hopes. There was a party of Indians coming up the ravine with a prisoner; and their quick ears caught the sound of Frank's footsteps long before he came in sight. The prisoner knew who it was approaching at that reckless gate, and so did the Indians, who, at a sign from their leader, quickly concealed themselves beside the path; and when Frank was on the point of passing their ambush, a figure which seemed to rise out of the ground clasped him in its strong arms, and he was a prisoner again almost before he knew it.

The first Indian who confronted him, as he was lifted to his feet, was the chief, who astonished his prisoner by the reception he gave him. He seemed somewhat surprised to see him there, but he did not appear to be angry. He looked at the blanket and spear, then at Frank, and giving him a hearty slap on the back said, approvingly:

"Good boy! Make fine Injun, some day!"

Frank, although his face was very pale, and he was trembling in every limb, was not as badly frightened now as when he first found himself in the power of the savages. For himself he was not at all concerned, for he did not stand in any fear

of bodily harm; but there were his friends in the valley, whom he was so anxious to warn of their danger! It was of them he thought, and not of himself.

"I say, youngster," said a cheery, familiar voice, close at his elbow, "you've got a few things to larn yet, haint you? When a feller is in an Injun country he can't go tearin' through the woods as you did a minute ago. I can't shake hands with you, 'cause I am tied hard and fast."

"Dick Lewis!" cried Frank, in alarm. He was too astonished to speak again immediately. The redoubtable trapper was always turning up most unexpectedly, and generally, too, at just the moment when his services were most needed; but on this occasion he was not in a condition to assist his young friend. For the first time in his life Frank was not glad to see Dick. He would rather have had him a hundred miles from there, for he knew that the treatment the trapper would receive at the hands of his savage foes would be very different from his own.

"Well, what are you doing here?" asked Frank, at length.

"I might ask you the same question, I reckon," replied Dick. "What business had you to go roamin' off alone in the mountains, arter I had told you to keep your eyes open fur these Injuns? I knowed what was up the minute Archie come home without you; an' me an' Bob set out to find you. Bob's old legs tuk him safe out of danger, but I was ketched. I am here 'cause I can't help myself."

"But, Dick, does Captain Porter know that these Indians have suddenly turned hostile?"

"Turned!" exclaimed Dick. "They've been hostile ever since they was born. Of course he knows it. Come up closer, youngster, so that I can whisper to you, an' I'll tell you something."

While this conversation was going on, the prisoners were being conducted up the ravine toward the camp. The chief led the way, two Indians, who stepped exactly in his tracks, followed close at his heels, Frank and Dick, who walked side by side, came next, and two more Indians brought up the rear. The savages made no attempt to restrain their prisoners from talking, and Frank was glad it was so.

"The Cap'n didn't like the way these Injuns acted this mornin', no more'n I did," continued the trapper, in a low tone. "He spoke to the major, an' told him that if he knowed when he was well off he would look out fur things a leetle; an' the ole feller tuk the hint an' set his soldiers to work on the fort. Thar's too many ole

trappers down in that valley, an' they can't be tuk by surprise."

"You don't know how overjoyed I am to hear that," whispered Frank, who now breathed more freely than at any time since he had fallen into the hands of the savages. "Then Archie will be safe, won't he?"

"Sartin he will, unless he goes about pokin' his nose into danger like he allers does. He's jest spilin' to have his har raised, Archie is, an' it was all me an' ole Bob could do to keep him from comin' with us when we set out to look fur you. The chief's goin' to make an Injun of you, I can see that easy enough."

"That's what Black Bill says."

"Black Bill!" echoed the trapper. "Is he about here? Wal, if I don't settle with him ole Bob will, so it's all the same. I kinder thought, by the squint in the chief's eye, that it would have been better fur you if you had kept away from that camp," he continued. "Injuns don't giner'ly take sich a monstrous shine to white boys fur nothing. It won't be long afore you'll have a chance to see how the red skins treat their prisoners. Mebbe the chief will get up a show fur you to-night."

"A show!" repeated Frank.

"Yes. How would you like to see me tied to the stake, or runnin' the gauntlet?"

No one, to have heard the trapper speak these words, would have imagined that he had any fears that such would be his fate; but Frank knew that he expected nothing else.

"The chief is awful mad at me," continued Dick. "Thar were 'leven men in his party, when me an' ole Bob first diskivered 'em, an' now you don't see but four, do you? Thar's four more behind us, bringin' up the three that me an' Bob rubbed out. I'll have to stand punishment fur that; but I don't reckon that burnin' me or slashin' me with tomahawks will bring to life all the braves I have sent to the happy huntin' grounds."

A long, mournful yell from the chief interrupted the conversation. Frank looked up and saw the village in plain sight. The chief had given that yell to warn the camp of his arrival. Dick called it the "death-whoop," and said that one object of it was to inform the warriors that some of those, who had gone out on the scout with the chief, had fallen by the hands of their enemies. Presently an answer came echoing through the woods, then another, and another; and when they emerged from the ravine, Frank found the village, which had been so quiet when

he left it but a few minutes before, alive with men, women, and children, who seemed wild with excitement and rage. When their eyes rested on the trapper, they gave utterance to savage yells of exultation, and almost before Frank was aware of it, he was standing alone, gazing after a crowd of struggling, frantic Indians, who were bearing his fellow prisoner toward the chief's wigwam. Tomahawks and knives were flourished in the air close to Dick's face, arrows and rifles were pointed at his breast, spears were thrust at him, and now and then hickory switches in the hands of those behind him, fell with stinging force on his head and shoulders. Before he was carried out of sight, his face was bleeding from more than one wound; but Frank looked in vain for any expression of fear. The trapper was apparently as calm and self-possessed as he would have been had he at that moment been smoking his pipe on the porch of Mr. Brent's rancho. He never winced when the weapons of his savage foes passed within an inch of his person—indeed, one would have thought, from his manner, that he did not see them all. Never before had Frank witnessed such an exhibition of courage and fortitude.

When the trapper had disappeared from his view, Frank, who had stood rooted to the ground, horrified by the scene he was witnessing, awoke to a sense of his own situation, and began to look about him. Although there were Indians on all sides of him, no one seemed to take the least notice of him. His hands were tied behind his back, but he could move about as he pleased, for his feet were free. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, he followed in the direction the crowd had gone; and when he arrived at the chief's lodge he found that some unusual event was about to take place. The yells were hushed, and most of the Indians were gathered in a body on one side of the council ground, in the center of which two or three warriors were busy kindling a fire. Upon looking around for the trapper, he discovered him at the opposite side of the ground, standing with his back to a post, to which he was securely bound. Near him stood a couple of armed Indians; and when Frank approached his friend, they motioned him angrily to retire.

"Oh, don't I wish that my hands were unbound, and that I could have the free use of my knife for just one minute?" groaned Frank, as he reluctantly retraced his steps toward the chief's wigwam. "Dick wouldn't be in that fix long. He has saved me more than once, and I would risk any thing, if I could do as much for him now. Where is Bob, that he don't bring the trappers up here and attack these Indians?"

Frank stood off by himself and watched the preparations going on around him,

and wondered what would be the next torture the savages would devise for their prisoner. He could not have been more terrified if he had occupied Dick's place, and had been every moment expecting to hear the death sentence passed upon him. He did not like the deliberation and gravity with which the Indians conducted their proceedings, nor the scowls of mingled hatred and triumph which they threw across the council-ground toward the helpless trapper. He thought things looked exceedingly dark for his friend.

The huge fire that had been kindled by the warriors was well under way at last, and a dozen chiefs walked out from among their companions, and seated themselves in a circle around it. The first business in order was smoking the pipe of peace. The pipe was brought in by an aged warrior, who lighted it with a brand from the fire, and was about to present it to the principal chief, when the proceedings were interrupted by the arrival of a party of four men, who walked up to the fire without ceremony, and seated themselves near it. Frank recognized them at a glance; and that same glance showed him that they had not come alone. They had brought a prisoner with them, and he was standing near the trapper, with his hands bound behind his back.



CHAPTER V.

ARCHIE FINDS A NEW UNCLE.

For an hour and a half after Frank left him, Archie walked up and down the banks of the brook, pulling out trout of a size and weight that astonished him. When nearly two hundred splendid fish had been placed upon his string, he put his line into his pocket, leaned his pole against a tree where he knew he could find it again if he should happen to want it, mounted his horse, and rode slowly toward the rancho, keeping a good lookout on every side for his cousin, and wondering what had become of him. It was getting late. The sun had sunk below the western mountains, the shadows of twilight were creeping through the valley, and Archie began to fear that Frank was in a fair way to pass the night among the grizzlies. He did not find him at the rancho; Adam had not seen him, and neither had Dick, who, upon finding that Archie had returned alone, pulled off his sombrero, and scratched his head furiously, as he always did when any thing troubled him.

"Where's the boy that fit that ar Greaser?" he asked, with some anxiety in his tone.

"I am sure I don't know," was the reply. "He went into the mountains to hunt up an elk for supper, and I haven't seen him since."

"The keerless feller!" exclaimed the trapper.

"He'll have to camp out all night if he doesn't come back pretty soon," continued Archie. "Won't he have a glorious time among the bears and panthers? I wish I had gone with him, for I know he will be lonesome."

"You can thank your lucky stars that you stayed at home. Thar's a heap wusser things in the world than grizzlies an' painters."

The tone in which these words were spoken made Archie uneasy; and when Dick drew old Bob and the Captain off on one side, and held a whispered consultation with them, he began to be really alarmed. He had never seen the trapper act so strangely. Heretofore, when Frank had got into trouble, Dick had always said: "I jest know he'll come out all right;" but he did not say so now.

Archie could see that there was something in the wind that he did not understand.

While the Captain and his men were conversing, a trapper galloped up to the porch, and hurriedly ascending the steps, communicated in a whisper what was plainly a very exciting piece of news, for an expression of anxiety overspread the Captain's face, old Bob thumped the floor energetically with the butt of his rifle, and Dick once more pulled off his sombrero and dug his fingers into his hair. Almost at the same moment a second horseman approached from another direction, and he had something to tell that increased the excitement. The Captain listened attentively to his story, and then gave a few orders in a low tone to Dick and Bob, who shouldered their rifles, sprang down the steps, and stole off into the darkness like two specters. They had not made many steps before Archie was at their heels.

"Now, then, you keerless feller, jest trot right back to the house agin," said Dick.

"If you are going out to look for Frank I want to go too," replied Archie. "I can keep up with you."

"Go back," repeated the trapper; "you'll only be in the way. Thar's goin' to be queer doin's in this yere valley, an' you'll see enough to make you glad to stay in the house."

"What's up here, any how?" asked Archie, as he mounted the steps that led to the porch where Adam Brent was waiting for him.

"Indians," was the reply.

"Indians!" repeated Archie, who now thought he understood what the trapper meant when he said that there were things in the world more to be dreaded than bears and panthers. "You surely don't expect trouble with them?"

"That's what they say," replied Adam, coolly. "I heard Captain Porter tell father that they would be down on us, like a hawk on a Junebug, before we see the sun rise again."

"Well, I—I—*Eh!*" stammered Archie, almost paralyzed by the information.

"Oh, it's the truth. In the first place, they changed their camp very suddenly this afternoon, and without any cause; and since then they haven't showed themselves in the valley. That's a bad sign. When you know there are Indians

about you, and you can't see them, look out for them, for they mean mischief. But when they are all around you, and you have to watch them closely to keep them from stealing every thing you've got, there's nothing to fear. In the next place, one of Captain Porter's trappers, who was out hunting this afternoon, said that he crossed the trail of a war party, numbering at least five hundred men. Another trapper brought the information that there is a large camp of Indians about ten miles back in the mountains, and that the braves are all in war-paint. Father says it is plain enough to him that they have determined upon a general massacre of all the settlers in the country. There'll be fun in this valley before morning, and you'll hear sounds and see sights you never dreamed of."

Archie was astounded—not only at the news he had heard, but also at the free and easy manner in which it was communicated. He was trembling in every limb with suppressed excitement and alarm; and here was this new friend of his standing with his hands in his pockets, and talking about a fight with the Indians—which would be delayed but a few hours at the most—with as much apparent indifference and unconcern as if it had been some holiday pastime. But then Adam was accustomed to such things. The house in which he lived has been used as a fort in days gone by, and when trouble was expected with the savages, the settlers, for miles around, would flock into it for protection. It had withstood more than one siege, and Adam, before he was strong enough to lift a rifle to his shoulder, had heard the war-whoop echoing through the valley, and had molded bullets and cut patching for the men who were standing at his father's side, defending the house against the assaults of the savages. Archie could have told of things that would have made Adam's hair stand on end. He had ridden in the cars and on steamboats; and he had held the helm of the *Speedwell* in many a race around Strawberry island, when the white caps were running, and the wind blowing half a gale. Adam, in these situations, would have been as badly frightened as Archie was now.

While the latter was thinking over what he had heard, and wishing that his friend could impart to him some of his indifference and courage, Mr. Brent, who, with his men, had been engaged in collecting the valuables in the house, and loading them into a wagon for transportation to the fort, approached, and said to his son:

"Adam, get your rifle and ammunition, and go down to the fort and stay there until I come. Archie, you had better go with him."

Archie thought this good advice. If the Indians had really determined on making a descent into the valley—and he knew that Mr. Brent had had too much

experience to be deceived in such matters—the sooner he found a place of safety the better it would be for him. He had been considerably disappointed because he had not been allowed an opportunity to assist the settlers in their fight with Don Carlos and his men, but he had never expressed a desire to take part in a battle with the Indians. He trembled at the thought; and he was almost afraid to ride through the grove with Adam. He held his rifle in readiness for instant use, and so nervous and excited was he, that it might have been dangerous for even a friendly trapper to approach him unexpectedly. He and Adam reached the fort, however, without encountering any of their enemies; and then Archie drew a long breath of relief, and began to feel more like himself.

Every one of the hundred soldiers comprising the garrison was hard at work; and so were the trappers. Some were engaged in repairing the palisades, some were covering the roofs of the buildings with earth, to prevent the savages from setting them on fire with lighted arrows, others were cleaning and loading the weapons, and every thing was done without the least noise or confusion. Not a word was spoken above a whisper; the men moved about with cautious footsteps, and a person standing at a distance of fifty yards from the fort, could not have told that there was any one stirring within its walls. One thing that surprised Archie was, that among all these men, who had fought the Indians more than once, and who knew just what their fate would be if the fort proved too weak to resist the attacks of their savage foes, there was not one who seemed to be in the least concerned. There were some pale faces among them—pale with excitement rather than fear—but their manner was quiet and confident, and Archie began to gather courage.

His first care was to look up a place of safety for his horse. The garrison being composed entirely of cavalymen, there was plenty of stable room in the fort, and Archie soon found an empty stall, in which he tied the mustang; and after strapping his revolvers around his waist, and filling his pockets with cartridges for his rifle, he went out to look about the fortifications. He found Adam in the soldiers' quarters, sitting beside a fire, and engaged in running bullets. He kept him company for a while, but he was too uneasy and excited to remain long in one place, and finally he went out again, and resumed his wanderings about the fort. He watched the soldiers at their work, looked at the loop-holes, and tried to imagine how he should feel standing at one of them when the bullets and arrows were whistling about his ears, and the fort was surrounded by hundreds of yelling Indians thirsting for his blood, and at last he found his way out of the gate to the prairie where Frank had run the foot-race a few hours before. How

lonesome the place seemed now, and what an unearthly silence brooded over it! Archie felt his courage giving away again, and aroused himself with an effort.

"I am getting to be a regular coward," said he, to himself. "If Frank were here he would be ashamed of me. I'd like to know where he is, and what he is doing. I hope he has made his camp where the Indians will not stumble upon it. There's the Captain going back to the house. If it is safe there for him, I guess it is safe for me, too."

Archie shouldered his rifle, and hurried off in the direction the Captain had gone. He passed through the grove in safety, and when he reached the house he found that Mr. Brent and his men were still engaged in collecting all the movable property, and hauling it to the fort. The former knew that all his stock, barns, and crops would be destroyed, and it was his desire to save as much of his household furniture as possible.

Archie leaned his rifle in one corner, and worked with the rest until the wagon was loaded, and then sat down on the porch to await its return from the fort. He wished he had gone with it before many minutes had passed over his head, for scarcely had the wagon disappeared when he heard a stealthy step behind him, and, upon looking up, he saw three trappers standing close at his elbow. Although he was startled by their sudden appearance, he was not alarmed, for he thought that he recognized them as some of the men belonging to Captain Porter's expedition; but a second glance showed him that they were strangers. He sprang to his feet, and, boldly confronting the men, waited for them to make known their business. They looked at him closely for a moment, and then one of them said to his companions:

"That's him, aint it?"

"I reckon it is," replied another. "Now, my cub, no screechin' or fussin'. If you make the least noise, you're a goner."

Archie did not hear all this warning, for, while the trapper was speaking, he had seized the boy in an iron grasp, and pressed a brawny hand over his mouth to stifle his cries for help; another tore his revolvers from his waist; the third caught up his feet and held them firmly under his arm; and, before Archie could fairly make up his mind what was going on, he was being carried rapidly across the valley toward the mountains. Astonished and enraged, he struggled furiously for a time, but all to no purpose; he was held as firmly as if he had been in a vice; and, exhausted at last by his efforts, he lay quietly in the grasp of his captors,

wondering at this new adventure, and trying in vain to find some explanation for it. He was not kept long in ignorance, however, for in a few minutes the trappers had carried him across the valley, through the willows that skirted the base of the mountains, and into a deep, thickly-wooded ravine, and set him down in front of a camp-fire, before which stood a tall, fierce-looking man leaning on his rifle.

Archie was so bewildered that, for a minute or two, he could not have told whether he was awake or dreaming. He swallowed a few times to overcome the effect of the choking he had received, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him; and all the while the tall trapper stood regarding him, with a savage smile on his face, while his three companions seated themselves beside the fire, and coolly proceeded to fill their pipes.

"It's him, aint it, Bill?" asked one, at length.

"Yes," replied the person addressed, still looking fixedly at his prisoner, and evidently enjoying his bewilderment, "it's him. Seems to me you might have a good word to say to your uncle, seein' it's so long since we've met one another."

"My uncle!" exclaimed Archie, now for the first time recovering the use of his tongue.

"Sartin. You aint agoin' to deny it? You aint agoin' back on me, are you? I've been through a heap since I seed you last—I've been chawed up by bars an' catamounts, an' been shot at by Injuns an' white fellers, an' mebbe I've changed a leetle. I never did brag much on my good looks, but I'm your uncle, fur all that."

"You!" almost shouted Archie, gazing in amazement at the trapper's dark, scarred face; "you my uncle! Not if I know who I am, and I think I do. Do you take me for a lunatic, or are you crazy yourself?"

"Nary one, I reckon. I take you fur my nephew—Adam Brent—an' I know what I'm sayin'."

"Well, if Adam has such a looking uncle as you are, I am sorry for him. You've made a great mistake. My name is Winters, if it will do you any good to know it."

"No, I reckon not," replied the trapper, who seemed to be greatly pleased at his prisoner's pluck and independence. "I reckon you're Adam Brent."

"I guess I ought to know what my name is, hadn't I?" exclaimed Archie, angrily.

"Who are you, anyhow, and what business have you to take me away from my friends?"

"I'm your uncle—Bill Brent—Black Bill fur short; an' as fur the business I have in takin' you prisoner, it's the business every man's got to right the wrongs that's been done him. That's what's the matter."

Archie very deliberately seated himself upon the ground, rested his chin on his hands, and looked up at the outlaw. "I know you now," said he, "and I have no desire for a more intimate acquaintance. Do you remember that, one night, in the latter part of June, a fellow about my age walked into your camp, and you and your cowardly companions robbed him of his horse?"

"I'll allow I haint forgot it," replied the outlaw.

"Well, that fellow was my cousin. He and I were on our way to California, with Dick Lewis and Bob Kelly, and an uncle, who looks about as much like you as you look like a white man. You've got the wrong buck by the horn, if you take me for Adam Brent. He is at the fort, and among friends, where he is safe. I left him there not more than an hour ago."

"Now jest look a-here, Adam," said Black Bill; "that story won't go down—not by no means. If I hadn't never seed you afore, it might do you some good to talk to me in that fashion; but I know you as well as I know any of my mates here. I've got you now, an' I'm goin' to hold fast to you."

"But what do you intend to do with me?" asked Archie.

"I'm goin' to do jest what I told your father I should do when I got my hands on you: I'm goin' to make you jest sich a man as I am."

"You'll have a good time of it, and you can't do it. It is my intention to be of some use in the world, and I'd like to see you or any body else drag me down as low as you are. But I tell you that I am not Adam Brent, and neither am I any relative of his."

"Hold your hosses. I know jest what I am about, an' all your talkin' an' fussin' won't do you no 'arthly good whatsoever; so you might jest as well shut up. I'm goin' to make a renegade of you. Arter you have been with me a few years, you'll larn to hate white folks as bad as I do, an' will fight 'em like any Injun, I told your father that I would make him sorry for all he's done agin me, an' I'm goin' to keep my word. Jack, jest tie his hands behind his back, an' then we'll trot along.

I've spent the most of my time, durin' the last ten years, hangin' around this yere valley, watchin' fur a chance to get hold of you," continued the outlaw, while his companion was confining Archie's arms with a thong of buckskin, "but the ole man tuk mighty good care to keep you out of my sight. The fust time I sot eyes on you, since you was six years old, was to-day, at the fort, when them fellers run that race; but I knowed you in a minute. I've got you now, an' the next time your father sees you, you will be like me—half Injun an' half trapper, an' an enemy of your own race."

Archie had learned something during this interview with the outlaw, and now thought he could understand why Mr. Brent had been so careful never to allow Adam far out of his sight. In years gone by—perhaps when they were young men together—he had done something to incur the displeasure of this unnatural brother, who had resolved to be revenged upon him by dragging his son down as low as he was himself. But the outlaw's plans were not working as smoothly as he imagined. He had made a mistake in the boy; and Adam, of whom he had been trying to make a prisoner for ten years, was still safe under the protection of his father.

"He is barking up the wrong tree, if he only knew it," said Archie to himself; "but I don't think I shall trouble myself to tell him so again. The way he eyed me the last time I told him I wasn't Adam Brent, makes me think that it wouldn't take a great deal to induce him to use his bowie on me; and that would be disagreeable. Never mind; I am not afraid that I shall long remain a prisoner, while Dick and Bob are alive."

When Archie's arms had been securely bound, two of the outlaws started down the ravine in Indian file, and the others, one of whom was Black Bill, seized their captive by the shoulders, and assisted him over logs and through the bushes in a way that would have called forth from him a stubborn resistance, if his arms had been free. The trappers seemed to be in great haste; and whenever Archie stumbled in the darkness and pitched forward, they did not stop, but hurried on as fast as ever, leaving him to regain his feet if he could, or be dragged along the ground behind them. He wondered if this was a fair sample of the treatment he was to receive as long as he remained in the hands of the outlaws. It did not seem to him that he could endure it long, but he did endure it until ten miles had been accomplished, and then, to his intense amazement and alarm, he suddenly found himself on the outskirts of an Indian village. His captors kept straight ahead with him, until they arrived at the council ground, and there they left him to take care of himself, and went forward to join the circle of chiefs seated

around the fire.



CHAPTER VI.

THE MEDICINE-MAN.

"You keerless feller! You're here arter all, haint you?"

Archie looked up, and for the first time discovered that he had a companion in trouble. It was Dick Lewis, who was standing bound to a post by a band of hickory bark, which was drawn tight about his breast and arms. It is hard to tell which was the more astonished, the trapper or Archie. Numerous questions were asked and answered on both sides, and when Archie told of the mistake the outlaws had made, and how he came to be taken prisoner, Dick drew a long breath of relief.

"I'll allow that it makes me feel a heap easier to know that you aint in no danger of bein' massacreed," said he. "This is a leetle the wust scrape I ever seed you in yet; but as long as me an' old Bob are alive, you won't want fur friends to help you. Do you see that feller standin' over thar?"

Archie looked in the direction in which the trapper nodded his head, and was almost ready to drop with astonishment when he saw his cousin standing beside the chief's wigwam, bound and helpless like himself. He knew now why Frank had not returned to the valley.

"How came he here?" asked Archie.

"Go over thar an' talk to him, an' he'll tell you all about it," replied the trapper. "I want plenty of elbow room around here, 'cause when I get ready I'm goin' to leave, an' any thing that stands in my way will most likely get hurt. You'll hear something break purty soon, an' when I get started, jest keep your eye on me if you want to see runnin' as is runnin'."

Archie, judging from this that Dick did not want him there, walked slowly toward the place where his cousin was standing. As he passed the post he took a hasty glance at his friend's bonds, and wondered how he intended to escape from them. If he could break that piece of bark, he must be possessed of the power of a dozen men, for it was strong enough to hold an ox-team. But then Dick's strength was something wonderful, and there was no knowing what he might do

in an emergency like this.

The cousins did not spend much time in talking over their adventures, for they were too deeply interested in what was going on around them. The commotion occasioned by the arrival of the outlaws had subsided, and the chiefs were ready to proceed with their business. The aged warrior again lighted the pipe of peace, which was passed around the circle, each chief taking two or three puffs and handing it to his neighbor. The most profound silence was maintained in the village during this ceremony, which occupied several minutes; and while it was going on, the attention of the boys was attracted by a curious-looking object which suddenly made its appearance before them. They could not tell what it was, either by its size, shape, or movements. Sometimes it went on all fours, and then it looked like a bear with a crane's head; then it threw itself flat on the ground, and waddled along like an alligator, turning its queer looking head and sharp bill about as if seeking something to devour; and when it reached the edge of the council-ground, it took the form of a ball, and rolled along, as swiftly as if it had been sent from a boy's bat, until it reached the fire, when it stopped, and with a loud yell jumped to its feet and straightened out. Then the boys saw that it was an Indian, dressed in a most fantastic costume, and that he carried a tomahawk in one hand and a knife in the other.

"Oh, it's the medicine-man," said Frank.

"Well, he's a delightful looking fellow," observed Archie. "How would you like to have him prowling about your bed if you were sick? What is he going to do, I wonder?"

THE MEDICINE MAN AND DICK LEWIS.

The boys were not kept long in doubt on this point, for the medicine-man had evidently come there on business of his own, and was not disposed to waste any time. He first began tramping in a circle about the place where the chiefs were sitting, and then the cousins saw that he carried the burden of many years on his shoulders, for he walked with tottering steps, and form half bent. But he seemed

to have plenty of energy left in his old body, for he stamped the ground furiously as he moved along, causing the rattles which he wore around his legs to ring out musically, and expended a good deal of strength in flourishing his knife and tomahawk. Wondering eyes followed all his movements, broad-shouldered warriors stepped respectfully aside to let him pass, but he did not appear to notice any thing or any body. He moved with his eyes fastened upon the ground, and all the while singing a low, monotonous song. He made the circuit of the council-ground at least twenty times, without once looking up or changing his attitude, and the boys began to wonder what object he could have in view in tramping about that way; when suddenly, as he was passing the trapper, he raised his hatchet, and with one swift blow buried its bright blade in the post, almost to the handle and within an inch of Dick's head, and left it there, while he continued on his walk around the council-ground.

An exclamation of horror burst from both the boys as they witnessed this act of the medicine-man. They thought, when they saw the tomahawk descending, that they had seen the trapper alive for the last time; but he was still erect and unharmed, although the tomahawk had passed so close to his head that a lock of his hair was buried with it in the post. A less practiced hand than the medicine-man's would have driven the weapon into Dick's brain.

"Oh, don't I wish I was free, and had my breech-loader in my hands!" exclaimed Archie, who was so nearly beside himself with rage and alarm that he could scarcely speak plainly. "There would be one doctor less in this tribe. I'd up-end that old rascal so quick that he wouldn't know what hurt him."

Frank did not say any thing, but his compressed lips and flashing eyes spoke volumes.

This little by-play on the part of the medicine-man caused infinite delight among the Indians on the other side of the council-ground, who now began to watch his movements more closely than ever. And it was but a beginning. The next time he came around he thrust his knife into the post, just above the trapper's shoulder, pulled out the tomahawk, and went on. The third time he struck the tomahawk into the post again, if possible a little closer to the prisoner's head than before, and pulled out the knife. And so he kept on, threatening the trapper first with one weapon, and then with the other, to the great amusement of the Indians, and the intense horror and indignation of the boys, who, unable to endure the sight, turned away their heads, and wished for their rifles. During all this time Dick never once flinched so much as a hair's breadth. He did not appear to notice the

medicine-man at all; but kept his eyes fastened upon the chiefs. If the Indians had never seen a brave trapper before, they saw one now.

While this was going on on the outer edge of the council-ground, the chiefs were busy deciding upon the fate of the prisoner. First one made a speech, and then another, and another, until all had spoken, and half an hour had been taken up with the deliberations. Then a war-club was produced, and after that the Indians did not pay the least attention to the medicine-man. They were waiting to hear the decision of the council. The principal chief took the war-club, and after striking it upon the ground in front of him, handed it to the next warrior; and so the club went around the circle, some striking the ground with it, and others passing it along in silence. The boys knew that a vote was being taken upon some question, but what it was, or how the votes counted, they had not the least idea. They soon found out, however, for when the war-club had come around to the principal chief again, he jumped to his feet, and began shouting some orders in a loud voice; and in an instant the camp was in great commotion. The warriors ran about in all directions, and deafening whoops and yells arose on every side. Some hurried into the woods, and presently returned with their arms filled with dry wood and branches, which they deposited in piles at intervals along the ravine, below the camp, others lighted them with brands from the fire, which was burning on the council-ground, and in a few minutes every object in the lower end of the village was as plainly visible as if it had been broad daylight. This done, the warriors seized knives, tomahawks, switches, clubs, or whatever else came first to their hands, and arranged themselves in two parallel lines about six or eight feet apart, and extending up and down the ravine. Then the boys began to understand the matter. The trapper was to run the gauntlet.

"Oh, why doesn't he wake up and do something?" cried Archie, in great excitement. "He told me that I would hear something break pretty soon, and if he is going to escape at all, he had better be about it. In a few minutes it will be too late."

"Look at the club that first Indian carries on his shoulder," said Frank. "One blow with that would kill an iron man. If Dick once gets between those lines, he will never come out alive."

"And even if he does he can't get away, for there are a dozen warriors standing at the lower end of the ravine waiting to catch him. I wish we had stayed in California."

The boys turned to look at the trapper. Was he destitute of nerves entirely, that he could stand there and view all these preparations so calmly? An ordinary man would have been overcome with fear; but Dick was as indifferent as ever.

"If he could only contrive some way to break that bark now, he would be all right," said Frank. "Those two guards couldn't stop him, and the other warriors are all at the lower end of the village. That old medicine-man is getting ready to begin his operations again."

"He's going to throw his hatchet at Dick," gasped Archie.

The medicine-man was standing about twenty feet in front of the trapper, swinging his tomahawk around his head, and yelling at the top of his lungs. Even as Archie spoke, the weapon left his hand, and flew through the air with the speed of a bullet. Both boys turned away their heads and held their breath in suspense. They heard the tomahawk strike the post, and, when they turned to look at the trapper again, they were not a little astonished at the scene presented to their gaze. The medicine-man was rolling about on the ground in violent contortions, like some huge reptile which had just received its death-blow; the two warriors who had been guarding Dick lay motionless beside him; the piece of bark with which the trapper had been confined hung down beside the post, having been cut by the keen edge of the tomahawk; and something, which moved so rapidly that it looked like a flash of light, dodged in and out among the lodges for an instant, and then disappeared from view. The medicine-man had thrown his tomahawk a little too close to the mark that time, for the weapon had cut the trapper's bonds and set him at liberty.

For a few seconds the village was as silent as though it had been deserted. The warriors stood transfixed, holding their weapons in their hands, and gazing at the empty post where their captive had stood but a moment before; then yells of rage arose on the air, and the warriors swept through the village in a body in hot pursuit of the trapper. The cousins could not speak. Dick's escape had been accomplished so suddenly and unexpectedly that it bewildered them. They looked at one another in silence, gazed after the yelling Indians, who were flying through the valley in all directions, and, when at last they recovered the use of their tongues, the shouts of delight that broke from them would have done credit to any two savages in the band.

"Wasn't that well done?" cried Archie, dancing about like one demented. "The minute that bark was cut, he was off like a flash of lightning. Wouldn't I give

something if I could run like that? They'll never catch him, for they are all behind him, and Dick says he never saw the Indian, or white man either, that could overtake him, if he has two feet the start. He had at least twenty yards the start, this time; so, of course, he'll escape easily enough."

"I feel better," said Frank—"not only on Dick's account, but also on our own; we stand a chance of being rescued now. Well, what do you want?"

This question was addressed to a couple of warriors who at that moment approached them. The savages did not take the trouble to reply, but grasped the boys by the shoulders, and conducting them around the chief's wigwam, beside which they had been standing all this while, raised the door and pushed them under it.

"Here we are," said Frank, "and here we are likely to remain for awhile."

"But I don't propose to pass the night with my hands bound behind me, if I can help it," said Archie. "Don't you believe you can untie them with your teeth, Frank? You know that was the way Johnny Harris untied the lasso with which I was bound, on the night we made our escape from Pierre and his band."

Frank proceeded at once to act upon his cousin's suggestion, and, although he found that a thong of buckskin was rather a difficult thing to manage with his teeth, he finally succeeded in freeing Archie's hands. Then, after the latter had liberated him, the cousins threw themselves upon the buffalo robes to talk over their adventures; but they were not allowed to remain long to themselves, for, while Frank was describing the manner in which he had effected his escape from the village, the door of the lodge was raised, and Black Bill's villainous face appeared at the opening.

"Adam, are you thar?" he inquired.

"No, Adam isn't here," replied Archie. "The last time I saw him, he was at the fort. Winters is here, if you have any thing of importance to say to him."

"Wal, I have. Come out here."

"What do you want with me?"

"I am goin' to take you to my lodge, where I know you will be safe."

"Black Bill," said Frank, "you have certainly made a mistake; this fellow isn't

Adam Brent."

"Who axed you fur any advice?" was the gruff rejoinder. "Jest mind your own business, an' speak when you're spoke to."

The tone of the man's voice indicated that he was in very bad humor, and Frank, knowing that it would not be safe to irritate him, held his peace; and so did Archie, who offered no resistance when the outlaw seized him by the collar and pushed him roughly out of the lodge.

Frank's first care, on being left alone, was to examine into his chances for escape. That was quickly done, and the conclusion he came to was that it would be quite useless to attempt any thing of the kind. He was guarded by two sentries now—one standing at the back of the lodge, and the other at the door. He could not elude them both, and, with his usual happy faculty for accommodating himself to circumstances, Frank decided that there was no use in keeping awake all night if he was a prisoner; and, stretching himself out on the buffalo robes, he prepared to go to sleep. And he did sleep, in spite of all the dangers and excitements of the day, but not long. He was awakened by a rustling in the lodge, and started up in alarm when he saw a frightful-looking object, which he recognized as the medicine-man, crouching at his side. Frank's first thought was that he had come in there to torment him as he had tormented the trapper; and his second, that he should not do it. He was not bound, and he would not submit to any such treatment.

"Look here, old fellow," said he, shaking his fist at the medicine-man: "I don't know whether or not you can understand English; but, if you can, you had better pay attention to what I say: If you go to flourishing that tomahawk and knife about me, I'll break your head."

"Hist!" whispered the intruder, holding up his finger, warningly.

Frank was astonished. He gazed earnestly at the medicine-man, who began singing his low, monotonous song, at the same time fumbling with his odd-looking mask, which he soon removed, revealing to Frank's view the honest countenance of old Bob Kelly. Checking the boy's exclamation of astonishment by an emphatic motion of his hand, the trapper, still humming his song, proceeded to divest himself of the other articles of his disguise; and, as fast as he removed them from his own person, he put them upon Frank, who submitted wonderingly to the operation. In a few minutes he was rigged out in the medicine-man's dress; and, if he had only known it, he looked hideous enough to

frighten any body.

"Now, then," said old Bob, in a scarcely-audible whisper, "be off with you. Creep under them skins, an' make yourself skeerce about here, sudden. Thar aint no danger, if you'll only think so. You're a medicine-man now, an' you can go all over the village an' into every lodge, an' nobody won't say a word to you. I'll take care of myself."

The old trapper spoke these words hurriedly, and, pulling Frank off the buffalo robes, stretched himself upon them. Frank would have lingered to ask some instructions concerning the manner in which he ought to conduct himself, and what he ought to do if the guard allowed him to pass out of the lodge, but Bob motioned him impatiently to be off. Calling all his courage to his aid, he lifted the skins at the back of the lodge and crawled out. The guard looked down at him, and then turned away his head as if he did not care to see him; and Frank, throwing himself upon his hands and knees, and imitating as nearly as possible the actions of the medicine-man, hurried off into the darkness.



CHAPTER VII.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

"Well, this beats me completely. That old medicine-man that Archie and I wanted to shoot so badly was Bob Kelly; and, of course, he did not make a mistake when he cut that bark with his tomahawk—he did it on purpose. Didn't he play his part well? The old fellow must have a steady hand to send those weapons so close to Dick without hitting him. Where did he get this disguise, I wonder; and how is he going to escape from that lodge? This night's work is a little ahead of any thing I ever heard of."

Frank was sitting on the ground in a thicket of bushes on the outskirts of the village, where he had concealed himself, to obtain a few minutes' rest, and to decide what he should do next. He had passed through the camp in safety, and without attracting especial attention from any of the Indians. He had met several warriors on his way, but his disguise was complete, and they, supposing him to be the medicine-man, stepped aside to let him pass, and did not trouble themselves to take a second look at him. He had been emboldened by his success thus far, and a daring project had entered his head. It was to go back to the village, and find and liberate Archie.

There were a good many dangers and difficulties to be overcome in carrying out this plan. The outlaw had said that it was his intention to take Archie to his lodge, where he knew he would be safe; but Frank did not know where that lodge was. And suppose, if he succeeded in finding it, that Black Bill and his companions should be there guarding their prisoner! What would they do to him if they caught him prowling around? Frank did not care to enrage them, for he knew what manner of men they were; but still he was determined that he would not leave his cousin to his fate without making at least an attempt to save him. The village was nearly deserted, except by the women and children, and he could scarcely encounter more danger there than he would in attempting to find his way to the valley. The mountains were filled with Indians, who were searching for the trapper, and he could not hope to avoid meeting some of them. His disguise would protect him as long as he remained near the village, but wouldn't the warriors suspect something if they found him making his way

toward the fort?

"I'll be in danger, no matter what I do," said Frank, to himself; "and I am going to try to find Archie. If he isn't liberated I would just as soon be recaptured as not, for I could never live without him. How would I feel to go back to our hunting and fishing grounds about Lawrence, and know that he was kept a prisoner among these savages? I won't do it. If he must stay here, I shall stay with him."

So saying, Frank crawled out of the bushes, and started back toward the village. Not knowing how many eyes there might be watching him, he tried to imitate the medicine-man's movements—walking with his form half bent, and assuming a feeble, tottering step which he was sure would pass in the darkness for that of a very old man. He reached the village at last—passing the chief's wigwam on the way, where the guards stood in blissful ignorance of the fact that the captive they had been set to watch had crawled out of his prison under their very noses—and began looking about for the outlaw's lodge. How should he know it when he saw it? was a question he had asked himself over and over again. There was plainly but one way to proceed, and that was to visit every wigwam in the village until he found the one of which he was in search. This was something that more than one old trapper would have shrunk from undertaking; but, relying entirely upon his disguise, and remembering what Bob had told him—that he might go all over the village and into every lodge without being questioned—Frank resolved to attempt it. If he were captured it would be nothing more than what would most likely befall him if he tried to reach the fort; and he had the satisfaction of knowing that the Indians would not harm him.

The first lodge that Frank looked into was empty. The door had been thrown back, and by the flickering light of a fire which was burning in the center of the lodge, he was able to take a good survey of its interior. There were the skins on which the warriors had been sleeping when they were aroused by the chief's "death-whoop," but no one was in sight. An Indian woman came in just as he completed his investigations, but did not appear to notice him, and he hurried off to visit the next lodge. Just as he was about to place his hand upon the door, it was raised by some one on the inside, and Frank's heart fairly came up into his mouth when one of the outlaws stepped out. He looked savagely at the boy for a moment, and then shouldered his rifle and walked away; and presently Frank saw him mounted on his horse, and galloping toward the ravine.

"This is the place," said our hero, to himself. "Archie is in here; but now that I

have found him, how am I going to get him out? That's a difficulty I did not think of before."

With a trembling hand Frank raised the door and peered under it, half expecting that Black Bill or some of his companions would jump out and make a prisoner of him; but there was no one in the lodge—no one except Archie, who lay in one corner, bound hand and foot. But if his body was confined, his tongue was free, and his spirit as undaunted as ever.

"You here!" he exclaimed, when he saw his cousin approaching him. "Clear out; I've seen enough of you for one night. If I could use my hands for about a minute, I would pay you for what you did to Dick Lewis. Keep away from me."

"Silence!" whispered Frank, as he kneeled down beside his cousin, and began untying his hands. "Don't say a word."

Archie was as surprised now as Frank had been when old Bob appeared to him in the chief's wigwam. He recognized the voice that addressed him, but he could hardly bring himself to believe that the hideous-looking object bending over him was Frank Nelson. He would have asked a hundred questions had not the latter interrupted him.

"We've no time to talk," he whispered, hurriedly, as he assisted his cousin to his feet. "I will explain every thing when we are out of danger. Now, then, you can never go through the village in that dress."

"I am afraid I can't go through it at all," replied Archie.

"Yes, you can. I don't believe there is a single warrior in the camp now, except the two who are guarding the chief's wigwam. They are all out looking for Dick. We have little to fear from the women and children, for they couldn't stop us if they tried. Is there any clothing in here?"

"I believe there is a hunting-shirt and cap in that corner."

"Well, get into them as quickly as possible, and I will go out and see if the coast is clear."

Frank, knowing that a medicine-man was expected to do things different from any body else, did not go out at the door, but crawled under the skins at the back of the lodge. It was well for him that he did so; for scarcely had he left Archie, when the door was raised and Black Bill came in, and was astonished to see his

prisoner, whom he had left securely bound, standing in the middle of the lodge arraying himself in a hunting-shirt which he (the outlaw) had thrown off a little while before.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "what's all this yere? Ah ha! You were trying to escape, were you? Who turned you loose?"

Archie, seeing that his cousin's plans for liberating him had been nipped in the bud, put on a bold face, and made the best of the situation. He took all the blame upon himself. He knew that if he told the outlaw that he had had assistance, he would, of course, investigate the matter; and if he found Frank in the vicinity of the lodge, it might arouse his suspicions to such a degree that he would examine his disguise; and that would be very disagreeable for Frank.

"I have a way of turning myself loose whenever I feel like it," replied Archie. "Why didn't you stay away about five minutes longer? You can't keep me a prisoner."

"Can't!" exclaimed the outlaw. "Wal, I'll see about that. I knowed you were a slippery customer—all the Brents are—an' I kinder thought it would be a good plan fur me to come back here an' keep an eye on you, an' leave the others to hunt up Dick Lewis. It seems I got here jest in time. Now, crawl out of that huntin' shirt, an' I'll tie you up so tight that you won't get loose agin in a hurry."

Frank, who was lying flat on the ground at the back of the lodge, listened with a heavy heart to this conversation. His plans had failed, and it was useless to think of attempting to liberate his cousin again, for the outlaw had said that it was his intention to remain in the lodge and watch him. There was but one thing he could do now, and that was to look out for himself. His first hard work must be to find Dick Lewis; he would know just what ought to be done. Having come to this determination, Frank crawled slowly and cautiously away from the lodge, and finally, rising to his feet, hurried through the village; and having satisfied himself that there was no one observing his movements, he plunged into the willows that fringed the base of the mountains. It was not his intention to travel directly toward the fort, but to attempt to reach it by some roundabout way, and thus avoid meeting the Indians who were in pursuit of the trapper. He had something of an undertaking before him now, for he was in a strange country, and had not the least idea in which direction he ought to go to find his friends. When he reached the mountains he was as effectually lost as he had been on the day that he and Archie killed their first antelope; but trusting every thing to luck,

he made his way through the thick woods as rapidly as the darkness would permit, and after stumbling about among logs and rocks until he was almost exhausted, he removed his mask, which, on account of the long bill attached to it had considerably impeded his progress through the bushes, and sat down to wait until daylight.

His thoughts and feelings were what any other boy's would have been under the same circumstances. His courage had been tested more than once during the few months he had passed in the Far West, and he had never yet shown himself to be a coward; on the contrary, his attempt to rescue Archie had proved that in an emergency he could be as daring and reckless as Dick Lewis himself. He could keep up his courage, and show a bold front while in the presence of his enemies, but to be alone in the mountains, with no weapon but his pocket-knife with which to defend himself, and nothing to occupy his mind, or draw his thoughts from the dangers yet to be encountered—this it was that tried his nerves; and his face was whiter, and he was more nearly overcome with fear now, than at any time during the day. His situation was scarcely more encouraging than when he was a prisoner. How could he hope to find the valley when he did not know where to look for it; and what if he did succeed in reaching it, and should find the fort in ashes, and the soldiers and trappers all massacred? What would become of him? He might starve to death, or be devoured by the grizzlies there in the mountains, and no one would ever know what had become of him.

"But I am not starved yet," said Frank, when he had reached this point in his meditations, "and thus far I haven't seen any wild animals to be afraid of. As long as I can lift a finger, I shall live in hopes of getting safely out of this scrape. Now, I am going to sleep. There is no knowing what is in store for me, and I may have need of all my strength before I see the sun set again."

Frank stretched himself upon the ground, with the medicine-man's mask under his head for a pillow, and soon forgot the Indians, grizzlies, and all the other perils with which he was surrounded, in a sound sleep. When he awoke it was broad daylight. He had had one visitor during the night, and that was a large gray wolf, which sat on his haunches at a little distance regarding Frank intently, and which took to his heels and quickly disappeared when the boy raised himself on his elbow.

"I don't think I should have slept so soundly if I had known that I had such a neighbor as that," thought Frank. "But after all, I wish I was sure that I had nothing worse than wolves to fear, although they did frighten me considerably

when we had that race on the ice with them last winter. Now, if I only had a cup of Dick's coffee, and a venison-steak, I should be ready for work; but I don't see much chance to get any thing to eat up here."

Frank picked up his mask, looked at the sun, and struck off through the woods in the direction he supposed the fort to be. He had not made many steps before he found himself on the brink of a narrow gorge, which extended up and down the mountain. Its sides were thickly covered with bushes and rocks, and it was so deep that the roar of the mountain-torrent which ran through it came but faintly to his ears. Was it not fortunate for him that he had camped before reaching the gully? He might have fallen into it in the darkness, and that would have been infinitely worse than remaining a prisoner among the Indians. He wondered if he could jump it, but concluded that he would not make the attempt, when he discovered, a short distance from him, a small tree lying across the gorge. Upon examining it closely, however, he found that it would prove rather a perilous undertaking to cross it, for the bark was slippery, the tree was more than half decayed, and its top rested but lightly on the opposite bank. He was not allowed many minutes in which to make up his mind what he would do, for while he stood looking, first at the tree, and then up and down the gorge, in the hope of finding some better way of crossing, he was startled by a whistling sound in the air, an arrow whizzed by much too close to his head for comfort, and glancing from a tree on the opposite bank, fell down into the gorge.

Frank was so frightened that for a moment he was deprived of all power of action; and before he could look around to see where the missile came from, another arrow whistled by, a little closer to him than the other, and then came a third, which found a lodgment in the mask which he carried in his hand. Then Frank began to realize that it was dangerous to stand there in that exposed position; and in the excitement of the moment, scarcely knowing what he was about, he gathered all his energies for the effort, bounded into the air, alighted in safety on the other side of the gorge, and in a moment more was concealed behind a tree which grew on the edge of the precipice. This feat called forth an exclamation of amazement from his concealed enemy; and when Frank looked back at the gorge, he was astonished himself. He never could have made a standing jump like that in his sober moments.

THE LEAP FOR LIFE.

Scarcely had Frank disappeared behind his tree, when a young Indian stepped from the bushes, and stood out in full view of him. It was his rival of the morning—the one with whom he had run the foot-race. He carried a bow, and a quiver full of arrows, in his hand, and stood gazing earnestly at the gorge, as if mentally calculating its width; and the more he looked at it, the more astonished he became.

"Ugh!" he grunted, at last. "Good boy! Make good jump, make *very* good jump!" Then looking toward the place where Frank was concealed, he called out: "Hay, you!"

The young Indian did not speak these words as plainly as we have written them. He uttered them with his teeth closed, and with a grunting, guttural sound, that can not be imitated on paper.

"What do you want?" asked the fugitive, surprised to hear himself thus addressed.

"You come over, and I no shoot," replied the young Indian.

"Go over there!" exclaimed Frank, "I guess not. If you want to see me more than I want to see you, you must come over here. What do you want, any how?"

"We go back to chief. I no shoot."

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I'll wait awhile before I go back to the chief. You want the honor of taking me prisoner, but you sha'n't have it."

"You no come?" asked the savage.

"No, I no come. I'll stay here."

"You no come, I shoot."

"Go ahead; but keep yourself pretty close over there, or I may shoot too."

"Oh, no," laughed the Indian. "You got no gun, no pistol, no knife—no nothing."

If the young warrior had only known it, he was mistaken in this. Frank had something, which, although by no means as serviceable as a rifle or revolver would have been, was still effective enough in his hands to keep his enemy from crossing the gorge. While this conversation was going on, he had taken a good view of his situation, and finding that he had no way of retreat, he had prepared himself to stand a siege. The tree behind which he had taken refuge was a very small one, not more than half large enough to conceal him from the view of the Indian, and stood, as we have said, on the very brink of the gorge. It afforded him but a poor protection, but he knew that he must remain there, for there was not another tree or rock, or even a thicket of bushes large enough to conceal him, within twenty yards, and the mountain at his back was much too steep to be scaled. If he left his tree to find a better place of concealment, he would present a fair mark for the arrows of the Indian, who handled his bow with so much skill that Frank did not care to expose himself.

Frank, seeing that he was fairly cornered, began making preparations for compelling his enemy to remain on his own side of the gully; for he noticed that the young warrior carried a knife and tomahawk in his belt, and he was afraid that, if he allowed him to come to close quarters, he might not be able to vanquish him as easily as he had done before. At the foot of the tree was a rock which had begun crumbling away; and while he was talking to the Indian, Frank had busied himself in collecting the pieces that were of a size and weight convenient to throw. He had played ball so often that he had become a swift and accurate thrower, and he told himself that if the Indian did not mind what he was about, the interview would end in a way he had not dreamed of.

"He thinks he has got me fast now," thought Frank; "but I shouldn't wonder if he found himself mistaken. If he gives me a fair chance, I'll knock him down with one of these rocks, and go over there and take his weapons away from him. Then I'll make him guide me to the fort by the shortest route."

"Hay, you white boy! You no come I shoot!" exclaimed the Indian again; and, as he spoke, he fitted an arrow to his bow, and pointed it at Frank.

"Shoot away!" replied the latter.

The Indian let fly the arrow, and Frank threw a stone at the same instant. Both made good shots. The arrow struck the tree behind which our hero was concealed, and the stone whistled through the feathers on the young warrior's head-dress. He escaped by an inch.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated, in great astonishment.

"Ugh!" echoed Frank. "Didn't I tell you that you had better keep close? Look out! Here comes another!"

Away flew a second stone, and the Indian dived into the bushes just in time to avoid it, for it went straight toward the mark. He began to have some respect for the white boy, who, although he was without a weapon of any kind, was still brave enough to stand his ground.

The contest thus commenced was kept up for a quarter of an hour. The arrows whistled by the tree whenever Frank showed so much as an inch of his head, and were always answered by a volley of stones, which flew like bullets through the bushes where the Indian was concealed, compelling him more than once to change his position. Then there was quiet for awhile, and the combatants stood watching one another, Frank keeping a sharp lookout for any tricks on the part of his antagonist, and wondering what would be his next move. He was not long in finding out, for presently the young warrior set up a whoop which echoed and re-echoed among the mountains, until it seemed to Frank that the woods were full of yelling savages.

"If he is trying to frighten me, I hope he will have a good time of it," thought Frank. "Perhaps he has settled himself down there with the intention of starving me out. If he has, he will find it up-hill business, for I can go without food and water as long as he can. If I only had my rifle, wouldn't I show him something?"

The Indian waited a few minutes, and repeated the yell; and this time, to Frank's utter amazement and consternation, there was an answer. It came faintly to his ears, but still it was so plain and distinct that he knew he could not be mistaken. Had his rival been calling for assistance? The question was scarcely formed in his mind, when the savage raised his head above the bushes, and coolly announced:

"Hay, you white boy! More Indian coming!"

At that moment Frank's body, being but partially protected by his tree, offered a fair mark, and the young savage was prompt to take advantage of it. Another arrow flew across the gully, and this time it was not thrown away. Frank reeled a moment, threw his arms wildly about his head, and fell heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRANK'S FRIEND, THE GRIZZLY.

The young Indian was evidently very much surprised at the result of his shot. He stood for a moment as if petrified, looking at the prostrate form across the gorge, and then slowly and cautiously stepped out of the bushes to take a nearer view. He shaded his eyes with his hand, twisted himself into all sorts of shapes, ran up and down the bank, and looked at the motionless figure from a dozen different positions, and having satisfied himself at last that his enemy was really dead, he placed his hand to his mouth, and uttered a series of hideous yells, that once more awoke the echoes far and near.

His next move was to cross the gorge. He could not jump it, as Frank had done, and so was obliged to make use of the tree. It trembled and cracked beneath his weight, but he crossed it in safety, and bending over the young hunter, twisted his hand in his hair and yelled furiously. He held this position but an instant. He looked for the wound made by the arrow, but could not find it. He *felt* something, however, and that was a very slight pull at his belt, as four sinewy fingers were carefully inserted beneath it. With a cry of terror he sprang to his feet, and Frank arose with him—unharméd, save a slight red mark across his forehead, and as full of fight as ever. Before the young Indian could fully comprehend the trick that had been played upon him, his cries for help were stifled by a strong grasp on his throat, and he was thrown flat upon his back, with his head hanging over the brink of the precipice.

"Now, red skin, I'll show you how easily I can handle you," exclaimed Frank. "I was only playing with you this morning, but now I am in earnest. Keep perfectly still, or I'll pitch you into the gully."

Frank, as we have said, was greatly alarmed when he found that the Indian had been calling for assistance, and that his shouts had elicited a response from some of his friends. He had no fears but that he could hold his ground against one Indian, armed with a bow and arrow, but suppose that the reinforcements who were coming up were full-grown Indians, and supplied with rifles? He must escape from there before they arrived; and the only way that he could discover to accomplish this, was to contrive some plan to induce his antagonist to cross the

gorge. If he could bring him to close quarters, and could get hold of him before he had an opportunity to draw his knife or tomahawk, he was sure that he would have nothing to fear; but he dared not leave his tree while his enemy held his position on the opposite side of the gully, for he would send his arrows about him like hail-stones.

All these thoughts passed through Frank's mind in an instant of time; and when the savage discharged his last arrow at him—it passed so close to him that it left a mark across his forehead—he staggered and fell, as if he had been mortally wounded. That was his plan for bringing his enemy across the gorge, and we have seen how it succeeded. His design now was to disarm the savage, tie him to a tree, and then take to his heels, and leave the gully as far behind as possible, before the reinforcements arrived.

"I'm all right yet, you see," said Frank, holding his antagonist down with one hand, and with the other unfastening the belt in which he carried his knife and tomahawk. "If you live a few years longer, you will learn that an Indian never gets smart enough to outwit a white man. Now——"

Frank did not finish the sentence, for just then he happened to look up, and saw a sight that drove all thoughts of the Indian out of his mind. The bank on which he and his antagonist were lying, hung over the gorge, and a portion of it, about twenty feet square, having, no doubt, been loosened by their struggles, was sinking down into the abyss, carrying with it Frank and the Indian, and also the tree which had served the latter for a breast-work. Its motion was slow, almost imperceptible at first, but it was gathering headway, and moving more rapidly every instant. As quick as thought Frank was on his feet, and gathering himself for a spring; but it was too late. The earth slid from beneath him, and, like a drowning man grasping at straws, Frank clutched the branches of the tree with a death-grip, and plunged with it into the gorge. For an instant he descended with what seemed to him lightning rapidity, and then the motion was suddenly checked—so suddenly, that the branches were almost torn from his grasp—and he found himself swinging in the air, twenty feet below the top of the precipice. The tree was hanging with its head downward, but its roots were still imbedded in the firm earth above; and that was all that had saved Frank from destruction.

All this passed in much less time than we have taken to describe it, and it may be imagined that Frank's mind was in a great whirl. When he recovered himself sufficiently to understand his situation, he looked up and saw the young Indian clinging to the roots of the tree, and struggling to draw himself up to the firm

ground above. He saw more: he saw that with every effort the Indian made, he was loosening the roots of the tree, and that one by one they were giving away. Forgetting, in that moment of peril, that he and the young warrior had been engaged in a desperate fight but a moment before, Frank, still hanging at arm's length from the branches of the tree, with an abyss of unknown depth below him, into which he was every instant expecting to be plunged by the giving away of the roots above, addressed words of advice and encouragement to the frightened savage.

"Take it easy, up there!" said he, coolly. "Don't thrash about so, for you are only exhausting yourself, without doing any good. Take your time, and you are all right."

But the Indian was too nearly overcome with fear, and too intent upon extricating himself from his dangerous position, to heed the advice. He struggled more desperately than ever, and finally, to Frank's immense relief, succeeded in pulling himself over the roots, and crawling up to the solid bank. Then his fear all vanished. He uttered a loud yell of exultation, and bent over the precipice to look at Frank, who was coming up through the branches hand over hand. He watched him for a moment, and then disappeared from view; and when he came back to the brink of the gorge, he carried his bow in his hand, with an arrow fitted to the string, which he drew to its head, and pointed straight at Frank's breast.

The young hunter was now menaced by another danger. He had escaped falling into the gorge almost by a miracle, but it did not seem possible that there was the least chance for escape this time. The Indian was standing on the bank above him, and Frank could almost touch the steel head of the arrow with his hand. He was completely at the mercy of his foe, who surely could not miss so large a mark at that distance. His bearing at that moment would have delighted Dick Lewis, could he have seen him. He hung by his hands from the branches of the tree, looking defiantly up into the Indian's face, and not a muscle quivered. The young warrior was evidently astonished, for he lowered his bow, gazed down at his helpless antagonist for a moment, and called out:

"White boy, you no afraid?"

"Shoot close," replied Frank, his voice as firm and steady as ever. "If you miss, you are a goner."

Once more the arrow was drawn to its head, and pointed at Frank's heart; but the

Indian did not shoot. He looked up, as if alarmed by some unusual sound, and then, to Frank's astonishment, dropped his bow, and took to his heels. The young hunter could not imagine what had caused his precipitate flight, and just then he did not care. Something had befriended him by frightening the Indian away most opportunely, and Frank improved the respite thus unexpectedly given him, by clasping his legs around the body of the tree, and ascending quickly to the top of the gorge. He did not know what new danger he might meet there, nor did he give the matter a moment's thought. He would certainly have a much better chance for life while standing on the solid ground, where he could fight or run, as circumstances might require, than he had while hanging suspended in the air over the brink of the gorge.

In a few seconds Frank was within reach of the roots of the tree, and drawing in a long breath of relief, he pulled himself over them, and looked cautiously over the top of the bank. Then he saw that the friend who had rescued him from the arrow of the savage, was an enormous grizzly bear, almost large and ugly enough to be a second Old Davy. About fifty yards down the bank of the ravine stood a scrub pine; and in its topmost branches sat the young warrior, looking down at his shaggy foe, which was walking in a circle around the tree, now and then seating himself on his haunches, and gazing up into it, as if trying to contrive some plan to bring the Indian down to him.

"Hurra for you, grizzly," said Frank, to himself. "You have rendered me a most valuable service; and that you may never feel a trapper's bullet, or an Indian's arrow, is the sincere wish of, yours truly. Keep him up there for an hour or two, and I'll just take his weapons, and make myself scarce about here. I'll never forget this gully as long as I live."

Frank crawled noiselessly upon the bank, picked up the bow, and the quiver of arrows, possessed himself of the Indian's belt, which contained his knife and tomahawk, and looked about for some means of crossing the gorge without attracting the attention of the grizzly. That was a matter that he need not have troubled himself about, for the bear's quick ear had caught the sound of his footsteps, and, leaving the tree, he turned to attack Frank. He came on at a rapid pace, uttering hideous growls, and looking savage enough to frighten any body. He certainly frightened Frank, who could see but one way of escape, and that was to jump the gully. It was wider now than it was before, but he had a chance for a running start, and he accomplished the feat in safety, to the no small amazement of the Indian, who yelled at him with all the strength of his lungs.

"I suppose you thought I was caught, didn't you?" exclaimed Frank. "Well, I wasn't. I am all right yet; and now I will leave you in the grizzly's company."

But Frank, as it happened, was not yet done with the bear. The animal stopped when he saw that the boy had eluded him, and turned immediately, and ran toward the tree which lay across the gully. Things began to look dark again for the young hunter. If the bear were allowed to cross the gorge, he would, of course, compel him to take refuge in a tree, and there was no knowing how long he might keep him there. He could not forget that there were more Indians not a great way off, and that they had heard the young warrior's yells, and were hastening to his assistance. The grizzly, although he had saved him from the fury of his rival, might, after all, be the cause of his capture.

Frank saw the necessity of prompt action. His first thought was to try an arrow on the bear; but he abandoned the idea when he reflected that the bow was a weapon to which he was not accustomed, and that the chances were not one in ten that his arrow would reach a vital part. The grizzly was already half way across the gorge. The tree shook and bent beneath his weight, and Frank hoped it would break; but he could not afford to trust any thing to luck. He put it out of the animal's power to cross to his side of the gully, and caused his destruction at the same time, by seizing the tree with both hands, and lifting it from its place, and pitching it over the precipice. It fell with a loud crash, carrying with it the bear, which speedily disappeared from his view among the bushes and rocks which covered the sides of the gorge.

Frank, scarcely waiting to see what had become of the grizzly, snatched up the Indian's weapons, and flew down the mountain at the top of his speed, fastening the belt around his waist, and slinging the quiver of arrows over his shoulder as he ran. His mishaps at the gully had consumed a good deal of valuable time, and Frank was now in momentary expectation of hearing the reinforcements, who had been summoned by his rival, bounding along his trail in pursuit. He could not hope to beat full-grown Indian braves in a fair race, but he could, perhaps, elude them, and this he resolved to attempt. He had often heard the trappers describe the plans to which they resorted to throw pursuing Indians off their trail, and the information he had gained from their stories was of value to him now. He walked on every log he could find, jumped from rock to rock, doubled on his trail, and finally he found himself on the banks of a little trout-brook, the course of which he followed for two or three miles, walking in the water all the way. Of course, as he paid no attention to the points of the compass, he got completely bewildered; and when he stepped out of the brook, and sat down on the bank to

rest, he did not know whether he had been traveling toward the fort or not, or whether he was distant from it one mile or twenty. But that was a matter that did not trouble him. He was satisfied that he had eluded pursuit for the present, and he was also certain of another thing, and that was, that he was very hungry. His first care must be to obtain something to eat. That was not a difficult task, for there was a trout-brook at his feet, and he had a fish-line, and a flint and steel in his pocket. In half an hour's time a fire was burning brightly on the bank, three large trout, supported on sticks driven into the ground, were roasting before it, and Frank lay stretched out on the grass, watching the fish with a hungry eye, and thinking over his adventures at the gully. He began to be lonesome, and to long for companionship; and his wish was gratified before he was many minutes older, for, when the fish were done to a turn, and he was about to begin his meal, he was startled by the sound of voices and footsteps. He listened intently for a moment, and finding that the sounds grew louder, and that the intruders, whoever they were, were approaching his camp, he caught up his bow and arrows, and darted into the bushes. He had barely time to conceal himself before Black Bill and Adam Brent emerged from a thicket on the opposite side of the brook. The former stopped and looked about him suspiciously when he saw the fire, and the fish roasting before it, and cocked his rifle, as if in momentary expectation of discovering an enemy. A single glance at Adam's face satisfied Frank that he was a prisoner, and not a willing companion of the outlaw.

"Somebody has been campin' thar," said Black Bill; "but I reckon he heered us, an' tuk himself off. We'll go over an' look at things, an' see what's been goin' on."

The outlaw and his captive crossed the brook, and the former, after a few minutes' examination of the ground about the fire, struck the butt of his rifle with his fist, and opened his eyes in great amazement.

"It's the feller that run the foot-race yesterday, as sartin as I'm alive," said he, in a tone of voice which indicated that he did not understand the matter at all; "an' I'd like to know how he come here. The last time I seed him he was a prisoner in the chief's lodge, an' thar were two Injuns guardin' him. See them shoe-prints on the bank of the brook? Thar's where he stood when he ketched them fish. An' here's the pole he used, too. He was layin' on the grass beside that rock, an' when he heered us comin', he run off."

"Which was a lucky thing for him," observed Adam.

"Wal, I don't reckon it will do him any good," replied the outlaw; "'cause arter

we eat these yere fish of his'n, we'll hunt him up. If we don't find him, some of the Injuns will, most likely; an' even if he aint ketched at all, how much better off is he than he would be with the chief? Thar aint nothing left of Fort Stockton, an' he can't find no friends short of Fort Benton, an' that's a good hundred miles from here."

Frank was lying in the bushes, not more than twenty feet from the outlaw, and distinctly heard every word of the conversation. The information he gained from it destroyed his last hope. The savages had made the attack upon the trading-post during the previous night, and it had been successful. The soldiers and trappers were all massacred or scattered to the four winds of heaven, and he had no friends to look to for assistance within less than a hundred miles. The prospect before him was certainly most discouraging, but he could not dwell upon it then, for he had other matters to think of. He was in close proximity to a dangerous enemy, and how was he to elude him? This question was answered by the outlaw himself, whose actions suggested to Frank another daring project, which he was prompt to carry into execution. Black Bill laid his rifle upon the ground, and kneeled down beside the brook to drink. Scarcely had he taken a swallow of the water, when he heard footsteps behind him, and upon looking up saw Frank standing over him with his bow in his hand, and an arrow pointed straight at his breast.

"Don't move hand or foot," said the young hunter, so excited that he could scarcely speak. "Your game is up."

Adam was no less astonished at Frank's sudden appearance than was the outlaw; but he quickly recovered his presence of mind, and catching up his captor's rifle, leveled it full at his head.

"Surrender, Black Bill!" he exclaimed. "If you attempt to get up I'll send a ball into you."

CAPTURE OF BLACK BILL BY FRANK AND ADAM BRENT.

The looks of the weapons were enough to frighten the outlaw into submission.

He made no remark, but it was easy enough to see that he was not brave enough to think seriously of attempting resistance.

"Now, Adam," said Frank, "keep him covered with your rifle, and if he shows fight, bang away. I'll soon put it out of his power to do any mischief."

As Frank spoke he produced his fish-line from his pocket, and after doubling it two or three times, passed it around the outlaw's wrists, and tied it securely. The latter, at first, showed a disposition to be ugly, and resisted Frank's efforts to bring his hands behind his back; but the expression he saw on the face of Adam Brent, as he cocked the rifle, and placed its cold muzzle against his temple, quickly brought him to terms. Frank handled the fish-line skilfully, and in a few minutes the outlaw was as helpless as though he had been in irons.

"There!" said Adam; "he is all right, and so am I. I feel a little more at ease than I did ten minutes ago. What's to be done now?"

"The first think is breakfast," replied Frank. "Here are three trout—one apiece; and although they are hardly enough to make a meal for one hungry man, we can't catch any more, for my fish-line is in use. Help yourself. I'll feed Black Bill, if he wants any thing to eat. By the way, is this man what he claims to be?"

"I suppose he is my uncle," answered Adam; "but he doesn't act like it, does he? He has kept me a prisoner for ten years; or, it amounts to the same thing, for I could scarcely go out of the house, unless accompanied by my father. That is the story I promised to tell you, and I will relate it now while we are resting and eating our breakfast. Then I will tell you what happened last night at the fort."

"Black Bill, if you want me to feed you, come here," said Frank.

"Chaw your own grub," was the gruff response.

"All right. If you get hungry before night, you will know who to blame."

The boys, leaving the outlaw sitting sullenly on the bank of the brook, stretched themselves on the grass near the fire, with their weapons close at their side, and Adam began his story.



CHAPTER IX.

ADAM BRENT'S STORY.

"I shall try to tell my story," began Adam, "just as my father told it to me, years ago. It is not a long one, and even if it was, I should hurry through it as rapidly as possible, for it is a matter I do not like to talk about. That man," he added, nodding his head toward the outlaw, and speaking as plainly as a mouthful of fish would permit, "is a walking illustration of what bad company will do. He is my uncle, I am sorry to say, but, for a long time, I have never called him by any other name than Black Bill. In my story, however, I shall speak of him as William. I can remember when he was an uncle worth having. I used to run to meet him whenever I saw him coming, would stand at his side for hours listening to the story of his adventures in the mines, and was never easy unless I was in his company. But things have changed of late. I would run away from him now if I saw him coming toward me, and I am much more uncomfortable in his presence than I used to be out of it.

"When I was about six years old, mother and I lived with my grandfather at Placer City, in California. He kept a grocery and provision store, and my father and his brother William owned and worked a claim in the mines. The claim paid well, much better than any other for miles about, and father was steadily growing rich by his labor. William ought to have been equally prosperous, for he received half the profits; but somehow he never had a cent of money in his pocket, but was continually asking assistance from father, of whom he borrowed, first and last, several thousand dollars, which he has never taken the trouble to return. He said he was buying up claims; but when he had a quarrel with a miner about a gambling debt which he could not pay, the truth came out, and father saw where his money had been going. He found out, too, that for months William had been keeping company with some of the very worst men in the mines—gamblers, horse-thieves, and criminals of every sort, who had run away from the States to get out of reach of the law.

"I need not stop to tell you how shocked and pained all the family were when they heard of this, or how they tried, by every means in their power, to make William see what would surely be his end if he did not abandon the life he was

leading. Of course, he made promises of amendment, and, for a while, held manfully to them; but it requires moral courage to resist temptation, and that was something William did not possess. It was not long before he was as bad as ever; and when he could go no farther for want of money, he came to father to borrow. Then came the first quarrel between the brothers. Father refused to accede to his demand, and William threatened vengeance. He did not say what he would do, but father knew what he had determined upon, as well as if he had told him in so many words.

"Father had been in the habit of depositing his gold-dust in the safe at the store. William knew it, and was resolved to have that gold-dust. If he could not borrow it, he would steal it. He broke into the store that very night, but found the safe empty. Father had removed every dollar of the money. The noise he made in breaking open the safe aroused grandfather, who slept in a room over the store; and not recognizing William in the darkness, he gave him a shot from his revolver. The ball took effect somewhere, for the next morning there was blood on the floor, and William was nowhere to be found. Every one wondered who the robber could be, and a great many questions were asked about the missing man; for he had been a prominent character in the mines, and his mysterious disappearance excited curiosity. But it did not stop there. That curiosity became suspicion; and it was not long before it was noised abroad that he was the guilty one.

"William kept clear of Placer City forever afterward. The miners had a summary way of dealing with such men, and if they could have found him, the influence of all his friends and relatives combined could not have saved him. It was not long after that before people began to talk about Black Bill—the leader of a band of robbers who infested the mountains between Placer City and Sacramento; and in less than two weeks father fell into his hands. He recognized the chief, if others did not, and you can imagine what his feelings were when he found that he was his own brother. Black Bill robbed him, as he robbed every one else who came in his way, and released him with this warning, as nearly as I can recall the words:

"'You have made me what I am,' said the robber, 'and I will be revenged in a way you do not think of. I shall not lift a hand against you, but keep an eye on that boy of yours. If I get hold of him, I will make him a second Black Bill.'

"That was all the outlaw said, but it was enough to frighten father more than any physical danger would have done; and, as for myself, I might as well have been

sent to the State's prison at once, for I could scarcely have been more closely confined there than I was at home. Several attempts to steal me were frustrated by the vigilance of my father, who, becoming weary at last of living in constant fear of losing me, sold out his claim in the mines, and removing to this wild region, erected the house in which we lived until last night, and began business as a fur-trader. It was there he made the acquaintance of Capt. Porter. No sooner had we become fairly settled in our new home, than Black Bill made his appearance; and, although he has occasionally been off on trapping expeditions, he has spent the most of his time for the last ten years in hanging around the valley, watching his opportunity to capture me. He never succeeded, however, until last night; and, as good luck would have it, he was not destined to keep me long."

"O, I haint done with you yet!" exclaimed the outlaw, who had listened attentively to the story. "You're free now, an' I'm a pris'ner; but it won't be so long. I've got plenty of friends roamin' about among these mountains."

"You have found out by this time that the boy you captured last night was not Adam Brent, haven't you?" said Frank. "Where is he now?"

"Who—that spunky little feller? The last time I seed him the Black Fox was marchin' him off to the woods."

"Who's the Black Fox?"

"I should think you had oughter know him purty well by this time. He's the feller you run that race with. I told him that if he would take good care of that boy, an' not let him get away, I would make him a present of that leetle gray hoss of mine."

"That little gray horse doesn't belong to you, as it happens," said Frank. "He's mine."

"I'd like to see you get him. One of my mates, Jack Bowles, has got him safe."

"Well, if I had my other horse——"

Frank was about to say that if he had Roderick, and could catch Jack Bowles out on clear ground, he would show him that he hadn't got Pete quite so safe as he imagined; but he stopped when he reflected that the mustang was a good many miles away, and in the hands of the savages, and that possibly he might never see him again.

"I know where your other horse is," said Adam. "He is in the possession of Dick Lewis. You see, when the trappers learned that Dick had been captured, they went up and attacked the Indian camp, in the hope that during the confusion he might see a chance to get away. That was, probably, the time that Roderick escaped. At any rate, when the trappers returned to the fort, the mustang came with them, and Dick took care of him."

"That's all right," said Frank. "I knew the Indians would never catch Dick. Did you see Bob Kelly?"

"Yes; he was alive and yelling when we cut our way out of the fort."

"I have just thought of something," said Frank, turning to the outlaw. "You said you gave Archie into the keeping of the Black Fox. I met the Fox about three miles back in the mountains, and had a fight with him. What was he doing so far from camp?"

"I don't know," replied the outlaw, looking thoughtfully at the ground. "Mebbe the leetle feller got away from him."

"That's just my idea. Archie escaped, and he was in pursuit of him. If the Fox knows when he is well off, he will get help before he tries to capture him, for Archie is plucky and strong, if he is little. But, Adam, you were going to tell me what happened at the fort."

"There isn't much to tell," was the reply. "The Indians whipped us, and they were not more than an hour in doing it. The trappers, as I told you, left the fort and made an attack on the village, for the purpose of liberating Dick Lewis. Of course, they did not expect to whip the Indians in a fair fight; all they wanted to do was to throw the camp into confusion, and give Dick a chance to do something for himself. But he had already escaped, and about fifteen minutes after the trappers left, he came into the fort, puffing and blowing like a porpoise. The trappers were more successful than they expected to be. Finding the village nearly deserted, they set it on fire, kept up a running fight with the Indians for ten miles; and sixteen out of nineteen returned to the fort in safety. The Indians, in the meantime, must have received reinforcements from somewhere, for they followed close at the trappers' heels; and no sooner had the gates been closed than the fight began."

"You learned something about Indians when they made the attack on your wagon-train, while you were coming across the plains; but you have never been

in a regular battle with them, and you can have but a poor idea of the state of affairs in and about that fort during the short time the fight continued. They began operations by setting fire to our house and barns. The fire lighted up the whole valley; and I shall never forget how I felt when I looked over the top of the palisades and saw the savages coming toward us. I had never seen so many Indians before. There must have been a thousand of them; and the determination with which they made and carried on their attack, proved that they had great confidence in their overwhelming numbers, and that they expected an easy victory. They did not waste time in skulking behind trees and shooting at the fort—they came on in a body, like soldiers, approaching so close to the palisades that we could touch them with the muzzles of our guns as we thrust them through the loop-holes. They expected, no doubt, to find the fort in the same defenseless state in which they had seen it in the morning—with the gates gone and the walls broken down; but in this they were disappointed. The major had paid some attention to Captain Porter's warning, and the old trading-post was as strong as it had ever been. That was a fortunate thing for us, for, even as it was, it was all we could do to prevent the savages from affecting an entrance. They fought like tigers, climbing up to the top of the wall and throwing their tomahawks down at the soldiers, and even tearing out the palisades in some places; and I saw more than one Indian cut down with sabers inside the fort. The assault did not continue more than five or ten minutes—of course it seemed much longer to me—and then one of the chiefs set up a yell, and the savages fell back to the cover of the woods to devise some new plan of attack; while we improved the time to repair the damage they had done. I say *we*, because I count myself in as one of the defenders of the fort. My bullets went as swift and as straight to the mark as anybody's. I had a good rifle and a brace of revolvers; and, although I was excited and frightened, as I believe any other boy would have been under the same circumstances, I was not foolish enough to waste my ammunition, and did not shoot unless a fair mark was presented. I know I hit one Indian, and saved a soldier's life; but I haven't come to that yet.

"If you had been in the fort, I don't think you would have failed to take particular notice of Dick Lewis and Bob Kelly. All the trappers seemed to be in their element—I don't believe there was one among them who experienced any more fear than you and I would if we were defending a snow fort against the attacks of our schoolmates—but Dick and Bob were as wild as any of the Indians. Such yells I never before heard uttered by white men. If there was one place in the fort more dangerous than another, those two trappers were sure to be there. On one occasion, when the Indians had cut down a portion of the palisades, and the

soldiers were doing some desperate hand-to-hand fighting to keep them from entering through the opening, Dick seized one of the savages, and, whirling him clear over his head, threw him back into the fort, calling out: 'Ketch him, somebody!' Three or four soldiers sprang upon him at once, and before they had time to bind him, Dick threw them another. When the savages had been driven back, and the soldiers were repairing the palisades, the major took occasion to thank the trappers, and especially Dick and Bob, for what they had done. The former listened attentively to what he had to say, and then drew himself up and gave the major a regular military salute.

"'Fightin' comes as nateral to me as eatin',' said he. 'Me an' my chum, poor ole Bill Lawson, fit all through the Mexikin war; an' as fur Injuns, I've been in a heap of skrimmages with 'em, fust an' last. But we'll have to do wusser fightin' nor that afore we are done with 'em, major. They're goin' to begin their tricks, now.'

"The trapper had scarcely uttered these words, when a chorus of savage yells arose on all sides of us, and bullets and arrows began to come into the fort like hail-stones. A new danger threatened us now, for some of the arrows had bunches of burning leaves and pine-knots attached to them. They came over the walls in a perfect shower, some falling on the stables, some on the quarters, and in less than a minute the fort was on fire in a dozen different places.

"'Shovels!' shouted Captain Porter. 'All my men turn to and throw dirt on the fire!'

"But the savages were prepared for this. A number of them had climbed into the trees surrounding the fort, from which they could see all that was going on inside the palisades; and no sooner did the trappers fall to work in obedience to the captain's order, than a storm of bullets fell among them, sending more than one poor fellow to eternity.

"For the next half hour we had a serious time of it; but I believe the trappers would have succeeded in frustrating the designs of the savages, had it not been for the reckless bravery of a young chief, who, in some mysterious way, succeeded in entering the fort unobserved. How he managed to elude the vigilance of the soldiers, who were watching the loop-holes while the trappers were engaged in fighting the fire, I can not tell; but, at any rate, he got in, went into the officers' quarters, and after piling a quantity of clothing in one corner, set it on fire. I was standing at one of the loop-holes, watching a chance for a shot at

a warrior who was concealed in the top of a tree about fifty yards from the fort, when I heard a yell, and, turning quickly, saw a soldier struggling on the ground, and an Indian standing over him with his tomahawk raised to strike. I was not quick enough to prevent the weapon from descending, but I destroyed the Indian's aim by sending a ball into his shoulder. The hatchet grazed the soldier's head, and his enemy fell into the arms of a trapper, who bound him hand and foot before he could wink twice.

"If the trapper had known what the Indian had been doing, I do not think he would have taken him prisoner. He believed that the savage had just entered the fort, and that he had not had time to do any mischief; but he soon discovered his mistake, for when somebody opened the door of the officers' quarters, a thick volume of smoke rushed out. The trappers were ordered to the spot immediately, but it was too late. The fire had made rapid headway, and the inside of the building was a sheet of flames. It quickly spread to the stables adjoining the quarters, thence to the palisades, and almost before we knew it we were surrounded by a wall of fire.

"'The jig's up at last, youngster,' said Dick, as he hurried past me. 'Shovels aint no more account. We've got to trust to our hosses' legs now!'

"I don't believe I was ever before so badly frightened as I was when I heard these words. My situation then was bad enough, surrounded as I was by burning houses, almost suffocated by smoke, while bullets and flaming arrows were whistling through the air, carrying death and destruction on all sides of me; but to leave the shelter of those walls, and ride out of the fort under the very noses of a thousand yelling Indians, with nothing but the speed of my horse to stand between me and their fury—I tell you, Frank, the bare thought was enough to make my old fur cap rise on my head as it had never done before. While I was standing inactive, the soldiers had sprung into their saddles, and with drawn sabers in one hand, and revolvers in the other, were awaiting the order to cut their way out of the fort. Father and Captain Porter had secured my horse, and were looking for me. I had barely time to mount before the gate flew open, the bugle sounded a charge, and we swept out of the fort into the midst of the savages."

CHAPTER X.

TURNING OUT A PANTHER.

"I have been in more than one fight with the Indians," continued Adam, "and have heard their yells more times than I can remember; but I never heard any that equaled those which rung in my ears when the savages saw us coming out of the fort. At the moment the gate opened they were preparing for a second assault, and we must have taken them by surprise, for they scattered right and left before us like a flock of turkeys. But they did not forget the weapons they held in their hands, and, as we dashed through their lines, the bullets and arrows whistled about our ears thicker than ever. Before we had gone fifty yards from the gate, I saw riderless horses on all sides of me.

"Our party did not keep together long. Pursuit was commenced on the instant, and presently Indians, soldiers, and trappers were mixed up in the greatest confusion, so that I could scarcely distinguish a friend from a foe. Picture to yourself the scene: A desperate hand-to-hand contest among mounted men—the horses thundering along at the top of their speed, their riders too intent upon fighting to know or care where they were going; sabers, tomahawks, and spears flashing in the air, and emitting sparks of fire as they clashed together; rifles and revolvers cracking right and left, their reports sounding faintly above the noise of the horses' hoofs, and the whoops and yells of the combatants;—if you can imagine such a scene, you can have a faint idea of the running fight we carried on with those savages while we were going through the valley. As for myself, I confess that I took but little part in it, I was so badly frightened. I emptied both my revolvers before we were fairly out of the gate, and then clung to the horn of my saddle, and gazed about me in a sort of stupid bewilderment, while my horse galloped along with the rest. I seemed to be in a sort of trance; and when I came to myself I found that I had become separated from my father and Captain Porter, and that they were nowhere to be seen. I was almost alone. My horse, frightened by the noise and confusion, had left the others, and was going toward the mountains at a rate of speed I had never supposed him capable of. I saw that he was running away with me, but I did not care for that. If he would only take me out of reach of the Indians, and carry me to the willows, where I could conceal myself until daylight, he might run and welcome. I did not try to stop

him, but somebody else did. I heard the report of a rifle close behind me, my horse fell dead in his tracks, and I went rolling along the ground like a ball from a bat. I was badly hurt, and stunned by the fall, but still I retained my senses sufficiently to see that the enemy who had unhorsed me so suddenly was an Indian, and that he was approaching to finish the work he had begun. He came on at a gallop, holding in his hand a spear which was pointed straight at my breast. I gave myself up for lost; but when the spear was so close to me that I could have touched it, the Indian fell forward in his saddle (he was tied fast to it, so that he could not fall to the ground), the spear dropped from his grasp, and his horse carried him away, dead. Where the bullet that saved my life came from, I could not tell. It may have been a spent ball; or some friend may have seen my danger, and discharged his rifle at the Indian; but that was a matter I could not stop to inquire into. I jumped to my feet, and made the best of my way toward the willows, but had not gone far before I found that I had other enemies to contend with. I heard a shout, and saw a trapper running toward me. I stopped when I discovered him, for I thought he was one of those belonging to Captain Porter's expedition, and consequently a friend; but when he came within reach of me I found out my mistake. He seized me by the collar, and greeted me with:

"Who are you, boy? What's your name?"

"I am Adam Brent," I replied, astonished at his tone and manner.

"Then you're jest the chap I've been a lookin' fur," said he; and before I could tell what he was going to do, he caught me up in his arms as if I had been a child, and plunged into the willows. I did not struggle nor shout for help, nor do I believe I even trembled when, after carrying me perhaps half a mile into the woods, he put me down on a log, and, seating himself beside me, coolly announced that he was Black Bill, and that, having got hold of me at last, it was his determination to hold fast to me.

"I've been many a long year tryin' to get you," said he, with savage satisfaction, 'an' now I'm goin' to make a second Black Bill of you. I made that promise to your father more'n twelve year ago, an' I haint forgot it. When I see you as I have been—hunted through the mountains like a wild beast, an' shot at by every white feller who crosses your trail, then I'll be satisfied."

"I had lived in fear of this man from my earliest boyhood, and had more than once tried to imagine the terror I should experience if I should ever be so unfortunate as to fall into his power; but now that I was his prisoner, I was not at

all afraid of him. If your cousin, whom he captured last night by mistake, had been safe among friends, I should have felt no uneasiness; but, perhaps, after all, it was a good thing for Archie that Black Bill carried him to the Indian camp, for if he had been at the fort during the fight, he might not have been as fortunate as I was. A good many of our people were cut down, and I don't suppose that more than a dozen escaped.

"After thinking over my situation, I made up my mind that fate had destined me to a long captivity among the Indians, in company with this outlaw, and that I would endure it with what fortitude I could. Sometimes, when I thought of the scenes I had witnessed during that hand-to-hand fight, and reflected upon my father's chances for escape, I did not care what became of me. Black Bill said I would never see him again, and I believed him; and told myself that, if I must live without my father, I might as well be among savages as anywhere else. But I think differently, now that you have rescued me. I hope to be a man some day, and when that time comes, such fellows as Black Bill and his mates, who are constantly spreading dissatisfaction among the Indians, and urging them on to the war-trail, will have good cause to remember me. To whom are you making signals?" continued Adam, suddenly raising himself on his elbow, and looking earnestly at the outlaw.

Frank had been so intent upon his breakfast, and so deeply interested in his friend's story, that he had not thought of keeping a lookout for enemies; consequently he did not see the figure clad in buckskin, which crept stealthily through the trees on the opposite side of the brook, and took up a position behind a huge boulder, from which a good view of the camp could be obtained. But the figure was there, and it was that of an outlaw—one of Black Bill's mates. His eyes, which swept rapidly over the camp, were open to their widest extent, and on his face, as he raised it cautiously above the boulder, was an expression of great astonishment. Black Bill saw him, if the boys did not; and, by turning partly around and showing his confined hands, and by nodding his head, and winking his eyes, and making other mysterious signs, he must have succeeded in making the spy understand the situation, for he disappeared behind the boulder, and stole back into the woods.

"You were making signals to somebody," exclaimed Adam, catching up the outlaw's rifle, and casting suspicious glances through the trees around him.

"Makin' signals to the air, then," replied Black Bill, sullenly. "Thar aint nobody within miles of here that I knows on."

But Adam had lived too long on the frontier, and knew too much about the outlaw to be easily deceived. He had distinctly seen the prisoner nodding his head, and with the quick instinct of one who had passed his life surrounded with foes of every sort, he scented danger. Frank might have been satisfied with Black Bill's reply, and the innocent, surprised expression on his face, but Adam was not. He jumped to his feet, and running across the brook, looked up at the top of the cliffs under which they had been sitting. As he did so, he passed behind the boulder where the spy had been concealed but a moment before, and there he stopped, and leaning carelessly upon the rock, said, in a whisper to Frank, who had followed close at his heels:

"Don't exhibit any surprise, but look down at those leaves. Somebody has been here."

Frank looked, but could see nothing suspicious. Adam's trained eye, as keen as an Indian's, had, at a single glance, discovered signs of an enemy that Frank could not have found after an hour's careful search.

"I may have passed behind this rock when I first came to the brook," said he.

"If you did you never left those tracks," said Adam. "They were made by moccasins; and you've got shoes on. They were made by a white man, too, for the toes point out. If it had been an Indian, the toes would point in. A friend of Black Bill's was here not more than two minutes ago; and the sooner we get away from here the better it will be for us. What shall we do with our prisoner?"

"Let's take him with us, and compel him to show us the way to Fort Benton," replied Frank, astonished at his friend's skill in wood-craft, and at the coolness and deliberation with which he spoke.

"That would never do," said Adam, quickly. "His friends will be after us in less than five minutes, and he would shout to guide them in the pursuit. Besides, we are completely lost, and how could we tell whether or not he was guiding us to the fort? He would take us as straight to the Indian camp as he could go."

"Well, if we leave him here he will call for help the minute we are out of sight."

"Perhaps he will not be able to call for help by the time we are done with him. I'll tell you what we will do," continued Adam, glancing toward the outlaw, who still sat on the ground, closely watching all their movements, "do you get behind him, throw your arm around his neck, and choke him with all your power; and

I'll cram my handkerchief into his mouth. Then catch him by the shoulders, and drag him to that sapling and tie him there; and while you are doing that, I will secure his knife and tomahawk, and also his powder-horn and bullet-pouch. After that we'll take to our heels, and do some of the best running we ever did in our lives. There's not a single instant to be lost. Don't flinch, now."

Adam knew that Frank was a remarkably swift runner, an excellent wrestler, and a splendid shot with the rifle; but he had never seen him in a situation like this, and he did not know how cool and determined he could be. If he had, he would not have talked to him about "flinching."

"Wal," exclaimed the outlaw, as the boys sprang across the brook, "seen any thing wuth lookin' at? Didn't diskiver none of my mates hangin' around in the bushes, did you?"

"We saw all we wanted to see," replied Adam. "We saw foot-prints behind that bowlder, and we know who made them. That's the way to do it! Choke him till he opens his mouth."

While Adam was occupying the outlaw's attention, Frank had stepped behind him, and thrown his arm around his neck. He struggled and tried to shout for help; but the strong grasp on his throat rendered him powerless, and effectually stifled his cries. His under jaw dropped down, and the handkerchief which Adam held ready in his hand, was forced into his mouth. A moment afterward Black Bill was lying flat on his back, held down by Frank's handkerchief, which was passed around his neck and tied to the sapling of which Adam had spoken, and the boys, having possessed themselves of their weapons, and the outlaw's ammunition, were scrambling up the cliff like a couple of goats. They looked back now and then to satisfy themselves that their prisoner was still secure, and both told themselves that if they should be so unfortunate as to again fall into his power, their treatment would be very different from that which they had already received at his hands. Black Bill seemed almost beside himself with rage. He glared up at them like a madman, and made the most desperate attempts to free himself from his bonds; but the boys, although they had done their work quickly, had done it well, and as long as they remained in sight of the outlaw, he had accomplished nothing toward liberating himself.

Arriving at the top of the cliff, Adam shouldered his rifle, and sprang forward at the top of his speed, closely followed by Frank, who stepped as nearly as possible in his tracks. For nearly half an hour they flew along without speaking,

turning their heads occasionally to listen for sounds of pursuit, making use of all their skill to render their trail as indistinct as possible, and finally they slackened their pace to a rapid walk, which they kept up for two hours longer without once stopping to rest. At the end of that time, Frank, being satisfied that they were out of danger for the present, proposed "half an hour for refreshments." The half hour was really not more than ten minutes, for the boys were so much afraid of the enemies who they knew were following them, that they regarded every instant spent in needful repose as so much time wasted. Their refreshments consisted of just nothing at all—not even a drop of water to cool their lips. They could not stop to cook a dinner, even if they had had any thing to cook; and after a very short rest, during which they talked over their situation, and tried to determine upon their plans for the future, they sprang up, and resumed their flight, Adam, as before, leading the way.

The outlaw had told his nephew that Fort Benton, which was the nearest trading-post, and the place to which all the trappers and soldiers who escaped the massacre would be likely to direct their course, was a hundred miles distant; and the boys had decided, after much debate, that it lay nearly due east of Fort Stockton. A hundred miles from the nearest place of refuge, in the heart of an unbroken wilderness, every step of the way they must travel beset with dangers, and their path waylaid by crafty foes who might spring out on them without an instant's warning! Twenty miles of mountains and ravines to be passed over, and eighty miles more of prairie, where there was not even a thicket of bushes to afford them concealment from their enemies, to be traversed on foot! Would they ever succeed in reaching the fort?

"It looks like a slim chance, doesn't it?" said Adam, who easily read the thoughts that were passing through Frank's mind. "But father used to tell me that a fellow never knows how much he can accomplish until he tries. We will do the best we can, and if we fail we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that it isn't our fault."

Frank's endurance was severely tested that day. He found that traveling through the mountains on foot was something besides a holiday pastime, especially with such a guide as Adam, who moved along without any apparent effort, threading his way through the thick, tangled bushes with a celerity that was surprising. The afternoon wore slowly away, and just as the sun was sinking out of sight behind the mountains, the boys, weary and footsore, halted in the edge of the willows, and looked out over the prairie which stretched away before them as far as their eyes could reach. Adam stood for a long time with his chin resting on the muzzle

of his rifle, and his gaze fixed upon the horizon, thinking of his father and Captain Porter, and wondering if he should meet them if he succeeded in reaching the fort; while Frank, after satisfying himself that there were no Indians in sight, became interested in objects in his immediate vicinity. He thought the place looked familiar. There was a wide, shallow creek flowing through the ravine in which they were standing, and on its left bank arose a rocky cliff, which hung over the bed of the stream. Under the branches of a spreading oak which grew near the foot of the cliff, were the remains of a camp-fire; and a little farther on was a sapling which had been stripped of its bark. Frank remembered that sapling. It was the one to which Roderick had been tied when the trappers first brought him into camp. The horse was wild and vicious then, and after trying in vain to break the lasso with which he was confined, he had attacked the tree with his teeth, and peeled off the bark as neatly as it could have been done with a knife.

"We have accomplished the hardest part of our journey," said Adam, his gaze still wandering over the prairie in the direction he supposed the trading-post to be, "and now comes the dangerous part. If what father said about a general rising of the Indians was correct, the savages are scattered all over the plains between here and the fort; and if we get through, it will be more by good luck than good management. Do you see any thing?"

"Yes, I do," said Frank; "I see plenty of old friends. I know every stick of timber about here, for I passed three of the pleasantest weeks of my life in this very ravine. You have heard Dick and Bob speak of the Old Bear's Hole, haven't you? Come with me, and I will show it to you."

Frank crossed the creek and began pulling aside the bushes at the base of the cliff, searching for the entrance to the cave. Dick had told him that more than one sharp-eyed Comanche had looked for it in vain, and for a long time Frank thought he should meet with no better success; but at last he discovered the entrance by stepping into it accidentally. The mouth of the passage was filled with leaves, which had effectually concealed it from his view.

"The cave must be a mile or two below, isn't it?" asked Adam, gazing dubiously at the dark opening.

"No; it is above ground altogether, and is inside this rock," replied Frank, pointing to the cliff. "But the question is, Shall we use it, now that we have found it? Do you suppose that Black Bill and his friends are in pursuit of us?"

"Of course they are. They won't give us up so easily."

"But we have taken a great deal of pains to conceal our trail, and they may not be able to follow it."

"Don't you believe it," replied Adam, with a laugh. "Those men's eyes are as sharp as a hound's nose. If they can track an Indian when he is doing his best to cover up his trail, they can surely follow us. We are not done with them yet."

"Then I propose that we sleep in the Old Bear's Hole. I can't travel any farther to-night, and I should feel much safer in the cave than I should if we camped in the open air. We can't get along without some supper, and we must have a fire to cook it; and that might attract the attention of the outlaws if they should happen to be in the neighborhood."

The matter was settled without any further debate, and the boys began to busy themselves in collecting a supply of pine-knots to serve as torches. This done, Adam lighted one of them with his flint and steel, and handed it to Frank, who backed down into the opening; but, to his friend's surprise, he came out of it again much more quickly than he had gone in.

"I have just thought of something," said he, in reply to Adam's inquiring look. "The first night we camped here, while we were on our way to California, Dick Lewis went into the cave and found that a grizzly bear had taken possession of it. He had a terrible fight with the animal, and was so badly clawed up that his most intimate friend would not have recognized him. There may be a bear in there now for all we know."

"That's so," said Adam. "Must we give up the idea of sleeping in the cave?"

"Not yet. Dick and Bob, who spent many a day here hiding from the Indians, were old foxes, and had two holes to their burrow. Come with me, and I will show you the other."

Frank led the way to the top of the cliff, and, after a short search, discovered the entrance to the upper passage-way. He was not greatly encouraged when he found it, for he saw that a path, hard and well beaten as any road, led from it down the side of the cliff. Then he blessed his lucky stars that he had not gone into the cave. It had an occupant, the character of which was proved by the bones that lay scattered about on both sides of the path. It was some ravenous beast of prey, which probably would not feel disposed to abandon his snug

quarters without a fight. Adam kneeled down beside the passage-way, and, after a single glance into the cave, sprang up and threw his rifle forward in readiness to shoot. Frank looked in and saw a pair of eyes, which shone like coals of fire, glaring at him through the darkness.

"It isn't a grizzly," said Adam, "but something almost as bad. It's a panther. He must come out of there, too," he added, pulling off his hat and digging his fingers into his head to stir up his ideas. "That cave is the only safe place we can find, and we must have it, whether he is willing or not."

"Hand me your rifle," said Frank; "I'll fix him."

"Not for the world," replied Adam, quickly. "You must remember that we have enemies not a great way off, and that it stands us well in hand to be quiet about what we do. Besides, there may be a whole family of panthers in there, and if you should wound one of them, we'd have a fight on our hands directly. I know how to manage him. Take this rifle and climb up into that tree, and when he comes out tell me."

Frank did as his companion requested. He mounted into the topmost branches of the tree, and, after settling himself into a comfortable position, from which he could watch the mouth of the passage-way, he turned to observe Adam's movements. He saw him, with a long stick in his hand, kneeling before the opening at the foot of the cliff, engaged in pushing a quantity of dried leaves and pine-knots into the passage-way. Then his plan was clear enough to Frank: he was going to smoke the panther out.

Adam worked steadily for half an hour, and then Frank, seeing him take his flint and steel from his pocket, turned his attention to the passage-way at the top of the hill. There was draught sufficient to make the fire burn well, and presently Frank heard a great roaring and crackling in the cave, and a thin wreath of smoke came curling out. With the smoke came the panther, which was evidently very much alarmed by this unexpected assault upon his home, for he flew down the path like a flash of light, and speedily disappeared in the bushes. Adam's plan had worked to perfection. The Old Bear's Hole had been cleared of its dangerous occupant, and the boys were at liberty to take possession of it.



CHAPTER XI.

FRANK IN SEARCH OF HIS SUPPER.

"He's out!" shouted Frank, scrambling down out of his tree.

"I thought I could manage him," said Adam. "Don't you think my plan was the best? But I say, Frank," he added, as he joined our hero at the top of the hill, "we must fire the rifle once, at least, for we want some supper."

"If we could use a bow and arrow as well as the Black Fox, we would not need the rifle. Now, one of us had better stay here, and build a fire in the cave, and gather a supply of wood for the night, while the other goes out and knocks over a big-horn. The mountains about here are full of them."

"Well, seeing that you are the best shot, perhaps you had better go to market. By the time you get back, I will have every thing ready. You are not afraid to go?"

No, Frank was not afraid, but still he did not like the idea of wandering off alone among those mountains. He would have felt much more at his ease if the big-horn had already been killed, and was ready for the spit. Besides the danger of getting lost, there were the outlaws, who might hear the report of his rifle, and pounce down upon him before he could secure his game and make good his retreat to the cave. He and his companion might have gone without their suppers for that night without serious inconvenience, but they were still eighty miles from Fort Benton, and, while they were traveling across the prairie, they might not find any thing to shoot, for the Indians had doubtless frightened away all the game. If Frank succeeded in killing a big-horn, it was their intention to cook it all, and carry with them a supply of the meat sufficient to last them until they reached the fort.

Adam began looking about for dry wood with which to start the fire in the cave, and Frank shouldered his rifle and started down the cliff. He followed the same course which he, and Archie, and the trapper had pursued on a former occasion, when they went out to hunt big-horns, and presently found himself in the ravine in which his cousin had met with his first adventure with a grizzly. Dick had once told him that if the trees in that ravine could speak, they could relate many a thrilling story about him and Bill Lawson; and Frank thought that, if they could

find tongues now, they might have something to say concerning himself that would prove interesting.

The deer-path which Frank was following ran through the ravine for about half a mile, and then led down the side of a precipitous cliff, and terminated on a rocky ledge, perhaps twenty-five feet square, in the center of which was a spring of water. When Frank reached the edge of this cliff, he looked over it very cautiously, and was gratified to see, about a hundred feet below him, a noble elk, with wide-spreading antlers, drinking from the spring.

"Our supper is all right," soliloquized the young hunter, after he had taken a good survey of the ledge, and calculated the animal's chances for escape in case he failed to disable him at the first shot. "That ledge juts out into a gorge which is much too wide for any deer to jump. If he tries it, I am sure of him, for he will fall on the rocks and be killed. He can't scale the cliff, unless he comes up the path; and, if he tries that, I'll be here to stop him."

Frank did not usually spend as many minutes in getting ready for a shot as he did on this particular evening. On ordinary occasions, his rifle was at his shoulder the instant the game appeared in sight; and one quick glance along the barrel made him sure of his aim. But this was not an ordinary occasion. He was working for his supper now, there were enemies all around him, and it was rapidly growing dark. He must kill the elk at the first shot, secure a portion of it (the animal was so large and heavy he knew he could not carry it all), and make his way back to the Old Bear's Hole without the loss of a single minute. He raised his rifle and took a long and deliberate aim at the buck, and just then the animal bounded across the spring and came leisurely up the path. For a single second his breast presented a fair mark; but that second was long enough for Frank. The rifle cracked sharply, and the elk, turning in his tracks, made one tremendous bound, and, leaping clear across the ledge, disappeared among the trees which lined the sides of the gorge. Frank's supper was not all right, after all.

"Now just look at that!" he exclaimed, in a tone of great disappointment. "When one is in a hurry, something always happens to trouble him. The deer is dead enough, but what good will he do me as long as he lies at the bottom of the gully?"

As Frank said this, he jumped to his feet, and, running down the path, looked over the ledge. The bushes were so thick that he could not see the bottom of the gorge; but there were drops of blood on the leaves, and Frank knew that the fall

had proved fatal to the buck, even if the shot had not. What plan could he contrive to descend into the ravine was the question that troubled him now; and it was one that was asked and answered almost in the same breath. He chanced to look toward the top of the cliff, and was frightened nearly out of his senses when he discovered two Indians advancing toward him with stealthy footsteps. He was now in the same situation in which the elk had been but a moment before, with this slight difference: He was conscious of the presence of his enemies, while the first intimation of danger the buck had was, receiving the ball in his breast. There was no place of concealment on the ledge, and he had his choice between two courses of action: One was to ascend the path in the face of the Indians, and the other to jump over into the ravine. He was not long in coming to a decision. He took a single glance at the Indians, and, seeing that one of them was in the act of raising his gun to take aim at him, he tightened his grasp on his rifle, which he held in his left hand, and seizing with his right the bushes that grew on the edge of the precipice, he fearlessly threw himself into the gorge, while the bullet that was intended for him sped harmlessly through the empty air. The Indian was just a moment too late.

Both savages uttered loud yells of astonishment as they witnessed this act of desperation, and, bounding swiftly down the path, they leaned over the rocks to see what had become of the reckless young hunter. The bushes, by the aid of which he had swung himself over the precipice, sprang back to their place, but Frank was nowhere to be seen. The Indians thought, no doubt, that he had paid for his temerity with his life, and that he was lying mangled and bleeding at the bottom of the gorge; but could they have looked under the overhanging rock on which they were kneeling, they would have seen him standing erect and unharmed about ten feet below them, with his rifle clubbed, ready to strike the first of his foes who came in sight. His attempt at escape was not so reckless as the Indians imagined it to be. While standing on the ledge, he noticed that the branches of a tree, which grew at the bottom of the ravine, extended almost to the top of the precipice, and he thought he could jump into them with perfect safety. Still he hesitated to try it, until he discovered the Indians, and then he found that he had no alternative. To assist him in his descent, and to render the attempt less hazardous, he made use of the bushes, which, contrary to his calculations, swung with him far below the top of the tree, and out of reach of it. This proved, however, to be a point in his favor; for, to his great surprise and delight, he landed on a broad, flat rock, which was effectually concealed from the view of the Indians by the overhanging cliff. It seemed as if this way of escape had been prepared expressly for him. If he had built the cliff himself he

could not have devised a better hiding-place. His enemies, even if they discovered him, could not climb up to him from the bottom of the cliff, for it was so steep that a mountain-goat could scarcely have found footing thereon; and if they descended to him from above, he would shoot the first one who came in sight.

"I am all right yet," thought the young hunter, drawing a long breath of relief, and feeling for his powder-horn. "There is only one way in which the Indians can get the better of me, and that is by starving me out. Adam must go without his supper to-night, for I have business on my hands that will——"

Frank paused in his soliloquy, and his face once more grew pale with terror. He could find no ammunition for his rifle. When Adam removed the powder-horn and bullet-pouch from the person of the outlaw, he had thrown them over his own shoulders, and there they were now. Frank had left his companion without thinking to ask for them. He was in something of a predicament, standing, as he was, almost within reach of two hostile Indians, and without even a charge of powder or a bullet for his rifle. A movement at the top of the cliff drew his thoughts from himself to his enemies. They leaned over the precipice and conversed earnestly for a few minutes, and then one of them sprang into the air and landed in the branches of the tree. Fortunately his back was turned toward Frank, and this gave the latter an opportunity to conceal himself, which he quickly did. The savage, little dreaming that the object of his search was so near to him, descended the tree and disappeared among the bushes which lined the sides of the gorge.

While Frank was waiting to see what the other Indian was going to do, he was sure that he heard the sound of a desperate struggle at the bottom of the ravine. It continued but a moment, and then all was still again. He might have been mistaken in this, but still he was certain that something had happened down there, and so was the Indian, who, after waiting nearly ten minutes for the report of his companion, uttered some words in the Indian tongue. An answer came from below, and the savage sprang into the tree and quickly descended to the bottom of the gorge. Frank thought he had gone down to assist in cutting up the buck; but if that was his intention, he did not carry it out. His companion had been tomahawked the moment he reached the foot of the tree, and a like fate was in store for him. Two trappers, one of them in the disguise of an Indian, were concealed among the bushes in the ravine, awaiting his appearance. The wary savage, always on the lookout for danger, discovered his foes, but just a moment too late. The report of a rifle rang through the mountains, and the Indian, falling

headlong to the ground, was instantly pounced up by the trappers, and dispatched as if he had been a rabid wolf. Frank's ears told him what had been going on, and his heart beat high with hope. Friends were near, and he was certain that he knew who they were. Without stopping to consider that there might be more Indians in the vicinity, who would be attracted by the sound of his voice, he called out: "Dick Lewis!"

There was silence for a moment, and then came the reply: "Show yourself, you keener feller!"

Frank, too overjoyed to speak again, was on his feet in an instant, and preparing to descend into the ravine. There was but one way to accomplish this, and that was to spring into the tree. It was a long jump from where he stood, and, if he failed to catch one of the limbs, or if it proved too weak to sustain his weight, he would fall forty or fifty feet. But Frank did not stop to think of this. Grasping his rifle tightly in one hand, he sprang into the air, and, by the aid of a friendly branch, swung down to the body of the tree in safety. In a moment more he was standing between Dick and Bob, who were wringing his hands with an energy that brought the tears to his eyes.

But little time was wasted in explanations. Frank told the trappers that he had left Adam at the Old Bear's Hole, and that he had come out in search of his supper; and Dick told him that he and Bob were traveling through the ravine, on their way to the cave, when they heard the report of the rifle and saw the buck fall over the precipice. They also heard the voices of the Indians on the cliff, and, supposing that they owned the game, and that they would be likely to descend into the ravine to secure it, they concealed themselves in the bushes to await their appearance. The first savage who came down the tree was easily overpowered; and when his companion called out: "Do you see any thing of the white man?" (that was the first intimation the trappers had that there was a white hunter about) Dick replied: "Yes; he's here, but I can't get at him." "That brought the Injun down, you see," said the latter, in conclusion, "an' when he come in sight, we sent him where he'll never get a chance to attack any more peaceable tradin'-posts, I'll bet a hoss. Fetch along the mustang, Bob, an' we'll start for the Ole Bar's Hole."

The horse was brought up, and Frank fairly danced with delight when he found that it was Roderick. The animal recognized his master, and answered his caresses by rubbing his head against his shoulder. Frank sprang upon his back, and the trappers, after they had raised the elk from the ground and placed it

before him, led the way toward the cave. It was quite dark when they arrived within sight of it, but Dick knew in an instant that there was something wrong; and so did Bob, who placed his hand on his companion's shoulder and pointed toward the top of the cliff.

"My eyes aint as good as they used to be," said he, "but if that aint an Injun up thar, I never seed one."

"An' if that aint one of Black Bill's mates standin' at the foot of the cliff, may I be shot!" added Dick.

"Then they've tracked us, after all the trouble we took to throw them off our trail!" whispered Frank, in great excitement. "Who knows but that they have captured Adam?"

"If they have, we'll soon turn him loose," replied Dick. "Now, youngster, you stay here, an' me an' Bob will creep up an' take a look at things. If thar aint nobody in the cave except Black Bill an' his friends, we'll clean 'em out in a hurry. We've got a long account to settle with one of them fellers, an' this is jest the time to do it."

The trappers stole off in the darkness, and Frank sat on his horse and awaited the issue of events with feelings that can not be described. He saw Dick and Bob creep noiselessly upon the outlaw who stood at the foot of the cliff, and seize, gag, and bind him; and so silently was the whole operation performed, in spite of the man's furious struggles, that he did not hear even a leaf rustle. One enemy had been disposed of; but there were still three others, besides the Indian, to be overcome.

"If I had a load for my rifle I wouldn't sit here long," said Frank, to himself. "I know there will be a desperate fight in that cave if Black Bill is there, and perhaps just one bullet may be needed to decide the battle in our favor. What in the world was that?"

A thin sheet of flame, followed by a dense volume of smoke, suddenly arose from the mouth of the upper passage-way. The moment's silence that succeeded was broken by cries of pain and loud yells of anger, and through the smoke, which settled like a cloud over the cliff, the Indian appeared, running at the top of his speed, as if badly frightened at something, and directing his course toward a thicket of bushes at the opposite side of the ravine. The thought that it was the Black Fox had scarcely passed through Frank's mind when he discovered that

there were two horses tied to the bushes, and that the Indian was running toward them, evidently with the intention of mounting one of them and making good his escape. Frank leaned forward to obtain a better view of the animals, and, in a moment more, the elk had been pitched to the ground, and Roderick was flying down the ravine with the speed of the wind.

"Stop, you Black Fox!" shouted Frank, swinging his rifle around his head and giving vent to a yell that awoke the echoes far and near. "I've got something to say about this business."

One of the horses was Pete, and the other was King James. While Roderick had been faithfully serving the trappers—he had carried Dick Lewis through that desperate hand-to-hand fight at the fort, and, like him, escaped without a single injury—his swift rival had been equally faithful to one of the outlaws. Black Bill had captured him from one of the soldiers during the fight, and, recognizing Dick's massive form among the struggling horsemen, he had made every exertion to come to close quarters with him. Roderick moved so swiftly, however, that the black could not overtake him; and perhaps that was a fortunate thing for the outlaw, if he had only known it. While Dick was cutting his way through the ranks of the Indians, he was keeping a bright lookout for Black Bill, and if he could have found him, and brought him within reach of the cavalry saber which he was wielding with such telling effect, he would have put a sudden stop to his career of depredation. Pete had carried Black Bill many a long mile since his master last saw him; but now he seemed in a fair way to fall into the hands of his rightful owner.

"Stop, I tell you!" shouted Frank, again. "You are at the end of your rope now, my hearty."

The young Indian heard the order, but paid no attention to it. He ran directly to the horses, and, springing upon King James's back, cut the lasso, with which he was tied, with his knife, and went tearing down the ravine, with Frank in hot pursuit. The time had come now to decide the question which had been so long in dispute. This was to be a fair race, and Frank wished his cousin had been there to witness it, for he was sure of a victory.

A few of Roderick's long bounds carried him through the willows and out on the prairie, where Frank discovered the Indian, almost a hundred yards distant, lying flat along his horse's neck, one hand twisted in his mane, and the other swinging the lasso, which he now and then brought down on the black's side with a

sounding whack. Roderick seemed to know what was expected of him, for he increased his speed the moment he emerged from the willows, and then the race began in earnest. The gray gained from the start, and rapidly, too; and, before half a mile had been accomplished, Frank was so close to the object of his pursuit that he leaned forward to catch him by the scalp-lock.

"I guess you'll stop now, Indian!" he exclaimed. "Well, it makes no difference to me which way you take it, on foot or on horseback, for I can beat you."

The Indian, for once, was a little too quick for Frank. Slipping like an eel out of his grasp, he threw himself from his horse without attempting to check his headlong speed, and, landing safely on his feet, started back toward the willows. Frank was on the ground almost at the same instant; and then began another race, which, like the one that had come off the day before at the Indian camp, was decided in favor of the fleet-footed young hunter. The Black Fox, however, was desperate to the last; and, after the race, a fight ensued. One quick, determined blow with the rifle knocked the knife from the savage's hand; but that was not the end of the matter—it was only the beginning of it. The young warrior's strength and agility seemed to have increased wonderfully since their last meeting, and the struggle, which continued at least ten minutes, was decided only by Frank's superior powers of endurance. He came off with flying colors; and when he helped his prisoner to his feet, his arms were fastened behind his back with his own belt.



CHAPTER XII.

ADAM BESIEGED.

For a quarter of an hour after Frank left him, Adam worked industriously, collecting a supply of wood for the fire, which he piled at the entrance to the passage-way. The next thing to be done was to ascertain whether or not the cave was a safe place for them to camp during the night. One enemy had been dislodged by the smoke, but there might be others in there for all he knew. The only way to find out was to go in and see; and this Adam prepared to do.

Having satisfied himself that his knife and hatchet were safe in his belt, he grasped a lighted pine-knot in one hand to serve as a torch, and holding in the other the bow, and half a dozen arrows which he had selected from the quiver, he crawled down into the passage-way. The thought that he was about to enter the cave which, but a few minutes before, had been the home of a panther, made him tremble so violently that the torch shook in his hand. He worked his way along very slowly and cautiously, stopping every few feet to examine the ground before him, and finally reached the foot of the passage-way without having discovered any thing at which to be alarmed. There was the panther's bed on the withered hemlock boughs which, in days gone by, had served Dick and Bill Lawson for a couch; but the panther himself was gone. The cave appeared to be empty, but it was not so in reality. Had Adam raised his torch above his head and examined the sides of the cavern closely, he would have discovered something crouching behind a projecting rock, about ten feet above the floor of the cave, and might have seen the eyes which glared down at him through the darkness.

"This will do nicely," said Adam to himself. "There is a little too much smoke in here just now for comfort, but that will soon pass out. If the outlaws track us here, and come in at one of the passage-ways, we can go out at the other; and if they surround us, so that we can't get out at all, we can climb up the sides of the cave and hide among those rocks."

So saying, Adam began making preparations for the night. He threw down his weapons, stuck his torch into the ground, and ascended out of the cave to bring down the wood which he had collected. In a few minutes a fire was blazing brightly in the center of the Old Bear's Hole (the passage that led to the top of

the hill answered all the purposes of a chimney), a quantity of wood sufficient to keep it burning all night was piled in one corner, and Adam sat on the hemlock boughs whittling out some spits on which to cook the supper when Frank brought it in. All this while that dark object behind the rocks had been looking down at him, closely watching every move he made.

When the spits were finished, Adam went out of the cave to look for Frank. He began to think that if the big-horns were as plenty about there as his friend had represented them to be, he was a long time in finding one. His impatience soon gave way to anxiety; and when at last it grew quite dark, and Frank did not make his appearance, he became alarmed. He could not go out to look for him, for he did not know the direction in which he had gone; and, besides, he might get bewildered in the darkness, and be unable to find his way back to the cave. For two hours he kept watch at the top of the hill—as Dick, years before, had kept watch for the return of Bill Lawson—listening in vain for the sound of Frank's footsteps, and then he reluctantly came to the conclusion that he was destined to pass the night alone and supperless. He did not mind the loss of his supper so much, but he knew he would be lonesome down there in that gloomy cavern, with no one to talk to. He felt the need of companionship; and, more than that, he was harassed by the fear that Frank had fallen into some danger.

"There is but one thing that I can do," he soliloquized, "and that is to wait until daylight and follow his trail. I'll never make another step toward Fort Benton until I know what has become of him. It would be a cowardly piece of business in me to desert him, after what he has done for me."

Adam's first care was to make his camp secure against any visitors he might chance to have during the night. The bright fire which was burning in the cave, and which shone out at the mouth of the passage-way, lighting up the bushes all around, was just the thing to keep off four-footed enemies, but it might serve to guide the outlaws, whom he feared more than bears or panthers, to his place of retreat. The light must be covered; and that could be easily done, for there was the log which the trappers had more than once used to conceal this entrance to the Old Bear's Hole. Adam rolled it close to the opening, and, after listening again to make sure that Frank was not approaching, he backed down into the passage-way and pulled the log over it, leaving only a small opening for the passage of smoke.

For the next half hour Adam was miserable enough. He lay upon the boughs, gazing into the fire and thinking over his adventures, now and then raising his

head to listen for Frank's footsteps—once or twice almost certain that he heard his voice—and finally he fell into an uneasy slumber. When he awoke, it was with a start and a presentiment of evil. He knew he heard a voice now, but it was not Frank's voice. Starting up in alarm, he grasped the bow which lay close at his side, and looked up the passage-way in the direction from which the voice came. A cold sweat started out all over him, and he trembled in every limb when he saw that the log which he had placed over the opening had been removed, and that two men were leaning over it, peering down into the cave. The fire had burned out, leaving only a bed of smoldering coals; consequently it was dark in the Old Bear's Hole, and Adam was sure the men could not see him, although he could observe every move they made, and could even distinguish their features. The men were Black Bill and his friends.

"Wal, I reckon we've run yer cubs to earth at last," said a gruff voice. "They're thar easy enough, 'cause I can see a fire an' smell smoke."

"Yes," assented Black Bill, "they're thar, an' we'll jest go down an' fetch 'em out."

"Mebbe it aint them at all," said another of the outlaws. "P'raps it's Dick Lewis and Bob Kelly."

"No, I reckon it aint nobody but the boys," replied Black Bill. "Haint we follered their trail all the way, an' did we see any signs of Dick and Bob? Say, you, Adam, an' you other feller!" he shouted, "we've got you, an' you can jest give up without any fussin' or foolin'. Hear me, don't you?"

Adam did hear him. He thought he could have heard that stentorian voice very distinctly if he had been half a mile distant; but he did not make any reply. He was well satisfied of one thing, and that was that Black Bill, boldly as he spoke, was in no hurry to enter the cave. The latter could not forget that the boys had possession of his rifle and ammunition; and, from what he had seen of them, he did not think it likely that they would hesitate to use the weapon in an emergency. This view of the case was confirmed by the next words the outlaw uttered.

"You needn't keep so still down thar!" he shouted. "We've got you fast enough, an' if you don't hand up that rifle an' come up out o' that, it'll be wuss fur you."

If the outlaws had known that Adam was alone in the cave, and that the rifle they so much dreaded was a long way from there, they would not have spent many minutes in settling matters. They waited and listened for a reply, and then Adam

saw Black Bill's burly form darken the opening. He was tired of waiting for Adam; and since the latter would not come up, he had decided to go down after him. The boy saw that it was high time he was doing something.

"Hallo, up there!" he exclaimed, as if he had just awakened from a sound sleep; "who's that? Frank, Dick, Bob, wake up! There's somebody coming down the passage-way."

By the time these words were spoken, there was no one in the passage-way, or even in sight. Black Bill had crawled back to the top of the hill with all possible speed. He believed now that his man was right in his conjectures—that the trappers, of whom he stood so much in fear, were in the cave with the boys, and that it would not be quite safe for him to go among them. He said nothing until he had rolled the log over the opening, thus putting it out of the power of his enemies to ascend out of the cave to attack him, even should they feel so disposed, and then he exclaimed, in an exultant tone:

"We've got you all jest where we want you. It wont take us long to settle up our accounts. Thar won't be enough of you left to go on another tradin' expedition by the time we are done with you."

During the next ten minutes Adam sat on his bed of boughs, listening intently, and wondering what would come next. The outlaws were holding a consultation. He could hear them conversing in low tones, but could not understand what they said. After a long and earnest debate, they seemed to have come to some decision, for the sound of their voices ceased, and Adam heard them moving down the hill. The next sound that reached his ears came through the lower passage-way—a rustling sound, as if some one was crawling toward the cave; but Adam knew it was not that. He was well aware that the outlaws could not be induced to enter the Old Bear's Hole as long as they supposed that Dick and Bob were there, for there was not one among them who was brave enough to meet either of the trappers in a fair contest. They had determined to compel them to come out of their hiding-place, so that they could overpower them by their superior numbers. In order to accomplish this, they adopted the same plan to which the boys had resorted to drive out the panther. But Adam was not a wild animal, to be frightened out of his snug harboring-place by a little smoke. He thought he knew how to beat the outlaws at their own game; and, while they were employed in filling the passage-way with leaves and pine-knots, he went to work to stop the draft so that the fire would not burn. The lower passage-way, where it entered the cave, was about two feet square; and it was a matter of but

little difficulty for him to close the opening by cramming the hemlock boughs into it. When the work was done, he surveyed it with a smile of satisfaction, and told himself that the outlaws would have a fine time smoking him out.

Having finished the task of blocking up the passage-way, Adam spread his hunting-shirt upon the ground, and began cutting the garment into strips with his knife. The pieces, when tied together, formed a rope about fifteen feet in length; and in one end of it was a running noose. Adam then threw a pine-knot upon the fire, and when it blazed up so that he could distinguish objects in the cave, he coiled the rope in his hand, and, after one or two failures, succeeded in throwing the noose around a projecting point of rock about ten feet above his head. As the noose settled down over the rock, something glided from behind it, and stole noiselessly up the side of the cave; but Adam did not see it. It was dark up there, and he was too deeply interested in his work to notice any thing. In order to make sure that the rope was strong enough to sustain his weight, he ascended it hand-over-hand, and climbed upon the rock.

"This is just the place," said he, to himself. "Black Bill will not be long in finding out that I am alone here, and then, of course, he will come in. I can't whip him and his three mates, so when I see him coming, I will climb up the rope, and hide behind this rock. He'll never discover me, unless he comes up here; and if he tries that I'll begin to fight. I'll show him that he's got a nephew who isn't afraid of him, if he is an outlaw and a desperado."

Adam slid down the rope again, and busied himself in collecting his weapons, and getting every thing in readiness, so that when the time came for him to retreat, he could ascend to his hiding-place without an instant's delay. Then, for the first time, he discovered that Frank had gone off without any ammunition for his rifle. The powder-horn and bullet-pouch were still hanging over his shoulder, where they had been ever since he and Frank escaped from the outlaws. How careless they had both been! What a reckless piece of business it was for a hunter to go off alone in the mountains, with only one load in his rifle! Frank might have run into some danger from which a single extra charge of powder would have saved him. But no amount of regrets could now place the ammunition in his friend's hands; and after a few seconds reflection, Adam thought that perhaps what had been Frank's loss might be his gain—that the powder, at least, might be made to serve him a good turn. An idea came into his head, and no sooner was it conceived than he set about putting it into execution. Stepping to the place where the upper passage-way opened into the cave, he pulled the stopper from the powder-horn, and poured nearly all its contents in a

pile upon the rocks. With that which was left in the horn, he laid a train from the pile to the middle of the cave. When he had done this, he felt greatly encouraged. He believed that if he had a few more pounds of powder, and a supply of provisions and water, he could hold the Old Bear's Hole against all the enemies Black Bill could bring against it.

While Adam was thus employed on the inside of the cave, the outlaws were equally busy on the outside. They had filled the passage-way with leaves, and after a fire had been started in them, Black Bill and two of his men went up the hill to tell the occupants of the cave what they had done, and to demand their surrender. The outlaws had left some one at the upper passage-way to watch it during their absence. It was the Black Fox, who, shortly after his fight with Frank, had found and joined Black Bill's party. He had a piece of news to communicate to the outlaws, and that was that Adam was alone in the cave. He had kept a close watch down the passage-way, and had seen Adam moving about—it was so dark that he could not tell what he was doing—and he had seen no one else. He did not believe that Dick and Bob were down there, and, after Black Bill had listened to his story, he did not believe it either. With angry haste he pulled away the log which he had rolled over the mouth of the passage-way, and shouted:

"You Adam Brent! You can't fool me no longer. I know jest how the matter stands; you're alone down thar. Pass up that rifle an' come out, or I'll be down arter you."

Adam, as before, had nothing to say until the outlaw, enraged at his silence, began making preparations to descend into the cave; and then he called out:

"Black Bill, can you hear what I say?"

"Do you hear what *I* say?" asked the outlaw, in reply. "Come up out o' that."

"Listen to me," said Adam. "We are not going up there——"

"*We!*" interrupted the outlaw; "thar aint nobody down thar but you. If Dick an' Bob are in the cave, why don't they speak?"

"Their rifles will speak sooner than you care to hear them. We are all ready for you, and the first man who comes down here will be blown in pieces. We've got something that you don't know any thing about."

Adam knew, by the silence which followed, that his words had not been without

their effect upon the outlaws. They were cowards at heart, and they dreaded to face an unknown danger. They talked together in a low tone for a few minutes, and then Black Bill began to descend into the cave, his actions indicating that he was thoroughly in earnest this time, and that there was to be no backing out, no matter what perils he might encounter.

"Stop!" shouted Adam, who plainly saw that something was going to happen. He was standing near the fire, holding in his hand one of the spits on which he had intended to cook his supper. He was ready to put it to a different use now, for one end of it was blazing, and he stood within reach of the train of powder. "Stop!" he repeated, in a still louder tone. "I am not going to be captured again, and I give you fair warning that, if you come into this cave, I will blow you up. Don't come a step nearer."

Black Bill was too angry to heed the warning. He growled out a savage reply, and came on down the passage-way, followed by both his companions. It required the exercise of all the courage Adam possessed to stand there and await their approach, but he did it; and when Black Bill was directly over the pile of powder, he threw his burning spit upon the train. There was a quick flash which lighted up the interior of the Old Bear's Hole as bright as noon-day, and a great volume of smoke arose and filled the cavern. For an instant there was silence in the cave; then a frightful yell rang through the passage-way, followed by a volley of oaths, and threats of vengeance that made Adam's blood run cold. He had all the while been aware that the powder was not sufficient in quantity to do the outlaws any great damage. He had hoped that it would frighten them, but it had a directly opposite effect. They were almost beside themselves with rage now, especially Black Bill, who had suffered more severely than either of his companions. When he came into the cave he carried his knife in his hand, and was in just the humor to use it upon something.

"Start up this fire, one of you, an' give us a light here," said he, in a voice choked with passion. "Jack, watch that hole, an' be sure that he don't slip by you."

The smoke which filled the cave soon passed out; and when the wood, which had been thrown upon the fire, blazed up so that the outlaws could distinguish objects about them, they were not a little amazed to find that the Old Bear's Hole was empty. Their plucky enemy, who, alone and unaided, had held them at bay for more than an hour, had disappeared. Adam was where he could see them, however, and he took particular notice of the outlaws' faces. Black Bill's eyebrows had disappeared altogether, and so had his whiskers and moustache. His

'coon-skin cap and hunting-shirt were badly burned, and his face was blacker than ever from the effects of the powder. His two companions had also suffered severely, and Adam did not wonder that they were angry.

"Where is he?" exclaimed Black Bill, in great perplexity. "He couldn't have gone out through this other hole, 'cause it's stopped up. Ah! I see where he is. Come down out o' that."

The outlaw was looking straight at the boulder behind which Adam was concealed; but the latter, knowing that he had not discovered him, kept perfectly quiet. He had made up his mind to fight in earnest now, and was ready to give his enemies a warm reception, if they attempted to drag him from his hiding-place.

"I haint agoin' to waste no more words with you," said Black Bill, savagely. "I'll snake you down from thar, an' split your wizen fur you; that's what I'll do."

The outlaw placed his knife between his teeth, and snatching one of the pine knots from the fire, began the ascent of the rocks. As they were almost perpendicular, that was a task of some difficulty; but, with the assistance of his men, he was at last able to grasp the boulder, and draw himself up until he could look over it. Adam was there. He was lying flat on his back with his bow drawn, and the moment the outlaw's head appeared in view, he discharged an arrow at him. The missile passed through his cap, and sent it whirling to the floor.

"Here you are!" shouted Black Bill. "You'll never have a chance to draw an arrer or any thing else on me agin."

Adam knew by the expression he saw on the outlaw's face, that he had something worse than captivity to fear now. His enemy swung himself over the boulder, and was on the point of springing down upon the boy, when his movements were arrested by a savage growl which seemed to come from the rocks directly over his head. The next instant a dark object bounded through the air, and alighting on Black Bill's shoulders, fastened its teeth in his throat, and fell with him headlong to the ground. Adam saw it as it passed over him, and knew that it was a panther—the mate to the one he had smoked out of the cave.



CHAPTER XIII.

DICK IN A NEW CHARACTER.

Let us now return to Archie, whom we left in Black Bill's wigwam. He was very much disheartened at the result of his cousin's bold attempt to release him, but knowing that it was useless to repine, or to attempt resistance, he submitted to his fate with all the fortitude he could command, and allowed the outlaw to bind him hand and foot.

"You said I couldn't keep you pris'ner, didn't you?" said Black Bill, fiercely; "now I'm goin' to show you. If you can break that buckskin, you're a hoss."

"I don't see what you want with me, anyhow," returned Archie. "I am not Adam Brent, and, more than that, I never saw or heard of him until three days ago."

"Keep your breath to cool your porridge," said the outlaw, as he stretched himself on a pile of skins near his prisoner, "'cause it aint no 'arthly use to waste it in talkin' to me. I'm too ole a 'coon to let a boy like you pull the wool over my eyes. Don't I know that nose of your'n, an' that har, an' that black face? I could pick you out among a million. Now, I am goin' to sleep, an' you had better do the same."

This command was uttered in a very savage tone of voice, and Archie, knowing that it would be the height of folly to enrage the outlaw by disregarding his wishes, turned over on his bed to find an easy position, and held his peace; but sleep for him was quite out of the question. Black Bill slept, however, and snored lustily for half an hour; and then he suddenly awoke and started up with an ejaculation of wonder. Almost at the same instant a yell rang out on the air, followed by the report of a rifle, which brought the outlaw to his feet in great haste.

"What's the matter out there?" asked Archie, who speedily became aware that there was something unusual going on in the camp.

"We're attacked!" exclaimed Black Bill, in great excitement. "Them fellers at the fort are either mighty reckless, or else they've got help from somewhere. They're pitchin' into us, that's sartin."

As the outlaw spoke, the report of a volley of fire-arms rang through the ravine, followed by yells, and the hurrying of feet outside the lodge. Black Bill tore open the door, and looking out, began a rapid conversation with some one. It proved to be the Black Fox, who came in, and hastily untying Archie's feet, grasped him by the collar, and hurried him out of the lodge. Black Bill caught him up in his arms as he came out, and placed him upon the back of a mustang, which was standing in front of the door; after which the young Indian seized the bridle, and led the animal off at a rapid trot.

As soon as Archie had time to look about him, he found that the outlaw had not been mistaken in his conjectures. The confusion in the camp was increasing every moment. The reports of the rifles rang out louder and clearer, showing that the attacking party was gaining ground rapidly; men, women, and children, surprised and terrified by the suddenness of the assault, ran through the village in all directions, some with packs on their backs containing their household goods, others empty-handed, and too intent on making good their escape to think of any thing else, and all hurrying at the best of their speed toward the mountains. The flames were already ascending from the lower end of the village, and by the light which they gave out, Archie discovered that the attacking party was composed of trappers, and that they were coming directly toward him, sweeping every thing before them. The hope that they would see and recognize him was short-lived; for the Black Fox plunged at once into the midst of the flying crowd, and a very few minutes sufficed for him to conduct his prisoner into the woods.

The fight at the village, if such it could be called, was over almost as soon as it began. The trappers, whose only desire was to release Dick Lewis, passed rapidly through the camp, looking in vain for the object of their search, and then turned and retreated toward the fort, thus extinguishing the last spark of hope which their appearance had raised in the breast of the prisoner. Scarcely had their shouts died away in the distance, when a chorus of yells arose in another direction; and the retreating Indians, one and all, faced about, and hurried back to the camp. Those yells produced a great change in them, for their terror gave away instantly to the wildest delight, which they expressed in all possible ways. The Black Fox, who still held fast to the horse on which Archie was mounted, shouted until he was too hoarse to speak plainly, and then triumphantly announced:

"More Indian coming. Burn fort now, sure."

When Archie arrived within sight of the camp, his heart stood still, and he

trembled for the safety of his friends at the trading-post. A cloud of braves in war-costume—five hundred of them at least—was moving through the burning village in the direction the trappers had gone—the horses running at the top of their speed, and their riders swinging their weapons around their heads, and yelling like madmen. These were the reinforcements the chief had been expecting; and now that they had arrived, Archie knew that the attack on the fort would not be long delayed. It was commenced that very hour; and when it was over, some one brought him tidings of the result.

When the reinforcements had passed out of sight, the Indians who had fled before the trappers ran into the village, and busied themselves in pulling down the wigwams to stay the progress of the flames. This was a matter in which the Black Fox was not interested. He had no property to save, but he had a prisoner to watch, and to this duty he gave his whole attention. Stopping in the edge of the woods, he tied the mustang to a tree, and seizing Archie by the shoulders, pulled him rather roughly to the ground; after which he spread his blanket on the leaves, and settled into a comfortable position to observe what was going on in the village. He was very talkative, and entertained his captive with a glowing description of the manner in which the Indians would overcome the garrison, and the way they would dispose of their prisoners; but finding that Archie was in no humor to listen to him, he finally relapsed into silence.

At the end of two hours—two long, dreary hours they were, during which Archie was a prey to the most gloomy thoughts—he was aroused from a reverie into which he had fallen, by the movements of the Black Fox, who jumped to his feet, and gazed earnestly toward a group of warriors who had just emerged from the ravine. Archie thought they acted very strangely. Some of them walked with feeble, tottering steps, as if they scarcely possessed the strength to retain an upright position, while others reeled about like drunken men. He looked toward the young Indian for an explanation.

"Much hurt," said the latter; then, fearing that his prisoner might not understand him, he struck himself on various parts of his body with his hand, raised his bow to his shoulder as if it had been a gun, and imitated the motions a person would make in using a saber. From this Archie knew that the warriors had been wounded, and that they had received their injuries during the battle at the fort. This was enough to put him into a fever of suspense. He wanted to know if the Indians had been successful, and he wished some of the braves would tell him; but they did not seem disposed to do any thing of the kind. They did not even notice their friends, but threw themselves upon the ground, and wrapping their

blankets around their heads, suffered in silence.

"Which side whipped?" asked Archie, at length.

"Indian," replied the Black Fox.

"How do you know?"

"O, Indian always whip white man."

"No, Indian doesn't. He gets thrashed sometimes, and badly, too. He couldn't whip the trappers who set fire to that camp, a little while ago."

The young savage did not appear to be in a mood to discuss the matter, and Archie, with his feelings worked up to the highest pitch of excitement, twisted about uneasily, and waited to see if there were any prisoners brought in. The wounded Indians, in the meantime came in rapidly, and in a few minutes there were so many disabled warriors lying about him, that Archie began to believe that the fight had resulted in a decided victory for the defenders of the fort. Among the wounded savages was one who attracted Archie's attention; and if he had been a white man, or even a friendly Indian, he would have felt the keenest sympathy for his distress. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, powerful-looking fellow, badly injured, if one might judge by the looks of his face, and the pain occasioned by his wounds seemed to be so intense that he could neither sit, lie, nor stand still, even for a moment. He would seat himself on the ground, and rock back and forth for awhile, then stretch out at full length, and thrash about uneasily, and finally spring to his feet, and look around for another resting-place. At length he walked rapidly toward the Black Fox, who, thinking that it might not be quite safe to trust himself within reach of a man driven nearly frantic with pain, jumped up, and retreated a few steps. This seemed to be just what the wounded man wanted; for he took possession of the young Indian's blanket, and, wrapping it around his head, lay down upon the ground.

If the owner of the blanket was angry, he did not show it. He stood looking at the warrior a moment, and then an idea occurred to him which he announced to Archie in his broken English. There was no danger that the latter would escape while the Indians were all around him, he said, and he would go to the village and make some inquiries concerning the fight. It might be well for Archie to keep perfectly quiet during his absence, he added, for there was the wounded Indian, who was in just the right mood to hurt somebody.

"Don't be uneasy," replied Archie. "Go and get some information about that fight, and hurry back; for I want to know which whipped. I'll wager my rifle against your bow and arrows that you Indians were completely cleaned out."

When the young warrior had disappeared, Archie, not knowing what else to do with himself, lay down on the ground to await his return, looking over his shoulder occasionally at the wounded Indian, who began to kick about worse than ever.

"It serves you just right," said the prisoner. "What had those people at the fort done to you, that you wanted to kill them? Perhaps you will learn to let peaceable white settlers alone in future."

"I don't reckon I ever done any harm to peaceable white fellers," said a familiar voice, from under the blanket. "Lay down, you keerless feller!" it added quickly, as Archie started up in amazement; "lay down, or you'll spile every thing."

Archie, for a moment too astonished to speak, fell back upon the ground again, and, as he did so, he felt the cold blade of a hunting-knife pressed against his hands. The thongs of buckskin with which he was confined gave away, one after the other, under its keen edge, and in a few seconds he was free.

"Dick, is that really you?" he whispered, as soon as he had recovered the use of his tongue.

"I don't reckon it's any body else."

"How did you get so badly hurt?"

"Hurt!" repeated the trapper; "I aint no more hurt nor you be. This aint the fust time you've been fooled to-night, is it? I've been through a heap since I seed the sun set, but I can out-run and out-fight the best Injun in this tribe yet. I haint got no time to waste in talkin', howsomever. We're licked, the tradin'-post is burned up, an' the only thing we can do is to make tracks for Fort Benton. Creep into them bushes, an' keep in 'em till you get around to the other side of the camp; then strike off through the mountains, an' go straight south. The moon is up now, an' you can tell the pints of the compass from that. Arter you have gone about two miles from the camp, you will strike the ole wagon trail—it aint traveled now, but it is a good, plain road, an' you can't miss it—which you must foller till you reach the prairy."

"I might get lost," whispered Archie. "Why can't you go with me?"

"'Cause I can't leave ole Bob," was the reply. "He's a pris'ner now, an' I'm goin' to stay here till I see a chance to turn him loose. You can't get lost if you do as I tell you. When you reach the prairy, travel straight north fur about ten miles, an' you will come to the Ole Bar's Hole. If me an' Bob are alive, we'll be thar to-morrer night; but if we shouldn't come then, don't wait fur us, but strike out fur Fort Benton, which is exactly north-east of the Ole Bar's Hole. Now be off afore that young Injun comes back."

"But, Dick," persisted Archie, "I don't want to leave Frank."

"Who axed you to leave him? Ole Bob sent him safe out of camp long ago."

Dick jumped to his feet and staggered off in the direction of the village, and Archie, after looking all around him to see that there was no one observing his movements, crept into the bushes. When he reached them, he arose to an upright position, and hurried along with all possible speed, keeping in the edge of the ravine, as Dick had directed. How long it was before the Black Fox discovered his escape and what he said, and what he did, when he found that his prisoner had slipped through his fingers, Archie never knew. He heard no tumult behind him, nor any sounds of pursuit; and neither did he meet any of the Indians during the two hours he stumbled about through the darkness, picking his way over rocks and logs toward the old wagon trail of which Dick had spoken. He reached it in safety, and then his progress became more easy and rapid.

The road, being overhung by cliffs and trees, was, in some places, pitch dark; but Archie found but little difficulty in following it. He ran along, forgetful of every thing except that there were Indians and outlaws behind him, never giving a thought to the grizzly bears, panthers, and other savage animals with which the mountains abounded, and thinking only of the foes he had left in the ravine, and of the Old Bear's Hole, where he hoped to meet the trappers. Alone in the mountains, on foot, and entirely unarmed, his situation was far from being an encouraging one; but Archie had a happy faculty of looking at the bright side of things.

Dick had told him that the trail was not traveled now, but Archie found that he was mistaken; for, when he had gone about two miles, he came suddenly around the base of a mountain, and found before him a long row of camp-fires, and wagons drawn up on each side of the road. He was startled by the unexpected sight, and his first impulse was to turn and take to his heels; but a closer glance satisfied him that he had stumbled upon the camp of a party of emigrants. That

same glance showed him also that an attempt at retreat might prove extremely hazardous; for, standing in front of the nearest fire was a man who hailed him the moment he came in sight, and covered him with his rifle.

"Who's that?" asked the emigrant, in some alarm.

"A friend!" replied Archie. "Don't shoot."

"Come up to the fire, friend, and let's have a look at you," said the man. "Why, what's the matter with you? You are as white as a sheet."

"Perhaps you would be white, too, if you had passed through what I have to-night."

"And you are panting as though you had been running," continued the emigrant. "Where's your horse and your gun? and what are you doing out here alone in the mountains, at this time of night?"

"It's a long story, and I can't stop to relate it to you. You have made your camp in a very dangerous place, if you only knew it, and my advice is to hitch up and start for Fort Benton with as little delay as possible. There are hostile Indians all around you."

"Indians!" cried the emigrant. He stepped back, and, dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground, leaned on the muzzle of the weapon and looked earnestly at Archie, while several men who were lying near the fire on their blankets, and who had been awakened by the conversation, raised themselves on their elbows and began to listen more attentively.

"Where is Fort Benton, and why should we go there? We want to go to Fort Stockton."

"Well, you will never see it. It was burned by Indians not more than three hours ago, and the most of the garrison were massacred. The savages may come along this road in less than twenty minutes."

If Archie had never created a sensation before, he could certainly boast of having made one now. It seemed to him, from the commotion that ensued, that every person in the train had heard his words. Exclamations of wonder and alarm arose on all sides: men began running about, some yoking their oxen and harnessing their mules, others crowding around Archie and asking innumerable questions which they did not give him time to answer; horses pranced and snorted; dogs

barked; children cried; women screamed and thrust their heads out of the wagons to see what was going on; and in a moment the camp, which had been so quiet and peaceful when Archie first discovered it, was in the greatest uproar.

"Why, boy, you're crazy!" exclaimed one of the emigrants, when Archie had hurriedly related his story. "I don't believe a word you say. You've been asleep, and dreamed it all."

"Am I asleep now?" retorted Archie. "Look at my wrists. Do you dream that you see those marks on them? They were made by the strips of buckskin with which I was tied."

"Didn't they tell us at Fort Alexander that there wasn't a hostile Indian on the plains?" asked another.

"Very likely they did, sir; and no doubt they thought so. I have been living within sight of a camp of Indians for the last three days, and I didn't know they were preparing to go on the war-trail; but they were, and I have passed a portion of this night as a prisoner among those same Indians."

"But suppose they do attack us? we've got twenty men."

"There were almost seven times as many in Fort Stockton, and yet the Indians captured it. If you are tired of life, you can stay here; but as I desire to live awhile longer, I shall go on."

Archie did go on, but he did not go alone; the entire train went with him. Among the emigrants there were many who had never crossed the plains before, and who were terrified by the simple mention of the words "hostile Indians." These prepared to turn back at once; and the others, not caring to be left behind, accompanied them.

"Is there any one here who can spare me a horse and rifle?" asked Archie. "I have tramped about among these mountains until I am completely tired out; and I have no weapon except a pocket-knife."

Archie was standing near a wagon occupied by an invalid, who had listened to his story with blanched cheeks. When he made this request, the man said, in a trembling voice:

"You don't look as though you were strong enough to handle a gun but if you are, here's one at your service."

"I don't want to take this, sir, unless you have other weapons," said Archie, who, anxious as he was to have some means of defense in his hands, was not selfish enough to disregard the comfort or safety of others.

"I have a brace of revolvers," replied the man; "but that thing is of no use to me, for I never fired a gun in my life. You will find my horse picketed with the others—a large chestnut-sorrel, with white mane and tail. The saddle and bridle are in the front of the wagon."

Archie thanked the man cordially, and wondering where he had lived all his life that he had never learned to use a rifle, he took the saddle and bridle from the wagon and started out to find the horse.

Never before had Archie seen a wagon-train prepared for the march in so short a space of time. Every thing was done in a hurry, and, in less than five minutes, some of the emigrants were moving down the road toward the prairie. He noticed, also, that now that the excitement and alarm occasioned by the intelligence he had brought had somewhat subsided, silence reigned in the camp. Not a loud word was heard. The men moved about their work as silently as specters, and spoke to their animals in whispers; the screams had ceased, the children had stopped crying, and all seemed to understand the necessity of making as little noise as possible. The horses, too, seemed to comprehend the situation, for there were no prancing or restless ones among them; and even the wagons moved off with a subdued creaking of their huge wheels.

When Archie had found and saddled his horse, he began looking about for the captain of the train. He had something to say to him.



CHAPTER XIV.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

Archie had a plan to propose to the wagon-master, and that was that the train should be conducted first to the Old Bear's Hole, and then to Fort Benton. He thought this would be much safer than to attempt a long journey across the plains. The Indians would certainly pass over that road in going from their camp to attack the settlers on the prairie; and it was equally certain that they would discover and follow the trail left by the wagons. If the emigrants were overtaken in the open country, they could offer but a feeble resistance; but if they intrenched themselves in the cave, they could hold any number of their foes at bay. Archie explained this plan to the captain when he found him, and, to his utter amazement, it was rejected without an instant's hesitation.

"I've done nothing but lead wagon trains across these prairies for the last two years," said the man. "I've made a business of it; but I never before heard any thing about Indians on the war trail. You've well-nigh frightened the whole train to death by your cock-and-a-bull story; and, since the emigrants are bound to turn back, I shall take them to Fort Alexander."

"Why, that's farther off than Fort Benton!" exclaimed Archie. "It must be two hundred miles from here."

"No difference if it's a thousand. I don't know the way to Benton, but I could go to Alexander if I was blindfolded. And another thing: wouldn't I look well trusting my own life, and the lives of these people, to a boy like you! I don't believe you ever saw an Indian."

"I've seen more of them than you ever did," replied Archie, indignantly, "and I have had more experience with them, if I am from the States. Mark my words: Before morning, you will wish you had taken my advice."

Archie left the captain and fell back to the wagon of the invalid. "I am much obliged to you, sir, for the use of your horse and rifle," said he, "but I must return them now. The wagon-master is about to undertake a journey of two hundred miles across the prairie; and, as I don't think it a safe piece of business, I am going to leave the train and start off on my own hook."

"Hold on!" exclaimed the man, as Archie dismounted to tie the horse to the wagon. "Where are you going?"

Archie unfolded his plan again for the benefit of the invalid, adding that, as the wagon-master had not seen fit to adopt it, it was his intention to go alone to the Old Bear's Hole, and, if he did not find Dick and Bob there, to strike for Fort Benton. The invalid listened attentively, and, when the boy ceased speaking, announced that it was his determination to accompany him. This was something that Archie had not counted on, and he did not know whether to be disappointed or delighted. The prospect of a lonely journey of ninety miles, through a country infested with hostile Indians, even though there was a bare possibility that he might meet the trappers at the Old Bear's Hole, was by no means a cheering one; and he would have been glad of almost any company except this invalid. If the latter accompanied him, he would, of course, go in his wagon, and that was an arrangement the boy did not like. Its white cover could be seen at a long distance, dark as it was, and if there were any Indians about it would be certain to attract their attention, in which case Archie, to save his own life, would be obliged to leave the helpless emigrant to shift for himself.

"You will let me go with you?" said the invalid, seeing that Archie hesitated.

"That is a matter which you must decide, sir," was the reply. "I do not expect to reach the fort without trouble; and whether or not you will be safer with me than with the train, is a question which I can not take the responsibility of answering."

"I will answer it for myself: I shall go with you."

Upon hearing this, the invalid's teamster, who had sat listening to the conversation, pulled up his horses with a jerk, and, hastily collecting the articles in the wagon which belonged to him, jumped to the ground.

"What's the matter out there?" asked the owner of the wagon. "Why don't you go on?"

"'Cause I am done with you; that's why," replied the teamster, gruffly. "If you are goin' into any sich business as this—philanderin' off over the prairy with that fool of a boy, who will lose you an' himself into the bargain in less'n twenty minutes arter you git out of sight of the train—you can jest drive your own wagon. I am goin' to stay with the emigrants, where I know I am safe."

Every little trouble seems a mountain to a sick person, and when the invalid

heard this, he covered his face with his hands and cried like a child. As the teamster was about to move off, he looked up and said, piteously:

"Mike, don't leave me. Remember that I can't help myself, and that I must have some one to defend me if we get into trouble."

"I reckon my life is worth as much to me as your'n is to you," was the rejoinder.

"Don't go yet, Mike; hear what I have to say," continued the invalid. "I have twenty thousand dollars in hard money in this wagon, and if you will go with me, and stick to me until we reach Fort Benton, I will give you one-fourth of it—five thousand dollars. You will certainly run less risk in traveling ninety miles than in going two hundred."

The teamster stopped, and, walking slowly back to the wagon, looked down at the ground in a brown study. Archie, who had watched his face closely, noticed that he listened with indifference to the invalid's appeals to his pity, but at the mention of the twenty thousand dollars, the expression of unconcern on his face gave way to a look of astonishment, and he began to listen more eagerly. This made it plain enough to Archie that, if the man consented to accompany the wagon, it would not be out of any desire to respect the wishes of his employer, or to protect him if he fell into danger, but simply to earn the money that had been promised him.

"If I had twenty thousand dollars, or twenty cents, about me, I should be very careful not to mention the fact in the presence of such a man as he is," said Archie, to himself. "He is a villain—I can see it in his eye; and I hope he will decide to remain with the train. I should feel quite as much at ease among the Indians as I should with him for company."

"You will not leave me, Mike," said the invalid, in a pleading voice. "Didn't I find you in the streets of St. Joseph in a destitute condition, and haven't I fed, clothed, and paid you well since you have been with me? Drive me to Fort Benton, and the five thousand dollars are yours."

"Wal, Mr. Brecker, you have treated me mighty kind, that's a fact; and, now that I think of it, it would be mean in me to desert you. But I don't want to go alone—this boy would be of no account if we should happen to fall into trouble; and, if I can get company, I'll stick by you."

The teamster, without waiting to hear the invalid's profuse thanks, threw his

bundle into the wagon and hurried down the road out of sight. He returned in a few minutes, accompanied by a rough, reckless-looking man, with whom he was conversing earnestly. They stopped at a short distance from the wagon, and Archie, who was listening intently, overheard a portion of their conversation. Mike was urging the man to accompany his employer's wagon, and the latter was holding back through fear of the Indians.

"I tell you thar aint no Injuns on the prairy," said the teamster. "That boy don't know what he's talkin' about. The wagon-master says so, and so does every body else in the train, except Brecker, and he's a fool. It'll be the best job you ever done. Twenty thousand dollars aint picked off every bush nowadays."

Archie pricked up his ears when he heard this. The invalid had offered his teamster but five thousand dollars for driving the wagon to Fort Benton, and yet the man was talking as though he had promised him the whole twenty thousand. Archie began to get excited, and believed that the best thing Mr. Brecker could do would be to remain with the wagon train.

"Are you sure that you can depend upon that man?" he inquired, addressing himself to the invalid.

"Who—Mike? Certainly. He is an honest fellow, and I would trust him with my life. Why do you ask that question?"

Archie did not think it best to give a direct answer. The invalid was frightened nearly out of his senses already, and the boy had no desire to increase his alarm by revealing the suspicions that had suddenly arisen in his mind. If Mr. Brecker was willing to trust himself and his twenty thousand dollars on the prairie under the protection of the teamster, it was really no concern of his. If Mike was an honest man, however, he was certainly keeping bad company, and Archie thought it might be a good plan to keep his eyes open and be prepared for any emergency. He was sure that something exciting would happen during the ride to the Old Bear's Hole. While he was thinking the matter over, the two men approached the wagon, and Mike introduced the new-comer as his friend Bob Frost, an old guide and Indian fighter.

"He is just the man we want," said the invalid. "I shall feel safe now."

"In course you can feel safe," replied Frost, with a braggadocio air that made Archie put him down as a coward at once. "Thar aint Injuns enough on the prairy to skeer me. I'll take you through to Fort Benton without no trouble. 'Taint wuth

while to have that ar youngster taggin' arter us, though," he added, glancing at Archie.

"Why, he will show us where to go," replied Mr. Brecker.

"We don't need him, and he can't go," said Frost, decidedly. "I know the way to Fort Benton better nor he does."

"I don't see how my presence will interfere with you in any way," said Archie. "It was I who first proposed Fort Benton as a place of refuge, and I shall go there, whether you are willing or not."

Frost had an overbearing air about him, and an insolent way of talking that Archie did not like, and he thought he might as well give him to understand that he was not under his control, and that he should do as he pleased. When the man was about to reply, Mike interrupted him. The two conversed in a low tone for a few minutes, and then sprang into the wagon and drove after the train, which was by this time out of sight in the darkness. In half an hour they reached the prairie, and, leaving the road, the teamster turned to the left and drove along the edge of the willows toward the Old Bear's Hole.

The cover of the wagon was open at both ends, and Archie could see every move the men made. They drove rapidly for awhile, and then, allowing the horses to settle down into a slow walk, entered into an earnest conversation. The invalid tossed about uneasily on his bed, now and then raising the cover of the wagon, and looking out over the prairie to satisfy himself that there were no savages in sight, and, becoming impatient at length, desired the teamster to drive faster.

"'Taint safe," said Frost, who seemed to have taken the management of affairs into his own hands. "The faster we go the more the wheels rattle; an' if thar are any Injuns about, the noise will lead them to us. I say, youngster! Mebbe it would be a good plan fur you to ride on ahead, an' see if the way is clear."

Now, this was something that Archie had no intention of doing. He had already marked out the course he intended to pursue, and one thing he had determined upon was, that he would not for a moment lose sight of the teamster and his friend. He thought too much of his own safety, and, besides, he wanted to be at hand to protect the invalid; for he was sure that he would need somebody's protection before many minutes more had passed over his head. He knew, as well as if had been explained to him in so many words, that the men had determined to take possession of the twenty thousand dollars, and that the

guide's suggestion, that he should ride on in advance, was but a plan to get rid of him. Perhaps, the moment his back was turned, Frost would send a ball into him; or, it might be, that it was his intention to lose him in the darkness, and then dispatch the invalid and rob the wagon. Archie did not know which of these two courses of action the men had decided upon, but he was resolved that neither of them should prove successful.

"Did you hear what I said, youngster?" exclaimed Frost, angrily.

"Oh yes, I heard you."

"Then why don't you start—why don't you obey orders?"

"Well, I have two reasons. In the first place, I do not recognize your right to give any orders; and, even if I did, I should pay no attention to them, as long as you issue them in that insolent tone of voice. In the next place, if it is all the same to you, I prefer to ride behind."

"Then you can stay behind. You can jest toddle back to the wagon train."

"I am not going that way. My route lies in this direction."

"Wal, then, travel on ahead," roared the guide, growing angrier every moment. "We don't want you hangin' about us no longer."

"Oh, don't send him off," cried the invalid. "He is going to show us the way to a safe hiding-place."

"You need not be at all uneasy, Mr. Brecker," said Archie. "I have not the least intention of leaving you alone with these men."

"Haint you?" exclaimed Frost. "Mike, pull up them hosses. I'll soon fix him."

The time for action had come, and Archie was ready for it. As the teamster stopped the horses, and Frost leaped to the ground, he rode up to the wagon, and, thrusting his hand under the cover, pulled out the invalid's revolvers. He knew just where to find them, for he had seen their owner place them beside him on the mattress, where he could seize them at an instant's warning.

"What's the matter?" cried Mr. Brecker, in great alarm. "What are you going to do with those pistols?"

Archie could not stop to reply. He grasped a revolver in each hand, and covering the teamster's head with one of the weapons, pointed the other at the guide, who at that moment came around the end of the wagon. The former dropped the reins, and turned pale with terror; but Frost, who was in too great a hurry, and too highly enraged to notice any thing, ran up to Archie, and seized his horse by the bridle.

"Now, my lad," said he, savagely; "climb down——"

"Take your hand off that bridle!" interrupted Archie.

Frost now looked up for the first time, and seeing the shining barrel of the six-shooter leveled full at his head, uttered a cry of alarm, and staggered back as if

he were about to fall to the ground. The man who boasted that he had never seen Indians enough to frighten him, was thoroughly cowed by a sixteen-year-old boy.

"Drop that knife!" commanded Archie, and the bowie which the guide held in his hand fell to the ground instantly. "Look out there, Mike! I am watching you, and if you attempt to pick up a weapon it will be the last of you. Now, Frost," he added, waving one of his revolvers over the prairie in the direction he supposed the wagon train to be, "make tracks. Don't stop to talk, but clear out at once. Mr. Brecker and his money are safe while I am about. Why don't you obey orders? One——two——"

The guide did not wait to hear any more (he was afraid that when the "three" came out, a bullet would come with it), but hurried off at once, and without uttering a word. Archie kept one of his revolvers pointed at him as long as he remained in sight, and then turned to the teamster.

"Now, Mike, it's your turn," said he, giving emphasis to his words by pointing both his weapons at the man's head. "Jump down from that wagon, and follow your partner. When I count three, I am going to send two bullets over the seat on which you are now sitting."

Had Archie fulfilled this threat, the bullets would have passed through the empty air; for Mike, taking him at his word, leaped to the ground and walked off, shaking his head and muttering to himself. That part of the work was done, and now came a more difficult task, and that was to quiet the invalid, who seemed to be on the point of going into a fit of hysterics. Archie soothed him as best he could, assuring him that the danger was passed, and that there was nothing more to be apprehended from the would-be robbers, but his words seemed to have no other effect than to increase the invalid's agitation. The boy did not know what to do; and, while he was considering the matter, the reports of rifles suddenly rang out on the air, followed by a chorus of savage yells which made the cold chills creep all over him. The Indians had overtaken and attacked the train. As quick as thought Archie dismounted, and after tying his horse to the wagon, sprang into the driver's seat, and seized the reins and whip.

What happened during the next two hours Archie could scarcely have told. He tried many a time afterward to recall the incidents of that wild ride, but all that he could remember was that he clung to the reins with one hand, and swung the whip with the other, until his arm was so tired that he could hardly raise it to his

shoulder; that the spirited horses never broke their mad gallop from the time they left the willows, until he checked them on the banks of a little creek, twenty miles from the base of the mountains, where he stopped to obtain a few minutes' rest; that the heavy wagon rocked and groaned like a vessel in a gale of wind, as the frantic horses dragged it over the prairie, up one swell and down another—bounding over buffalo wallows and gullies, which at any other time would have effectually checked its progress;—he remembered this as if it had been a dream; and when he came to himself, he was sitting on the ground beside the wagon, the horses were standing knee-deep in water, and the invalid was staring at him with a bewildered air, like a man just aroused from a sound sleep.

"Where are we?" asked the latter, in a scarcely audible voice.

"We seem to be in a grove of willows on the banks of a creek," replied Archie; "but how long we have been here, and how we came here in the first place, I scarcely know. What is that noise?"

Archie was himself now, and all his senses were on the alert. He heard the tramping of horses' feet on the other side of the willows, and, jumping up, he clambered, into the wagon and seized the whip; but the jaded horses refused to move. One of them lay down in the water, and before Archie could compel him to get upon his feet again, the willows on the bank were dashed aside, and a company of horsemen came into view. They were not Indians, however, but cavalrymen from Fort Benton.



CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

When Adam Brent saw the outlaw preparing to jump down upon him, he gave himself up for lost. He was not able to defend himself from the assault of that strong man, and neither did he expect assistance from any source; and when he saw the panther spring from his hiding-place among the rocks, and fall with Black Bill to the bottom of the cave, he was so amazed and bewildered, that, for a moment, he could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes. He forgot Black Bill, and every thing else, in the reflection that he had passed a portion of the night in the cavern with that savage animal, and that he had slept while his glaring eyes were fastened upon him. Regardless of being seen by the outlaws, he looked over the boulder, and watched the struggle that was going on below. He had never witnessed so desperate a fight before, and, although he was intensely alarmed, he retained his wits sufficiently to notice that the panther was getting the best of it, and that he was in a fair way to clear the cave of his enemies. The bullets which Black Bill's friends had fired at him, if they had hit him at all, had only served to render him more furious.

When Adam first looked over the boulder, the combatants were tumbling about on the ground, the men using their knives, and the panther striking right and left with his claws, and growling fiercely. In a moment the scene changed. Black Bill was lying motionless where he had fallen; one of the outlaws, with his face terribly lacerated, was rolling about, uttering piercing cries of pain and terror; the other, who was the only one uninjured, was trying to climb up the sides of the cave out of reach of his dangerous antagonist; and the panther was crouching low on the ground, looking toward the passage-way, where stood a couple of trappers who had entered unobserved.

"Send a chunk of lead into the critter, Dick; thar's my game," said Bob Kelly, pointing toward the prostrate form of his old enemy.

The panther, lashing his sides with his tail, sprang into the air, but was met half way by a bullet sent by an unerring hand, and fell dead almost at the feet of the old trapper, who ran into the cave, and bent over Black Bill's motionless figure; while Dick collared the uninjured outlaw, and held him fast.

"We're too late, Dick," exclaimed Bob, after he had taken one glance at his insensible foe. "I've waited an' watched fur him all these years to be cheated at last by a painter. The critter's done the work fur him."

Dick's prisoner seemed astonished beyond measure at the sudden appearance of the trappers. He never thought of resistance, but readily surrendered his knife, and begged lustily for quarter. His captor looked at him with an expression of great contempt on his honest countenance.

"You're a purty feller, to lead wild Injuns agin peaceable tradin'-posts, an' then when you're ketched ask fur quarter, aint you?" he exclaimed. "If me an' Bob were like we used to be, all your hollerin' an' beggin' wouldn't do you no 'arthly good whatsoever; but we lived among white folks a good while, an' we've larnt that thar is law, even on the prairy, fur jest sich fellers as you. We'll take you to Fort Benton, that's what we'll do with you, an' if you aint hung fur your meanness, I shall allers think you'd oughter be. Hallo! Come down from thar, you keerless feller!"

The trapper had discovered Adam looking at him over the top of the bowlder. He thought it was Archie, and he was a good deal disappointed when he found that it was not. He asked a good many questions concerning the missing boy, but Adam knew nothing about him. Archie had left him while he was sitting by the fire in the soldiers' quarters, running bullets, and he had not seen him since.

"Never mind," said Dick; "he'll turn up all right yet. He's got a heap of sense, that little feller has, an' grit, too; an' they'll bring him safe out of any scrape he can get into. Now, where's Frank, I wonder? The last time I seed him that hoss of his'n was carryin' him through the ravine like a streak of lightnin'. It would take two or three sich men as I be to watch that oneasy feller."

Dick shouldered his rifle, and hurried out in search of Frank, while Bob, after binding the prisoner, busied himself in setting things to rights. In half an hour the Old Bear's Hole presented a scene that was a cheering one to our weary fugitives. The fire was burning brightly again, the body of the outlaw had been removed, and all traces of the fight which had taken place there but a few minutes before, were concealed by the leaves which the old trapper had pulled out of the lower passage-way and spread over the floor of the cave. Dick had returned with Frank, who was so jubilant over his success that, for a long time, he could talk about nothing else. He felt particularly proud of the result of the race he had just run. Roderick had fairly vanquished his swift rival, and Frank,

after a protracted rough-and-tumble fight, had overpowered and bound the Black Fox. The young hunter now lay stretched out on the ground in front of the fire, one hand supporting his head, and his eyes fastened upon his prisoner, who sat sullenly in a remote corner of the cave. Adam lay near him, watching the movements of the trappers, one of whom was engaged in cutting up the elk, and the other in superintending the broiling of several steaks, which he had placed on the coals. In the corner, opposite the entrance, sat the outlaws—the remnant of Black Bill's band. The one who had been wounded during his fight with the panther, was too severely injured, and too thoroughly cowed by the presence of the trappers, to attempt escape, and consequently he was not confined; but the others were bound hand and foot.

"Things are comin' out all right at last, aint they?" said Dick, turning the steaks with his knife. "If I could only see Archie settin' somewhere about this fire, an' could hear him laughin' an' goin' on like he allers does, I should be jest as happy as I want to be. A good many of the fellers that left the Colorado with us we'll never see agin, but I'll bet a hoss that we will find every one of our crowd at Fort Benton, when we get thar. I come out without a scratch, an' so did Frank an' Adam; Bob, here, has got a hole in his head, made by a tomahawk, an' another in his arm, made by a bullet; but he's as sassy and full of fight as ever."

"Did you recognize Bob when he was playing the part of medicine-man?" asked Frank.

"Sartin I did. I've knowed the ole feller since I was a boy no bigger nor you, an' I've seed him when he looked wusser nor he did in that doctor's dress. I knowed I was safe the minute I seed him come into the village."

"How did you obtain possession of that disguise?" inquired Frank, turning to the old trapper.

"Easy enough. Arter Dick was captured, I hung around the camp in the edge of the woods, waitin' fur a chance to do something fur him. I happened to meet the medicine-man, an', thinkin' that I could make better use of his rig nor he could, I jest knocked him over."

The supper, which Dick now pronounced ready, did not put a stop to the conversation, for there was much to talk about. Adam told what had happened at the cave during Frank's absence, and the latter described his adventures, from his unsuccessful attempt to liberate his cousin down to the time he met the trappers in the ravine. Dick and Bob were astonished at the reckless courage he had

exhibited. The former, as usual, called him a "keerless feller," and Bob declared that he would make a trapper "wuth lookin' at." Then Dick told how he had seen Bob captured while they were cutting their way out of the fort, and how he had gone into the camp in the disguise of a wounded Indian to assist him in making his escape. When he liberated Archie, however, he found that Bob had already eluded his enemies; and, after wandering about the camp until he found a rifle which he could take possession of without attracting attention, he returned to his horse, which he had left hidden in the bushes, and soon overtook his chum, who was on his way to the Old Bear's Hole.

When the boys had satisfied their appetites, they lay down on the leaves and went to sleep, while Dick set out in search of Archie, leaving Bob to watch the boys and the prisoners during his absence. He was gone all day, and when he returned he was not as hopeful as when he left in the morning. He had met no Indians, he reported, but he had seen the ruins of a wagon train, which had been attacked and burned. If Archie was with that train, the probabilities were that they would never see him again.

After another hearty meal on venison, the fugitives set out for Fort Benton, accompanied by their four prisoners—the trappers on foot, and the boys and the wounded outlaw riding the horses. They traveled all that night, and at noon the next day arrived within sight of the walls of the fort. The very first person they saw was Archie Winters, who galloped out on the chestnut-sorrel, swinging his hat around his head, and shouting like one demented.

"Not one of our crowd is missing now," he yelled, when he had embraced his cousin and Adam, and shaken the trappers warmly by the hand. "Captain Porter and Mr. Brent came in last night. As I live, there's my horse, which I never expected to see again. And isn't that Pete? Hurrah for every body! except the Indians and the outlaws."

Almost the first thing the cousins discussed was the race between Roderick and King James. Archie listened attentively to his cousin's story, and when it was concluded he said, in a tone of voice which showed very plainly that he was not yet willing to give up beaten:

"The speed of a horse depends a good deal upon the driver. I know that the Black Fox was riding for his liberty, but I don't believe he made King James run as swiftly as I could, if I had been on his back. But, since you were kind enough to recapture the horse for me, I will settle the matter by riding a race with you at the

very first opportunity—that is, if you say so."

"Of course I say so," replied Frank. "Archie, you do crawl out of little holes when you are cornered, don't you? I'll beat you so badly that you will never boast of your horse's speed again."

Although the boys were very jubilant, and often congratulated one another on the good fortune that had attended their "crowd," they still had much to be sorry for. Of the twenty trappers who had accompanied them across the plains from Fort Yuma, only seven remained. More than one brave fellow mourned the loss of his chum, who had fallen by the hands of the Indians, and the boys heartily sympathized with them, one and all. But still the expedition was not abandoned, and neither was the departure from the fort long delayed. After a consultation with the trappers, Captain Porter decided to pass the winter on the Saskatchewan; and the morning of the third day after their arrival at the fort, found the cousins ready for the journey. Archie took leave of the invalid, who, to show his gratitude for the services the boy had rendered, offered him half his twenty thousand dollars; and when Archie declined to accept, he insisted on presenting him with his horse and rifle. The expedition was as well equipped now as when it left the Colorado, for the captain had procured a supply of weapons, traps, pack-mules, and provisions from a trader who happened to be at the fort.

"Good-by, Adam," said Frank, who stood with one hand clasping his friend's, and the other holding the impatient Roderick by the bridle. "We have seen some stirring times during our short acquaintance, and you will not be likely to forget us soon, will you?"

"I'll never forget you," replied Adam, earnestly. "If it hadn't been for you, Frank, I should now be a prisoner in the hands of the outlaws. I tell you, fellows, my ideas concerning boys from the States have changed wonderfully since I first met you. You can both beat me riding and shooting, and you take to the mountains as naturally as though you had been born here."

When the farewells had been said, Adam returned slowly and sorrowfully to his quarters in the fort, and the cousins galloped after the trappers, who had already disappeared behind the distant swells.

The adventures we have attempted to describe in this volume form but a small portion of the history of the life Frank and Archie led while they remained with Captain Porter. If space would allow, we might tell of many interesting events

that happened during the winter they passed upon the banks of the Saskatchewan. We might describe the races which came off between the rival horses, in every one of which the gallant little black was as badly beaten as ever Sleepy Sam had been. Although Archie, at first, found any number of "little holes to crawl out of," he was finally obliged to confess that Roderick was the swifter horse. We might tell of the rivalry which existed between the boys, and which seemed to grow stronger every day, affording infinite amusement to the trappers, who praised first one, and then the other, to incite them to greater deeds of valor; how Frank took the lead by killing a grizzly bear, alone and unaided, and Archie, to be even with him, nearly broke King James's neck, and his own into the bargain, by attempting to capture a wild horse. That was a proud day for Archie, for he actually succeeded in lassoing one of the drove; but, unfortunately, the lariat was insecurely fastened to his saddle, and the wild steed made his escape after all, carrying the lasso with him. All the trappers voted that this exploit was fully equal to the killing of a grizzly, and that, if Frank wished to take the lead again, he must trap or shoot another bear. We might recount the adventures that befell them during the two weeks they were lost in the mountains, living in a little hut they had built under the shelter of a friendly cliff, which effectually protected them from the fury of the snow-storms—enjoying splendid shooting in the meantime, and experiencing not a single fear but that "every thing would come out all right" in the end. We might tell of the long winter evenings they passed listening to the trappers' stories; and of the days, too, when they never stirred out of the cabin, because they were snowed under and could not get out. This was the poetry of the life they led during that long-to-be-remembered winter, and then came the prose. Their provisions gradually disappeared; game became scarce; the snow filled up the mountain passes to the depth of forty feet, and covered all their traps; their horses and mules were killed and eaten, and finally but one single horse remained besides Roderick and King James, and that was Pete. His time came at last, and then the cousins looked at one another with a most doleful expression on their hunger-pinched faces.

"It can't be helped, boys," said Captain Porter. "We must live, and one horse is about as good as another, any how. I have twenty-five hundred of them on my rancho, and when we get home you can take your pick of the lot."

"Do you suppose I could ever find a horse that would suit me as well as King James?" whispered Archie, drawing the captain off on one side. "No, I couldn't; but take him and save Roderick, if you can. Frank thinks so much of that horse I shouldn't like to see him killed."

Frank saw the whispered conversation going on, and, suspecting something at once, took Dick into his confidence. "I know what they are talking about," said he, "and I am not going to have any one make sacrifices for me. When you get up in the morning, go out and shoot Roderick. It would be a severe blow to Archie to lose his horse, and I will prevent it as long as I can."

The trappers, knowing how hard it would be for the boys to part with their favorites, hunted all that day without any food at all; and when they returned to the camp that night, they brought four big-horns and an elk. That hunt saved the lives of the horses, for, in a day or two, the snow began to melt, game became more abundant, and things looked bright again. It had been a narrow escape for their favorites, however, and the boys, fearing that they might again be placed in the same situation, became impatient to begin the homeward journey. Besides, they had seen quite enough of perilous adventure, were heartily tired of life in the mountains, and longed for the society of their friends once more. To their great delight, their departure from the Saskatchewan was not long delayed. One bright, spring morning, they started for Fort Churchill, where the captain procured a supply of horses and pack-mules, and, after a fatiguing ride of nearly two months, the cousins found themselves once more in Uncle James's rancho. They met new faces there, for Mr. Winters had sold his farm and stock, and the purchaser had taken possession of the premises.

There was nothing now to detain them in California, and after a few days spent in taking leave of their acquaintances—they found it an exceedingly difficult task to say good-by to Dick and Bob—the cousins took passage on board a steamer for Portland. In four weeks more the little cottage on the banks of Glen's Creek was filled with a happy party, including Archie's father and mother, and Uncle James. Things began to wear their old accustomed look again. The Speedwell once more rode proudly at her moorings in the creek (her sailing qualities had not been injured in the least by her fourteen months of idleness, and she was still able to beat the swiftest boat about the village), the door of the museum was open every day, and there was plenty of work being done there. A stand had been erected in the middle of the room, and it was already filled with specimens which excited the wonder and admiration of the village boys. "Old Davy" was there, stuffed and mounted, and looking so life-like that Archie said he almost expected to see him jump down from the stand and come at him. Then there were three smaller grizzlies, two elk, as many Rocky Mountain goats, and the prong-horn they had killed on the day they were lost on the prairie.

In Frank's room some changes had been made. There were more pictures on the

walls now, and among them was the identical one which Pierre Castello had removed from its hook on the night he tried to compel Frank to tell where he had hidden the office key. The picture was hanging from the same hook over which the Ranchero had thrown the lasso when he pulled Frank up by the neck, and the lasso itself was there also—or, rather, all there was left of it. The "sporting cabinet," which hung on the frame at the foot of the bed, had received several additions in the shape of rifles, revolvers, and hunting-knives; and the hooks at the top of the frame supported the bow, quiver of arrows, and tomahawk which Frank had captured from the Black Fox. An apartment in the book-case, which contained the stuffed birds, was devoted to the other relics which the boys had collected during their absence. There were knives, pistols, and carbines from Don Carlos' rancho; a piece of the "bridge of clouds," at which the trappers had been so badly frightened; a portion of the flat-boat which had carried the horses across the creek; and also the lantern which Archie had used in the stable. There were stone arrow and spear heads, and necklaces of bears' claws from Fort Benton; elk horns from the Saskatchewan; and Mexican dresses, spurs, lassos, and a saddle and bridle from Southern California. In short, the room was almost as much of a curiosity-shop as the museum itself.

The barn had two more occupants now, and they were Roderick and King James. The horses had been so intimately connected with their adventures on the plains and in the mountains, and the boys had become so greatly attached to them, that they could not think of leaving them behind. They were plump and fat now, looking very unlike the poor, scraggy animals which had so narrowly escaped being served up at the camp fire, and many a pleasant morning gallop had the boys taken with them over the breezy hills with which Lawrence was surrounded.

Frank had brought another old friend with him, and that was Marmion. Brave at first regarded the new-comer with suspicion; but being, like his master, of a kind and accommodating disposition, he made overtures of friendship, to which the ill-mannered Marmion responded by taking Brave down and giving him a good shaking. But the Newfoundland was like his master in another respect: he was hard to whip; and, before the boys could separate the combatants, he gave his fierce antagonist a drubbing that must have astonished him. At any rate, Marmion howled lustily for quarter, and the next time Brave made advances, they were more graciously received. The dogs were now living very peaceably, Brave occupying his kennel by the back porch, and Marmion sleeping in the barn. They ate out of the same dish, without any quarreling over the tit-bits,

always accompanied their master wherever he went, and if one got into trouble with the village curs, the other always lent prompt and effective assistance.

The cousins had not forgotten the quiet sports they had so often enjoyed in the days gone by. Their fishing-rods and double-barrels came as readily to their hands as ever; squirrels and trout were served up at the cottage every day; and to many a thrilling story did George and Harry Butler listen while sailing up and down the river in the old Speedwell. On all the adventures of which Frank and Archie had been the heroes during their journeyings in the Far West, they delighted most to talk about those which befell them on the memorable night they spent IN THE MOUNTAINS.

THE END.

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