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We held our breath as animal and rider shot out like an arrow over the brow of the cliff and then fell into the waters below.
—Page 328.

Defense of Fort Henry.

THE
DEFENSE OF FORT HENRY.

A STORY OF WHEELING CREEK IN 1777.

By JAMES OTIS. 1777.



With Eight Page Illustrations by J. Watson Davis.

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THE DEFENSE OF FORT HENRY.

BY JAMES OTIS.

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Defense of Fort Henry.

“The defense of Fort Henry was one of the most remarkable for courage, on record, and deserves far more prominence in the catalogue of battles for independence than has generally been awarded to it by historians.”

B. J. LOSSING, “Field Book of the Revolution.”

THE DEFENSE OF FORT HENRY.

CHAPTER I.

FORT HENRY.

IN those days when sturdy men and brave women sought, and sought successfully, to raise from the wilderness a home near-about Wheeling Creek, on what was called the frontier of Kentucky, Teddy McLaughlin and I, Cornelius Dunbar, were mere lads ; but although our years in this world had been few, we were richer in harsh experiences than often falls to the lot of grown men in this year of grace 1800.

Twenty-three years have gone by since we two lads lived in the vicinity of Fort Henry, where was a small settlement of perhaps twenty-five huts, not one of which gave shelter to a coward.

Because of what we saw, and, I may say it without boasting, because of the dangers which we encountered like men, have I set myself down

to put it all in words, in order that those who live now in peace and security where we fought our way by day as well as by night, shall know what price was paid for the safety which they now enjoy.

If, in the course of this simple statement of facts, I make mention of myself in what seems a boasting spirit, let it not be charged against *me*, if it so be any read these lines ; but set down to the credit of Teddy McLaughlin, who has declared that I shall leave a record of our doings for those who have come after us, and who insists now and then in tampering with the written lines lest, as he says, I give more credit to him and less to myself, than the facts warranted.

In the year 1777 Teddy and I had seen our sixteenth birthdays, for we are the same age, barring less than a week, therefore are we now comparatively young men, whose memories of those times are not much shaken, and who pride themselves that they had a hand in the settlements hereabout, although, mayhap, in days to come, when one hundred years have rolled by, it will appear to those who read the past as if we were even at this day living on the frontier.

Why Teddy's father and mine settled on Wheeling Creek it is not necessary to say, ex-

cept that they were among those adventurous spirits who pushed out into the wilderness to make homes for themselves far from the busy towns. Such men as are ever pressing their way beyond the outpost of civilization, and thereby really are the pioneers in the building-up of what I doubt not will one day become a mighty nation.

Teddy, who is at this moment seated in front of a roaring fire in my home, and had, just now, reason to look over my shoulder, suggests that it was his purpose I should set down an account of what we two did, while lads, toward making this settlement a place of safety for white men ; that my going into the future a hundred years has nothing whatsoever in common with the task before me.

Therefore, to take up the business properly according to his ideas, let me explain that Fort Henry was built in 1774, during Dunmore's campaign, and intended only as a place of refuge.

Of course no one has forgotten what bitter injury the last royal governor of Virginia did us of the frontier, when he excited the savages against the colonists, so it is claimed, and let his troops go among the Indians for the alleged purpose of making peace, when it was really to band himself with the red scoundrels. At all events, the fort

was built during that campaign to serve the purposes of the colonists, and despite what Lord Dunmore has done since then, stood us in good stead many a time.

His lordship called it "Fort Fincastle," after one of his favorite officers, but later it was known as "Henry," in compliment to that great Virginian orator, who by his words did so much toward awakening the spirit of liberty among the colonists in North America.

It was situated on the bank of the Ohio River, about a quarter of a mile above the mouth of Wheeling Creek, and around it were built, as I have said, twenty-five or more log huts, each of which contained a single family.

In one of these lived Michael McLaughlin, Teddy's father, with his wife, and five children, of whom my comrade was the second, and in another, Henry Dunbar, my father, and the head of a family numbering seven, including mother.

In the spring of '77 we had great hopes that our red enemies might overlook the fact that here was a small band of white people struggling for existence.

Attacks had been made upon Logan's and Boone's forts, during April, when so many of the savages were killed that we came almost to

believe a wholesome lesson had been taught them.

Daniel Boone and his neighbors were visited again about the first of July by more than two hundred Indians, who beset the place for eight-and-forty hours, when they drew off with a loss of seven, while the garrison had but one man killed and two wounded.

While sympathizing fully with these brave fellows, we of Fort Henry could but hope that the savages would occupy themselves with the gallant Boone and his companions to the utter forgetfulness of ourselves.

But we had a merciless enemy who was ready to incite the painted savages against us, as was rumored in the latter part of July, when some of our people, who had been sent out to gain information, reported that Simon Girty had gathered no less than four hundred Indians near-about Sandusky, declaring it was his purpose to take possession of Fort Henry.

This was the same Girty who had once been a companion of Daniel Boone ; but was now as desperate a renegade as could be found on the frontier, and is to this day, for the black-hearted villain yet lives, despite the many brave men who have gone out with the hope of killing him.

His father was an Irishman and a drunkard, and his mother anything but an honest woman. This precious pair lived in Pennsylvania, where they reared four sons, the eldest James and the second Simon, who was, so it seemed, brought into this world for no other purpose than to make desolate the hearths of good men and true, who were struggling desperately against a merciless enemy as well as the wilderness, and for many a long day it seemed impossible they could conquer both.

James and Simon Girty were taken captives by the Indians shortly after Braddock's defeat, so I have heard it said time and time again ; the eldest boy was adopted by the Delawares, and, as I believe, became the fiercest among that bloodthirsty crew.

Simon was taken by the Senecas, and had the reputation of being a great hunter at the time he and Daniel Boone were friends, which is to say, before he had given his life over to the evil one.

Among all the people whom I have ever met, Simon Girty is spoken of as the most fiendish, the most bloodthirsty, being who ever lived. He murders for the sake of seeing blood flow, and merciless as the red man is known to be, this renegade far surpasses him in acts of wanton cruelty.

I have hoped it might be the good fortune of Teddy McLaughlin and myself to kill this, the vilest man who ever walked abroad, but although we have spent many days, aye, and nights, on his trail, the villain has escaped us as he has hundreds of others who had vowed to put an end to his career of crime.

If I write in what seems a revengeful spirit, there is justification for it. Simon Girty killed my father and Teddy's brother—not in fair battle, but by coming upon them in ambush, and it was not that he struck them down as a man would strike an enemy; but he first wounded, that he might make sure of taking them prisoners, and then, during one long summer afternoon and evening, he tortured them at the stake until death came with laggard feet to their relief.

This cruel deed had not been committed at the time we heard Simon Girty was rendezvoused at Sandusky with his greasy, painted band; but was in the near future.

Even then we lads knew somewhat of his character and somewhat of the depths of crime into which it was possible for him to descend, and, like all who were struggling to found the little village near Fort Henry, had good cause for alarm.

It is needless to write many words descriptive of this villain, whose breath still pollutes God's pure air, for I question if there be one person in all the country who does not know the reputation of the murdering scoundrel, and most like I have said too much ; but it is hard to check the words when memory goes down into the past, bringing me once more to those days of what was neither more nor less than a literal struggle for life.

As I have said, we had been warned that this renegade and his savage following were making ready for their work of murder and plunder, declaring that Fort Henry should be destroyed.

Therefore every member of our little settlement was on the alert for danger, and while we could not remain shut up completely in our homes, none ventured forth without taking due precaution.

Teddy McLaughlin and I, on one certain morning in August, had gone out hunting, not by way of sport, but because it was necessary we should bring meat to our homes ; and having been brought up in that school wherein experience is a teacher, we were not unskilful in the chase.

As a matter of fact, both Teddy's father and mine looked to us to keep the larder filled with

such game as might be found near-about, and it was not often that either household lacked a plentiful supply of meat.

On this day when I count to begin the story of what Simon Girty did against us of Wheeling Creek, Teddy and I were nigh on to ten miles from home at noon, having wandered thus far because, singularly as it seemed to us, the game was scarce and wary, and when we had come to a halt because it was high time for dinner, a single turkey, not overly large, was all we had succeeded in taking.

In ordinary times we lads would have thought nothing of remaining from the settlement two or three days, so that thereby we might carry home a goodly supply of meat; but now, with rumors brought by every traveler that danger menaced, we were, as might be supposed, more cautious, and had fallen to discussing the question as to what should be done, when we arrived at a narrow water-course where the trunk of a fallen and decaying tree afforded a plentiful supply of fuel.

“Here is where we had best cook this forlorn-looking gobbler,” Teddy said with a laugh, “and while it is on the coals we can make up our minds whether it be safe to go further afield in the hope

of coming upon something to repay us for the tramp."

As if positive I would agree with him in the matter, he leaned his gun where it could be gotten at handily, for in those days one was like to need his weapon at any instant whether at home or abroad, and set about building a fire.

"It is not probable Girty and his following will come anywhere near-about," I said, as if feeling called upon to make some lengthy reply, "and yet I like not this scarcity of game. What has been abroad here that even the deer have taken to flight?"

"Nothing, I am thinking," Teddy replied carelessly. "More than once before have we traveled thus far without finding meat. Animals, as well as birds, take fancies now and then, which lead them here or there, according to my way of reckoning."

"But a band of savages would clear the forest much in the same fashion as we have found it this day," I replied, whereat he laughed heartily, saying to me that I was grown a coward because Simon Girty had so much as declared his intention of destroying Fort Henry, and added with what was very like a sneer in his tone:

"We would not have wondered at the scarcity

of game save for the rumors we have heard, and like enough there is no foundation for any of those alarming tales which have been brought in. You are timorous with much thinking, Cornie, and unless a bad habit is conquered we are like to go home empty-handed."

It pained me that my comrade should speak in such a strain, as if my courage was not to be depended upon; but I made him no answer, because it would have sorrowed me had Teddy McLaughlin and I spoken harsh words one to the other.

While he built the fire I set about making ready the turkey for such a roasting as we could give it in short order, and said, as if believing his speech was no more than a joke:

"I am willing to remain away from the settlement so long as suits your fancy; but both you and I have been taught, Teddy McLaughlin, always to find out why anything unusual occurs, lest there may be danger behind it, and he who forgets such lessons as our fathers have given us, is like to lose his scalp."

"I am not disputing with you about that, Cornie, my boy. He who remains far from home in this part of the country comes mighty near taking his life in his hands. But I am not minded to go back without meat simply because of the

rumors. You and I have been hereabout many a time, when we knew there were savages close at hand, and yet we carried home our hair."

"Perhaps because we were not so foolish as to build a fire, that there might be no trouble in their finding us."

"Yet we cannot go hungry, and raw turkey is little to my taste. You were not so cautious an hour ago. Then it was that we stumbled over what looked to me much like the print of an Indian's moccasin."

"It was an old trail," I replied, "and might have been made by one who is friendly toward us."

"Then, what has come over you, lad? Surely a man who can pass quietly by that which tells him a possible enemy has been near-about, will not let his fancy lay hold of him in such fashion that a stranger might think it cowardice?"

"It is nothing, and yet everything, which makes me what you appear to think timorous. Perhaps that trail began the work in my mind, and the wariness of the game where it should be plentiful, has finished it; at all events the idea has come, and will not be shaken off, that we are in some danger—enough at least to teach us caution."

I spoke earnestly, for at the moment my mind was so filled with apprehension that fancies had become realities, and Teddy was disturbed by the words, as could be plainly seen.

“We’ll cover the fire, if it is more to your liking,” he said quickly, and had already begun to separate the burning sticks that the flames might be quenched without too much smoke arising, when I stopped him.

“We may as well have dinner now the fire has been built; but afterward, whether we decide to push on, or return to the fort, I beg that we proceed as if knowing danger was close at hand.”

I had no more than spoken when a rustling among the underbrush, which told that some heavy body was forcing its way through, caused both of us to grasp our weapons and seek shelter behind the nearest trees which would cover our bodies.

But our fears were soon seen to be groundless.

Four men, clad much like ourselves, in deer-skin hunting-shirts and leggings, moccasins, and a closely fitting cap of fur, came through the thicket guided by the smoke from our fire.

With the exception of Simon Girty, and those other two renegades who were as like to him as evil things could be to each other, there were no white

men whom we need fear, and, knowing these were honest people, without delay we stepped forward.

Frontiersmen in the wilderness do not practise all the furbelows that fashionable people who live in cities think necessary, and as soon as might be we explained, one party to the other, who we were.

These four who were coming thus incautiously through the thicket, approaching a fire which might have been built by the savages, lived in a small settlement twenty miles or more above ours, and had been out to learn whether there might be any truth in the rumors that the renegade Girty was on the war path with red-skins who were only less savage than himself.

They had with them a haunch of venison, and while this and our turkey was being cooked, we held converse as to the situation, for having met us, these scouts might not now be forced to go out of their way to warn the settlers at Fort Henry, as they proposed to do.

“Yes, that fiend in human form is making ready to revenge himself for having been put into prison at Pittsburg,” Master Mansfield, the eldest of the party, said to Teddy and me while his companions were busying themselves with making ready the dinner. “I am so well con-

vinced we shall have troublous times along the river within a few weeks, that I count on persuading my neighbors to go with their families to Fort Henry. We must expect somewhat the same trials as Boone's settlement has been undergoing, and too great caution cannot be exercised. Even now I am much mistaken if the renegade's scouts are not hereabouts, for we have seen more than one sign this day which looked to me suspicious."

"And yet you came on toward this fire as if there was nothing to cause alarm," I ventured to remark.

"We heard your voices while yet some distance away, and therefore knew full well that there was no need of caution in this instance. You may be certain, however, that we have given good heed to our footsteps these last four and twenty hours."

"There have been no signs of Indians nearabout Fort Henry."

"It may be I am grown timorous in my old age," Master Mansfield said reflectively, "and yet, lad, if you have seen none of the painted villains, it doesn't argue that they are not nearabout. You should know them well enough to understand that while they are making ready for

such a movement as Girty has on hand, there is little danger of an attack unless a single man comes upon them unawares, and may be killed without fear of giving an alarm. I give you fair warning to take good heed to your steps from this out, and forbear such carelessness as that."

He pointed to the fire as he spoke, and Teddy retorted laughingly :

"Even while reading us a reproof, Master Mansfield, you are not so timorous as to neglect the opportunity of cooking your meat."

"And for several reasons, lad," the old man replied with somewhat of sharpness in his tones. "We make a large party, the six of us, larger than the same number of prowling savages would dare to attack, and again, the mischief was done before our coming."

He said much concerning that which had been learned by him and his comrades, going further into the story than would have been the case but for the fact that he believed himself sending word to our elders at Fort Henry, and preparing them for a considerable addition to our number.

Throughout it all was his evident purpose to impress upon our minds the fact of danger being near at hand, lest we should do some foolish thing in the belief that there was nothing to be feared.

It can well be fancied that by the time he had come to an end Teddy was no longer disposed to speak of my cowardice ; but felt even more timorous than did I, and it needed but a single word from me to convince him we had best return without delay.

After hearing all Master Mansfield and his companions could tell us, there came to my mind the thought that we might do for our parents and our neighbors what would win for us many a good word, and I decided, if my comrade should be willing, to know from our own knowledge how near these savage enemies might be.

Then it was that I said to Master Mansfield, casting a quick glance at Teddy lest he should contradict my words :

“ We were sent out for meat and much of it, perhaps because of what has been told regarding this murderous Girty and his purpose. It is not well that we return to the fort empty-handed, and both of us believe it our duty to discover, if it so be we may, how many Indians are lurking near-about.”

“ Then you do not count on going to the fort at once,” Master Mansfield said, seeing nothing really venturesome in our lingering, because, in those days, and even now, lads of our age on the

frontier were expected to do the work of men in guarding the settlements.

“Not until eight-and-forty hours have passed,” I replied decidedly, and noted with somewhat of satisfaction that it was Teddy’s turn to give proof of what he had rashly called “cowardice.”

Then Master Mansfield, after consulting with his friends, decided they had better make the necessary detour in order to pass through our village, because it was proper the people be warned that they were like to have visitors, and he said to us two lads :

“I will tell at Fort Henry of our meeting ; that you are scouting as well as hunting, and I doubt not but that you will bring back information of value. We who live near-about the river must be on the alert now, if we would save our lives and the lives of those dear to us. Therefore you boys shall do whatsoever you may toward protecting those who have protected you. But have a care to it that you move neither one way nor the other without first finding out if there be enemies in the path.”

CHAPTER II.

SIGNS.

MASTER MANSFIELD and his companions did not linger after the noonday meal had been eaten.

But for the fact that each was so anxious regarding the future, and knew we two lads could act the part of scouts as well as our elders, with the advantage that if we were killed it would not be so serious a matter as if two men of the settlement had fallen under the tomahawk and scalping-knife, I believe of a verity they would have urged us to return to the fort at once in order that they might be spared the additional labor caused by such a deviation from their course.

They had just come up the river, from the direction where it was reasonable to suppose we would go, and had seen what led them to believe that there were Indians in the vicinity ; but we, who had only our two selves to care for, might, in fact ought to, learn beyond a doubt if their fears had a foundation in truth.

We would be on guard for all the settlements

within twenty or thirty miles, and these travelers were careful to say nothing which might prevent us from thus assuming the task.

It was when they had departed, leaving Teddy and alone amid the well polished bones which bespoke the vigor of our appetites, that my comrade turned on me in what was very like anger.

“Had you no care of life, Cornie Dunbar, but that you must thus send us out on a task which would try the skill of either your father or mine, skilful hunters though they are?”

“It was no more than you had proposed before they came in sight,” I replied, with a certain secret satisfaction because I had forced him to a show of fear after the scornful words with which he had treated me when I simply counseled prudence.

“What I had in mind was to get something in the way of meat before turning back.”

“And it can be done at the same time we are doing that which is our duty,” I replied quietly, whereat he grew more petulant, crying sharply :

“It is the duty of those who have had more experience, Cornie Dunbar, and you told Master Mansfield we would take such a serious task upon ourselves, only that he might think you exceedingly brave.”

“I made the statement because you had said we should push yet further afield, and if that was true, we could do no less than keep our eyes open for savages, if only in order to save our own hair.”

“I would not have been such a simple as to keep on after knowing what Master Mansfield had to tell,” he replied moodily.

“Then we can go back. Surely we are no further from home than when we met him.”

“How may that be after he has gone to the fort to repeat your boasting words? It would then appear as if we had turned back because our courage failed us.”

“And wouldn’t that be the truth?” I asked, feeling bold as Teddy grew timorous.

“Even though it was, I wouldn’t be willing to admit it before all in the settlement.”

“Particularly Elizabeth Zane,” I said with an assumption of carelessness, and straightway Teddy’s cheeks grew red even beneath the brown laid on by wind and weather, for, although we had never spoken together concerning the matter, it was no secret to me that my comrade believed Ebenezer Zane’s sister made of something better than the other girls of the settlement.

“Would *you* care to have her know you were

afraid to do what might be in your power to prevent harm from coming upon those in Fort Henry?" he asked quickly.

"I had rather take my chances here alone twice forty-eight hours, with not so much as a hunting-knife by way of defense, than admit to her that I oftentimes am well nigh being overcome by fear. If I had her courage, I might already have made myself famous by great deeds."

"She would refuse to even so much as look at a lad who gave way to fear, however great the provocation," Teddy said half to himself, and then, quite ready to speak of her since I had broached the subject, he added to me, "Because of Elizabeth Zane, but none the less on account of others in the settlement, I must fall in with the mad plan you spoke of to Master Mansfield as if we were already agreed concerning it, and, if the savages be as near as he appeared to think, we may never have an opportunity to see any of them again in this world."

"Master Mansfield is not so far on his journey but that we may outstrip him, and thus arrive first," I suggested.

"Of what avail would that be? He or some of his companions would ask why we thus suddenly changed our plans, and the fact must be known.

No, Cornie Dunbar, we are committed to what is little less than a piece of folly, for we are not capable of outwitting the savages as Daniel Boone or Simon Kenton might do. You have made the bed, and we must lie in it."

Perhaps I had not been so valiant had Teddy shown himself willing to perform the task which, as I am now and was then, ready to admit should have been left to more experienced woodsmen than we lads; yet as he held back I was the hotter to go forward, and thus because of my own folly did we not only run into grave dangers; but were nigh to leaving this world forever before having done the slightest act which might benefit those on the bank of Wheeling Creek.

However, it was destined that we should be of service to our fellow-creatures, hair-brained though it was to think of measuring strength and wits with the savage foe, and we came to be looked upon as lads of tried courage when, as a matter of fact, we had no claim to such praise.

Well, that the story may not be too long in the telling, it is best I do not set down all which Teddy and I said before we were prepared to set out on such a hunt as any lad might well shrink from.

It is enough to say that he finally ceased scolding because it now seemed necessary we turn our

faces way from home, rather than toward it, and we made ready for the work before us.

There was but little time spent in preparations, since we could do no more than make certain our weapons were in good condition ; the flints of our muskets sharpened until a spark must be set off with every blow of the hammer, and our hunting shirts girded tightly lest the skirts, catching on a twig, give notice of our whereabouts when silence was necessary for the preservation of our lives.

In a general way we spoke of what ought to be done under the circumstances ; but we formed no plans, for he who ventures forth among blood-thirsty Indians will not often find it possible to follow any certain course of action.

We knew, with reasonable surety, that whether Girty led the skulking red men, or they were under command of their own chiefs, the natural and most convenient approach to the little village on the bank of the creek would be by the river ; therefore, without mentioning such plan each to the other, we decided to travel in that direction.

Down, rather than up, stream was the point from which danger manaced, and after we were ready for the scout I led the way, wishing most fervently I had not shown myself quite so bold with

my tongue, in which case I could, with good reason, have insisted that Teddy take the advance.

As we went on, however, moving but slowly in order that we might learn the cause of the slightest unusual noise, my heart grew stronger. I came to understand how noble was the work in which we had thus voluntarily engaged.

We were literally guarding the settlement—we two lads, when there were behind us men of renown as hunters and Indian-fighters.

Colonel Sheppard, who was in command of the garrison with its forty men, would be glad to know he had not been forced to weaken his little company by sending out scouts, since we had volunteered for such duty, and during a few moments I dreamed of a home-coming when we would be welcomed, even by the oldest, as *men* worthy every confidence in those days of danger.

From these foolish dreams I was soon suddenly and thoroughly aroused.

We had been following the trail of Master Mansfield and his comrades, and on coming around a bend in the river, while being an hundred feet or more from the shore, I saw that others beside our two selves were doing much the same thing.

There, set down upon the broken blades of grass

and bended twigs, written so plain that none could mistake them, were the "signs" for which we were searching.

Halting quickly, hardly daring to draw in a long breath, I pointed silently to the imprints of moccasins which had been worn by an Indian, as could readily be told by the pointing inward of the toes.

Teddy's face grew a shade more pale as he gazed ; but I observed a sudden closing of the lips which told that the lad was prepared for danger. I had seen the same contraction of the muscles once before, when we came, not many months previous, upon a panther crouching ready for a spring, and knew his courage was good.

A savage, perhaps one of Simon Girty's painted crew, had been following Master Mansfield and his companions, and for the safety of our own lives, as well as for those whom we loved, it was necessary we learn whether the bloodthirsty brute was yet on the trail, or had turned back.

It was certain the savage had advanced up to this point, and both of us understood full well that even at this moment his musket might be pointed at us.

We crouched low, each at the same instant, and, while our bodies were thus partially screened



There, written so plain that none could mistake them, were the "signs" for which we were searching.—Page 26.

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by the underbrush, tried to read correctly what was written on the ground before us.

The single footprint showed by the side of Master Mansfield's trail, and there it stopped, as if he who made it had suddenly been lifted into the air.

Strive as we might, it was impossible to discover another, and after a vain search with our eyes, Teddy motioned me to remain there as he turned to retrace his steps.

He was bent on going back to learn if the Indian had passed further on—if we had failed to see that which should have arrested our attention immediately it was met.

I am not ashamed to say that I was sick at heart and trembling with fear at thus being left alone when it seemed most probable an enemy was hidden close at hand, only waiting a good opportunity to strike me down ; but not for my life would I have admitted as much to Teddy.

Not above five minutes did I remain there, expecting each instant to be stricken ; but it was the same as an hour to me, and I welcomed the return of my comrade as I had never done before.

By a shake of the head with which he greeted me, I understood he had failed to find the trail, and then we moved cautiously first to one side

and then the other, searching for more evidence that we had read the sign aright.

It was a long hunt ; but we were finally rewarded by discovering how the Indian had turned back without apparently touching the ground.

A crooked sapling was leaning over the trail, and we soon understood that the scoundrel, seizing the top of this, had swung himself a dozen yards or more amid the bushes, coming down on his feet with a force that drove the moccasins a full inch into the yielding turf.

Now our task was simple, and our fears quieted somewhat, for the Indian had traveled down stream at a rapid pace, and without heed to leaving a trail, which proved he had turned aside before we came up.

Therefore was it certain we had so much of an advantage over him, as lay in the fact that he was ignorant of our approach.

Teddy read even more than this in what we saw, and thereby put me to shame because of my blindness.

“There are none of his crew near at hand,” he said confidently, “otherwise this fellow wouldn’t be going at such speed. He—perhaps all the party—saw Master Mansfield, and followed the trail to learn if the settlers were going straight

up the river. Having learned this, the scout has turned back to give the information. We may go on five miles or more without fear of seeing a painted face."

"After which we should be near-about Master Hubbard's clearing," I said, giving but little heed to the words until they were uttered, and then we two gazed into each other's eyes, not daring to speak the thoughts which had come.

If the Indians were as near as that, what might not already have been the fate of the settler and his family.

We had never seen the Hubbards ; but we knew there were two daughters and a son, besides the man and his wife. It had been told in our village that these people came from Pennsylvania, and had made but poor preparations for defense. Their log house stood in a small clearing, and for a distance of ten miles in either direction there were no neighbors.

The painted demons might work their will upon this little handful of human beings, and none could give them aid.

It was Teddy who first spoke, and his words caused me to feel a certain pride because he was my comrade.

"We must push on at our best pace, Cornie

Dunbar. There is not much we can do, but that little shall be done !”

I pressed his hand in silence, and then we pressed forward, both understanding full well that we might be hastening toward death.

We followed Master Mansfield’s trail, believing he had visited the Hubbards to give them warning, and knowing it was, thus far, leading us in the right direction.

It goes without saying that we also were on the trail of the savage who had followed our neighbors, and presently we saw where he came in, from the detour made when he sprang aside by aid of the sapling.

It is impossible to travel rapidly, and at the same time with any degree of safety while going over such a course as was then ours.

One must halt at the first unfamiliar sound until making certain what caused it, and move at a pace sufficiently slow to admit of reading all that lies on the ground in front of him.

Therefore it was we had covered no more than three miles when, as we believed, an hour had elapsed.

Thus far the only sign was that which we had been following ; but when we were, perhaps, another half mile on our dangerous way, it appeared

as if three score of savages had come up the river and turned into the thicket at this point.

I came to a full stop, having been in the advance up to this time, and asked with my eyes, what Teddy read by these signs.

“They have turned off here to approach Hubbard’s house from the rear,” he said in a whisper. “We must follow this last trail, lest by continuing on we come upon the stragglers of the party.”

We did as he had suggested, and, moving slowly lest we overrun the game, continued our advance.

As we both expected, it led us to the clearing made by the settler from Pennsylvania, but before we were come within sight of the house, it became necessary to turn toward the left because of having approached so near the painted crew.

I came to a full stop on seeing a tuft of feathers in the bushes not more than ten paces in advance, and my fingers itched to be at the trigger of my musket, for I knew only too well the bloodthirsty wretch was crouching there until the signal for murder should be given.

By this time fear was forgotten in the excitement caused by our situation.

Although in the very midst of enemies whose greatest pleasure was the destruction of life and

property, it seemed to me that we were engaged in a work which must be performed whatever stood in the way, and I ceased to think of self.

Never before had we two lads given so good a proof of our training.

We skulked from bush to tree and from tree to bush as noiselessly as squirrels, and more than once turned aside from the course because of having seen a tuft of feathers, or a patch of color, among the foliage, telling that we were close upon the heels of the half-human wolves.

It is enough if I say that an hour before sundown we were come directly opposite the door of the house, and perhaps two hundred paces distant, knowing full well by this time that the building was almost completely surrounded by Indians.

As nearly as I could judge by the trail, and those whom we had seen, there were no less than fifty painted wretches who had come to murder an almost defenseless family of five souls, and yet they dared not make a bold attack.

There was no need for Teddy and I to discuss the situation.

We knew beyond a doubt that these wretches were counting on remaining in hiding until night had come, when they could leap upon their prey

with less of danger to themselves ; yet, if we showed ourselves, they might begin the fight at once.

Our task was to warn Hubbard of the fate that awaited him unless it could be warded off, and to stand by the little family to the last.

But how that might be done was what puzzled me, and I looked around at Teddy with the question in my eyes.

He was gazing intently at the dwelling, and I followed his glance, observing what had escaped my notice before, that the windows were closely shuttered and the door closed.

The settler must have seen something to cause alarm, and in a certain degree was prepared for the attack.

There came to my mind the thought that we had ventured on a useless errand ; that we had put our lives in direst peril needlessly.

I asked myself if it was possible two lads like us could lend any material aid to the threatened family, and for the instant a most cowardly fear took possession of my heart.

“ We must work our way close up to the front of the house, and then make a rush for the door,” Teddy finally whispered softly in my ear, and I replied somewhat impatiently :

“That would be to compass our own ruin. The door is doubtless barred, and while we stood there trying to make the settler understand that friends demanded admittance, the Indians could readily shoot us down.”

It was evident Teddy had not taken this into consideration, and by the wrinkling of his brows I believed he had just realized into what great danger we had ventured.

Hubbard would not open the door to our cries, believing it might be a trick of the enemy, and it was doubtful if we could retreat in safety, for, as night approached, the savages would gather nearer the building.

To my mind we were in a most dangerous position, and if we came out of it with all our hair, it would only be because the savages had taken us prisoners.

It was when hope had well-nigh vanished from my heart, that I saw what caused it to revive suddenly.

Just outside the door stood a barrel that looked as if it might be filled with water, and I believed the settler had been making ready for a siege when the savages surrounded him. Most likely he began to provide a water supply after Master Mansfield and his party gave him warning that

Simon Girty's crew was on the war-path, and had lacked the time to take it inside the dwelling.

However ignorant he might be of Indian fighting and Indian trickery, it was not probable he would neglect to get this barrel within doors if the opportunity offered, and I whispered to Teddy :

“ We must creep up yet closer to the house, and be ready to leap in when he tries to get possession of the water.”

“ And in the meanwhile get a bullet through our heads from Hubbard or his son, under the idea that we are enemies,” he said grimly. “ We will go nearer the house, if you choose, and perhaps your plan may be worked successfully ; but I misdoubt it.”

We wormed ourselves along through the bushes after the fashion of snakes, keeping close to the path, and hiding our bodies from friends as well as foes, for the settler might fire if he saw so much as a bit of our shirts, believing we were Indians.

It was a long and difficult task.

At the end of an hour, when the sun was hidden by the tree-tops, we had come to within fifty paces of the house ; but further than that we did not dare to move, although knowing full well

that as the night came on the savages would draw their lines more closely, perhaps enclosing us.

To cry out, or make any other sign to those within the building, would have cost us our lives.

We were powerless to aid them, or even so much as save ourselves, except through some unexpected chance, and it was certain death stood very near.

We strained both eyes and ears ; but neither saw nor heard anything to give us cheer.

Then Teddy whispered :

“ We must get yet nearer to the house.”

“ It cannot be done in safety.”

“ The Indians will not come closer until dark. During the twilight we should be able to creep under the logs near the door.”

“ And what then ? ” I asked impatiently, for the imminence of danger had caused me to be both nervous and cowardly, a bad combination for him who ventures against such as Simon Girty had summoned.

“ It will go hard if we cannot make those on the inside understand where we are. At all events, no more will be lost there than here, for once these painted villains close in, we shall be discovered.”

“ Think you we might work our way back to

the river?" I asked tremulously, knowing it would be well nigh impossible.

"I haven't the courage to try such a plan; it is beset with more dangers than that of gaining an entrance to the building," he replied, pressing my hand as if to give me courage. "Let us advance a bit nearer now while the shadows are gathering."

I was at my wits' ends; it seemed as if death must come to us whichever plan was tried, and despair rendered me reckless.

"Go on; I'll follow," I said, and then began again that slow advance which might be checked at any moment by a bullet from friend or foe, and, meanwhile, the savages lay hidden and silent, awaiting the moment when they might begin the butchery.

CHAPTER III.

BESIEGED.

WELL, Teddy's plan was a success, despite all the danger and the many obstacles against it, and after a certain time we found ourselves inside the house, nearer to death, perhaps, than we had been while lurking in the thicket.

Our approach was effected in this fashion :

We crept slowly through the underbrush, for at such a time haste meant failure, and perhaps more, the shadows lengthening as we progressed until, when having arrived within ten or twelve paces of the building, it was so dark that one could only discern the objects nearest him.

Now it was that the barrel of water stood us in good stead, as it seems my comrade had counted on, for we contrived to slip behind it after the gloom of night had fully come, and were thus, to a certain degree, sheltered from the bullets of the savages.

We crouched close against the logs of the house, and heard now and then a faint hum of voices, as

those on the inside spoke words of encouragement one to the other.

Then Teddy set about making them understand who and where we were, by whispering hoarsely with his lips close to the crevice between the timbers, until from the movements within it could be told that he had been heard.

Then came the faint noise of footsteps as Master Hubbard made his way across the rough floor of split logs, and an instant later we heard his voice as he asked :

“ Who are you ? ”

“ Two lads, who, having met Master Mansfield on the river, set out to learn where the savages might be. We found them surrounding this place, and came to give warning. ”

“ Which we have already had, as you may judge, ” the settler replied, and with that in his tone which told plainly he was in doubt as to whether our statement was true, or we were leagued with the savages and trying to deceive him at his own cost.

“ We are minded to aid you in the attack which must come, and cannot well do otherwise, since it is almost impossible we could make our way through the line of villains that have surrounded the building. How may we get in ? ”

Teddy's voice was not quite steady as he thus spoke, and I knew he had for the first time come to realize that mayhap this settler was not minded to trust our simple word as to friendship, and would hold his door closed upon us.

"How may I know you speak the truth?" Master Hubbard asked in a whisper, and my heart leaped up, for now I saw there was a chance the man might give us shelter—shelter to us who had come with the thought of aiding him.

"I know not," Teddy replied slowly, "save that we are lads from the settlement around Fort Henry, who set out to get meat, and met with Master Mansfield. Then we pushed on, hoping we might carry back to our people information as to where the savages were, and are now betwixt two fires. A couple of muskets will stand you in good stead at this point, Master Hubbard; but if it so be you are in doubt about our intentions, we will try to fight our way through after some fashion, being, perchance, in no more danger than if we shared your lot."

There was a whispered consultation between the inmates of the building, during which I fancied it was possible to distinguish a female voice pleading we be admitted when the small garrison so sadly needed reinforcements.

After this Master Hubbard came nearer the wall, and said solemnly, as if we were the veriest villains in the land whose consciences needed arousing :

“I am minded to give you entrance, and if it so be you can deceive an old man and his family at the cost of their lives, then are ye worse than the savages who thirst for blood, knowing no better.”

“Once we are on the inside there can be no doubt in your minds but that we have spoken the truth,” Teddy said earnestly, and while I could not complain because of the caution which the settler displayed, knowing how many and various were the tricks the savages used in their bloody work, it angered me that we should be thus held on the outside when the inmates of the house needed our assistance even more than we were in need of their shelter.

“I am about to open the door,” Master Hubbard said at length, “and there will be three muskets ready to end your worthless lives before we who hold them can be cut down, if you have spoken falsely.”

“Take all the precautions you choose,” Teddy said, now speaking angrily ; “but do not delay longer, else those who surround us may come to understand what is going on.”

We heard Master Hubbard command some person, most likely one of the women, to remove the bar, while the others stood by to defend themselves if need be, and a moment later the door was opened so far as admitted of our slipping through.

Once on the inside, and with the door securely fastened again, we were given as cordial a reception as could have been desired, even though we had been forced to face the muzzles of their muskets as we entered.

Master Hubbard gripped my hands hard when, by the aid of a pine knot that had been lighted in the small fire, he scanned my face, and Teddy was greeted in like manner by the son, who was a lad younger than ourselves, so nearly as I could judge.

“Ye are welcome and sadly needed,” the old man said fervently. “That I was over-cautious must be forgiven me, for, although never having battled against the painted savages, I know full well that they resort to many tricks in the hope of deceiving their victims, that murder may be done with less of danger to themselves.”

“Don’t think for a moment that we harbor any ill feelings because of not being admitted at once,” was my reply, “for I doubted much whether you could be made to believe we had

come as friends, but it would have gone hard with us had you held out any longer."

"It may go hard yet, lad, with all of us, for there be near-about a horde of demons who wait to kill, and we have, counting yourselves, only five muskets."

"There are not above fifty Indians here, as Cornie Dunbar and I have good reason to know, since we have been among them these three hours, having followed their trail from the river," Teddy said without a tremor of his voice.

"You were brave lads to thus venture on their heels," the settler's wife said, patting me on the head, and I rejoiced that she could not know how cowardly had been my heart—how strong my desire to run away, which I would have done if there had been a fitting opportunity."

"We were warned by four men who passed here this morning that Simon Girty had gathered a band of savages to make an attack on Fort Henry, and would likely come upon our clearing as he made his way to the river," the son of the house said to Teddy. "Father had almost decided to push on to Wheeling Creek when we saw an Indian surveying the house, and barricaded ourselves here, as you see. Now it is too late."

"With five muskets inside these walls of logs,

we should be able to hold out," Teddy said hopefully, although I knew that he was far from believing his own words.

I was certain he felt, as did I, that we had come simply from the frying-pan into the fire.

However, I was not so cowardly now that we were sheltered by the logs, poor protection though they were against such as thirsted for our blood, and managed to put on a brave show of confidence as I gazed around at the remainder of the family, two girls, one younger and the other older than the boy, I should say, who gazed at us as if believing we were of a verity their deliverers.

They were more comely than any to be found in our settlement ; at least that was my belief, although Teddy McLaughlin insisted later, when we had time to speak of such things, that neither could so much as hold a candle to Elizabeth Zane.

Somehow, I do not even now understand why, the sight of these girls, who looked upon us two as if we were able to bring them out from the perils which menaced, gave me such a brave heart as I had never known, and it was in my mind that before the fight should have been ended—for I believed even then that there could

be but one end to it, which would be when the last defender was dead or taken prisoner—they should have good reason to feel that their first impression was as nearly correct as lay within our power.

There was not much opportunity just then to make the acquaintance of these settlers, and what I had seen was taken in at a glance, so to speak, between the time of Mrs. Hubbard's remark and my reply.

Then we were shown the preparations for defense, and simple enough they were.

A goodly store of ammunition was laid out where it might be come at most handily, and every vessel fitted to contain it was filled with water, although I would have much preferred that the barrel had been brought inside.

There were provisions on the table—corn bread and fried bacon—which, as we eyed them greedily, were freely offered to us, and Teddy and I made no scruples about setting to with a will, for although having so lately dined on a plentiful supply of meat, we had learned to keep our stomachs full whenever it was possible—especially when danger beset.

While we ate, and the two girls waited upon us by bringing a gourd of water, with salt and

melted fat for the bread, Master Hubbard told us what were his plans.

“I had not hoped to hold out long against the horde which beset us,” he said gravely, “but counted on making as good a fight as might be until the last. My son and I have one spare musket, which at the worst my wife can use ; but it was decided between us that while we stood at the loop-holes the women should load the third weapon whenever it was empty, and perhaps it will be as well that we carry out the same plan. Can you lads tell me more than I already know ?”

“We can say this,” Teddy replied, “having had some little experience in such as threatens now : It is not likely the Indians will make any move until near-about midnight, perhaps later, and then we shall be most fortunate if they present themselves as targets. I should guess that, failing to burst in the door, they would set fire to the house, which is the greatest danger that threatens this night.”

“The bark of the roof is dry, and will burn readily,” Master Hubbard said, as if casting up the chances in our favor. “The logs of the house are not so well seasoned that fire would lay hold upon them quickly, and the door, as you can

see, is made to withstand no little amount of battering.”

Teddy and I searched around for the loopholes, of which there were enough, although not placed as advantageously as one who was better versed in Indian warfare would have chosen.

Taking it all in all there was indeed a bare chance we might hold our own, providing Girty's main crew of murderers were yet so far away that they would not be able to take a hand in the sport.

There was a possibility that all his scoundrels might be in the vicinity, and instead of having to fight this small band in order to save our lives, we would find ourselves surrounded by the four hundred which he had gathered together for the attack on Fort Henry.

It was in Teddy's mind and mine that thoughts such as I have just set down came, shaking our courage sadly, but never entirely quenching it.

I question if Master Hubbard, or any member of his family, had a suspicion that the silent, waiting crew of villains on the outside might have reinforcements so near at hand that they could be called up when the attack began.

These settlers had lately come from Pennsylvania, as I have already said, and were ignorant

of such enemies as then beset us. Their greatest danger had ever been from Tories or Britishers, who were as sucking lambs by the side of the painted demons who patiently waited to shed our blood.

While we stood listening for the first sound which should tell us that the wolves in human form were ready to begin their task of killing and scalping, I had good opportunity for taking note of the Hubbard family, one of whom pleased me greatly.

Speculating in my mind upon each in turn, I mentally decided that the head of the family was an honest, God-fearing man, but not possessed of that energy which he who lives on the frontier needs quite as much as he does his weapons, and without which he is like to become disheartened when dangers press thick and fast.

The mother was the pushing member of the family, and I said to myself that if we were forced to meet the foe hand to hand, I would rather have her than her husband at my side.

The boy seemed much like his father ; he was named Henry, and the girls looked up to him as if he had proven himself a hero in an hundred battles, when, unless I was much mistaken, he had more stomach for running than fighting.

Esther and Sarah were inmates of the house upon whom one could look with pleasure. Comely girls both, although the elder had no slight advantage over her sister in this respect, and patterned after their mother. Except that they seemed to indulge in a sort of worship for the clumsy lad, I believed they would be true comrades in a battle such as was before us, and while Teddy talked with Master Hubbard of the crops, the climate, and, in fact, everything save that with which we must come face to face before many hours had passed, I made myself acquainted with the young ladies.

Now it may sound like boasting when I say that on my part the painted murderers who lurked outside were forgotten for the time being, except at such rare moments as we spoke of them, for Esther Hubbard pleased me so much that I gave no heed to anything save her face and voice.

During such time as we conversed in whispers I, as well as Teddy, had been standing by one of the loop-holes on the alert for those sounds which should proclaim that the time of trial was near at hand, and it was for me to catch the first indication of danger.

One unaccustomed to life in the forest would have said it was no more than the rustling of

leaves swayed to and fro by the gentle night wind ; but I knew that the side of the house at which I stood was sheltered from the breeze, therefore the foliage would not be disturbed save by human agency, and I said in a low tone, laying my hand on Esther's shoulder to learn if she was alarmed :

“ They are creeping up on us ! The attack is about to be made ! ”

The brave girl never so much as quivered ; but her brother involuntarily stepped nearer a sheltered corner of the room, and I knew that at the last moment he would show the white feather.

Then suddenly, startling each one of us although we were expecting it, came a hideous yell as if from an hundred throats, drowned an instant later by a great crash against the door.

The Indians, knowing full well that the settlers were aware of their presence, had begun the work without delay, when, under ordinary circumstances, some time would probably have been spent in a parley that the intended victims might be induced, under one pretext or another, to yield as prisoners.

The trunk of a tree was being used to batter in the door ; but, judging from the timbers that could be seen inside, I believed that this might prove a longer task than they had anticipated.

Almost at the same instant the crash came. Teddy and I caught a glimpse of an enemy, and our weapons were discharged as if the same hand had pressed the triggers.

We had the satisfaction of hearing a yell of pain, and, to our great surprise, Master Hubbard said in what was very like a tone of reproof:

“It is not well for us to begin the battle. We should wait until certain of their purpose.”

“Any delay might cost us our hair,” I said impatiently, beginning to load my musket; but being checked as Esther thrust the spare weapon into my hand, taking it upon herself to pour in the powder and ram home the ball.

“It strikes me we are knowing to their purpose by this time,” Teddy added, reloading his own weapon. “There is little need they shall send us written information of what is to be done, after knocking thus vigorously for admittance.”

He had no more than ceased speaking before I caught a glimpse of one fellow who was trying to gain shelter, and once more I fired with good effect.

“There are two less that I know of!” I exclaimed, and Esther thrust a loaded musket into my hands.

Even in the gloom I could see that her eyes were sparkling with excitement, and, almost

without being aware of the movement, I pressed her hand warmly.

She gave promise of being a rare comrade in time of danger.

Master Hubbard no longer expostulated against our plan of opening the battle ; but took his station at one of the loop-holes, discharging his weapon at what I verily believe was nothing more than a shadow.

Henry was not aroused by the odor of burning powder ; he remained in the corner holding his musket idly, and I whispered to Esther :

“ If your brother does not count on taking part, it would be wise to give his weapon to your sister, that she may serve Teddy as you are serving me.”

Then a movement among the foliage warned me that the savages had not been driven very far away by our first volley, and during five minutes or more I had enough with which to attract my attention.

When next there was an opportunity to glance quickly around the room, I observed that Esther had followed my advice.

Sarah was standing behind Teddy, reloading his musket, while he stood with Henry's weapon fully charged, watching for another target.

It is not to be supposed that during this time the savages had remained silent.

They fired fully an hundred shots without the possibility of seeing one of us, and only a single bullet had penetrated the building.

That came through a loop-hole within two feet of where Henry was standing, causing him to crouch to the floor, no longer able to hide his fears. From that moment until nearly an hour had passed the coward remained prostrate, and I almost forgot he was with us.

His sisters and mother were a "very present help in time of trouble," however, and stood by us like good comrades.

Master Hubbard discharged his weapon now and then ; but I felt confident he did no execution.

It was for Teddy and I to defend that family, and I rejoiced in the fact, because each moment my admiration for the brave girl at my back increased, until I had courage sufficient to stand between her and danger, even though face to face with Simon Girty himself.

Twice within an hour had the savages attempted to batter in the door, and each time we drove them howling into the bushes.

I was certain that we crippled or sent into an-

other world not less than six, and at such rate the siege could not long be maintained, for, whatever certain people in the east may say regarding the courage of an Indian, I maintain he is the veriest coward, save when attacking helpless women and children.

From time to time they contented themselves with shooting at the building, and more than one bullet came among us ; but thus far we had escaped a wound.

Then the painted crew drew off, or, at least, I believed they had drawn back because we could no longer see nor hear them, and there was a certain terror in my heart as I asked myself whether they had not sought shelter until others could be summoned.

“We have beaten them !” Master Hubbard cried in a triumphant tone, and I looked at him long before convincing myself the man was so ignorant as to believe that such a happy state of affairs had been brought about by the short battle.

I saw an expression of relief come over Esther’s face, therefore checked the sharp words which sprung to my lips, and Teddy remained silent ; but neither he nor I retired from the loop-holes.

Master Hubbard leaned his musket against the

table as if about to take his ease, when, observing that we were still on guard, he asked :

“Do you lads think there is any fear the savages may return ?”

“They’ll not come back, because of not having gone away,” Teddy replied grimly. “Cowards though they are, it isn’t possible this fight is ended. When it begins again we’ll have more trouble. Thus far we’ve seen only the beginning.”

Master Hubbard turned quickly, as if impatient because a lad set an opinion against that of his elders, and Esther came nearer to me.

Then ensued a short discussion between the head of the family and Teddy ; but I gave no heed to what was being said because Esther, standing so close by my side that I could have touched her hand by raising a finger, asked :

“Do you also believe we have seen only the beginning of this terrible night ?”

I would have let the question go without answer, but that she pressed for a reply, saying in a tone so low that none but I could hear the words :

“It is better to know the worst, for then one may be prepared.”

“But that you are a brave girl, I would say what is not true, and give relief of mind, although

it could be only for a short time. Teddy has spoken truly, unless these savages are of a different breed from those who have come this way before. Thus far we have been exposed to little danger; but when the fight begins again we will have our hands full."

She looked at me steadily for an instant, and then turned toward her timorous brother, whose courage she tried to revive.

CHAPTER IV.

FIGHTING FIRE.

BUT for the fact that Master Hubbard had not the heart to give offense to those who assisted him, I believe of a verity he would have laughed Teddy to scorn when the latter insisted that our troubles, instead of being ended, were but just begun.

As was natural, his wife had more faith in the opinion of her husband than in that of two lads whom she had never seen before, therefore, believed as he did; but I knew full well that Esther and Sarah were quite confident Teddy and I had spoken only the truth, and the brother need not be taken into consideration, for he was like so much useless furniture, only to be considered when he was in one's path.

Well, we remained there nigh on to two hours, saying but little; the girls, Teddy and I keeping close watch, while Master and Mistress Hubbard hovered here and there as if of the mind to seek repose for the night.

Once during this time Esther whispered to me :

“ Will there be another attack made before morning ? ” and I replied confidently, for one who has had experience in Indian warfare can say almost to a certainty that whatever of crime and mischief the savage does, will be during the hours of darkness. When the sun shines he, like other venomous reptiles, remains hidden from view so far as possible.

Without any intent on our part, this had become the condition of affairs when near to two hours were passed since last anything had been seen or heard from the foe.

Teddy and Sarah were on the southerly side of the room to the right of the door, and standing guard at the loop-holes which overlooked both the approach by front and that side of the building where the foliage was most dense. Esther and I were opposite them, rather more at the corner than on the side or front, for at this point was a loop-hole which commanded a partial view of two angles of the house, and the most advantageous, to my mind, for observation.

The muskets were loaded ; Master Hubbard's was yet leaning against the table, while each of the girls, my comrade and myself held the remaining stock of weapons.

Then, at the end of this two hours of suspense on the part of Teddy and I, and incredulity in the hearts of the master and mistress of the household, the next decisive move was made by the foe, and discovered by the cowardly Henry.

He, some time since, had regained so much of courage as to sit at the table and devour like a glutton the food spread thereon.

Now he raised his head, sniffed here and there as does a dog, and finally said as if it were something of annoyance rather than danger :

“The fire is smoking.”

Teddy and I faced about suddenly at this remark, which seemed so commonplace and innocent, most likely, in the ears of his parents.

The odor of smoke was what both of us had for some time since feared to detect, and now that the timorous son of the household mentioned it, I was sensible that my eyes burned and smarted.

“Can you see anything?” Teddy called sharply to me, and I answered him curtly, while running to the opposite end of the room :

“There has been nothing wrong on my side.”

After a minute, knowing full well what had caused the frightened lad annoyance, I discovered its location.

While Teddy and I stood watching, each at

our post, and the master of the house, secure in his own wilful ignorance, the savages had come up from the rear where I would least have expected an attack because there the ground was cleared for a garden patch, and built a fire close under the walls, which, fanned as it was by the gentle night breeze, was burning merrily.

But for the two girls, who had shown so much spirit, I would have made known the discovery in such words as must have thrown Henry Hubbard into a fever of fear, and aroused the old man from his blissful ignorance.

As it was, I said quietly, and in a low tone, knowing Teddy would understand full well all the significance of the information :

“The fire has been kindled here, and has gotten such headway that we must sacrifice some of the water.”

My comrade was beside me in an instant, and behind him came Master Hubbard, moving slowly as if counting that it would be possible for him to prove I was mistaken ; but Esther and Sarah, true women of the frontier, remained at the loopholes we two lads had just vacated, standing guard there as would girls who had spent their lives amid such scenes of danger as these.

Ere we could clearly make out how far the fire

had eaten into the logs, the room became filled with smoke, so that the feeble glow from the embers in the fireplace was cut off, and one must needs rub his smarting eyes again and again, even though such action could afford no relief.

I fancied it was possible to feel a certain warmth on the inner side of the logs, and something like fear possessed me, for I knew that once the fire had taken a firm hold we were doomed.

The settlers roundabout Fort Henry would remain unwarned, and Simon Girty with his crew of cut-throats might come upon them unawares.

There was little time for speculation. Something must be done, and that immediately.

I dashed a gourd of water down at that point where the floor was butted on to the timbers, knowing even as I did so that it would be of little avail, and Teddy said sharply, in a voice which he did not intend to be heard by any save me :

“Do not waste it like that, Cornie ; we shall need the small supply on hand when the flames break through.”

And I, all heedless of the alarm which might be caused by such words, replied :

“When that happens we shall no longer need the water, for all hands must have been suffocated.”

Now, if never before, was Master Hubbard convinced the savages could not be driven away as readily as he had fancied, and the cowardly lad set up a howl of terror that it would have pleased me to answer by a blow.

My heart has often been timorous, but never to such an extent that I would show it as plainly as did he, and more especially when there were women near-about.

A low cry, in which I fancied it was possible to distinguish my name, came from Esther, and, hurrying to her side, she beckoned me to look through the loop-hole.

I saw what appeared in the darkness to be the figure of an Indian just within the fringe of bushes nearest the building, and made certain it was one, when a yell and a sudden commotion followed the discharge of my musket, for I took careful aim.

They were counting on sneaking up and shooting us through the loop-holes while we fought the fire, so I believed, and calling to Teddy I said, as if it was my right to command :

“Stand by, lad. Surely Master and Mistress Hubbard may attend to whatsoever is possible there. You are needed here.”

Teddy obeyed promptly, and during the next

five minutes he and I found our targets with a bullet at least once every thirty seconds, the girls loading the muskets more deftly even than I would have done.

But it was of little avail that we held the enemy back in this direction, while the fire was gaining headway in the rear, and when we could no longer see a moving shadow which told of an enemy, I crossed over to where Teddy stood, Esther following, bent on learning what might be said.

There was no time in which to check her.

Indeed I doubt whether I would have done so had it been possible, for the danger was now so great that it should be thoroughly understood by all in order that every precaution might be taken for safety.

“Ten minutes from now, and it will no longer be possible for us to accomplish anything,” I said in a low tone, observing as I spoke that Esther and her sister drank in every word.

“That much I grant you, lad, and yet am I at a loss to know what more we can do.”

“This much ;” I said, grown desperate through the knowledge that unless some change could speedily be effected, the end was near at hand. “The savages count on our opening one of the rear windows in order to extinguish the fire.

Now I propose that while you stand at this loophole and Esther remains at my post, Master Hubbard taking his place by the door, I shall go out, carrying two kettles filled with water."

Teddy interrupted me by saying sharply, as if the proposition was one he could not even so much as consider :

"You would be shot down, Cornie Dunbar, before advancing a dozen paces."

"That is not so certain," I replied, emboldened by his refusal to discuss the plan. "It is not so certain as that we will speedily be suffocated by smoke if we remain here much longer. There is a chance that I might succeed, and under all the circumstances, with death so near at hand, I hold such a chance is well worth taking."

Esther laid her hand on my shoulder, as she whispered :

"It is for my father or my brother to imperil his life in aid of the family, rather than a stranger."

By way of reply I glanced toward Henry Hubbard, who was cowering in that portion of the room farthest from the flames, and she understood full well all I would say.

"Then it shall be for me to go," the brave girl cried, and I believe of a verity she would have

ventured out, regardless of all the weapons which I knew were at that moment directed toward the building.

Her words decided Teddy, and he said sharply :

“It is my right ! Do you stand guard here while I make the venture.”

But to such a proposition I had no intention of listening. The suggestion had come from me, and I was the one to carry it out.

“While we loiter here squabbling the fire gains headway,” I said, throwing off my hunting shirt, and looking about for the kettles. “I have the right to make an attempt because first having spoken of it. Stand by to do whatsoever may be possible in my aid, and after I have failed you shall take my place.”

Esther, understanding by this time that it would be useless for her to make any protest, silently held out her hand, and I grasped it for a single instant.

“I shall stand guard with your comrade,” she said, and then took her station at the loop-hole with far more of courage than I was displaying.

Master Hubbard was so bewildered by the danger that he did not attempt to dissuade me from the purpose, save by complaining that when

he unbarred the door the savages might make a rush, thereby gaining an entrance ; but I quieted such idle words by reminding him that while we stood talking an enemy quite as cruel was rapidly gaining entrance at the rear, and one against which our bullets would be of no avail.

It was the wife, rather than the man, who finally took charge of the affair, by filling two iron kettles with water, and then taking station at the door with Sarah by her side.

“ You are to wait until we have fired,” Teddy said to me, laying his hand for a single instant upon mine, and he added to Esther, “ When I discharge my weapon, you fire whether anything is in sight or not, and at the same moment Mistress Hubbard will unbar the door. You, Master Hubbard, are to stand at the loop-hole on that side past which Cornie must run, and remember that his life depends upon your watching, and upon your quickness with the musket.”

Master Hubbard obeyed silently. What through ignorance and fear, he was a poor man to be at the head of a household, unless it consisted wholly of such as Henry.

Well, I am making many words of what occupied us comparatively few seconds, and should be told quickly.

Stripped of my shirt, with nothing to impede the free use of limbs, I stood where a sudden rush could be made instantly the door was unbarred, and with a kettle of water in each hand, awaited the signal, which was to be the discharge of Esther's and Teddy's muskets.

Let it not be supposed that I was so brave as to have no care or fear regarding this venture.

Never do I remember of having been so frightened, but yet that fear was mingled with despair—with the knowledge that death stood close behind each of us, causing this venture to seem rather in the nature of a relief than otherwise.

There was little hope in my mind of being able to extinguish the flames with such a small amount of water as was contained in the kettles ; yet was it possible, and on that slight chance I fain would risk my life.

First Teddy's musket cracked, and then Esther's, the reports sounding in my ears like the roar of cannon, and on the instant the door was opened wide enough to admit of a passage.

My very timorousness stood me in good stead now ; I realized that every movement must be rapid—that only by going at full speed could I hope to succeed, yet at the same time understanding that the most perilous moment would come

when I halted sufficiently long, standing in the light of the flames, to pour on the water.

Some one, I believed it was Esther, said "God bless him" as I went out, and these three words gave me more strength of purpose than an hundred others could have done.

Of that quick dash I know little, save that I ran with all speed around the building expecting each instant to feel the twinge which tells of a bullet wound, and on turning the corner at the rear of the building I saw that the fire had not made any great headway. True, the flames had fastened upon the logs underneath where, unless checked, they would eat up through, and like a flash I understood how that danger might be averted from the inside.

Without coming directly into the light of the flames I stood just aside, and threw on first one vessel of water and then the other with steady aim, having the satisfaction of seeing fully two-thirds the fire quenched, when, still holding the precious kettles, I darted back the same way by which I had come.

Even as I turned the report of a musket rang out; a bullet whistled over my head; but it had come from the house, and not the thicket; Teddy or Esther was mindful for my safety.



Without coming directly into the light of the flame, I threw on first one vessel of water and then the other, quenching fully two-thirds of the fire.—Page 68.

Defense of Fort Henry.

Not to make too many words of this venture lest it should seem like self-praise, I must content myself by saying that I finally stood inside the building once more, with the door barred behind me, and not so much as the smell of powder upon my garments.

The skulking foe had been taken by surprise, perhaps there were not among them good marksmen, or, in whatever way you choose to explain it, I had accomplished my purpose without injury to myself or others.

Esther held out both hands as I dashed in, her mother and Teddy securing the door once I had passed over the threshold, and, flinging the kettles aside, I seized hers, answering the welcome which I knew she was giving as she would to one who had just returned to life, for of a verity had I gone down into the shadow of death.

“It was a bold deed, my boy,” Master Hubbard said, and would have added more in much the same strain when acts, not words, were needed, but that I cut him short, explaining how the fire had taken hold, and adding :

“By cutting away the floor we shall be able to come at it, for I did not succeed in quenching the flames entirely.”

He looked ruefully down, and I knew what

was in his timorous mind. The floor was made of planks split from the solid logs and at the cost of much labor, and he, even in that moment of peril, was averse to destroying it.

We around Fort Henry made of the hard earth a floor, but this settler from Pennsylvania, bringing with him odd notions of luxury even in the wilderness, must perforce have a plank beneath his feet, and now he mourned at cutting them away when, perchance, it would result in the saving of his life.

However, he began the task, hewing here and there as if thinking the desired end might be attained without the loss of too many planks, while the women, Teddy and I stood on the alert to discover the next move which might be made by the foe.

Now and then, at intervals of ten or fifteen minutes, we who watched saw dark forms flitting here or there amid the foliage, and opened fire at every fair opportunity as best we might in the darkness ; but other than that the savages gave no sign of returning to the attack.

We knew full well at least a dozen bullets had taken effect, and they must have understood that their intended victims had thus far received no harm.

I believed they had become disheartened, although Teddy insists to this day that they were bent on continuing the siege until the remainder of their crew should come up.

However that may be, it does not concern my portion of the story, and at the time both my comrade and I felt positive the end would come only after we had been shot down and the women taken prisoners.

Such fate was not to be ours, thank God! and assistance came when we least expected it.

It was near to three o'clock in the morning, to the best of my judgment, and Teddy had just whispered to me that now was come the time the painted enemy would make their most vigorous assault, when we heard, seemingly near at hand, the report of a musket. Then another and another, and from roundabout the house a rustling in the foliage as if men were running to and fro.

"They have begun to fight among themselves!" Master Hubbard said in a joyful tone, whereat Teddy laughed, the noise of his mirth sounding strangely out of place in that house over which death had hovered so long.

"Do not believe for a single moment, Master Hubbard, that those snakes are so obliging as to

shoot each other. It is better news than that, although who has come I fail to so much as guess."

"White men are attacking the Indians," I said in reply to Esther's inquiring look, and, understanding that help was come after so long and weary a time of danger, her face suddenly paled, and the musket dropped from her hand, telling how great had been the mental strain.

The cowardly Henry, hearing my words, alternately shouted and wept for joy, until, losing patience, I clapped my hand over his mouth to still the rejoicings of a fool.

"We cannot stay here," Teddy said to me, and I filled my powder-horn from Master Hubbard's store, at the same time making certain my bullet pouch was not empty.

"Where are you going?" Esther whispered.

"To meet those who have come to our assistance."

"But why venture out when there is no real need of it?" she asked falteringly.

"Because it would be cowardly to stay here while others were fighting for us," Teddy said quickly, and in another instant he was unbarring the door.

We went out into the night, moving swiftly

until, having gained a shelter among the bushes, and then advancing cautiously toward that direction from which had come the reports of weapons, for it was necessary we screen ourselves against both friends and foes, lest, perchance, a bullet intended for an Indian should find lodgment in our skins.

In less than half an hour, although I was not in that frame of mind which admits of accurate calculation so far as the passage of time is concerned, those who had thirsted for our blood were driven away, and we led into the house Captain Mason and three men, all of whom had come from the fort on a scouting expedition, after learning that which Master Mansfield had to tell.

“It seems we arrived in the nick of time,” Captain Mason said, when, being assured that the savages had taken to their heels, we greeted him with such warmth as one would greet a preserver. “I had no idea we should find the wretches so near the fort, and was nigh to running upon the whole band, when we chanced to hear the groans of one whom you had wounded.”

“It strikes me that you two lads have been proving yourselves men in a brave fashion these last few hours,” he added, after we explained what manner of a settler was Master Hubbard,

and how valiant his son had shown himself to be.

Words of praise were disagreeable just then to me, who had been so timorous at heart, and I checked the captain by leading him into the house.

Here he was greeted by Master Hubbard, as if the latter had had no assistance until the arrival of the captain and his companions ; but Esther said to me when the elders of the party were discussing affairs :

“But for you and your friend we should all have been killed or taken prisoners, for after the first attack father would not have hesitated to open the door, believing the battle was over. I shall never forget that through your bravery we have been, for this time at least, spared the pangs of death, or the horrors of captivity.”

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE FOREST.

CAPTAIN MASON was not one who allowed himself to be over-confident regarding a matter in which there might be any doubt.

He had lived on the frontier sufficiently long to realize that one must never judge of an Indian's intentions by comparison with that of any decent person, therefore it was that, although the foe had unquestionably beaten a retreat, we remained in Master Hubbard's dwelling until the day dawned, on the alert and prepared for an attack at any moment.

Perhaps when he saw what measures against a surprise this sturdy frontiersman took even after it was known that the enemy had left the vicinity, Master Hubbard came to believe that the precautions which Teddy and I insisted upon observing were not the result of timorousness.

I fully believed in what my comrade found an opportunity to whisper in my ear before the sun rose :

“Master Hubbard and his valiant son will either come to a speedy end, or acquire a greater store of knowledge concerning the savages between now and next winter.”

I was convinced that the settler from Pennsylvania would not have six days of life left to him, if he remained on his clearing, now that the Indians had taken to the war-path.

The thought that Esther and her sister might, through their father's ignorance, suffer a captivity worse than death among those brutes in human form, set me all aflame with the desire to urge that, at least while the times were so troublous, the family take refuge in Fort Henry.

I cannot so much as guess whether the Pennsylvanian would have fallen in with my views in this regard, had there been no one of more experience near by to whom he could apply, and I was spared the slight pain of having him claim that I was given to idle fears, as he might have done, by Captain Mason, who said in a tone that admitted of no argument, while we sat there waiting for the break of day:

“As a matter of course, Master Hubbard, you will not think of remaining here at present.”

“Do you then believe, as I have heard it stated,

that the savages are bent on ravaging this section of the country?"

It is already proven that they meditate such mischief," the captain replied, "and I should say that you, better than almost any one else in this vicinity, were aware of it. Surely one does not need more than a single visit such as you have had this night, to give him a generally good idea of what may be expected."

"What would you advise?" Master Hubbard asked helplessly as any child.

"So far as I can see there is but one course, which is to seek shelter in Fort Henry with the least possible delay."

"I will do so within a week," the settler said after a brief pause.

"If you wait that long it will be impossible to come, save you are brought, for you may depend upon it that those who have seemingly been driven away will return at some more convenient season to finish the work which was interrupted by our arrival. It was fortunate these lads chanced to be here, for with your small garrison it would have been well-nigh impossible to have held the fiends in check so long."

"The lads have done us a great service," Master Hubbard said, as I fancied, grudgingly, "and it

may be the time is near at hand when I can reward them for their efforts in my behalf."

"They want no reward, sir," I made bold to interrupt. "It is enough if we have been able to serve you," and I looked full at Esther as I spoke.

Then, as if Captain Mason was minded that this ignorant settler should understand fully all the dangers to which he had been exposed, he questioned us two lads as to how we chanced to come upon the scene so opportunely, and literally forced us to tell every detail of the story, after which he said heartily :

"It was a brave deed for you two to make your way through the savage band and gain the dwelling. I question if I would have dared quite so much, for entering a building under such circumstances is a most hazardous undertaking."

I fancied that Esther was pleased because the captain thus praised us, and certain it is her father shuffled uneasily in his seat, as if the knowledge of how much we had really done was not to his liking, while the cowardly Henry tried to belittle the affair by saying with something very like a sneer :

"We have had much assistance from our visitors ; but yet I question if they were not

thoroughly well pleased at being able to take refuge behind these stout walls."

Whereat Captain Mason said with a hearty laugh :

"If I were seeking refuge from such as we came upon round about this dwelling, it would be the trackless forest, rather than a log hut, which I would choose, and I am much mistaken if these lads are not in the same way of thinking."

Perhaps I had no right to lead on this conversation, which did little more than remind Master Hubbard of the obligations which he was under to us ; but yet I said with a certain degree of satisfaction :

"When we first came upon the savages I was tempted to urge flight. We could easily have made our way back to the fort, and without danger."

Master Hubbard was not inclined to do his part toward dwelling upon the theme ; but changed the topic abruptly by asking of the captain :

"Do you really think, sir, that it is necessary my family and myself set out for the fort at once ?"

"You should do so without loss of time, sir. In fact, I believe the situation so grave that

instead of scouting any further down the river, as was my intention, I shall return to Wheeling Creek this day, and you two lads," he added, addressing himself to Teddy and me, "must come with me."

"We were counting, sir, on gaining more information concerning the savages," I replied.

"You already have as much as is needed to warn the settlers, and I shall insist that you do not longer expose your lives. It would be well if you joined us in the march, sir," and again he turned toward Master Hubbard, who asked with a certain show of helplessness :

"When shall you set out?"

"As soon as the sun rises."

"But I cannot get ready to leave then," and now the settler spoke decidedly. "Besides, I must take with me what few goods I have here, and you speak of the journey as if it were to be ended before sunset."

"And so it is, my good sir, unless some serious accident befalls me."

"Then I cannot be of your party, much as it would please me to travel in your company."

"I pray that you think carefully upon the matter, sir. This is not a time when you can say to yourself that you will save this or that article

of value. The moment has come when you have the lives of your wife and children to protect, and that may not be done until you have brought them to the fort. Don't think I am trying to aggravate the situation ; it is as serious as it well can be, and I assure you, sir, there is not a settler within twenty miles who would allow thoughts of property to prevent his seeking a place of safety at such a time, although perhaps few of them have had as serious a warning as yours."

It would have been impossible for any one to hear Captain Mason without feeling certain he was speaking no more than the truth, and this Mistress Hubbard and her two daughters appeared to understand, while the boy, who had bawled like a baby when danger was nigh, sided with his father in the view that the journey must be delayed.

The girls urged that preparations for the march be made at once ; but the old man shook his head slowly, although decidedly, until his wife called upon him for some service in the loft above this room in which we were gathered, when, as I shrewdly suspected, she gave him a sound rating for being so pig-headed.

At all events, when he came down the ladder it was with the announcement that, "in order to

please his wife and children," he had decided to journey to the fort in company with the captain and his men ; but at the same time he claimed, as if finding a certain satisfaction in thus setting his opinion against the advice of those who knew far better than he, that there was no real necessity for what had much the appearance of flight.

"It is flight, my dear sir, and I should not take the trouble to deny that fact," Captain Mason replied gravely. "I will guarantee that among all those whom you may meet at Wheeling Creek, there will not be one who thinks it necessary to say other than that he ran to the fort for protection as quickly as his legs would carry him."

Well, all this seems unimportant and unnecessary to the story, now it is written down ; yet at the time I literally trembled with fear lest this stubborn old Pennsylvanian should sacrifice his brave wife and daughters through stupid ignorance.

It mattered little to me if the cowardly Henry fell a victim to his father's folly ; and I would not have shed many tears had the old man himself been taken prisoner ; but as for the girls and their mother, the case was different.

Those three women were brave--brave as any to be found on the frontier, as we two, Teddy and I,

had good proof, and they should not, if I could prevent it, be exposed to the horrible dangers which beset those menaced by Indians.

Had the old man refused to go to Fort Henry I was determined, so great was my anxiety and apprehensions, to take him aside and threaten the direst vengeance, and Teddy has since said that he was prepared to do his share toward dragging the girls and their mother away, if no more could be effected.

Well, the argument, if such it can be called, came to an end when Master Hubbard announced his willingness to be saved from a sudden death or lingering torture, and the female portion of the household set about gathering such trinkets of value as could readily be carried through the woods.

Once, just before daybreak, Master Hubbard insisted that the soldiers and we two lads go to Wheeling Creek and send back a boat for him and his family, in order that his miserable goods might be saved, but Captain Mason quickly gave him to understand that so much labor would not be spent upon a man who was virtually proving himself a fool, by saying :

“ Colonel Sheppard, who commands at the fort, would not allow man or boy to venture down the

stream in a boat after I have made my report. Those settlers who fail to arrive at the mouth of Wheeling Creek by nightfall must be abandoned to their fate, for, in view of all we have learned, every musket there will be needed, and we cannot spare one of the number to bring in loiterers, lest by so doing the lives of those who are disposed to aid themselves should be lost."

I fancy that such talk as this carried greater weight with the stubborn Pennsylvanian than could any argument.

It was plain to be seen that Captain Mason had lost patience with him, and this last remark was little less than a threat ; but it served the purpose.

Master Hubbard made no further protest against being saved, while by this time his cowardly son was so eager to set out that he urged his father to start even before the day had dawned.

Mistress Hubbard, good soul, even while engaged in putting together such belongings as might be taken with her, gave due heed to the needs of those within the house, by preparing breakfast, and when the simple meal was spread upon the table, Esther and Sarah acted the part of servants.

The sun was not yet an hour high when we set out on the tramp through the forest, and every



The sun was not yet an hour high when we set out on the tramp through the forest.—Page 84.

Defense of Fort Henry.

member of the Hubbard family, save Henry, was literally laden down with different articles of property which the old man was eager to save.

That precious boy I soon found was as selfish as he was cowardly, and more than willing to stand by and see his mother and sisters act the part of pack-horses while he strode on unhampered, which behavior I believe no other male being, except the savages from whom we were fleeing, would have copied.

After having set down thus freely and fully all my thoughts, it can readily be understood that I did not allow Esther to stagger on under her burden ; but insisted upon taking all her load and a portion of that which her mother carried, while Teddy relieved the good woman of the remainder and added to it that which Sarah was carrying.

Observing this, Master Hubbard said fretfully :

“ We might have saved very much more had I known you two lads were willing to aid us.”

“ I myself would have proposed something of the kind,” Teddy said laughingly, “ had I seen that your son displayed any willingness to do his portion of the work. In fact, it was on my tongue’s end to suggest that Cornie and I would take our share of the goods, until Henry walked away with nothing more burdensome than his

musket, whereupon I concluded my comrade and I had best save our backs."

The lad turned upon Teddy with something as near an angry look as he dared, and the old man was silent ; but Mistress Hubbard, who I should say had protested as loudly as did the girls against our taking their loads, said soothingly :

"Henry is a weakly boy, and because neither his father nor I has ever called upon him for much work, he appears to think there is no necessity for his doing anything whatsoever."

Whereat Captain Mason added, with a laugh which robbed his words of all disagreeable sound :

"I should say, Mistress Hubbard, that he was poor timber to bring on the frontier. Here a man must work and fight continually, otherwise he is crowded to the wall, or such as visited you last night will have him in their clutches."

No one made reply to this very sensible speech, and as we went on in single file through the woods, Captain Mason leading and I bringing up the rear, it so chanced—I did not dare hope it might have come about by design—that Esther fell out of her place in the line for an instant, and on stepping back found herself directly in front of me.

"It grieves me to see you so burdened," she

said with a tone of real concern. "Surely I am as able as you to carry a part of the load, therefore why not divide it between us?"

"Why should I?"

"Because I want to do my share of the work."

"And that you have, ever since Teddy and I made your acquaintance—more than your share, I should say, because but for you, your mother and your sister, I question if we had felt quite so much courage when sore beset with but little hope of coming out alive."

"Did you then really believe the Indians would overpower us?" she asked, looking around at me quickly, and in such fashion as set my heart bounding.

"Indeed I did, and after you have been on the frontier six months longer, I venture to predict that you will understand what a good turn Captain Mason and his men did by coming at the moment when we most needed them. There are few settlers on the Ohio who can boast of having successfully defended themselves against fifty or more savages, with but five muskets on which to depend, and only three to use them."

"I am afraid you think harshly of Henry's behavior," she said, as if pleading with me to forget what I had seen. "He is not a strong boy, as

mother has said, and is unacquainted with this kind of life."

"He should at least be as strong as either of his sisters," I replied, determined that she should not coax me into thinking he was other than a coward, "and I venture to say you have had no more experience in frontier life than he."

"But I am older than he is," she said.

"Aye, so I guessed. And your sister is younger?"

"Not quite two years."

"Yet she stood up with Teddy and me, bearing herself almost as gallantly as did you."

It is needless, and perhaps foolish, for me to repeat the conversation which passed between Esther Hubbard and myself as we trudged on toward Fort Henry.

Then it interested me greatly; but might not have the same interest for a stranger, therefore it is, possibly, wisest that I continue with such portion of the story as concerned all of us, and say that from the time of leaving the log cabin, until four hours were passed, we did not come to a halt.

Then it was high time indeed, so far as I was concerned. My arms and back ached with carrying Hubbard's goods until, had it not been for

Esther and the other women, I would have thrown them into the thicket.

It should not be understood that we pressed straight on without heed as to who or what might be in our path.

Two of the soldiers acted as scouts, pushing here and there into the underbrush, and now and again falling far to the rear that they might make certain we were not being followed, or running into danger. In fact, there was no precaution which an intelligent man like Captain Mason could take that was neglected.

The women showed signs of weariness before our leader called a halt, and there was a fear in my mind that the journey might be prolonged until after nightfall because of their weakness; but when we had rested half an hour those brave girls and their mother pushed on once more, keeping pace with the men, and whatever the fatigue from which they suffered, betrayed no sign.

It was during this first halt that I heard Mistress Hubbard speculating with her daughters as to how so many might be cared for in the fort, for, as has been said, Captain Mason had told them that all the settlers for twenty miles around, and there could not be less than one hundred and

fifty, counting men, women and children, would be gathered there.

I explained as best I could what arrangements would be made for their comfort, and finally succeeded in raising their spirits somewhat, for, as may be supposed, all were disheartened, not only because of leaving home, but on account of the dangers such as might well depress even a brave man.

Then I suggested that whatsoever was lacking among them, which my mother could provide, would be at their disposal, and perhaps it was because of such conversation that I was on more familiar footing with them than was my comrade, when the long journey came to an end.

The settlers at Wheeling Creek had not yet taken refuge in the fort when we arrived late that afternoon, and I had the good fortune to be able to conduct the Hubbards to my father's house, one of the best known in the country round about, because he who had built it was looked upon as a mighty hunter and an honest man.

As I knew would be the case, my mother received these homeless ones with open heart and hands, and I would not have had her manner changed in any way, save when she gave that

coward Henry and his pig-headed father as warm a welcome as the others.

My father was out hunting, he having heard from Master Mansfield that Teddy and I would probably go down the river scouting, and it was necessary that food be procured, particularly if the settlers were to shut themselves up in Fort Henry.

Teddy, who had come to my home on our arrival because of bearing a portion of the Hubbard goods, insisted upon taking his departure immediately he had deposited his burden on the floor ; but I pressed him to stay, saying as I did so :

“ Your father will learn from Captain Mason all that can be told, and there is no reason why you should go away until after supper.”

“ Neither is there good reason why I should stay to add to your mother’s labors,” he replied with a smile.

“ One more mouth will not make extra work, and I would like, now we are at home and in safety, to speak with you of that which we have passed through.”

“ Meaning that you have not had enough of flattery from Captain Mason ? ” he asked with a laugh.

“ I got no more of it than did you ; but last

night, for the first time, we two stood shoulder to shoulder in a fight, as true comrades should, and it seems as if you were nearer to me now, than four-and-twenty hours ago, when a quarrel was imminent because you first wished to press on in search of meat, and I afterward insisted upon acting the part of scout when there was more of timorousness in my heart than you ever knew in yours."

"You can talk it all over with Esther Hubbard," Teddy said, laughing yet more heartily as he literally tore himself away, and in order that he should not have the final word, I added :

"While you go to relate the story to Elizabeth Zane?"

"Perhaps!" he shouted, and then was lost to view in the gloom.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEELING CREEK.

ALTHOUGH Captain Mason had declared to Master Hubbard that if he valued the lives of his family and himself he would abandon the clearing without the loss of an hour, it was generally understood among those who had seen service against such a foe as threatened us, that there was no probability Simon Girty's band would arrive at Wheeling Creek until at least four and twenty hours had elapsed.

That there might be single Indians, or even small bands of the reptiles, scouting in the vicinity, we had no question; but they counted for little unless one of our people should come upon them in the depths of the forest, where a murder might be committed without alarming the garrison, and so long as we held together in the village, within a short distance of the fort, we might remain in our homes until the following night.

My father was out hunting alone, and yet no one felt any anxiety concerning him, for he was an experienced frontiersman, who had fought hand to hand against the savages many a time, ever coming off victorious, and we knew full well he would not be caught napping, especially after having been warned that danger threatened.

It would have pleased me right well to have remained within our humble home where I might hold converse with Esther Hubbard and her sister ; but, fearing lest they might think I presumed upon the situation and took advantage of them by intruding myself where they could not well avoid my company, I left the house as soon as supper had been eaten, saying to mother that if father desired me on his return, I should be at the fort.

She, good soul, believed I was bent only on learning what news had been brought in by the scouts, and, intent on playing well the part of hostess, as she ever did, made no protest at my going, but rather encouraged it, hoping, most likely, that I might bring back some cheering word.

If Teddy had spoken with Elizabeth Zane since our return, it must have been hurriedly, and with no dallying, because when I entered the stockade

he was there, repeating to Colonel Sheppard the story of our adventures from the time of parting with Master Mansfield until Captain Mason relieved us so opportunely.

Immediately upon coming within view I was summoned to what proved little else than a consultation between the defenders of the fort as to the steps which should be taken in view of all the information brought in, and during half an hour Teddy and I had the satisfaction of being questioned, and asked for our opinions, as if we had been men.

Before that terrible time in the history of our settlement was come to an end, I knew, without being vainglorious, that each of us lads did a man's full duty.

Then my father arrived. He had brought in, as I afterward learned, only a small amount of meat ; but had seen plenty of signs, and made a report to his fellow-settlers something after this fashion :

“ The Indian scouts are all around us on the south and west, evidently spying out the land, and when the attack comes it will be only after they have returned to the main band and announced the result of their labors. They have been in this vicinity not less than eight and forty

hours, I should say from what has been seen, and we may count on their knowing by this time much as to how we are situated.”

Then he stepped back to give way to Ebenezer Zane, who had also been out into the forest for the double purpose of procuring meat and learning what the savages might be about, and I observed that father spoke for some time with Captain Mason, after which he came directly to where Teddy and I were standing side by side, and holding out both hands, said in a hearty tone, one in which I fancied could be detected evidences of pride :

“ I am glad to learn, lads, that you have proven yourselves worthy the training received. You did good work—work such as any of your elders might well feel proud of—and it rejoices me to know you give promise of following in the footsteps of your fathers.”

After saying this he would have it that we repeat the story in all its details, and while the others were taking measures for defense, he listened to us, seemingly hanging on every syllable, and interrupting now and then to repeat his words of praise.

It was the last lengthy conversation I ever held with my father, and therefore do I remember

more distinctly all which was said, treasuring up those words of approbation.

After hearing all we could tell him, and stating that we would be called upon during the coming time of trial to perform an equal share in the work of defense, he joined the officers of the fort and the chief men of the settlement in their consultations.

It was decided that the settlers could with safety remain in their dwellings yet a little longer, and perhaps it would not be necessary to take shelter in the fort after all the alarm, because, finding that we were prepared for them, the renegade Girty and his band of savages might think it safer to retreat than advance, for it must have been known to them that there were at least forty men in the stockade and settlement, and such men as, favored by the fortification, could make a brave defense even against four hundred.

There were many who believed that this last would be the result ; but my father and Ebenezer Zane, lad though he was, held strenuously against such dreams of security.

Once Simon Girty had started out to destroy the settlements on the Ohio, it was to their minds not probable he would return until after having

made at least one attempt at massacre, and even though the chances were in favor of his retiring without having done mischief, we ought to believe, so my father said earnestly, for our own safety, that he would certainly push forward to the attack.

Perhaps if these two had not urged the matter so strongly the settlers would have neglected any save the most ordinary precautions ; but advice from such as my father was not to be lightly put aside, even by Colonel Sheppard himself, and the result was that twenty men were told off in two parties to scout within a mile of the fort during the hours of darkness ; the first squad to continue the work up to midnight, when the other would carry it on from that time until sunrise.

Teddy and I urged that we be numbered among these sentinels, bringing forward a good argument, as I believed, when we claimed that should any misfortune befall us lads it would be of less loss to the settlement and garrison than if two men had been cut down.

My father, however, without waiting to learn what the others might think of that proposition, set his face against it by saying :

“ You lads have already done a plentiful amount of work during the past six and thirty

hours. You were without sleep last night, and however good the intention, one cannot hold his eyes open when nature demands that they be closed. I am right glad that a son of mine is one of the two who pushed themselves forward zealously, and perhaps too boldly, in behalf of others, but the security of the settlement demands that those who are in better bodily condition shall perform the present task."

Then Colonel Sheppard and my father told off those who were to act as sentinels; the first naming ten men from among the soldiers, and the latter an equal number of settlers.

If Teddy and I were exhausted by our labors, as my father would have had it appear, we were not conscious of the fact.

It may have been that the excitement upheld us, or that our younger frames needed less rest and care than those who had suffered more hardships; but, however that was, we walked slowly from the fort to the village, fully convinced there would have been no neglect on our part during the night because of previous labors or present fatigue.

Teddy was particularly aggrieved because our proposal had not been accepted, and said querulously to me as we walked homeward:

“ It seems that, no matter how much of courage a lad may display, his years must always be brought up in disparagement of his ability. I guarantee, Cornie Dunbar, that five men out of every ten who were at the fort this night, would have hesitated long before venturing out of Hubbard’s house to pour water on the flames, as you did, knowing the savages closely surrounded the place on the alert for just such a maneuver as you executed. Yet after all that—after saving the Hubbards, as in fact we did—you and I have not had experience enough to act as scouts this night.”

I was not feeling as sore as did my comrade over father’s refusal to number us among the sentinels, although it would have pleased me greatly could I have come home in the morning and met Esther Hubbard, she knowing I had been looked upon by the settlers as being of sufficient importance, and possessing the necessary skill, to guard them while they slept.

Yet, if the truth must be told, I was really in need of sleep, and not averse to going home then, particularly since we had such visitors as were some of those within our dwelling.

Therefore it was that I tried to soothe Teddy’s ruffled temper by saying :

“If the savages make an attack there will be ample opportunity for every one here to prove himself a man or a mouse, and to-morrow night sentinels must be posted again, whether we be in the fort or not, therefore our time may yet come.”

“It should have come this evening, and then would have been proven, to me at least, that the words of praise we have heard were meant in good truth, rather than spoken simply for pleasuring us.”

“My father is not given to saying anything whatsoever which he does not believe, simply that others may have pleasure,” I replied, flaming up at once as Teddy thus hinted that aught save the strictest truth had been spoken.

“Now you are angry without reason,” he said quietly. “I did not mean all which the words seemed to imply. I was vexed, and spoke without due thought.”

“Because you wanted Elizabeth Zane to know that you could be reckoned among the trusted ones,” I retorted ungenerously, and he replied with a smile which had in it much of friendliness and good nature:

“Perhaps you can judge me thus quickly because of what is in your own heart. It may be you would not have been eager for the task if

Esther Hubbard had remained at the settlement down the river."

I could make no reply to this remark which hit so nearly the truth, and because of my silence he laughed, whereat I joined him, and the two of us parted in the same friendly spirit we ever had done, for between Teddy McLaughlin and myself no quarrel lived more than a few moments.

When I entered my own home it was to find it in much the same condition as I then fancied, having had no experience in the world, well patronized inns might be—filled with people lying upon beds made up of skins and blankets which nearly covered the floor.

In these days, when one building a house must needs have many rooms, it may be well to look back at those who settled on Wheeling Creek to reclaim the wilderness, being content, and even counting themselves fortunate, to have but a small portion of what now seems absolutely necessary.

The twenty-five or more dwellings in the settlement were each built after the same fashion, and one was neither better nor worse than another. Every house was of logs, the crevices chinked with moss and clay; the roof covered with bark stripped green from the trees, and fastened in place by saplings or small timbers hewn in halves.

The floor was nothing more than the earth beaten solid, and at one end stood a huge fireplace, formed of stones and held together by clay, from which we received the necessary warmth and also found opportunity for cooking.

The lower portion of the house was a single room ; but above it, under the roof, was a loft where in some cases all the family slept, and again only the children.

In our home this loft was unusually small, and we children occupied all that portion of it not used as a store-room for such products of our garden as could be kept throughout the winter.

On this night, when we had five guests, the lower portion of the building was devoted entirely to them, and the beds, as I have said, covered nearly the floor space.

The Hubbards had not lain down for the night, having waited until father should return, and when he was come we sat there a full half-hour, although it was long since bedtime, talking of what had occurred to drive these people out of their home, as well as what might happen to deprive us of ours.

The conversation was not cheerful, nor one calculated to console our guests for their loss, although it gave me no little satisfaction to see

young Henry twist about uneasily in his terror, when father spoke of the attack which he believed would soon be made upon the settlement.

From time to time I glanced at Esther Hubbard and her sister, and they looked up at me with a bright smile so full of courage, and in such contrast with their brother's behavior, that I came to consider them the bravest girls I ever knew, not even excepting Elizabeth Zane, who was ever ready to go where duty seemed to call, utterly regardless of danger.

The other children were up-stairs asleep, and mother and I joined them when father gave the signal for us to go to bed.

He counted on lying down near the door, so that, should he be called upon during the night, he might leave the house without awakening our guests, and my heart swelled with pride when he said to me :

“ My son, have your musket and ammunition where you can readily lay hands upon them, for if it so be an alarm is given you must take your place with the men.”

Esther Hubbard heard this, as a matter of course, and I went to bed quite as well content as if Teddy and I had been numbered among those who were to thread their way in and out through

the thicket on the alert for some signs of the painted savages.

I am overly long in coming to that portion of this poor story which has been begun for the purpose of relating the incidents of that time of trouble which came upon the little settlement of Wheeling Creek, blighting it as a frost blights the summer leaves ; but to me it seems well that he who reads should know how we prepared for the affliction—what we thought and what we did before Girty's horde of demons began their work of slaughter.

The light of a new day had but just appeared above the tree-tops in the east when I was awakened by hearing the hum of conversation, just outside our door, and as speedily as might be I hastened down the ladder, taking with me musket, powder-horn and shot-pouch, in the belief that the threatened danger was close at hand.

It would have been as well had I indulged in another half-hour of slumber.

The visitor was Master McLaughlin, Teddy's father, who, having faithfully performed his share of the work as scout since midnight, was on his way home, but had halted in response to my father's hail.

It appeared to me that Master McLaughlin's report was in the highest degree cheering.

"We have seen no fresh signs," he was saying when I came out. "I feel certain there is not an Indian within five miles of the fort, else had some one of us come across him during the night."

"And have all the sentinels the same report to make?" my father asked.

"Aye, we met at the fort half an hour since, and exchanged views. It is my opinion that Girty's scouts have reported what took place at the Hubbard clearing, when your son and mine gave a good account of themselves, and that renegade, knowing we would be prepared to meet him, has concluded to draw off for a time."

"It may be," father replied doubtfully; "but yet I claim it the duty of us in this settlement to carry ourselves as if we knew he was within an hour's march until at least a week has passed, and even then I shall lay myself down at night in fear of being awakened by the cries of the reptiles. When a settlement is to be surprised they will hide as long and as close as a catamount until the time comes when the tomahawk and the scalping knife can be used with but little danger to themselves."

“In that you are right, neighbor, and it behooves us all to keep our eyes open. While believing, as I have said, that the attack is given over for a time, I hold to it, as you do, that we must remain on the alert.”

It was as Master McLaughlin had said.

Those who had acted as sentinels throughout the night returned with the same report, and the settlers were evenly divided in opinion as to whether they might go about their farming in reasonable safety, or should flee to the fort for protection.

Knowing how scanty was our supply of meat, I made the proposition to my father, before we had come inside the house after having talked with Master McLaughlin, that Teddy and I set out once more in search of game, claiming that it might be done safely during this day at least, but he set his face against anything of the kind.

“Those who have been longest on the frontier are the least inclined to put faith in a sudden drawing back of the savages after they once set out on the war-path,” he said decidedly. “I misdoubt everything at such a time as this. What loss you lads inflicted upon them at the Hubbard clearing was as nothing. If the attack had been made here, and they drew off, as it

seems has been done now, the case might be different ; but even then I should mistrust the movement. There is an old saying, lad, that it is always darkest just before day, and in the same breath you may add : It is always most dangerous when those painted reptiles are the most quiet. Any unexplained silence on their part means the breaking out of mischief. Once that renegade Girty has decided to attack us of Wheeling Creek, he will not rest content until after having at least made an attempt to carry out his plans."

I saw little of our guests during this day, save when we ate breakfast, and then there was no opportunity for me to hold private conversation with Esther or Sarah.

Immediately after the meal Master Hubbard and his precious son set out to view Fort Henry, most like in order to learn if it was sufficiently strong to protect their own two selves, and the female guests claimed the right to help my mother in her housework.

For me to have lingered among them would have been to set myself down as womanish.

I sought out Teddy McLaughlin, as had been my custom when there was no especial work to be done, and on this day every man remained idle, save he acted as scout.

We two lads walked hither and thither, listening to the opinion of this settler or that, until both were at a loss to decide what should be believed.

Of course I held to my father's judgment, having perfect faith and every confidence in what he believed while on his side, Teddy claimed that we were anxious without cause, because of the report Master McLaughlin had brought in.

It was this piece of information which proved our undoing.

At the time it seemed to me foolhardy in us thus to discuss or quibble when we knew beyond a peradventure that those Indians who had surrounded the Hubbard house were out for mischief, and also that Simon Girty had gathered a wicked crew for the avowed intention of attacking the fort.

As I said to Teddy, we had all the information needed to put us on the alert, and he who neglected any precaution, or sat himself down in fancied security, was culpable, because better we fled to the fort twenty times without due cause than to remain outside one night when death lurked in the air.

However strong Master McLaughlin's belief was that Girty had abandoned his purpose, he, as

did my father, refused permission for his son to go out hunting, although meat was scarce in the settlement.

Toward nine o'clock of that forenoon the men gathered in the fort once more to learn what view Colonel Sheppard took of the matter by this time, and while we were there—for Teddy and I believed it our right to take part in any consultation of our elders—the Merrills, husband and wife, came up the river in a canoe laden with their household effects, landing at our settlement.

Now Master Merrill was a trapper and hunter who had spent many a year among these savages, and knew them better than did any other man on Wheeling Creek.

He had remained quietly in his cabin at other times when the Indians were reported to be on the war-path, without apparent fear ; but now had he come to Fort Henry, as he himself said, to gain such protection as might be found there.

As a matter of course he was invited into the stockade immediately after landing, even before the canoe could be unloaded, and there, having been told of the reports brought in by the scouts, was asked for an opinion on that subject regarding which our people were so much at variance.

“There is little need of talk,” the trapper said

decidedly, standing before the group of officers and settlers with his long musket in hand, as if believing the war-cry of the savages might ring out at any moment. "That renegade Girty has designs against those who live on the Ohio, and will murder and plunder out of revenge for his imprisonment; this no sensible man can doubt after what has been learned. I have seen the brutes set out on the war-path many a time, and yet remained in my own hut, Rebecca and I, giving little heed to what might happen, save that we warned those in our vicinity; but now, because of what I have heard here and there, am I come to Fort Henry for shelter. If that worse than wolf, meaning Simon Girty, does his will on this settlement, it can only be because you remain unprepared for his coming. In case there is any doubt among you concerning the wisest course to be pursued, then will Rebecca and I continue on further up the river, for we have no desire to cast in our lot with those who refuse to be convinced when the truth is set plain before them, as it is this day."

Now it was reasonable that such words as these, coming from a man who knew the ways and tricks of the savages better than did any other on the Ohio river, should be given full weight; but yet

even after he had spoken, and stood waiting to hear the verdict in order to decide if he would remain or no, there were many who questioned, not openly, for no man dared call him a coward, whether he had not given way to useless fears.

Thus did we dally with death.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE FORT.

Now it so came about that in spite of the warnings we had received, regardless of all we knew beyond a peradventure, and what should have been understood from experience, we of Wheeling Creek did not enter Fort Henry in a leisurely fashion, carrying with us all that might be needed in case the fight proved to be a long one, as we should have done.

And this neglect, this stupid refusal to do what we knew should have been done—a refusal such as might have been expected only from a man like Master Hubbard—cost us a goodly portion of the best and the bravest blood on Wheeling Creek.

As I look back now at that time I am lost in wonder and amazement at the wilful neglect of those people to secure safety for themselves and their dear ones. Although having taken my share and part in all that befell the settlement,

hearing this argument for, and that against, our going into the stockade, I fail to understand why we remained outside so long.

It is one of those things which will be set down in history as the perverseness of human nature, and read as a lesson that cannot fail of being heeded, to those who put off until the morrow what should be done on the day.

However, by thus reflecting I am not carrying on in proper form what I had the audacity to hope might prove something after the fashion of a readable tale, such as men print in a book.

To go back to the hour when trapper Merrill had given his opinion to the men of Fort Henry in no unmistakable words :

Luckily Colonel Sheppard was not so idiotic as to believe the old hunter had fallen a prey to his own fears, although it is true that the colonel did not quite consider the danger so great nor so imminent.

At all events, the members of the garrison were held strictly to their several duties, and messengers were sent up the river to acquaint such as lived there with what we had learned, for the double purpose of giving them an opportunity to seek shelter in the fort if they were so disposed, and to prepare them for the possibility that we

might stand in need of assistance before the renegade and his crew could be beaten off.

Orders were given that no man set out to hunt, or leave the settlement for any other purpose, without first gaining the permission of Colonel Sheppard, and the women were warned to be in readiness to come into the fort with their children and most valuable goods at a moment's notice.

Now one would suppose at this late day, that when such dangers were even talked about, the most valuable or the most needed of one's possessions would have been carried from the log huts into the stockade, from whence they might readily have been taken out again in case there was no reason for alarm ; but instead, I believe of a verity that I saw no person moving his household belongings.

Even in my own home all work was carried on much as usual, save that mother cooked an unusual quantity of meal, and made ready bacon enough to have lasted our family two weeks or more, in which work she was assisted by Mistress Hubbard and her two daughters.

If, when I went home at noon, Teddy accompanying me as far as the door, a stranger had at that moment entered the little settlement on Wheeling Creek he would have said the inhab-

itants were happy and contented, with never a care on their minds, so little changed was the general appearance of affairs, and yet even then Simon Girty and his crew of four hundred remorseless, bloodthirsty savages were lurking within five miles of the devoted village.

My father did not join us at the dinner-table. He had applied to Colonel Sheppard and received permission to go down the river a few miles scouting on his own account, and, therefore, the breakfast of that morning was the last meal of which he ever partook in our company.

Master Hubbard and his valiant son Henry, however, were there, and if they had been as good fighters as they were eaters, I venture to say the two would have been more than a match for a dozen savages.

The father was what you might call a courteous gentleman, if you were not too well acquainted with him ; but the son was as selfish as he was cowardly, and betrayed such fact even at the table. He took good care to get for himself a little more than his full share of the food, and gave no heed as to how his mother, his sisters, or even his hostess, fared, so that he filled his own stomach.

Shortly after the meal was ended the women of

the neighborhood came in to pay their respects to Mistress Hubbard and her daughters, and the boy and his father went out to still further gratify their curiosity, never so much as asking if there was anything they might do about the house, which, perhaps, was in itself no great offense, but at the time, and even now, it vexes me decidedly.

As a matter of course I could not remain while the house was full of women, and, therefore, lounged about the settlement in company with Teddy, until three canoes came down the stream, each containing a family that had been alarmed by Master Mansfield, and, having more sound sense than we of Wheeling Creek, were taking advantage of the present opportunity to provide for their safety.

Each hour after this until nightfall saw fresh arrivals, all of whom went at once to the fort, for it was no longer possible they could be accommodated in the houses of the settlement, and soon the scene within the stockade was an interesting one, although it would have pleased me better had I seen our neighbors of the Creek making more urgent preparations.

An hour before sunset I went home to urge that mother allow me to carry such skins and

blankets within the fortification as would serve for beds, saying as I made the request :

“I am certain father will insist that we sleep there this night, even though many of the other people do not, and it would be better I took some of these things now, even at the expense of bringing them back later, than that we, waiting until the last moment, are forced to seek refuge within the stockade virtually empty-handed.”

Because of what father had already said, my mother was willing I should do as I wished, although more than one of the good women near-about laughed because of what they were pleased to call her timorousness.

Therefore it was that before sunset I had within the block-house, in a corner somewhat apart from where the refugees who had lately come down the river took up their quarters, our skins and blankets and no small store of food, and was on the point of going down to the creek when I met Teddy McLaughlin, who was coming toward me panting as if breathless from long running.

“Have you seen my father?” he asked hurriedly.

“He was here not more than half an hour ago, and then declared that those who sought refuge

in the block-house were wasting their time, for to his mind it was positive Simon Girty's crew had gone back."

"He will have speedy cause to change his opinion now," Teddy said sorrowfully. "Captain Mason and your father have just come in from the scout to report a large body of Indians laying concealed along the river bank not three miles away. Instead of retreating on account of what they learned from the attack on Master Hubbard's house, Simon Girty has hurried his crew forward, hoping most like to arrive before we of Wheeling Creek are prepared."

"And it would seem that he has accomplished his purpose," I said, wondering why the alarm was not given at once. "We have had all day in which to settle ourselves here, yet none save those who came from up the river are in any way prepared for the attack."

"I must find my father," and Teddy made as if he would hurry away, whereupon I asked, although it was really none of my concern :

"Why do you not spend your time bringing in here such things from your house as will be needed, instead of running after him?"

"Because it may be that he is not yet ready," Teddy replied, and I was near to making a cut-

ting remark which might have interfered sadly with our friendship, for it was upon my tongue's end to say that if Master McLaughlin remained in doubt now, no one would feel very much concerned when the savages raised his hair, as they were like to do.

However, I checked myself in time, and just then lost for the time being all interest in Teddy's doings, for I saw my father approaching hurriedly.

“Bestir yourself, lad. It is time we brought such goods as may be necessary into the stockade, and I would have the work done before nightfall, for after that, in my opinion, no man is warranted in venturing beyond the fortification.”

For reply I led him to where our small store of household goods and provisions had been placed, and he put his hand on my shoulder approvingly, as he said :

“You have done well, my son. A wise man prepares for the worst at such a time as this, and, even though his labor has been wasted, heeds not the scoffing of those who remain idle at home, knowing full well that the ounce of prevention may have saved the necessity for a pound of cure. We will see that your mother and the

children, together with her guests, come over at once, and then you and I cannot go amiss, if we bring all our store of ammunition, for it is in my mind that every ounce of powder and every bullet in the settlement may be needed before this work has come to an end."

Well, I can say with pardonable pride in the correctness of my father's opinion, that our family had more to make them comfortable during the siege which followed, than any other of those from Wheeling Creek, and that we also brought with us, as my father had said, our store of powder and ball, being one among only nine of all those frontiersmen who, when they sought shelter in the fort, carried with them those things so necessary if any defense was to be made.

Before we reached home messengers were running to and fro warning all the people to come into the stockade without delay, declaring in the name of Colonel Sheppard that it was now too late to make any effort at conveying their household goods ; that the gates would be closed at sunset, and not opened again until the following morning.

"After all the time which we have had for preparation, it seems to me as if there should be no need

for such summons as this," I said, whereat my father replied, as if speaking to a comrade rather than a boy :

"In that you are right, lad ; but in any settlement there are always some who disbelieve everything save the evidences of their own senses, and at times like this such people are dangerous."

"Teddy McLaughlin says that you and Captain Mason came upon two or three hundred Indians hidden along the bank of the river within three miles of here."

"Rather nearer than that, I should think, and you can hardly say that they made much of an attempt at concealing themselves. We advanced within five hundred paces of a large body of savages—perhaps more than three hundred—who had halted on the bank of the river without any effort at keeping in hiding, and were holding a pow-wow of some kind."

"And you saw Simon Girty?"

"We did not stay long enough to single out any one among the gathering. It seemed to the captain, as well as myself, that an attack might be made at any hour, and certainly would come before to-morrow morning, because of this open showing of their force, therefore we hurried back on the moment."

“And you think there were three hundred?” I asked, inwardly quaking, for perhaps until this moment there had been in my mind the hope that all those experienced in Indian warfare who had declared we were in danger, might have been mistaken.

“More, rather than less; but the numbers do not concern us. If we can hold off two hundred, we can keep at bay twice as many.”

“And you don’t believe there is any danger of their capturing the fort?”

“There is always danger, my son; but I do not think they will succeed, although our defense may cost us much blood.”

Then we were come to our home, and there found matters much as I should have expected.

Mother and the children, each carrying some little thing which might be needed during our enforced imprisonment, were standing as if awaiting the word of command from father, while Mistress Hubbard and her two daughters had gathered up the scanty belongings which Teddy and I toted through the woods rather than see them perform menial duties.

Master Hubbard was bending over that precious son of his, who had thrown himself down in one corner of the room, covering his eyes with

his hands, as if it was only necessary he be blinded in order to ward off all danger.

“What’s the matter here?” my father asked sharply. “Why are you people standing thus idle when the word has come for you to seek refuge in the stockade?”

“Surely there can be no great need for haste, sir!” Master Hubbard said with somewhat of petulance in his tones.

“There is always need of haste when such a command is given,” father replied quietly. “The gates of the stockade will be closed at sunset, and after that it will be difficult for any one to gain admittance.”

Master Hubbard continued to whisper to his whimpering coward, observing which father said to the women :

“You had best come without delay. There is no good reason why you should linger here. If Master Hubbard prefers this dwelling to the stockade, he is at liberty to remain ; but I do not think he will be so foolhardy.”

Mother, motioning for the children to follow close behind, set out at once, and I, not minded Esther and her sister should remain until that foolish man had made up his mind the cowardly boy must obey orders, took from the girls’ hands

their burdens, so far as was possible, as I said in a low tone :

“Your father and your brother will come later. It is best for you to enter the fort as soon as may be, in order to secure room for your goods near where ours have been placed.”

The girls glanced toward their mother for an instant, and she said quickly :

“Go, my daughters, and I will follow later.”

Then my father quickened the movements of the party by saying to Mistress Hubbard, in a tone which admitted of no reply :

“Let my son conduct you, for it is indeed high time you were gone,” and in a friendly manner he pushed her toward the door so that she had no choice save to follow us, unless at the expense of giving her host to understand she was not willing to take his advice.

My father had followed on within twenty paces of us, leaving the Hubbard father and son to do as pleased them best, and the result was that within a very few seconds after finding themselves alone, the two decided that perhaps Fort Henry might be as comfortable an abiding place as our poor dwelling.

It lacked no more than ten minutes of sunset when Esther Hubbard and I, walking side by

side, passed in through the great gate of the stockade, and then I could see thirty or forty people coming in hot haste lest Colonel Sheppard should hold to his threat of locking the gates when the sun had set, for he was a gentleman not given to saying one thing and meaning another.

Even at the risk of much repetition I say although we had every reason to know the lives of all in the settlement were in danger, and might have sought this refuge in seemly fashion, carrying with us everything that would be needed, we waited, even my father's family, until the last moment, and then rushed in pell-mell as if we had only on the instant learned that the blood-thirsty savages were lurking in our neighborhood.

Teddy's family, dallying until the positive command was issued, had only time to bring with them what each could seize and run with, therefore were they nearly destitute both of provisions and clothing, save such of the last as they wore upon their bodies.

The Zanes, Ebenezer, Silas and Elizabeth, who were counted by all in Wheeling Creek as being the most courageous, had come early in the afternoon, the brothers moving their household goods while the sister set them in order within the

block-house, and there they were seated comfortably, partaking of the evening meal, when we loiterers arrived.

Those members of the garrison who had families, of course were living within the stockade, and they were obliged to share their food with those who had left plenty outside, which should not have been the case.

When the gates were closed I heard Colonel Sheppard say to Captain Ogle that there were not less than one hundred and fifty men, women and children within the stockade, and he concluded with a remark which made me feel more comfortable in mind, for I had been wondering how all these people were to be fed if the Indians began a regular siege.

“While having given orders that the settlers should come in this night, I am not inclined to the belief that we shall be attacked for four-and-twenty hours at the least, because it is never the custom of these savages to set about their bloody work without much ceremony, and to-morrow morning the people can spend their time bringing in provisions and ammunition.”

“Unless it should so chance that no opportunity is allowed them,” Captain Ogle said, thus giving me to understand that his fears and mine were

alike. "In which case there might be considerable suffering caused through wilful neglect."

"You are right, sir," the colonel replied gravely, "but it is not for us to peer into the future when we have sufficient trouble near at hand. I think it is enough to know that we are likely to be attacked by three hundred or more savages, without raising a question of a famine."

Then the two officers walked away, and I had no opportunity of hearing the remainder of the conversation, much as it would have pleased me to listen.

I went here and there looking at the preparations for the night which were being made by these people thus deprived of a home for the time being, and was soon joined by Teddy, who had stopped for a moment to speak with Elizabeth Zane and her brothers.

Together we two surveyed the scene before us, walking here and there, up and down the main room in the block-house, which was given up to the women and children, for the men and older boys were to be quartered wherever they might be needed in case of an attack.

Each family occupied a greater or less amount of the floor space, according to the quantity of household goods they had brought with them.

Some had the appearance of being already at home, and were cheerfully making the best of the situation, while others, thinking only of their own comfort and regardless entirely of their neighbors, were moaning and complaining because of having been forced to leave their dwellings, whimpering as if the discomfort had been caused through some whim of Colonel Sheppard's, and not in order to take measures for their own safety.

I wondered what Master Hubbard and that precious Henry were doing, until we came to that portion of the building where my father's family was located, and there we saw the cowardly son lying upon half a dozen skins that his bed might be soft, with his face covered, while his mother sat by him as she would sit by the side of an infant.

Anger took possession of me at this sight, and I might have said many harsh things, some of which would perhaps have been overheard by Esther and her sister, but that Teddy suggested grimly :

“He had best make the most of that bed for an hour, because by the end of such time I allow the men and grown boys will all be turned out of here.”

“He’s a grown baby ; not a boy,” I said disdainfully, whereat my companion laughed as if the conceit pleased him wonderfully.

“I doubt not but that he would be willing to lay claim to being a baby, in order to remain here with the women ; but, unfortunately for him, it is the size of his body rather than that of his heart which will count, and out he goes with the rest of us. It is my hope that the colonel calls on him to do guard duty this night.”

“The coward would refuse.”

“It wouldn’t be safe for him to disobey any command which Colonel Sheppard gives, and I have no fear but that he will be forced to do his full share of the work while we remain here. At all events, I shall take good care that he is called upon, for Captain Mason will readily listen to what we may say on such a matter.”

The refugees, for such they were in truth, had assembled in the block-house as if by common consent, and soon Master Lunt, stepping into the middle of the room, called for all to join him in prayer.

It was a timely summons, and heeded by every person in that assembly, save it might have been young Hubbard.

During fifteen minutes or more Master Lunt

prayed fervently that, if it was not the Divine will we be spared the affliction which threatened, we be given strength to struggle for our loved ones, and assistance in holding steadfast to our faith in God whatsoever might betide.

There were tears in Teddy's eyes and mine when the good man had come to an end of his supplications, and we were not ashamed of them.

Surely at such a time as this, if we of Wheeling Creek could not in the fullest faith appeal to the good God for aid, and strength, and courage, believing it in His power to bring us from out the dangers which beset, then indeed was it like that Simon Girty might work his will unopposed, for those who cannot rely upon their Heavenly Father are not to be trusted for their defense at such a time as had come upon us.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCOUTING PARTY.

AFTER the prayer was ended, and we all felt decidedly better for it, since it seemed much as though it would be answered because of our dire extremity, if for no other reason, the regular routine of work was taken up in something after military fashion, as might have been expected.

Captain Ogle entered the block-house just as Master Lunt had said "Amen," which was repeated by a half an hundred voices, and I believed the moment had come when we would be assigned to our several duties.

In this I was not mistaken.

"The men and all boys over twelve years of age will fall into line," Captain Ogle cried, and it seemed as if the words were no sooner spoken than nearly every one took his station near-about the officer who, after ordering us to form in double column, made a circuit of the place, for what I did not at the moment understand.

“He is gone to seek out the skulkers, and now has come the time when the brave Hubbard will find that his mother is not allowed to coddle him any longer,” Teddy said to me in a tone of satisfaction. “It is a shame such a delicate youth as he should be forced out into the night air,” he added with a laugh, and then we looked toward where my father’s family had taken up their quarters.

Master Hubbard and Henry yet remained among the women.

A single glance around told me that those two, who, better than almost any one else, knew how necessary it was they should obey any and every command because of the imminence of the danger, were the only ones not standing in line, and such fact had not escaped Colonel Ogle’s eyes.

He went directly toward them, and every person in all that assembly watched, curious to know why these two, who had been already once saved from a terrible death or a still more horrible captivity, had not responded to the summons.

Although neither Teddy nor I could hear what was said, we knew the captain was speaking harshly, and without at once receiving a satisfactory reply, because he lingered in front of the Hubbards fully a moment.

Then, with a gesture which had the appear-

ance to us of a menace, Captain Ogle pointed toward the door of the house.

Master Hubbard was on his feet by this time, and, musket in hand, came toward us.

Henry rose slowly, sullenly as I thought, and without weapon or any other thing in his hand, followed in the footsteps of his father.

More than one jeered them as they passed, but Henry looked neither to the right nor the left, and for very good reason.

His eyes were red and swollen, and to have raised his head would have been to make known the fact that he was terrified into tears.

I was ashamed at having so much as aided in saving his life, such a veritable coward had the lad proven himself, and I said to Teddy, with much of the disgust I felt for the poltroon apparent in the tone :

“I no longer hope that Colonel Sheppard will make him do his share of sentinel duty.”

“Why?” my comrade asked quickly.

“Because he could not be depended upon. A mouse running across his path would set him into spasms of terror, and the cry of an owl give him a genuine fit.”

“I’ll guarantee to look after the cur, if the colonel forces him to perform the same amount

of work he calls for from the rest of us, and do it in addition to my regular duty.”

“I wouldn’t agree to look after him while one might hold his breath, because the less I see of such curs the better I feel in mind.”

Then the word was given for us to march out, and I observed that Colonel Ogle remained in the rear to make certain there was no skulking, although he must have known full well that, save for these two Hubbards, there was not one within the stockade who would have dreamed of such a thing, and in addition, more than half the women among us would willingly have shared our task, doing it even better, perhaps, than the majority of us.

Well, we were marched out to the small log hut, which in times of peace served as a sort of store-house, and here the party was told off into two squads, one put under command of Captain Mason, and the other of Captain Ogle.

Teddy and I were not separated. We were in Captain Mason’s command, and the Hubbards assigned to the other squad.

Whatever may have been said against Colonel Sheppard because of that terrible disaster which came upon us, it cannot be claimed he was not a good officer, so far as military men go.

He had correct ideas as to the necessity of discipline, although it was hardly to be supposed he could whip into shape immediately such as had suddenly come under his command.

Fortunately, however, the greater number of them were men accustomed to danger, familiar with all the tricks of the savages, and understanding full well the need for obeying orders.

Would that the officers immediately under the colonel had been less able soldiers and better frontiersmen !

Our duties on this first night in the stockade can well be fancied, and need not be described in detail.

There were of men and boys forty-two, as we learned when those of the garrison were drawn up in company with those of us who had been marched out from the block-house.

Of this number I knew beyond a question that two were useless timber, therefore I whispered to Teddy that there were but forty to defend the fort.

For the first watch, which was to continue until midnight, ten were told off, and ten more selected to take their places from that time until morning.

It was only the older and more experienced

members of our company who were in this last squad, for we knew from painful experience that if Simon Girty's painted crew made an attack that night, it would be shortly before daybreak, rather than earlier.

I suppose this is their custom because the Indians argue, as is doubtless true, that people sleep more soundly at such hours, and are less readily aroused.

Teddy and I were hurt, although we took good care that it should not be seen, because we were chosen to stand the least important watch ; after what had been done we believed it our right to be put among the hunters.

It is not to be supposed, however, that we allowed personal feelings to prevent us from doing proper duty.

Never so much as once during the long hours of that watch did we speak with each other, because it was forbidden that any should hold converse, except it became absolutely necessary to do so, and although there were many things it would have pleased me to say to him, I refrained from speech until midnight came, when the other squad, at the head of which was my father, marched out, having been aroused by one of the captains.

Then Teddy and I went into the store-house to seek such repose as we could find upon the bare earth, for all the skins and blankets had been given up to the women, and he whispered, half laughingly, as we lay down side by side :

“I am disposed to believe that proverbial truth which says ‘a fool for luck.’”

“Why?” I asked, knowing reasonably well what was to be his reply.

“The precious Henry won’t be called on for duty this night, and I warrant you he is hugging to himself the thought that fortune favors him.”

“In which case you have proven one proverb to disprove another, for mayhap he repeats to himself that ‘fortune favors the brave,’ and counts on being so classed.”

“Perhaps I am making more talk than such a cur deserves,” the lad said petulantly, and then changed the subject abruptly by saying : “Do you not think it strange that we have failed of hearing anything whatsoever from the savages this night?”

Whereupon I repeated that which I had heard Captain Mason say while he, with Colonel Shepard, was passing near where I stood on guard, which was something after this purport, for I

cannot be depended upon at such a late day to remember exactly each word :

“An Indian is never more dangerous than when he remains quiet. We know beyond a question they are near-about, and I am not encouraged by this show of idleness.”

“But that is no more than your father or mine would say,” Teddy rejoined with somewhat of impatience, and I, with very good reason, reminded him that such opinion answered, as I believed, right well his own question.

I think it was the belief of nearly all the men within the stockade that we would be attacked before morning, and yet my comrade and I, having fallen asleep, were not disturbed until the sun rose.

Then, those who had last acted as sentinels made the same report as had we who stood guard during the earlier hours.

Nothing was seen or heard of the enemy. Not so much as a single feather had been noted near-about the stockade, and certain it is that with such men as watched over us from midnight until sunrise, there was never one of Girty's crew who could have come within sight and not been observed.

Now those who had been disinclined to believe the warnings we had received, and such few as

half objected to taking shelter in the stockade, came out in full force, declaring that we were proving ourselves timorous by having entered the fort when no danger threatened, and some, among whom was Master Hubbard, even went so far as to declare that as soon as breakfast had been eaten they intended to go back to the dwellings from which we had come.

I doubt not but that these foolish ones would, later in the day, have carried such a crazy proposition into effect, but for the stand made by Colonel Sheppard.

He declared that no one should leave the stockade, save by his express order or permission, and to that end stationed sentinels at the gate with the strict command that it be opened for no one, unless he himself was present.

There was much loud talk, no little indulgence of open threats, and a great deal of dissatisfaction apparent among those who should have had a better idea of the situation.

When I entered the block-house, believing my mother had made ready the breakfast, Master Hubbard and Henry were already there. The old man gave me a friendly salutation ; but the lad did not so much as glance my way, a fact that troubled me never a whit.

I was the less inclined to heed his rudeness because of the greeting I received from Esther and Sarah.

Despite the love which these two girls probably had for their brother, they could not but have come to realize by this time that he was a veritable coward, and, what was worse, had no scruples about allowing others to discover the fact.

Perhaps because of his churlishness they gave me a more friendly salutation than otherwise would have been the case, and while waiting for the meal to be made ready, a task which required considerable time, since there was but one fire at which all these refugees could cook, I held most pleasant converse with the girls, being able also to make them better acquainted with Elizabeth Zane, who, having been earlier at the fire, was finished with her housewifely duties.

That she felt somewhat of an interest in Teddy, although probably nothing as compared to his regard for her, I understood when she opened the conversation by asking me for particulars regarding the attack upon the Hubbard house, and seemed most pleased when I spoke oftenest of what he did.

Esther, however, would not allow that I should give to him all the praise, as was my purpose,

believing that by such means I was pleasing Elizabeth, but insisted on telling the story in her way, and making great account of my having voluntarily gone out to quench the flames.

“I am glad Cornie proved himself a man,” Elizabeth said finally; “but yet what he and Teddy did is no more than might be expected of any other lad or man in the settlement. I would be ashamed to own even as an acquaintance one who at such times would fail to do his full duty.”

This was an awkward turn which the conversation was taking, for I feared Esther and Sarah might think their new acquaintance was bearing down upon Henry, and I would have done what I might toward changing it into another channel but that Elizabeth, suddenly realizing how much pain the words might cause, for of course she knew, as did the others, that young Hubbard was a cur, asked if there had been no signs of the foe during the night.

I understood perfectly that this question was asked simply to cover her confusion, because of having spoken so decidedly about what men and lads should do in times of danger, because Ebenezer had been among the last batch of sentinels, and must already have given her the particulars.

After that we spoke of the probability of an

immediate attack, and the possibility of our holding the painted demons in check without great loss ; but yet all understood that in case of a fight some must fall, and this subject was so unpleasant to all that Elizabeth soon took her departure on the plea that our breakfast must by this time be nearly ready.

Perhaps it is not well that I give so much space to these hours when we were in comparative safety ; but I love to dwell upon that time, for after it passed there was nothing but sorrow, and anguish, and wretchedness.

Before that day had come to an end those who scoffed at our eagerness to take refuge in the fort were silenced, and some of them silenced forever.

The forenoon was passed in an idle fashion. Those who had not stood guard during the night took their turn at doing sentinel duty, and the remainder of us wandered here and there within the stockade, discussing for the hundredth time the possibilities of the future, and coming no nearer a satisfactory conclusion than on the previous day.

Now it was that the older men, and among them my father and Master McLaughlin, claimed openly that it was time a scouting party be sent out.

They argued that we should know beyond a doubt where the bloodthirsty crew were, and what caused the delay in the attack, which must come sooner or later, as seemed positive.

More than one of them talked with Colonel Sheppard regarding this, and he insisted it would be time enough for them to gratify their curiosity when the Indians came in sight ; that to go after them was foolhardy, since no positive benefit could be derived.

Teddy and I overheard some of this discussion in which the commandant of the fort took part, and therefore do I set it down in his favor.

I think it was Master McLaughlin who had said we were accomplishing nothing by remaining there idle, and Colonel Sheppard asked with somewhat of sharpness in his tones :

“ And what might be accomplished if you went forth, a dozen or more, pitting yourselves against all that crew ? ”

“ There is just a chance that the reptiles have abandoned the attack, as some here claim, and if so we should know it at once.”

“ You cannot gain such information,” Colonel Sheppard replied, and with decision. “ If a scouting party were to traverse every square yard of the forest on this side of the river for five miles

in either direction without seeing a painted face, still would I hold that common prudence demanded we remain here in security ; but if, perchance, a dozen or more of you should come upon the crew, what would be the result ?”

“ Unless we have lost all our knack in hunting Indians, little danger could come to us,” Master McLaughlin said quickly, and Colonel Sheppard added, as he turned away :

“ Men as well versed in such matters as you have fallen into an ambush before now. My advice is that we remain here quietly eight-and-forty hours at the very least, before we venture forth. It is better to spend two idle days now than have no more days whatsoever to spend.”

There were some who bluntly declared Colonel Sheppard was growing timorous, and announced it as their belief that Fort Henry should have a new commandant ; while there were yet more who declared he had no right to keep them inside the stockade if they decided to return to their homes.

I shall always hold to the belief that the colonel was badgered into sending out a scouting party—that had he followed his own best judgment in the matter not a man would have left the stockade on that day or the next ; but there was so

much complaint because of the inaction, and so many of the best hunters among us who chafed at being restrained, that he finally gave an unwilling assent to the proposition.

And this was the proposition which had twice been submitted to him before he entertained it :

That twenty men go out of the stockade, pushing directly toward the settlement as if intent on traveling up the river, and then, making a detour, come around below the fort, where we believed the enemy to be.

This party was to be under the command of Captain Mason, and to hold themselves obedient to his orders, remaining together in a body, save by his express command, and returning as soon as the enemy had been discovered.

Immediately the colonel agreed to this proposition, although stating that it was against his better judgment, a clamor arose as to who should be of the scouting party.

Not all among us took part in this, because there were several who preferred remaining behind in the stockade, or some other place of safety, to making their way through the forest where perchance they might come upon an Indian bullet.

But those who were desirous to go talked loudly

of their rights, and among them were Teddy and I.

As soon as we learned that permission had been given for the party to set out my comrade said in a tone of determination :

“ We must be among the twenty, Cornie. It has been said that we did the work of men at the Hubbard clearing, and if such be the case, how can Captain Mason refuse us permission ? ”

“ Are you expecting he will come and beg of us to accompany him ? ” I asked, believing our wisest course was to go at once to him.

“ It was in my mind that you speak to your father, claiming the right. ”

“ I think we stand a better chance in appealing to Captain Mason himself. Once his word is given he is not the man to reconsider it. ”

Teddy fell into my way of thinking, and without delay we set off toward the block-house to make our request.

At the time it seemed fortunate to me that Captain Mason was to lead the party, for he knew what we had done at the Hubbard clearing, and there was no need for us to go into all the details in such manner as might have seemed like boasting.

The captain laughed when we came to him

open-mouthed in our eagerness, and stammering as we tried to speak quickly lest some other should get ahead of us.

“So you think, because of having been in great peril once, you have the right to go again, eh?” he asked after we had finally succeeded in making known our wishes.

“We at least believe we should have an even chance with the older men of the company, since we did what some of them are pleased to say was good work,” I cried, and Teddy added :

“There are many reasons why we ought to go.”

Whereupon Colonel Mason interrupted him by saying :

“Aye, lad, and many more why you should remain. This is not to be as easy a task as some of the company fancy, although according to my belief there is more of labor than danger in the undertaking.”

“You do not believe we shall do any fighting?” Teddy cried.

“No, lad ; as I understand it the colonel has given permission for this scout with the understanding that we are to return immediately the enemy is discovered. It would be folly for us to attack, or even make a stand, if they set upon us.

Twenty against three or four hundred is more odds than I care to consider."

"Then truly you should allow us to be of the party since we are so anxious," I said. "Let the older men be relieved from the labor, and we younger ones can do as good work in discovering the whereabouts of the savages as those who were on guard from midnight until sunrise."

"You shall go, lads," the captain cried with a laugh, as if glad to put an end to the pleading; "but if we are forced to tramp ten or twenty miles, as is quite possible, you must not blame me because you are weary."

"Never fear anything of that kind, Captain," Teddy cried merrily, so rejoiced at being counted among the men of the company that he could hardly behave in a fashion beseeming one who claimed the right to be considered as a man, while I was little less elated.

And thus we two poor foolish lads made merry because of having been given permission to go down amid that butchery where was shed the best and the truest blood to be found on the banks of Wheeling Creek.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AMBUSH.

AMONG that party who stood in line fronting Captain Mason, ready for the dangerous venture, Teddy McLaughlin and I were the only ones regarding whom some story of personal prowess could not be told to his credit.

With the exception of us two, all were men who had been tried in many a peril, and proven themselves at the same time cautious and courageous.

I believe of a verity that had each man gone out on his own account, free to follow his own good judgment, and unhampered by the knowledge that some one was set in authority over them, the result would have been far different.

Do not understand me as saying that Captain Mason was in any wise at fault, or responsible for what followed; I only suggest that these brave frontiersmen, in trying to comport themselves as members of a military organization, were less cautious, less keen to the possibility of dan-

ger, less on the alert for signs of their foe, than would have been the case under other circumstances.

However, it is not for me to speculate upon what has been, for there are many times when it is exceeding difficult for us mortals to follow the hand of Providence in that which crushes us.

We stood in line, twenty men, if you are willing to count Teddy and I in that class, facing Captain Mason, and waiting for a last word from the colonel, who, having once consented to the scout, although much against his will, was now looking sharp after all the details which might well have been left to his subordinates.

I question if there was one in the stockade, save it was Colonel Sheppard himself, who looked upon our venturing forth as anything of a very dangerous nature.

Our people had plunged into the depths of the forest, again and again in the past, when it was known that Indians were lurking in the vicinity, and had been able to care for themselves, therefore, as it seemed to our friends, the work might be safely done again.

To this confidence in the skill and courage of the scouts was added, in the minds of very many, a doubt as to whether the savages were really as

near as had been reported, and thus one may understand why there were no signs of sorrow or anxiety over the proposed departure.

Colonel Sheppard, as I have already set down, had a keen sense of the danger to be encountered, and, advancing to where we awaited his final orders, said in the tone of a friend rather than that of a commander :

“I charge and implore that you men, who are better versed in this kind of warfare than I, be wary; that you be overcautious rather than take any chances. Believe, if only for such time as you are absent, that the foe is close about in overwhelming numbers, and act accordingly. You must guard well your lives, if for no other reason than because you all have loved ones here who look to you for protection. To err now by being over-bold is to risk the lives or freedom of all within this stockade, for without you we might not be able to beat off the painted demons who threaten us. Make certain of their whereabouts if you will ; but remember that it is your solemn duty to return to defend those whom God has entrusted to your keeping.”

Then he saluted gravely ; stepped back a few paces, Captain Mason gave the word to “forward march,” and we filed out of the great gate, by the

side of which stood four soldiers with loaded muskets to prevent others from following.

Now it was but natural that Teddy and I should feel free from responsibility, because my father and his brother were near at hand, and we had every confidence in their skill and judgment.

It was the first time we had been allowed to accompany the men of the settlement in a time of danger, and our hearts were nearly bursting with pride because at last we were going out to bear our full share of whatsoever might come.

In addition to such thoughts, we saw Esther Hubbard and Elizabeth Zane watching us as we passed through the gate, and our heads were held yet higher, for girls on the frontier are much more inclined to look with favor upon one who is counted among his elders as capable of doing a man's full duty, than on a lad who has not proven himself worthy the name of hunter or fighter.

Thoroughly well pleased with ourselves were we lads as we kept in line, side by side, for the party marched out by twos, and once clear of the gate Teddy whispered :

“But for our having blundered in at Hubbard's clearing just in the nick of time, we would not be here. I question if Ebenezer Zane will again call me ‘only a boy,’ as he did last week.”

“Why is Ebenezer not here?” I asked with mild curiosity.

“He was on guard when the party was made up, and I suppose felt of too much importance to ask permission, as did we.”

“Yet he claimed to believe that the savages had given over the idea of attacking the fort.”

“Aye, and so you may say every one, save Colonel Sheppard, is of the same opinion. It would be a happy deliverance for us, yet I had rather have one brush with them first. We may not soon again have another chance to show what we can do.”

It stands out in my memory as fresh as if it was but yesterday, that I laughed heartily at this speech; but for many a long day afterward the sound of merriment never left my lips.

“We may show ourselves only worthy a place by the side of Henry Hubbard,” I replied, and he added gravely :

“Neither you nor I believe that, Cornie Dunbar. We have seen some danger before this, and can remember well how we behaved. It was not by crying like a baby that we confronted the peril.”

I understood that banter was not to his taste just then, and held my peace until the moment

arrived when we had passed across the clearing and were come to the first fringe of foliage that marked the line of the forest.

Here Captain Mason said in a low tone :

“ We will hold in column until having come across the first fresh trail, after which the company will form in skirmish line, no one advancing more rapidly than his neighbor, until a view be had of the foe.”

“ We may go too far afield before we see them,” Teddy’s brother said to the man nearest him, and more than one of the party nodded to show that he was of the same mind.

From this out we marched forward through the woods as if there was nothing to be feared.

It is true the men were silent ; but not one did more by way of precaution than to keep his eyes fixed upon the ground in front of him searching for fresh trails, and little heed was given to advancing without noise.

Regarding this, which many who had no positive knowledge of what occurred at the time have declared to be the height of carelessness, I took little thought. Even though the savages were still bent on attacking the fort, it was not reasonable to suppose they were so near at hand, otherwise the sentinels within the stockade would

have seen them, and on we pushed, never dreaming of what lay before us.

Now and then Captain Mason, who marched midway of the column, urged the leaders to advance more slowly, or reminded the men that a sharp watch was to be kept for signs of the foe, until we were come to a dense thicket which, as I knew, extended in either direction half a mile or more.

There was what might be called a path directly through it; but to avoid the tangle entirely meant a detour of more than a mile.

The thought came into my mind that here was a famous hiding-place if the savages were near at hand; but I felt neither fear nor anxiety when the leaders pushed directly on along the path which would have escaped observation from all save those trained in woodcraft.

Each was forced to trail his musket, carrying it in one hand, while with the other he shielded his face from the tiny twigs and briars which threatened to scratch out his eyes, and it was difficult to keep the formation Captain Mason had insisted upon.

We were soon huddled together, for the leaders could not travel as rapidly as we who were partially sheltered by those in advance, and it seemed



“An ambush!” some one shouted. “Give way, men! Back to back, and fight for your lives!”—Page 157. *Defense of Fort Henry.*

to me as if I were in the midst of a throng when suddenly, sounding to my ears as loud as the roar of many cannon, came the report of a single musket.

Then, before I could raise my weapon, a volley rang out, the bullets seemingly coming from every direction save the rear.

On either side of me men fell with a cry of pain, or silently, according as a sudden or a lingering death had come, and the shrill howls of the savages rent the air until it was as if we were beset by a thousand.

“An ambush!” some one shouted, discharging his weapon almost at random, for we could not see a single painted body, and there was no need of these words to give me an understanding of the terrible thing which had come upon us.

Dimly, while trying to make room to raise my musket, so close were we huddled one upon the other, I heard Captain Mason cry :

“Give way, men! Back to back, and fight for your lives!”

It was easy to give such a command; but exceeding difficult to execute it.

The bullets were coming thick and fast; had each hit a target every one of us would have been pierced with twenty missiles.

The savages could not take careful aim in that tangle, and the balls were often thrown out of their course by the twigs and branches; but so many had taken effect upon our little party that I saw six men upon the ground, one of whom was Teddy's brother.

During a certain time I do not know of my own knowledge exactly what was done. The surprise had been so great that I was bewildered; my head swam, and everything took on the same hue of red as that which I saw staining the hunting shirt of Teddy's brother.

I was at the same instant cold with fear and hot with rage. I had an insane desire to kill, and loaded and discharged my weapon without being fully conscious of what I did.

Dimly I understood that Teddy McLaughlin remained by my side, and uninjured; that the tears were streaming from his eyes, although he shouted like one who is bereft of his senses.

Another man fell.

It was my father!

I saw him raise himself on his elbow, and I struggled to gain his side; but the press of men held me prisoner.

The dear old man was reloading his musket,

giving no heed to the blood that trickled from a dark blotch on his leggings.

He had been wounded in the left leg, seriously, as I knew from the fact that he tried in vain to rise, and, failing, would have continued the fight while lying stretched out on the moss.

Then I saw the feathers of a red demon as the reptile crawled through the thicket to seize my father, and I took careful aim, doing it as calmly then as if my musket was pointed at a squirrel.

The murderer fell backward, and, seeing his hand through the bushes, lying limp among the leaves, I knew my aim had been true.

“Fall back steadily, men! Our only hope is to come so near the fort that they will send out a rescuing party!” Captain Mason cried, and our party retreated two or three paces, leaving my father and Teddy’s brother just so much nearer the foe.

“You shall not leave him!” I cried frantically, struggling to make my way from between two men who held me fast, and Teddy tried to aid me.

“Stay where you are, lad! It is impossible to give him any help, and we must hold to our own lives if only for the sake of those in the fort!”

My father must have understood what I would

do, for he cried as he raised his musket to take aim :

“Do not think of me, lad ! Take heed to yourself, remembering that your mother and the children will have only you to care for them. My time is near at hand.”

He fired ; I heard a scream from the thicket, even above the horrible din, and knew his bullet had sped true.

He was never known to miss a target, however small.

Then, seeing a tuft of feathers amid the foliage just beyond him, I fired.

My musket and his were now empty !

At that instant, as if, which I doubt not was the case, the fiends had been waiting until the brave old man was unarmed, two sprang out from the thicket, seized him, and began a retreat.

I tried to wrest a musket from the man nearest, believing it was loaded, and succeeded, only to find it empty.

“Shoot ! By the love of God, shoot !” I screamed ; but no one heeded me.

Each man was trying to guard his own life and one could not be singled out for especial attention when so many were in danger.

I sprang forward, wresting my arm free from

the detaining grasp of a neighbor, and he, as the only means of saving my life, knocked me senseless with the butt of his musket.

While I lay there like one dead the demons succeeded in their purpose.

They dragged my father and Teddy's brother, although not until more than one worthless life had paid the forfeit, into the thicket in order that, later, they might torture the brave men to death.

When consciousness returned to me our people, now seemingly a mere handful, were still facing the foe, and retreating step by step, one or the other dragging me after them.

Counting Captain Mason, only twelve remained in sight. The others were dead, or prisoners, which last was far worse.

Because of seeing no lifeless bodies near at hand, I knew we had retreated some distance, and the thought that I had been unconscious so long well nigh maddened me.

I should have followed my father, and died with him if nothing more !

“Have you gathered your wits yet ?” Teddy asked hoarsely, thrusting a musket into my hands.

I understood that my father was a prisoner, and I remained alive, but more than that was

like a mist, because of the blow which had stricken me down.

“Get on your feet, else there is danger of your being left behind,” he cried, pulling me yet nearer with a sharp jerk that seemed to scatter a portion of the clouds enveloping my brain.

Almost involuntarily I obeyed, and began loading the musket.

No enemy was in sight; but now and then came a shot from the front, or one side, which told that they were close about bent on compassing the death of all who escaped from the ambush.

While one might have counted twenty I watched eagerly for a redskin, burning to avenge the loss of my father, and then I heard Captain Mason say, as he brushed away the blood which trickled down his face from a wound in the cheek:

“Twenty paces in the rear are half a dozen fallen trees which will serve as a shelter if we can gain them. Stand ready for one rush, and it is done.”

“We may not turn our backs even for a single second,” one of the men, an old trapper, replied grimly, peering ahead in the hope of seeing that which would proclaim the whereabouts of a foe.

“We can go backward that distance, and as we

do so Teddy McLaughlin must get far in the rear. While we hold these scoundrels in check, he can make his escape."

"Which I am not minded to do!" Teddy cried bravely, and at the same time angrily. "I came out to take the place of a man, and don't count on running away because I'm only a lad!"

"Neither do I mean you *shall* run away from your comrades in time of danger," Captain Mason cried quickly. "Unless word can be sent back to the fort it is certain we must all be wiped out. It will be a venturesome thing to attempt to gain the stockade, but some one must take the chances."

"I'm ready to try it," and now that Teddy understood how much of danger there was in the deed, he burned with eagerness to be at it.

"Get to the rear," the captain said, now speaking quietly as if we were safe within the stockade. "It will be of no use to carry your musket, for unless the journey can be made without fighting, it is folly to attempt it. Travel light, my boy, and remember that it may be to your death I am sending you."

"Many a better man than I has met his doom, and it can make little difference to those who are left, if I never get there."

“You are wrong, lad. If you fail in the attempt, then are we all the same as slain, and, besides, every arm will be needed in the defense of the fort.”

Teddy waited only so long as was necessary to grip me by the hand, look into my eyes for an instant, and then, leaving behind him musket, powder horn, and shot pouch, he darted back to the rear.

“Are you all ready?” the captain said a moment later, after having whispered a few words to my comrade. “If this plan is to succeed, we must move together, firing so rapidly that the savages will not know the lad has left us.”

“Does the fool think there are no Injuns behind us?” an old hunter muttered; but he made no reply to the captain.

“Stand close, and when I give the word, begin firing and moving backward as rapidly as may be!”

One of the men had by this time forced me to the center of the group, and, consequently, I was obliged to do as did those around me.

The word was given.

I understood, rather than saw, that Teddy had started at full speed, and then came the crack, crack, of muskets, the men pointing their

weapons either side, instead of directly in front of us, and over all the din I heard the report of weapons in the rear.

Teddy had been discovered and shot down, I said to myself ; but my heart was already so sore that I could feel no additional grief, even though believing I would never see my comrade again in this world.

We discharged our weapons, reloaded and discharged them again before having gained the shelter of which the captain had spoken, and when finally we were behind the fallen trees, another of our number had been slain. I could see his lifeless body hardly more than ten paces away, between us and his murderers.

Here, sheltered on every hand by the trunks and branches which formed a regular network, we felt that we had a respite for a time ; but that it would be possible ever to gain the fort, I knew the more experienced among us did not believe.

Once within this shelter I heard Master Merrill say in a low tone to his neighbor :

“The lad was stopped by an Injun bullet, I reckon,” and the other replied :

“I heard the firin’, an’ knew full well what it meant.”

“How far are we from the fort?”

“Nigh on to two miles, I should say. It’ll be more rather than less.”

“Then it’s only a question of how long we can hold out, for there’s little chance of pullin’ through a muck like this.”

“As I reckon it, our only hope is to die fighting, rather than be taken alive. I’m not fearing sudden death so much as a wound that’ll cripple.”

“Every man must take what is in store for him. I’ve never been in a pinch like this, but always allowed that I could provoke the reptiles into killin’ me outright, if it come to such close quarters as we’re in now. Surely the good God won’t bear down hard on a man who comes before him after having brought death upon himself rather than endure what those poor fellows must, who have been taken alive.”

Then the men fell silent, each occupied with his own thoughts as I could well imagine, and my heart was filled to bursting as I dwelt upon my father’s fate.

It is not to be supposed that once we gained this shelter the men conversed as if in safety.

Each was on the alert for an opportunity to take aim at a painted foe, and every time one of

us stirred ever so slightly, bullets cut the twigs from every side.

That we were entirely surrounded there could be no question, and such fact only served to show more clearly that Teddy could not have succeeded in his purpose.

“Even at this moment he may be with his father and his brother,” I said to myself, and so great was the mental agony that I could not shed a tear.

My eyes were parched and burning ; it seemed as if my tongue had swollen to twice its natural size, and my heart was crowding up into my throat.

I was partially conscious of a great thirst, caused, most likely, by the wound on my head ; but there was such grief in my mind that bodily suffering passed almost unheeded.

Not one of our little party spoke of the possibility that aid might come from the fort.

All believed Teddy had been killed or taken prisoner, and it was certain the reports of our weapons could not have been heard from that distance.

Death stared us in the face, and I believe every man had a firm belief that his life would be taken before the sun went down, for there was no hope

those fiends in human form would give over the sport of slaying us.

Then it was we began to realize that the battle, if such it could be called, must come to a speedy ending.

Our powder and ball was falling low, and when one discovered this fact, every man fell to taking account of the ammunition in his horn and pouch.

As nearly as could be decided by guessing, we had no more than an average of five charges each, and Master Merrill said in the tone of a man upon whom death has already fastened its clutches :

“There must be no more shooting at random. Do not fire unless you are certain of bringing down your reptile. It will do *us* little good to slay more or less ; but we are bound to help those inside the stockade to the best of our ability before going under.”

CHAPTER X.

A RESCUE.

As the moments wore on a deep silence fell upon us, a silence that was broken at intervals by the crack of muskets and the hideous yells of Simon Girty's crew.

As for myself, I had passed through all the mental stages which man can experience.

At the first, when I heard those sounds which proclaimed, as I supposed, Teddy's death or capture, a great fear seized upon me, and the perspiration stood on my face ; there was such terror in my heart that I could not so much as have raised my musket had one of the fiends stood directly before me.

Then came a mighty tide of grief, blotting out all thoughts of danger as I realized my poor father's position, and the agony my mother must soon endure. I did not weep ; but gripped my hands hard, and believed for the moment that my heart was bursting.

Finally it was as if mind and body had become

numb. I heard the reports of the weapons, and the savage yells, being hardly conscious that the silence was broken.

I was frozen into a stupor by terror, grief and a sense of utter helplessness.

From this strange condition I was partially aroused by a cry of pain from the man nearest.

He sprang to his feet for an instant, clutching at his own throat, and stood there in full view of those demons hidden by the foliage, until half a dozen bullets battered out his life, when he pitched heavily forward.

“It was the best way to end it,” I heard Master Merrill say half to himself. “Better that than hold on till the fiends get us in their clutches.”

Then I understood that this man had compassed his own death. Believing himself to be wounded unto helplessness, he had summoned all his strength to stand erect and present such a target as the savages could not resist, however great their love for taking prisoners.

If anything had been needed to prove to me how hopeless was our situation this sufficed.

From that instant I ceased to think there was the slightest possibility I could come out alive, and my only thought was as to how many moments might elapse before my turn should come.

Even in our utter helplessness and hopelessness we did not cease striving to inflict as much injury as might be done those demons whom Simon Girty had led against us.

Each man remained on the alert for an opportunity to fire with effect, I among the rest, and we cried aloud in triumph when one of the reptiles fell beneath our bullet.

That there may be a speedy ending to the telling of such horrors as we endured, I will pass over the half hour which elapsed, although there were many dreadful scenes that might be related—much that is painful yet remaining to be told.

The numbness of approaching death was still upon me when we heard the report of muskets coming from the direction of the fort, and each man looked at his neighbor with paling face, for it was as if the possibility that aid might be coming our way terrified us.

Again we heard the crack of musketry, and knew from the movement of the foliage here and there that our assailants were pressing toward the rear as if to ward off some threatening danger, and then a cry, which was at once that of relief, encouragement and of newly-born hope, burst from our lips.

Even Master Merrill, the oldest and strongest among us, trembled like an aspen leaf when it had become certain the foe was being attacked in the rear, and little wonder is it that we should have been thus overwhelmed, after having remained so long at the very portals of the grave, seeing no avenue of escape.

Then came the same question on each man's lips. Could it be that Teddy McLaughlin had made his way through the line of savages and gained the fort?

It would seem as if there was no other way in which the situation might be explained, for of a verity those within the stockade could not have heard the sound of the conflict, and there was no reason why any should sally forth because of our delay, since, had all gone well, or had the Indians retreated as some believed, Captain Mason's party might have been absent until sunset, without giving due cause for apprehension regarding their safety.

There was a great load lifted from my mind, even though my father was in the hands of the relentless foe, and surely it was doing him no injustice for me to rejoice because my comrade had escaped.

We no longer had occasion to discharge our

weapons, for not a savage could be seen, although we knew full well they encircled us completely ; but until whoever was approaching from the rear could be checked, they were content to hold us virtually prisoners, not minded to run the risk of death until understanding full well how strong was the force coming to our assistance.

We could not afford to waste powder and ball, which was now so precious ; but we shouted at the full strength of our lungs, that those who were advancing might know we were in dire need, and then Master Merrill cried, shaking himself as one does to throw off the lethargy of sleep :

“ Why are we sitting here idle ? Is it that we hope to remain yet longer ? Our aim should be to meet those who come to help us, and then we shall be so much nearer the stockade.”

“ But we cannot afford to expend the ammunition,” Captain Mason said faintly, for by this time he was growing weak from loss of blood.

“ We would have to spend it all in working our way back, whatever the outcome of this, and five minutes saved now is worth a man’s life. Come on ! Let us move back singly, each taking heed to himself rather than in such a soldierly fashion as has brought us to this pass. There’s no one here who is not the equal of half a dozen

such serpents as have driven us like rats into a hole !”

The voice of the hunter animated every man, and myself among them.

It was as if we had suddenly received new strength, and I believe that no one, except it might be the captain, gave heed to the possibility that we would find ourselves unarmed because the powder was exhausted.

It was no longer to be a fight ; but a skulking here and there among the thicket, working always in the same direction ; but maneuvering to keep under cover, and shooting only when it became necessary.

Now there was but one thought in my mind, and that to come face to face with those who had sallied out to meet us, if it so be the friends in our rear were from the fort ; but I noted that Captain Mason staggered as he rose to his feet, and, going quickly to him, at the same time taking due care to keep my body protected by some of the fallen timber, I proposed that he allow me to help him.

“ You are not able to travel far alone, Captain, and perhaps I can pull you through.”

“ Give no heed to me, lad,” he said bravely. “ The time has come when each man must strug-

gle for himself, and alone. If I fail in the effort, no one must be carried down by my weakness."

I insisted, urging my own strength as reason why it should be, and arguing that by thus moving on together we would have a double store of ammunition; but he cut me short when Master Merrill made a dash from the fallen timber into the thicket, followed by one after another of the men, literally pushing me from him lest I should be left behind.

At the same time he made a brave effort, and I saw by a quick glance over my shoulder that he was following.

Then I lost sight of him.

There was no longer time in which to look after a friend, for it required all my wits to keep on in the right direction, meanwhile screening myself from the Indian bullets.

Now and then I caught a glimpse of my companions far in the distance, and each instant the crack of the muskets in the rear sounded nearer.

I knew that every step was taking me further from that thicket where we had been ambushed, and bringing me closer to friends.

Once a bullet struck my cap, and it was as if a red-hot iron had passed across my head.

Believing myself fatally stricken, I sank down at the foot of a tree and pressed my hand upon the wound, taking heart immediately afterward as I found that the skin was barely broken ; but yet grazed sufficiently to cause a copious flow of blood.

In a few seconds my face was covered with the crimson fluid, which gave forth a salty odor, and I was forced to brush it away from my eyes again and again, else had I been blinded.

Then I pressed on once more, firing with steady aim as I saw a painted body just in front of me, and an instant later I was confronted by a hideous-looking savage who was leveling his gun at my head.

My own weapon was empty ; there was no shelter near enough at hand for me to seek, and, raising my musket like a club, I sprang forward just as his gun was discharged.

The bullet passed so closely to my face that I could feel the wind caused by its rapid flight, and yet giving no heed to it, because of the frenzy of desperation which was upon me, I leaped full at the half-naked wretch, dealing a blow that brought him to the earth as an ox falls beneath the ax of the butcher.

Then one more bound, and I saw before me,

standing back to back even as we under Captain Mason had stood, a company of our neighbors from Wheeling Creek.

Not all were erect.

Here and there on the ground I saw helpless forms ; but at that moment death was such an intimate acquaintance that the sight caused no tremor.

Another moment, and I was with them.

It was Captain Ogle who led the party, and instantly I came up he asked :

“ Are you the last ? ”

“ Captain Mason should be behind me, sir.”

“ Who are you ? ”

He looked into my face, unable to recognize me because of the mask of blood.

“ Cornie Dunbar.”

“ Your father——”

“ A prisoner, sir. Did Teddy reach the fort ? ”

“ Aye, and unharmed.”

“ Has Master Merrill come in ? ”

“ There he stands,” and, raising his voice, he shouted to the hunter, “ Look about you, sir, and tell me whether all who were alive are come save Captain Mason.”

“ All who left the fallen timber are here except Baker, and he was killed at my side as we came

through. Mason was weak from loss of blood, and must have gone down ere this.”

At that moment we saw, staggering through the thicket, groping his way here and there like a blind man, the captain who had led us out from the fort so short a time before, and, regardless of the danger, two men, I following, sprang to his assistance.

We managed to get him with the others, although at the expense of a serious wound in the arm received by one who went to his assistance.

Then was come the time when we must fight our way back to the fort, and step by step we worked toward the rear, assailed on every hand by the bloodthirsty demons, until it was as if each bush or tree held an enemy.

The cracking of muskets was like unto the crackle of hemlock logs upon a fire, so rapidly did they ring out, and we, forced to husband our powder and ball, dared reply only when we knew the bullet would take effect.

Step by step, losing a man here and upholding another there who had been wounded, we fought, and each moment death came nearer to Captain Mason, until his soul went out amid the noise of the conflict.

“He no longer fears the possibility of being

taken prisoner," was the thought which came into my mind, bringing with it a sense of relief that the poor fellow had been spared what I knew my father must undergo before his spirit should be freed.

Every step was marked by blood ; every yard of distance traversed paid for at the price of death.

Again and again was the number of our little band lessened, until it seemed to me that aid had come to us of Captain Mason's party only that those brave fellows who answered our call might be slaughtered, and I questioned even then, in that hour of terrible danger, whether it would not have been better for us to remain silent than have thus enticed them to their doom.

Then, suddenly, for in this race which we were making against death I had given no heed to the surroundings, the stockade came into view.

Less than two hundred yards separated us from those whom we loved, and I could see here and there around the fortification men, women and children who were watching eagerly our desperate fight.

Even then I saw Esther Hubbard's face as she stood side by side with Elizabeth Zane, and wondered if Teddy was inside the enclosure, or if he might not rashly have come out to aid us.

The firing died away.

The cowardly savages slunk back on finding they were come so near the fort, and we, each helping a wounded comrade, pressed forward as swiftly as our strength would permit toward that haven of safety, which might prove the place of our killing a few hours later.

Never had a yard of distance seemed so long ; never before had I realized how heavy a partially helpless man may be, nor how difficult it is to drag one onward who has not the control of his limbs.

It was as if a full hour passed before we were come to the great gate, which was swung open, and saw before us our neighbors—what few there were left, waiting to give us succor.

A mist came over my eyes once this place of refuge was gained, and I pitched forward, understanding only that it was my mother's outstretched arms which saved me from falling.

She, poor soul, had seen each man as he came up out of the thicket, running for his life across the cleared space, and knew that her husband was not there.

She asked me only this one question, and for the moment I was tempted to do what I had never done before—to tell my mother a lie :

“Is your father dead?”

I shook my head; it was impossible to frame the words which should tell her bluntly that with the going-down of the sun would begin his fearful torment, which God in His inscrutable providence might allow should be continued for many hours.

Then Esther Hubbard and Elizabeth Zane came up, and knowing, because of my father's absence, somewhat of the trouble which was upon my mother, Elizabeth led her away, speaking loving words which could not cheer, but might have brought somewhat of comfort, while Esther insisted on dressing my wound.

“It is only a scratch,” I said, striving to stand upright as a lad should, but staggering from sheer faintness.

“Show it to me,” she said in the tone of one who would be obeyed.

I pointed to my head, where the blood was matted with the hair until it was like a moss which has been stiffened by the frost, and straight-way she fetched water and cloths, calling on her mother to aid her.

Between the two they laid bare that furrow made by the ball, until it could be seen I had indeed spoken the truth, although the two women

would have it that the wound was considerably more than a scratch.

I was weak from loss of blood, although not knowing it.

The faintness and the dizziness which assailed me was caused by weakness, and I perforce was led into the block-house by these two women, unable to have gone so far as that alone.

All around me were weeping women, some of whom had the blessed comfort of dressing the wounds of their loved ones, and others alone in their grief for the brave men who would never come back—whose bodies lay out in the thicket, or who were yet holden for the fearful death, as was my father.

At such a time one individual wound attracts little attention, however grievous it may be, and, save for the attentions of Esther Hubbard and her mother, I was alone until we were come to where Elizabeth Zane stood trying to speak words of cheer into ears that heard them not because Henry Dunbar was a prisoner in the hands of Simon Girty's fiendish crew.

Some one came up with a basin of warm drink, and handed it to Esther Hubbard.

She held the pan to my lips, and I drank, quenching that thirst of which I had not fully

been conscious, and coming more nearly to my senses.

“Was Teddy wounded?” I asked, wondering why he had not come to greet me, who was the same as arisen from the grave.

“He was not wounded,” she said in an odd tone, which caused me to look around quickly.

“Did he go out with Captain Ogle’s men?”

“No; he remained here.”

“Where is he?”

“I do not know.”

She spoke much as if it displeased her that he should be the subject of the conversation, and sad at heart and sore in body though I was, it perplexed me much, as did also the fact that he had not come to me, his comrade, with a single word of welcome.

“Have you had speech with him since he came in?” I asked after a pause, and she replied soothingly, while binding up the wound on my head, stopping for an instant to lay her cool hand upon my heated brow :

“Do not speak of him. He and Henry are not fitted for such scenes as this.”

“He and Henry!” I repeated indignantly, trying in vain to turn my head, which she held fast by the bands of muslin. “Why should you

couple Teddy McLaughlin's name with your brother's?"

"Because there is little difference between them, save, perhaps, that one is more cowardly than the other."

"Surely you do not mean to say—you who have seen what Teddy is capable of doing—that he can be a coward?"

"Then why did he desert you in such a time of peril?"

"He did not!" I cried angrily. "It was by Captain Mason's orders that he made his way back to the fort. Surely his danger in the coming was greater than ours in the staying, for the savages were thick about us, and the only wonder is he escaped."

"He came in without so much as a scratch," she said in a tone of scorn; "and when Captain Ogle cried out to know who would follow him to the rescue, it was your comrade who lay down here among the women, when Elizabeth Zane and I both pleaded that we be allowed to do what we might."

"The lad was hurt," I said sharply. "It cannot be Teddy would have flinched from coming to aid us, knowing full well all the peril!" Then, and I know not why the sudden thought came to

my mind, "Does Elizabeth Zane believe as you do?"

"She has seen what I and all the others inside the stockade saw."

I was silent because of bewilderment.

Knowing full well that Teddy McLaughlin would never show fear, however much he might feel it, and that he would take no heed of his own life so that he might aid a friend, I failed to understand how it could have come about that he gave to the people in the fort the idea of his being a coward.

This, however, was no time for me to dwell upon such thoughts.

After my wound was bound up and I had thanked the young girl for her sisterly attention, I turned to my mother, wondering if it might not be possible I could say something which would, in ever so slight a degree, lighten the gloom that had come upon her, but soon saw that she would be alone with her grief.

I walked away softly, as one walks in the presence of death, for surely then death was with us, leaving Esther and Elizabeth to do what they might for the children who crowded around the heart-broken mother.

I was feeling stronger now, and the words

which greeted me on every side, or the fervent hand-clasps which were given, seemed to dissipate the weakness until the pain caused by my wound was almost a pleasure, and then I heard one man say to another in a tone of despair :

“ Thirty-three went out, and only eight came back ! We counted forty-two this morning, and now but twelve men and lads are left to defend this stockade. Surely the hand of God is heavy upon us ! ”

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIEGE.

EVEN I, who had been in the ambush and seen our friends shot down like rabbits by the blood-thirsty savages, could not for the moment realize that what this neighbor had said was true.

It did not seem possible that we who must hold the stockade, or give ourselves up to a frightful death, could be so weakened in numbers during that short time.

Only twelve to defend the fort against all Simon Girty's force of howling wolves, and among those twelve was reckoned such an one as Henry Hubbard.

When I had heard the statement again and again it became necessary to believe it, for by this time I could count for myself, and knew that in this list were included at least two whose wounds were so grievous that it was a question if they could so much as hold a musket to their shoulders.

Now did it seem as if those who had yielded up their lives in the thicket were the happiest, for they would be spared the agony of living to see all these women and children in the hands of those brutes in human form who knew neither mercy nor pity.

I was overwhelmed, terrified by the knowledge which was all too true, and said aloud to myself, not knowing there was a listener near-about :

“ Only twelve in all this stockade ! ”

“ There are women here who should be counted, if you reckon in as defenders two of the men,” a voice said sharply, and looking up I saw Elizabeth Zane.

“ There are many women here who deserve to be counted, whether we reckon all our force or not,” I said, hardly understanding for the moment what she meant. “ There are many who, inside this stockade or out of it, can give a better account of themselves than such as I, and among them I hold you foremost, Elizabeth.”

“ There is no reason why you should do that, Cornie Dunbar, though I thank you for the words. To be praised by a lad who has shown himself of so much spirit as you, is the same as having been praised by ”—she was going to say

“your father”—and then, realizing the situation, she added, “by one like Master Merrill or Colonel Sheppard.”

“I wish indeed I was all you seem to believe me, Elizabeth Zane,” I replied sadly, the knowledge of my own many defects and often attacks of cowardice coming upon me with a rush. “Whosoever thinks I am to be compared with any in this garrison—I do not count Henry Hubbard as being of it—is mistaken, for my heart is filled with timorousness again and again, until my knees shake beneath me.”

“I have never heard any one else make such a statement, Cornie Dunbar.”

“That is because I have hidden it from all. There is no lad living who would be willing his neighbor should believe him a coward, however great a one he may be.”

“So you have hidden your timorousness, eh?” she queried, looking sharply and yet at the same time with a friendly glance upon me. “If a lad may succeed in hiding his fear from those around him, and do it so successfully as to make the venture you did at the Hubbard clearing, or remain with his comrades this day, although wounded, I should be inclined to say that such an one was exceeding brave. I would admire more a man,

who, knowing and fearing danger, faces it, as he ought, than one so dull as not to realize the situation."

"At the Hubbard clearing I did nothing more than did Teddy McLaughlin."

"Who remained inside the house with the women while you ventured out to quench the flames," she interrupted.

"Aye; but it was my right to go, since I first realized the necessity of so doing."

"And you did not realize the necessity of coming back from the ambush this day, leaving your neighbors to be shot down."

"Hark you, Elizabeth Zane! I now understand that you are meaning somewhat the same as Esther Hubbard, when she spoke to me not long since regarding what she called Teddy's cowardice. He is my comrade, and of course I should speak up for him at all times; but even though the lad were a stranger, I would give evidence, as must all who were there, to the effect that he obeyed Captain Mason's command when he came back for assistance, and his was the more dangerous part than ours."

"You would have remained in the stockade, I suppose, when Captain Ogle called for volunteers to go with him, and heard women and children

plead for an opportunity to aid their loved ones? He was here, and held back like a coward.”

“ I must say to you, as I did to Esther, that until I hear Teddy McLaughlin himself admit it, I will never believe him to be a coward. There was some good reason for his remaining behind, else had he been among the foremost to volunteer. Where is he ? ”

“ You need not ask me now, or ever again, where he is, for I shall take good care not to see him even though he stands in my path. ”

With that the high-spirited girl, who looked upon cowardice as a crime, turned away as if angry ; but I knew that she could not hold temper against me for having spoken in favor of my friend, although it mystified me that both these women in whom I had every confidence should make a statement which I had good reason for believing false.

What had been the trouble with Teddy when volunteers were called for, and he hung back ?

I knew there was a good excuse, and began making a circuit of the stockade for the purpose of seeking him out, when some one cried :

“ Look yonder ! Who comes ? ”

As soon as might be I had clambered up into one of the sentry posts, where could be had a

full view of the clearing 'twixt the fort and the forest, and there saw some one in the garb of an Indian, although he had the appearance of a white man, bearing on the end of a musket a piece of white cloth.

It was a flag of truce, and the very idea that a band of Indians should send forth such a signal was in itself amazing.

I heard a murmur of surprise and indignation from two or three of the men who were standing near about Colonel Sheppard, and then came the words :

“ It is the renegade himself ! ”

I knew then that I was looking upon that most despicable thing upon the face of the earth, a white man outstripping the savages in cruelty, and willing to lead such as wolves would be ashamed to acknowledge for kin, upon his own race.

It was Simon Girty, dressed up after the fashion of an Indian, save that he wore a hunting-shirt where their bodies were naked ; but his face was painted, and upon his head a tuft of feathers.

If I had had my musket with me I believe of a verity I should have shot the renegade down, regardless of the fact that he was protected by that bit of white cloth which both civilized men and savages claim as a protection for the time being.



“Look yonder! Who comes?” “It is the renegade himself, Simon Girty, dressed up after the fashion of an Indian.”—
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Defense of Fort Henry.

It would have been ridding the world of a monster, and, however foul the act, would have resulted in the saving of hundreds upon hundreds of lives, to say nothing whatsoever of the untold torture which his victims must suffer before comes the relief of death.

However, I was unarmed, and Colonel Sheppard so much of a soldier that he would have cut down any man who raised a weapon against the foul thing that had approached, therefore was he allowed to pollute the air with his speech.

Showing by his bearing that he had no fear while holding that white rag above him, Girty approached the fort until he was so near I could fairly distinguish every feather, and then our colonel stopped him by demanding the meaning of such visit.

“I come to offer terms,” he said, in an insolent tone. “My force numbers more than four hundred, therefore you may well judge that it is within my power to take this place so soon as I shall be minded. Surrender now, and I will grant you such treatment as is given prisoners of war.”

“Are we to have no other guarantee than that of your word, Simon Girty?” Colonel Sheppard asked.

“ My word is enough, since there is no chance for you to receive any other.”

“ Have you one among your painted crew who would believe you for a moment ? Is there a savage in your following who, knowing you for a renegade, would repose in you so much trust as would be necessary for us, as inducement to deliver ourselves up ? ”

Girty snarled much like a wolf, and showed two long, tobacco-stained teeth that would have shamed the mouth of such an animal as I have likened him to.

I almost expected to see him arch his back as does a catamount when preparing to spring, so little of the human and so much of the brute was there in his appearance.

“ You had best surrender while there is a chance. I shan't ask again ; but shall come and take the place.”

I think by this time that Colonel Sheppard lost his temper, which he had held admirably in check when one realizes with what kind of a creature he was holding converse.

“ We would not surrender to such a scoundrel as you, on any terms, nor would we believe for a single moment that you would hold to whatsoever was promised. Therefore is your demand an-

swered. But I will make it yet stronger by saying that we will hold out against twice four hundred Indians, rather than surrender to any one, and if the time ever comes when we must yield, it will never be to such as you."

"I will see to it that your life be spared," Girty howled. "Especial attention shall be given such a brave soldier as you, and we will see how well you defend the post, for so long as I have a hundred Indians at my back, so long will I fight against this place, until it be captured. You are not able to withstand my force twelve hours, and before another sun rises, every man, woman and child shall be butchered, or reserved for the stake."

There was more than one within the stockade who felt much as I did about shooting that fiend, and I saw no less than three muskets partially raised for the purpose of putting an end to his worthless existence.

The sorrow of it is that not one who was thus tempted yielded, for what was the sanctity of a flag of truce compared to the wiping out of such a being as was threatening us?

Girty must have understood that the white rag might not protect him many moments longer, and he wheeled suddenly about, walking toward

the thicket at a more rapid pace than he had advanced.

I stood at my post on the stockade until the renegade had disappeared, after which we saw parties of Indians making their way into the settlement to take possession of the houses, and then I knew that Girty had begun his siege—then it was I believed the end would come, as he had predicted, for how might our feeble force hold out against him ?”

“ Let no man show himself on the stockade !” Colonel Sheppard shouted. “ Sentinels must be stationed, and every one fit to do duty shall come into line in front of the block-house.”

He was preparing for the fight ; making a brave show of courage, even though there was little reason for hope.

Well, we came into line, some of us with our wounds bandaged ; but yet able to do full duty, as in my case ; others who were assisted by wife, sister, or sweetheart, and among them, looking pale and weak, but standing alone, I saw Teddy McLaughlin.

There was no opportunity then to speak with him, because there were other matters more weighty than the greeting between friends ; but I took my stand by his side, gripping the lad’s

hand as I did so, and he looked up at me with a smile that was pitiful.

“There is no need for me to urge you men to a spirited defense against the danger which menaces,” Colonel Sheppard said, speaking in a grave tone, and looking up and down the sorry line which represented the entire strength of the garrison. “Those who are not here have attested to the bravery of the men of Wheeling Creek, therefore, in refusing to surrender, and I believe I was but echoing the thought in the mind of each one who heard that renegade make his demand, I knew full well that we should hold out against them so long as it was within the power of flesh and blood. It is not to remind you of duty that I have asked that this line be formed. It is that we come together this once as comrades, while I may throw aside my position as commandant, and stand with you shoulder to shoulder. We will fight together, each for the other, and all for the women and children, trusting that the God of battles will give us a victory even though the odds are so desperately heavy against us. We can do with no less than eight sentinels for this stockade, and yet it will be impossible for us to perform guard duty all the time—some hours must be devoted to slumber.”

“The women will do their share,” a voice shouted, and looking around I saw Mistress Merrill, strong and fearless, and all aflame with a desire to take part in the unequal struggle.

As she spoke twenty or more young women and old stepped out, demanding that they be called upon to do sentinel duty, and declaring that the men, and particularly the wounded ones, be allowed to rest until there was some more important work on hand than that of watching the savages as they compassed us round about.

Colonel Sheppard settled the matter at once by saying :

“It is but right that these brave women be given an opportunity to perform their full share of the work while the garrison is so weak in numbers ; but their time for labor shall come ’twixt the rising and the setting of the sun. During the night we men must bear the brunt of the watching.”

It was now near to the close of the day, and no time was to be lost in posting the sentinels.

Master Merrill and Ebenezer Zane insisted that Colonel Sheppard should still be looked upon as the commandant of the fort, and that he give to each man his station for the night.

Therefore it was that eight were sent out, my

name not being called, most like because of the bandage on my head which must have given me the appearance of being seriously wounded.

Teddy was assigned to a post which overlooked the thicket, and not in the most dangerous position, which last would be that side of the stockade facing the little settlement, for there were the Indians gathering in force, using our dwellings as fortifications.

I noted his station, and counted on joining him there so soon as might be after I had spoken with mother, for it seemed cruel in me to leave her longer without sufficient reason.

She, dear soul, was in a calm of what seemed much like despair, when I came upon her in the block-house. But, brave, true woman that she was, her own grief had been hidden to the utmost of her ability that she might comfort the children who were hardly old enough to realize their great loss, and I regretted having gone in to her.

It caused me regret because when I went up and kissed her, it was with the greatest effort she could choke back the tears that rushed to her eyes. Claspng me around the neck, she hid her face on my shoulder, shaken with sobs as a sapling is shaken by the winter winds.

It was beyond me to say one word at such a time as that. I could only hold her tightly to my breast, and pray that the good God would give her strength in this her hour of affliction ; that He would so temper the blow as to make it seem less burdensome while we were so sorely beset.

Esther Hubbard, whom I judged had been with my mother, because of the fact that she was preparing the evening meal for the children, looked up at me pityingly, and I read so much of compassion in her brown eyes as lightened my heart somewhat, bowed down though I was by the knowledge that within a few hours the painted demons would begin their work of torture upon my poor father's frame.

To have remained longer in the log house then, thinking of what had happened, and what must happen to him, of what it seemed certain must come to us, would have driven my senses from me, and, refusing Esther's request that I should "sit down and eat," I rushed out like one distracted, complaining because I had not been put on watch, for then I would have had something to divert my attention.

However, at such a time, when one sees around him this brave woman or that beautiful girl

bowed down with sorrow because of grief which was no less than mine, it causes him to feel that he had been selfish in dwelling upon his own affliction, and I realized then that there could be no honor, no glory so great in this world as would counterbalance that uplifting of the soul which a man must feel who could assuage, even in a slight degree, all this mental agony.

I had well-nigh forgotten Teddy, and set about going from post to post, speaking with this man and with that who had been my companions in the ambush, or who had come out to the rescue, hoping that he might see some light in the future which had escaped me ; but received no word of cheer.

It appeared to be the opinion of all that our defense of the fort was simply a question of a brief time ; that before many hours had passed Simon Girty and his crew would have worked their will, and what their will would be, one had not the courage to contemplate.

Then I came upon Teddy McLaughlin, starting as if surprised when I saw him, as indeed I was, because he had for a certain time disappeared from my thoughts.

“Have you come to believe, like the others, that I stayed in the fort, not daring to go out, when

Captain Ogle called for volunteers ? ” he asked, in a tone of reproach, and I replied heartily, clambering up beside him to take his hand :

“ Never for a moment, Teddy ! I know you as a brave lad, as a firm friend, and will not believe anything that has been said until you yourself tell me it is true.”

“ Thank you, Cornie Dunbar,” Teddy said, and tears coming into his eyes. “ It is true that I did not volunteer to go out to your assistance, although knowing better than any one else how sadly men were needed down there in the thicket.”

“ Why not ? ” I asked, knowing that now we should come to the truth of the matter, for Teddy McLaughlin would not lie, whatever the result to himself.

“ It is what I can't rightly explain, Cornie. When I left you, by Captain Mason's command, in the poor hope of gaining this fort, I firmly believed the moment of my death had come. It did not seem possible I could run two miles through a forest teeming with savages, and escape alive. That I did so you know full well ; but on arriving here I was so nearly spent, what from the fear and the running, that my story was delayed in the telling two or three moments. Then, while Captain Ogle was calling for men, there

came over me a faintness which I cannot describe ; my head swam ; I was like one who has been tossed about in a boat until he is sick, and—you must believe me now, Cornie dear, though it seems untrue—I really did not know when the rescuing party went out, else had I been with them.”

“ You did not see them go ? ” I asked, never for a moment doubting all he had said.

“ I had no idea of time. It seemed to me as if I had but just arrived when I went into the block-house almost unconsciously, and there laid down. The next that I realized was when Elizabeth Zane came by, and I rose, staggering even then like one drunken, to greet her. She turned her back. I followed, for a half-dozen paces mayhap, when she wheeled about and said, ‘ I have no time for converse with cowards. ’ Until that moment, Cornie, I was like one in a dream, and then came the awakening. Everything was gone from my mind, even to those terrible moments when we were made aware of the ambush, and then all came clear.”

I could realize somewhat of Teddy McLaughlin’s condition, as he described it, because of being near to falling into the same frame of mind when I gained the fort, and the one thought I had at

the moment was how we might make others know the truth.

On seeing me hesitate, and suspicious because of the foul blot that had been put upon him, he asked in a tearful tone :

“ Can you not believe me, Cornie ? ”

“ Believe you, lad ? Of a verity I can, and do not wonder that after having come out of that place of horror, you should have been dazed at finding yourself in safety. I was trying to decide how we might make others see what we know is true.”

The dear lad took both my hands in his, and pressed them with a grip like that of iron, while he thanked me again and again for my faith in him.

He, Teddy McLaughlin, my tried comrade, thanked me, who was so much less brave than himself, because I believed that which I myself had experienced.

“ You cannot make the others see it as we do,” he said finally in a low tone. “ All here will believe I turned cowardly when my services were most needed, and until such time as I may wipe out the stain, it is the same as if all they say is true.”

I did my best at consoling him, for his grief

was great, and we two talked there, while the savages took up position in the houses of the settlement, upon matters concerning only ourselves, although we knew full well the chances were many that we should not live to see another sun rise, and it seemed certain that if we were spared until morning, we could not be alive at sunset.

CHAPTER XII.

A FORENOON'S WORK.

COLONEL SHEPPARD allowed the male defenders of the fort but few idle moments during the night following the ambush, and in no other way could he have rendered me as great a service, for the exacting labor served in some slight degree to prevent my thoughts from going out into the forest, where I knew Simon Girty's crew were torturing my poor father and Teddy's brother to death.

My mother's anguish must have been terrible, sitting within the block-house picturing to herself what mortal agony the father of her children was being subjected to, for the pleasure of these brutes in human form.

More than once during the evening was I tempted to neglect for a few moments such work as had been set me, in order that I might speak with her in this time of trial; but I realized there was nothing I could say which would bring relief of mind, and the sight of me must call up more

vividly the terrible reality, for she had seen me march out in his company, returning alone.

Immediately the savages had taken possession of those houses in the settlement nearest the fort, our real work had begun.

It was necessary from that moment to remain screened from view so far as was possible, and at the same time pick off those of the hideous crew who were so rash as to expose themselves.

In fact, it was only by this last work that we could hope to bring the siege to an end.

Simon Girty's crew were in snug quarters while they occupied our dwellings, and there were so many of them that it would be no more than entertainment for each to stand in a convenient place an hour or two during the twenty-four, in the hope of killing a human being.

Therefore the situation cannot better be described than by using the words Colonel Sheppard spoke while trying to animate his small band of defenders, although I question if he himself believed all he said :

“ We must wing every redskin who shows himself, at the same time taking due care not to needlessly expose our own bodies,” he said to those of us who were not on watch. “ Few in number as we are, the loss of a single man is a

disaster which may lead to the undoing of all. If we cut down those bloodthirsty brutes with reasonable rapidity, then, perhaps, will they tire of the siege. Our only hope of saving this throng of women and children who look to us for protection depends upon our marksmanship. When the morning shall have come it is my purpose to summon those of the women who are known to be the best shots, and let them take their places with the men, so far as our supply of weapons holds out. Remember this," he said in conclusion, "every bullet fired which hits not a target simply serves to animate the courage of those fiends. If it could be that every one of our shots told, then should we find that they were not so eager to continue the siege."

The colonel moved away to make a tour of the sentinel posts, and I came alongside Master Merrill, who had not been put on duty, because of the wound in his left arm.

It was the first time we two had come face to face since the ambush, and he held out his hand to me as he would to a comrade, saying :

"Well, lad, we came out of yonder butcher's pen with more of life in our bodies than had at one time seemed possible. Were you wounded before we left that bit of fallen timber?"

I explained to him at what stage of the pursuit the Indian's bullet had found me, and then, taking courage because he spoke to me in such a friendly tone, as if I were really a comrade, I asked :

“What chance have we, Master Merrill, for holding this stockade ?”

He looked around cautiously to make certain there was no one within earshot, and, bending nearer to me, said in a low tone :

“To a lad who has shown such a spirit as you, one may speak freely. I would not give words to that which is in my mind in the presence of very many here, lest they should be disheartened ; but you have earned the right to be treated as a man. My idea is that we may hold out four-and-twenty hours, and then the end must come.”

“If we can defend the stockade for so many hours, why not twice as long ?”

“I am reckoning, lad, that within such time, at least four of us will be counted out of the fight. It is unreasonable to suppose we may hold those fiends in check, and not come to some harm. Now this is the situation as I figure it up : We are eleven, for that lad of Hubbard's is of no more account than a rabbit. Eleven who may be reckoned on ; most like as many more

can be found among the women who are able to use a musket fairly well, which makes twenty-two. Now suppose we lose one every two hours—and it will be rare good fortune if the savages cannot do better work than that—then are we so feeble in numbers that at the end of four-and-twenty hours the fight is over.”

He was a brave man indeed who could thus calmly count the cost of defense, and arrive at such a result with no more of fear and anxiety than I could see on Master Merrill’s face.

I looked at him for a moment with such thought in my mind, and he, noting what seemed like a scrutiny, asked with a smile :

“ Well, lad, what do you find in this old face of mine to study so long ? ”

“ It was not so much the face that I gazed at, sir. I was looking at a brave man, and wondering whether you felt no fear while believing the end of it all was so near at hand ? ”

“ Fear, lad ? I doubt if you and I use that word with the same meaning. If you think that I look contentedly upon ending my life here, that those sneaking reptiles shall do their savage will with these poor women and children, then am I misjudged. If I could give up my life as a price for the safety of all these good people, then would

I be rejoiced. But we will make a stout fight, my boy, holding out so long as we have strength to raise a musket, and I have no question but that you will do your full share during this, the last twenty-four hours which may possibly remain to us. I am counting on doing a little something toward giving Simon Girty's howling pack a specimen of how white men can shoot, before the time comes that I must stand my share of the watch. Follow me, and we shall have earned the right to lie down in slumber for a time, if we put two or three bullets into as many red carcasses."

I might, perchance, earn the right to give myself up to slumber, but it would be strange indeed had I found it possible to close my eyes in rest that night, knowing as I did what terrible ordeal my father was undergoing.

Well, we went to that side of the stockade nearest the settlement, where we could see the red fiends as they skulked up from the forest, or by the river bank, to gain a shelter in the dwellings, and there we remained until Master Merrill had discharged his musket once, and I mine twice, with the result that there were three less to take part in the tortures which would follow the capture of the fort.

Then the shadows had lengthened into night,

and we stood so much chance of wasting a charge of ammunition that my companion said with the air of one who believes he has done good work :

“ We can afford to rest now, lad.”

Then it was as if he had but just remembered what devilish work must be going on in the forest which concerned me most deeply, and, pressing my hand gently, he added :

“ I will speak with your mother first, lad, and do you remember that it is as much the part of a man to drive back grief at such a time, as to make stand against the enemy.”

Then he bent his way toward the block-house, and I set out making a round of the sentinel posts, visiting each in succession as if sharing the command with Colonel Sheppard.

Twice before midnight did I enter the block-house, and on the second visit my heart was made glad by seeing mother sleeping ; her great grief had wearied the body until it was no longer possible she could keep her eyelids open.

For a certain time she had found relief, and I prayed that the slumber might be so profound as not to admit of dreams.

Then was come the time to relieve some of the sentinels, and I was directed quite by chance to take the post occupied by Teddy McLaughlin.

“There is no reason why you should come on duty, Cornie,” he said to me in a tone of sadness. “I had rather remain here, than lie down where it will be impossible to sleep.”

“But you must sleep, lad,” I replied sharply, “else will it be impossible to do your full duty on the morrow, and there is like to be hot work then for all of us.”

“I am hoping the end of it may come for me speedily,” he said, choking back a sob, and I understood on the instant that he must be aroused from such gloomy ideas, else was he like to throw his life away at the time when it was most needed.

“Now are you indeed showing yourself to be that of which you were wrongfully accused,” I said sternly. “Because a woman has without reason declared you to be a coward, it is your desire to give her the proof, and you are counting to court death rather than hold to a life which is necessary for the safety of these defenseless ones! I am ashamed of you, Teddy McLaughlin! For the first time do I begin to believe you are not the lad I have always counted as my friend. Is it the act of a brave man to throw his life away when it is of such value, simply because others are mistaken in him?”

“ A coward has no right to live.”

“ And by courting death you would prove yourself one! If what is believed of you be true, stand higher on the stockade as a target, and thus give all this sorrowful company yet further cause for grief because the number of the defenders is lessened by one.”

“ You bear down too hard, Cornie Dunbar,” and it made me glad to hear a shade of anger in his tones.

I was determined to arouse him yet more, even though at the price of our friendship, and at the expense of making his heart bleed.

“ Where are your brother and my father at this moment ? ” I cried, and he cowered beneath the question as a brute shrinks from the lash.

“ At the stake most likely,” he said in a trembling voice.

“ Aye, Teddy, being tortured as none save those villainous beasts can torture, and yet think you either of them are showing the white feather? Think you if they were here, and had been wrongfully accused, they would throw away their lives, heeding not those who need protection, simply because of wounded pride? If you be not alive until the last—for it seems certain the end will soon come to every one of us here—

then shall I, while dying, believe that it was you, and not me, who had the cowardly heart!"

Having said this I turned quickly and left him, heeding not his softly whispered entreaties to come back, and thus did I desert my post, yet knowing full well he would remain on duty.

Colonel Sheppard was stationed on the opposite side of the stockade, and to him I went at once, explaining why I had left the place assigned me.

"It is as well he do more than his share of duty. It will have a good effect upon him perhaps."

"You don't doubt the story he tells as his reason for not venturing to go with Captain Ogle?" I asked anxiously.

"Not a bit of it, lad, for I can well understand that he might have been dazed on coming into comparative safety, after having believed death had already fastened upon him. Were he the coward as some here believe, then we need have no fear of his being rash. Seek out a wounded man, if it so be you cannot sleep, and relieve him for an hour or two."

This I did, and he who was thus relieved from duty lay down on the bare ground, his eyes closing in slumber almost on the moment.

It was on the side of the stockade nearest the settlement that I now stood.

There was no moon; but the stars were so bright that a rabbit could not have passed betwixt me and the log houses without my seeing him.

Never once during the two hours I remained here did a savage show himself, although now and then the crack of a musket from one of the dwellings told that Simon Girty's crew were watching keenly an opportunity to slay.

There was little fear they would make an attack upon the fort under such circumstances.

Had the stars been hidden by clouds, then might we have feared some dangerous move; but as it was we could feel certain no peril menaced, save to him who should incautiously expose himself.

When two hours had passed I awakened the wounded hunter whom I had relieved thus long, and set off toward where Teddy was watching.

As soon as he had spoken I knew the dangerous mood in which he was plunged when I left him, had passed away, for he greeted me with healthy eagerness, as he asked:

“Is everything well at the other side of the stockade?”

“Aye, lad; no mischief has been done thus far.

Poor Allen was in sore straits for want of sleep, and I took his place, knowing you would not begrudge the extra time spent here."

"Do the same service for some other; sleep and I are strangers this night."

Even though there had been no word said against him, I knew the thought of his brother's fate would hold him wakeful, therefore did not attempt to dissuade him from his purpose, save as to the method of doing it.

"It is you who shall relieve such of our company as are worn out," I said. "This post has been assigned to me, and I will stand to it, while you act the friendly part."

He hesitated an instant as if unwilling to come into contact with his few remaining companions; but I insisted, determined he should have whatsoever praise belonged to him for thus doing double duty, and not until the sun had risen did I see him again.

With the morning came to me no slight relief of mind, for I knew that my father must be dead.

It is a hard position in which a lad finds himself when he can get consolation only from the fact that the one he loved has gone out from this world forevermore; yet so it was with me, for I

knew the poor old man had done with his suffering—that he was at rest.

With the dawn of day began the real attack of Girty's fiendish crew, and that a white man was directing their movements could have been told by the methods employed, which were so unusual for Indians.

From the log houses they began a sharp fire upon us in the fort, discharging their weapons when so much as a cap was shown above the stockade, and giving us to know that death would follow the first exposure of our bodies.

Among those who had stood watch since midnight, one or two went into the block-house to rest; but the majority of us found it impossible to slumber at such a time.

When I went for breakfast Esther Hubbard was yet acting the part of comforter and assistant.

My poor mother was making a brave fight against the sorrow which weighed her down, appearing calm that the children might not give way to fear, and performing such housewifely duties as were possible in these narrow quarters.

Esther assisted her as a daughter might have done, and gave me almost a sisterly welcome when I entered.

“You had no right to remain on duty all

night," she said quietly. "The wound should have been attended to again before this."

Hearing which my mother said quickly, and much as if she was at fault because of having allowed grief to cause seeming neglect of me :

"We must dress the wound, Cornie, therefore let us set about it at once, for your breakfast is ready. I have brewed the small store of tea which we were saving, in the hope that you might be refreshed after the work of watching."

As she turned away to find something that would serve as a bandage, Esther whispered, laying her hand on mine in what I fancied was a caressing way :

"You should not abuse yourself, Cornie. It would have been better had you slept last night, because I am told the savages are making a determined attack this morning."

"I shall have plenty of time for sleeping between now and night. Those brutes will not waste powder and ball to-day, and except one of us should grow careless, there is little chance their fire will do any execution."

"Has any one been hurt during the night?"

"No; and I believe that those who were wounded during the afternoon are in much better shape than when the sun set."

Then mother began to dress my wound, which was of trifling moment compared with many to be found inside the stockade, and after that was done I hurriedly ate breakfast, for the sound of the firing outside told me the defenders of the fort were needed.

True to his word, Colonel Sheppard called upon the women for service, and it gave me no little anxiety to see Esther Hubbard standing at one of the loop-holes in the stockade, as entirely on the alert as the oldest hunter, and firing whenever a painted form could be seen.

I was proud because of the spirit she displayed ; but timorous lest she come to harm.

Elizabeth Zane, Mistress Merrill, and no less than a dozen of the women were engaged in a similar fashion, and I venture to say that they did as good work with the muskets as any of the men.

So far as we could judge, not more than one bullet out of every ten sent from the fort missed its aim, and we had the poor satisfaction of knowing that while it might not be possible for us to beat off these demons, we would so lessen their numbers before our end was come, that they would long remember the punishment received at Fort Henry.

I went from this point of vantage to that dur-

ing the forenoon, sometimes finding an opportunity to discharge my weapon with effect, and again failing to see any sign of the murderous band, save in the puff of smoke which came from one or another of the buildings as they fired upon us.

Half a dozen times I halted by Esther's side, and although neither of us spoke many words, there was to me a wondrous sense of satisfaction in coming near her.

Not since the previous night had I seen Henry Hubbard, and I had little desire to do so.

I met Teddy now and then. He was doing good work, and seemingly unconscious of fatigue; but his white face, drawn as if with lines of pain, told that the sense of shame lay heavily upon him, although he was not at fault.

Then, when the forenoon was well nigh come to an end, and the fire of the enemy had decreased until only at long intervals could the report of their weapons be heard, I met Master Merrill, looking strangely disturbed for one who had stood so steadfast and firm during the time of our greatest danger.

Knowing full well that something of serious import was come upon him, I asked the reason for his disturbance.

He did not reply, but beckoned me to follow him, which I did, until we were come to the storehouse wherein the men and lads had slept.

Then he pointed to the powder kegs without speaking.

I uncovered first one and then the other in turn, finding each empty, until the last, which was no more than one-third filled.

It was another disaster which had come upon us, and one under which, as it seemed to me then, we must surely fall.

So great was my distress of mind that it was impossible to speak ; I looked at him dumbly, and he read the question in my eyes, replying :

“ Aye, lad, so it is. After a brief defense, during which we have held our own in such fashion as a few hours ago seemed impossible, we have come to an end of the powder. Were it not that the greater number of those who refused to believe yonder savages were like to make an attack, have gone out of this world, I would say the harshest words which man could utter against them. The folly of neglecting to bring hither that which every person, young or old, in the settlement knew was most needed, after being warned again and again ! That the savages were in this vicinity was a certainty, and yet those

foolish ones, grumbling because of the better judgment of others which literally forced them to leave their homes even for a short time, brought only their precious bodies! If it had been told that men living on the frontier, having had bitter experience again and again, neglected to make such poor provisions for defense, no one could have believed the story, and yet so it is!"

I stood looking at the hunter in amazement and dismay. Amazement because there had been among us a man who neglected to bring hither his store of ammunition, and dismay because we were come to the end of our defense.

Involuntarily I shook my powder-horn, and there came a certain relief when I found it nearly full; but that was banished almost instantly as I realized how short a time it would serve me if the siege was conducted with as much vigor as it had been since morning.

"Then that is the end of it!" I said after a long pause, as I pointed at the keg containing the small store of powder.

"That is the end of it," Master Merrill repeated, and turning sharply on his heel he walked away, leaving me standing motionless as a statue, gazing after him until Teddy McLaughlin came up,

his powder-horn unslung, and I knew the reason of his visit to the store-house.

He filled his horn from the keg which was uncovered, and while he did so I pointed to the others.

Not until after having got that for which he came did he seek to learn the reason for my gesture, and then, wheeling suddenly about, he faced me with quivering lips.

“Is it all we have?” he asked in a whisper, and I could make no reply save by nodding my head.

CHAPTER XIII.

ELIZABETH ZANE.

THERE was no need of words between Teddy McLaughlin and myself after I had pointed out to him the discovery made by Master Merrill. He knew only too well all its meaning.

I question if there was one of us within the stockade who believed with our small force it would be possible to hold the fort against the crew Simon Girty had mustered, even though we possessed abundant store of ammunition, and certain it is Teddy did not hope, even before this alarming discovery had been made, that we should be able to beat back that horde of painted fiends.

Now he ceased to hope we might hold them in check for even so long as had been counted on.

Looking steadily into my eyes for an instant, he said slowly, as if weighing well every word :

“The end is nearer than the most cowardly among us had feared. If yonder brutes stand up

to their work as they have been doing since morning, we are like to come to the full end of our rope before the sun sets."

He was but giving words to the thought in my own mind, and I bowed my head with a silent prayer that I might show myself a man when the supreme moment came.

"Then, if not before, will it be possible for one charged with being faint-hearted when his friends were facing death to prove that he is not wholly a coward!" he said with a certain triumphant ring in his voice which told that the shame in his heart was so great as to outweigh fear of death.

Taking both his hands in mine, believing truly that we might not have another opportunity for speaking with each other in this world, I said, striving to put my whole soul in the speech so he should believe me :

"Teddy, the men inside this stockade—men who have proven their bravery again and again—do not look upon you as having been in the slightest degree cowardly. Colonel Sheppard and Master Merrill have both declared to me that they could understand full well how deeply you were overcome on finding yourself in safety when it had seemed certain death's hand was already laid upon you. Put far from your mind the baseless

shame ; be your own true self, and if Elizabeth Zane does not realize in this world the injustice she has done, it will be clear to her in the next."

The lad's eyes overflowed with tears as he gazed at me, and it was necessary he choke back a heavy sob before being able to make reply.

Then it was to say :

"You are a true friend, Cornie Dunbar, and he who would not be heartened by such speech is indeed a coward. I *will* put the thought from my mind, and when the end comes it shall find me doing all that is permitted a lad. We will stand side by side at the last moment ?"

"Ay, Teddy, and both of us in front of those we love."

Then we fell silent, gazing at the empty powder kegs until I understood that such an occupation was not calculated to put us in that frame of mind that was necessary if we would play our part at the last like men, and I said with as much of cheeriness as it was possible to assume :

"Let us take a turn around the stockade, Teddy ; it will brighten us to see even the children doing what comes in their way to aid in the defense."

"I must seek out my mother ; she, most like,

wonders why I have not shown myself since last night."

"It is indeed time you went to her," and I was glad the idea had come to his mind, for nothing will so cheer a lad as companionship with his mother when his heart is sore.

I walked with him to the door of the block-house, neither of us speaking again, and there I left the sorrowful boy, feeling such a pity that I could have hugged him to my heart woman fashion.

Then I went toward that side of the stockade where were gathered several men, with Colonel Sheppard in their midst, and only when I stood close beside them was it made plain to me why the savages had slackened their fire, as I observed was the case since Teddy and I came out of the store-house.

"They have gone back to cook up some better plan than trying to shoot us down from cover," Master Merrill replied to the question I asked. "It is high noon, and while Simon Girty's crew have not succeeded in inflicting so much as a wound upon us, we have lessened the number of brutes by more than a dozen."

"Where have they gone?" I asked, craning my neck to get a glimpse over the stockade.

“To the foot of Wheeling Hill ; but I am not counting on their staying so far away very long. That renegade will have some plan mapped out before many minutes, such as will keep them and us from idleness.”

Colonel Sheppard interrupted the conversation between the old hunter and myself, by saying that which sent a chill of fear down my back.

“Now has come the time when it may be possible to fetch some of the powder which should have been brought into the fort four-and-twenty hours ago,” he said in a low tone, lest the women should hear ; but yet the words sounded loudly in my ears. “It must be told that we have no more than sixty charges left—five to each man, and all of you know full well how soon that small supply will be exhausted if the savages make a spirited attack.”

“Tell off a squad of four to sally out,” Ebenezer Zane cried, pressing forward as if volunteering to be one of the number ; but to this proposition Colonel Sheppard shook his head.

“If those four should be killed, as is more than possible, we would not number enough to stand guard, and the fate of the women and children could not long be delayed. We can illy afford to lose even one, yet it is necessary the venture be

made, and a single man can do as much as a dozen. Who will offer his life for the others?"

Almost unconsciously I stepped forward with the remainder of those standing near by, and it cut me to the heart because Teddy was not present to show his willingness for the hazardous work, as I knew he would have done.

"A single man only can go," Colonel Sheppard said sharply, and yet his face was lighted up with pleasure because not one among us had faltered when the chances were as an hundred to five that he who ventured forth would be killed.

"Then I claim the right to be that man!" Ebenezer Zane cried, drawing his belt tighter as if confident his would be the task.

"Why should you put yourself before those who are older, and, at the best, have not so many years to live?" Master Merrill asked, almost angrily, pushing Ebenezer back, and standing in front of him musket in hand, as if to leave the stockake on the instant.

Then it was that all crowded around the old hunter, I among the rest, clamoring for a chance to die in behalf of those whom we loved.

The tumult became great as one after another urged in loud tones his claim to make the sacri-

fice, and as a matter of course, the women heard the noise.

It gladdened my heart to see Teddy come from the block-house at full speed, throwing off his hunting-shirt as he ran.

“If there be one here more than another who has the right to set forth, I am that one!” he cried loudly, his voice sounding out clear and distinct above the others. “Colonel Sheppard, in the name of fair play, take me as the volunteer?”

“Why in the ‘name of fair play’?” Master Merrill asked sharply. “What right has a boy to be chosen in preference to a man, who should be able to do the work better?”

Teddy, breathless with excitement, wormed his way to the colonel’s side, and there, where all faced him, he cried in a tone that must have made ashamed those who had called him a coward:

“It is my right because there be among you those who think I showed the white feather when I failed to go forth with Captain Ogle. I was like one in a dream upon coming into the stockade when it had been to me as a certainty I should be killed, and not until after the rescuing party had left did I recover my senses. I am no coward, and there are some here who know that full

well, even though I did allow my comrade to risk his life at the Hubbard clearing while I remained under cover ! Now I say again, it is my right to go for the powder, if for no other reason than that I may not bear a false name among those who have called me friend or comrade ! Who can show a better reason ? Who would remain here suffering under such a wrong as has been put upon me, when by this one act he can die, proving himself to be what in truth he is—a lad who stands ready to endure even the tortures of the stake rather than that his people shall bow their heads in shame because he was charged with having been a coward ?”

I could have hugged the dear lad then !

I dared not look around to learn if Elizabeth Zane and Esther Hubbard were listening, lest I miss one of the varying expressions which appeared on his face.

That Colonel Sheppard was inclined to favor his request, I understood from a single glance at the commandant's face ; he realized that Teddy was in the right, and I believe the matter would have been ended on the instant, but for Master Merrill, who, advancing to Teddy's side, said, as he took the lad by the hand :

“ There is not a man among us who gives heed

to the idle gossip of the fort. We know you are not a coward, my boy, and there is no reason why you should give up your life in order to disprove what has never been charged, save by prattling girls. You, Teddy McLaughlin, can do better work here ; you will be of more service than I, when the final struggle comes, therefore I say again, it shall be me who goes !”

Teddy was on the point of speaking again when Ebenezer Zane cried angrily :

“Do you believe the savages will kindly remain at the hill in order that we may spend an hour or more in squabbling? I will yield my claim to Teddy ; but at the same time he is to understand without question that I never accused him of timorousness. That charge, as Master Merrill has said, is only idle talk ; he saved the lives of those of Captain Mason’s party who succeeded in regaining the fort. Now let the matter be settled without delay, lest it be too late, and we be brought to realize that our only chance was lost through much speechifying.”

Again I fancied that Colonel Sheppard was about to give Teddy the permission he so ardently craved ; but another interruption came, and this time from Elizabeth Zane.

She forced her way among the men until hav-

ing come to Teddy's side when, taking him by the hand, she said in a loud tone :

“I ask your pardon, lad, for having wrongfully charged you with being a coward. You have already proven it was false, and that is enough. Neither you, nor any other man here, can be spared, because of the women and children who look to you for protection. Your lives belong to them, and must be preserved so long as is possible. It is different with me ; one woman more or less cannot weaken or strengthen the defense.” Then, turning to us who stood near by, she added, “In my home is a keg of powder ; I can go directly to it when Master Merrill or Teddy McLaughlin would spend valuable minutes searching. Let me go ; it is barely sixty yards from the gate, and you all know I am as fleet of foot as the best man here.”

A cheer went up when she ceased her brave appeal ; but a noise like that of a sigh was heard as every one drew in a long, tremulous breath.

Teddy spoke to her in a tone so low that we who stood nearest could not overhear the words ; she shook her head once, twice, as he evidently pleaded, and then, with a hand on either of his cheeks, she drew the lad forward and kissed him before us all.

After that I do not believe Teddy could have spoken ; he covered his face with his hands, sinking on his knees, and Elizabeth Zane made her preparations for the fearful race without hearing a word of remonstrance from those around.

It was as if all held the same idea in mind as did I : that she might do the work better than we, and that hers was unquestionably the right.

However it might be, we stood back, allowing a girl to set her life at stake in our behalf.

Esther Hubbard came forward to aid in the making-ready, and she it was who took from Elizabeth's shoulders the short mantle, and assisted in unfastening the outer skirts.

There must be no drapery to impede the limbs, and in her leggings of deer-skin and jacket of smoke-tanned otter hide, one who could not see her face and hair might well have mistaken her for a young lad.

The braids of long, brown hair were coiled tightly by Esther, who, when the work was done, took Teddy's cap from the lad's head and placed it on Elizabeth's.

No one would have attempted to carry a weapon on such a mission, for there would be no opportunity to use it, and a musket must be left behind once the return with the powder was begun.

“Let five men take stations along the top of the stockade, while the remainder of the party stand by the gate,” Colonel Sheppard said as sharply as was possible because of his trembling voice. “See that all the spare weapons are ready. The women shall gather near the men to reload as fast as the muskets are discharged.”

We took our stations ; I at the gate, with Esther close behind me holding two muskets and my small store of powder and ball. The others were ranged here and there according to the colonel’s directions, and every woman within the stockade stood ready to do her part.

“We shall hold the gate ajar,” the colonel said to Elizabeth, with an effort to steady his voice. “When you come back we will throw it wide open so you need not be forced to turn from a straight course.”

“If I come back !” the brave girl whispered, her face paling ever so slightly, and I knew full well what was in her heart.

Then she turned to Teddy once more, speaking three words in his ear, to which he responded by clasping her hands tightly for an instant.

“God bless you !” I said, as she stood a moment near me, waiting for the signal, and she, who was the bravest among us, replied :

“If I fail to come back do not let Teddy grieve too much,” and then it was I knew what she had whispered in his ear.

“All ready!” the colonel said in a low but thrilling tone as he began unbarring the gate. “Let each man have a care to his aim, and give no heed to what the others are doing!”

The gate was thrown half open, and like an arrow shot from a bow Elizabeth Zane darted forth.

Never before, although I had more than once stood in danger of my own life, did I realize how long a second might seem!

Although the dear girl ran with the swiftness of a deer, it was to me as if she hardly more than moved, and a groan came to my lips as I saw a movement among that throng of painted brutes at the base of Wheeling Hill.

“Do not think of her!” Esther whispered, and I stiffened my body, holding the musket at my shoulder, seeking earnestly for a target.

Until Elizabeth entered her home the savages remained near the hill, and then, as if but just realizing that something of moment was being done by us, they came toward the settlement like a swarm of bees, shouting and yelling.

While the brave girl remained inside the dwelling I do not believe one of us so much as breathed,

and then came the most intense relief when she appeared in the doorway carrying on her shoulder a keg of powder.

She had lost no time ; in fact, had performed the task in half as many minutes as one unacquainted with the hiding-place of the keg would have spent, and yet her absence from sight seemed to cover a full quarter-hour.

Perhaps she was inside the house no more than an hundred seconds, but, brief as was that space, it sufficed to bring the enemy down upon her.

When she came out, running less swiftly now because of the burden, twenty or more of the villains were within musket-shot range, and making ready to fire.

I took careful aim at the foremost, and at the very instant my musket was discharged he pitched forward, while the others came on swiftly.

Like a flash of light came to me the knowledge that every man among us had aimed at the same target, and thus were twelve charges of powder wasted upon one Indian, when a single bullet would have done the work.

Now a shower of balls struck near around the girl who had ventured her life for her friends, and I believed she must be smitten before half the distance had been traversed.



Nearer and nearer she came; faster and thicker the bullets and arrows rained around her.—Page 239. *Defense of Fort Henry.*

“Shoot quickly !” Esther said hoarsely, forcing a loaded weapon into my hand, and I fired at a brute who was sneaking around to the left as if to cut her off, bringing him down like a log.

More than one fell before our second volley ; but by this time not less than an hundred screaming butchers were coming toward us, some firing at random, while the others took such aim as was possible while they ran.

I longed to close my eyes in order to shut out the fatal scene which it seemed absolutely certain must come before Elizabeth could gain shelter in the stockade ; but forced myself to take in all the fearsome spectacle lest I lose a chance to give her aid.

Nearer and nearer she came, hampered by the powder, and breathing heavily, as all could see.

Faster and more thickly came the bullets from those who thirsted for blood, until it was as if the missiles tore up the turf directly beneath her feet.

Once she tripped slightly ; faltered for an instant, and was like to have lost her hold upon the keg ; but, quickly recovering herself, came on at full speed.

We were firing rapidly now—as fast as the women could re-load the weapons, and the sav-

ages received such check that they slackened pace as if terror-stricken.

“God help her!” I heard Esther exclaim, and I knew it was a prayer as fervent as if uttered on bended knees.

Excited as I was, it seemed to me as if the bloodthirsty brutes were upon her very heels when she dashed through the gate, which was flung wide open at her approach, and those on the stockade leaped down to guard against a possible rush by the enemy.

The race had been won!

The powder, earned by as brave a deed as was ever set down on the pages of history, was in our possession, and, strange to relate, Elizabeth Zane was not so much as scratched, although I venture to say that no less than two hundred bullets had been aimed at her.

She slipped and would have fallen while trying to check her speed, but that Teddy McLaughlin caught her in his arms, and it was afterward told me by Esther that she did not hasten to free herself from his embrace.

We who remained in comparative safety while she thus staked her life had exhausted nearly all the remaining store of powder when she arrived.

I do not believe we could have fired twenty

shots more, and but for the success of the venture we would have been helpless against the enemy, unable to offer any further resistance save by opposing our bodies to the knife or bullet.

It is hardly necessary I should say that a cry of triumph and rejoicing went up from all those inside the stockade when Elizabeth had arrived and the gate was closed. The savages, hearing it, returned a chorus of fiendish yells, as if to remind us that the end had not yet come; but we heeded not their threatening outcries.

Had Elizabeth failed of her purpose, but yet gained the shelter of the stockade unharmed, we would have shouted as loudly and exultantly as when she came back with what was to serve in the defense.

There was no reason why I should go to Teddy at that happy moment; he would not have thanked me for interfering while he was supporting the girl who had thus bravely and boldly declared her faith in his honor after having been the first to call him a coward, and I turned to Esther Hubbard, saying as I took from her hands the spare muskets:

“I do not think we need worry about Teddy and Elizabeth. She has covered herself with glory this day, and at the same time lifted from his

heart such a burden as had well nigh crushed it. They should be left alone now in order that a better understanding may be come at."

"I do not think they could understand each other better if they were to live a thousand years," Esther replied with a smile that set my heart leaping as if the body was too small to contain it, and I would have held further converse on that same subject, but that she bounded off like a deer, at once bringing to an end Teddy's occupation by dragging Elizabeth away with her.

It was only the younger of us who had inclination to think of other than the danger which menaced.

While I speculated in boyish fashion, Colonel Sheppard and the men took measures to prevent any waste of the precious powder by setting a sentinel over it, and only he who stood on guard, or was called upon to defend the stockade, might fill his horn from the keg that had come near to costing the life of a wondrously brave girl.

Neither was there much chance for other than the women to praise Elizabeth.

The savages were in the log houses of the settlement once more, shooting whenever anything movable around the fortification was seen; but, as during the forenoon, they effected nothing more than the wasting of their ammunition.

Colonel Sheppard at once detailed the older women to mould bullets, clean foul muskets, make cartridges so we might not spill powder by pouring it from the horns, and within ten minutes after Elizabeth had returned to the stockade every person, save the smallest children, was working industriously.

This exhibition of bravery had heartened us all wondrously, and I noted now that not a man spoke of that last moment when the bloodthirsty crew might be able to work their will ; but each took up the station assigned him as if confident we could hold our own to the extent of beating off the murderers.

And yet our prospects had not changed overly much. It was true we had a fresh supply of powder, but no more than might serve during four-and-twenty hours of a vigorous defense.

The number of defenders had not been increased by so much as one.

That we could hold Fort Henry against Simon Girty's crew was as hopeless as before ; but one who had then come suddenly upon us would have said we were filled with confidence as to the final result, and all because a girl had shown us what a brave heart might do.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIMON GIRTY'S CANNON.

It is not strange that the general situation, unchanged though it was, should have appeared brighter to Teddy McLaughlin and me because of the fact that the dark cloud had been lifted from my comrade's heart.

After what Elizabeth Zane had said and done there was not one person, man, woman or child, who would have said aught against his courage.

He proved that he was no coward, by insisting on being allowed to venture forth after the powder, and Ebenezer Zane had stood by him so far as to claim that the lad was entitled to the perilous honor.

Then had come Elizabeth's declaration and acts which made public the fact that he was very dear to her.

"It is almost as if no danger threatened, so far as I personally am concerned," Teddy said to me, after Esther had literally forced Elizabeth away from him. "I am ten times stronger than I was

two hours ago, and it seems as if I might encounter and vanquish Simon Girty himself, if that miserable renegade dared to meet a man face to face."

"It is little wonder that you are cheered," I replied, pressing my comrade's hand in token of the joy which had come to me because there was no longer a foul stain resting upon him. "It only needed that some one should speak as did Elizabeth, to clear away the clouds."

He looked at me as if to say that so far as concerned himself no one save Elizabeth Zane could have smoothed his path, and replied, much as if simply giving words to his thoughts :

"It was enough to make a lad long for death, to hear himself classed with such as Henry Hubbard."

"Where is he?" I interrupted, not minded that Teddy should brood over what was already in the past. "I have not seen that valiant lad since last night."

"He is posted over against the thicket, where there can be little danger from the savages. I warrant you Colonel Sheppard knows full well that the coward can be of no service, but has stationed him there in order that he may at least seem to be doing his share of the work. I watched

him ten minutes or more, and during all that time he never so much as raised his head above the stockade, or glanced toward the thicket."

"He is a cur, and the wonder to me is how he can be a brother to such girls as Esther and Sarah."

"I reckon he favors his father, who, by the way, is not overly eager to do aught that savors of danger."

Then our brief converse was interrupted by a warning cry from the sentinels posted on that side the stockade overlooking the village.

The villainous crew were returning to the task which, thus far, had not proven an easy one.

"It must be that Simon Girty has failed to devise a better plan than that of trying to shoot us down one by one," Teddy said with a note of triumph in his tone which I had not heard since he was wrongfully accused.

I was of the same opinion when we two stood where it was possible to gain a view of the dwellings, for the enemy was taking shelter therein, evidently to continue the same tactics as during the forenoon; but before an hour had passed we both came to know that the renegade was not at an end of his resources.

Once we were at our several posts, and now

every man and boy, including even the colonel himself, stood on duty, with the women and girls near by to do their full share of the work, it was seen that the brutes were as keen to shoot whenever we exposed so much as a cap or hand, as during the earlier part of the day ; but yet I fancied the bullets did not come so thickly.

It was as if we were opposed by a smaller number than before, and I gazed around anxiously to learn the cause of such slackening in the fire.

We were not long kept in ignorance of what the villains counted on doing, but the first portion of their new plans did not alarm us seriously. In fact, we were much surprised at their making such an attempt in the daytime when, unless we had all fallen asleep, there could be no hope of its success.

A huge log was brought out from a pile which my father had cut for the purpose of splitting them into planks, and now lay near the Zane dwelling with a dozen savages standing around it as if awaiting the word of command.

With this they counted on battering in the gate, and Simon Girty must have been eager to lessen the number of his men, else he would not have set them about such work.

There was not one among us who failed to un-

derstand exactly what was in the wind, and the only question in our minds was as to how the most severe lesson might be given.

It was Colonel Sheppard who settled the matter, by saying in a low tone as he walked up to each sentinel in turn :

“Do not fire until they are close at the gate ; but be certain your pieces speak before a blow can be struck. See to your spare weapons that they are in readiness, and after the first discharge, work rapidly. We should be able to cut down every brute at the log.”

But for Elizabeth Zane's brave venture we would not have viewed this work so calmly.

Now we had ammunition in plenty, providing the siege was not long continued, and were able, thanks to Simon Girty's stupidity, to strike such a blow as would sicken the brutes of the work in hand.

After bustling to and fro much after the fashion of a swarm of bees, the murderous villains were lined up ready to make the attempt which must of a surety end in failure, and the only way Girty's foolishness in this particular can be explained is on the ground that he believed our powder was well-nigh exhausted.

Ten painted fiends raised the log, and behind

them were grouped fifty or more, who had probably been instructed to hold themselves in readiness to take advantage of any weakening of the gate.

Esther Hubbard had come to reload my weapons, immediately the word was given that the savages had begun a new move, and I saw Elizabeth Zane performing the same office for Teddy at the next post.

My assistant had hardly spoken since she reappeared, and, thinking it would please her to know exactly what was being done, I called out while keeping my eye at the loop-hole :

“They are making ready now ! I reckon the villains will come with a rush, for it can't be pleasant to remain very long so close within range of our guns.”

Esther made no reply as I paused, and, looking around, I observed that her thoughts were far away. She held the spare guns where I might clutch them readily, but had apparently forgotten all save that which seemed to fill her mind.

“Of what are you dreaming?” I asked, and she, turning her head quickly, while the red blood mantled her cheeks and neck, replied, with somewhat of confusion :

“I was thinking of Teddy and Elizabeth.”

“And you put them together in your mind?”

“How else can I put them after all she did before going out to what seemed certain death?”

I knew she was thinking of the moment when Elizabeth kissed the lad before all the garrison, and, with beating heart because of my boldness, I said hurriedly :

“It would have filled me with joy to have stood in his place, if you had been in Elizabeth’s shoes.”

“Meaning you would be proud of me had I volunteered to fetch the powder?” she asked shyly, her face growing a deeper crimson.

“That I would not have suffered you to do,” and there must have been a tinge of fear in my tones even at the thought of such a thing, for my heart was quivering. “I would have been happy, though, had you made ready, as did she, and I stood in front of you.”

I would have given much had it been possible to see her face just then ; but at the instant Colonel Sheppard cried warningly :

“Stand ready ! Remember that you are not to fire too quickly !”

While I talked with Esther the savages had been approaching on a run, and were now within twenty yards of the gate, the heavy log poised ready for the blow which was never delivered.

Then came a single word from the colonel :

“Now !”

All our muskets spoke ; but, unfortunately, nothing had been said as to which target each of us should choose, and the result was that only four of the savages went down.

Running at full speed as they were, the log fell from their hands when those four pitched forward, and the attempt was proven to be a dire failure while they were yet a dozen yards distant.

Esther had a spare gun at my hands before the echo of the first report had died away, and the other women were hardly less prompt ; but yet we succeeded in bringing down only two more before the fugitives gained a shelter, although I know full well that not one escaped without a wound.

A cheer went up from us all, and as our voices rang out a volley of bullets came from the houses ; but we escaped without injury, as indeed we had done since that terrible ambush which cost us so much brave blood.

Before many moments had passed we came to understand that this useless attempt to batter down the gate was not Simon Girty's real plan.

The work had doubtless been done to cover a more serious purpose, but it was none the less

folly, since it did not blind us for a single instant.

Now we could see that the Indians had brought out a hollow maple log that had long been lying behind Ebenezer Zane's house, and seemed to be at work over it ; but what they were doing it was impossible for the moment to determine.

I was not the only one within the stockade who puzzled his brain in vain to make out the meaning of this new movement. I heard Colonel Sheppard cry to Master Merrill :

“What are they doing?”

“That's a question I can't answer, unless, it so be they haven't got enough, and will make another try at battering in the gate.”

“It can't be done with that log!” Ebenezer Zane cried. “I know it well these two years past. A hollow maple, fit only for fire-wood ; it would go to pieces before even so much as splintering one plank of the gate.”

The savages were so deeply engaged in their work that one might venture to expose himself a trifle more than had been prudent, and Esther insisted on climbing up beside me that she could view the work.

I might have refused her request but for the fact that it gave me an opportunity to hold her

close to me lest she fall, and my selfishness was so great that I was willing she should stand in a place of danger so long as I could be her support.

“What are they winding around the log?” the dear girl asked, after gazing a moment at the work.

Now that the question had been asked, I could see the savages wrapping what appeared to be a chain around the log, but my brain was so thick that I failed utterly to so much as guess their purpose.

“Can it be they might load that log as one would a cannon?” she asked, when I had said it was indeed a chain they were winding around and around the hollow maple.

I knew she had hit upon the real meaning of the work, and, proud of her quickness to understand the situation, I cried :

“Esther has hit upon the scheme! It is to load that log as a cannon that they are strengthening it in such fashion!”

A murmur of dismay could be heard from every side, and I saw a troubled look on Colonel Sheppard's face.

“Would it do harm, rotten as Master Zane declares it to be?” Esther asked, and I appealed

to Master Merrill who was at the post next mine on the side opposite Teddy.

“That’s a question I’m not able to answer, lad,” the old hunter replied in a tone of perplexity. “It could stand no more than one charge; but if that was aimed truly for the gate, and the butt of the log strengthened enough to withstand the shock, it is possible much harm might be done.”

There was not one among us, so far as I could judge from what was heard while I stood at my post, who did not fear that the savages would succeed in working us an injury which might not readily be repaired.

If the makeshift for a gun could be discharged successfully but once, it would make such a breach as to admit of their forcing an entrance, because of overwhelming numbers, and with this thought in mind we forgot our rejoicings at having been able to pick off so many when they used the battering-ram.

Involuntarily I held Esther yet closer to my side, and she was so intent upon the scene before her as to be apparently unconscious of what I did.

During the next ten minutes or more we watched closely, and saw that Simon Girty was not

disposed to neglect any precaution which might serve to make the plan a success.

To the best of my belief every house and shed in the village had been searched for heavy chains, and enough was thus procured to make a complete wrapping around the log. Every inch was protected, and it seemed certain to me that this rude weapon would answer the renegade's purpose.

"It is at the butt that the villain will have the most difficult work," I heard Master Merrill say to his wife who, like Esther, was peering out over the top of the stockade.

A single maple tree stood within ten yards of Ebenezer Zane's house, between it and the fort, and against this did Girty place his weapon, counting on using the living tree to strengthen the butt of the rude weapon.

More chains were used to hold it firmly in place, after the renegade himself had taken careful aim regardless of the shower of bullets we sent in that direction.

The wooden gun was now in position, and such care had been taken with its construction that I questioned if it could be moved by so much as an inch.

It was pointed directly for the stockade, and,

with a heavy charge, it seemed as if the timbers of the gate must be splintered into fragments.

I believe all of us were fascinated by this new danger, and more than one afterward admitted to me that it seemed as if the end of our defense had come.

Esther stood by my side while the brutes loaded their weapon.

Together, my arm around her waist, we saw them pour in horn after horn of powder until there must have been six quarts within the log. This was carefully rammed home, with grass for wadding, and while two hideous brutes did this, others were busy bringing sharp-cornered stones, pieces of iron, and quarts of bullets to make up the charge.

There must have been a vent near the butt in order to discharge the piece, and it was probably bored before the log had been brought out, for I failed to see them at any such work.

At last all was accomplished; the imitation cannon was ready to perform its work, and the Indians drew off, taking shelter in the houses as if nothing more remained to be done.

“What is the meaning of that?” I asked myself, unconsciously speaking aloud, and Esther

replied promptly, as if accustomed to seeing such fiendish work :

“They do not count on firing it until after night has come, when it will be safe for them to cross the open for the purpose of gaining an entrance.”

There could be no doubt that this was their purpose, and my heart sank within me.

How could our small force oppose such a horde once the gate was battered down?

“You fear they may succeed?” she asked, looking me full in the face.

“It is not certain Simon Girty’s cannon will do its work,” I replied evasively.

“But if it does?” she persisted.

“Then the end is close at hand,” I said, understanding from the expression on her face that she wished to know the worst.

“How long can these few men and lads hold out after the gate is down?”

“We would take refuge in the block-house, and they might find it quite a task to smoke us out.”

“But then you could not hope to beat them off?”

“No,” I replied with a sob, thinking of such fate as would come to the women and children once their defenders were slain.

“Cornie,” she said, putting both hands on my shoulders and gazing into my eyes, “would you do me the greatest favor one can do another at such a time?”

“Indeed I would! If I could only die in your stead, such torture as they can devise would seem pleasant, knowing you were spared.”

“You *can* spare me,” she whispered, still looking bravely into my eyes. “When there is no longer the slightest hope that we can hold out a moment longer, will you shoot me?”

I was near to screaming with distress and terror as she made this request, much as if it was some pleasure I might afford her, and yet I knew more than one man had shot the woman he loved rather than leave her to the painted fiends who knew no mercy.

“Will you promise me to do that thing?” she insisted, and I, speaking as steadily as one might under such circumstances, replied, holding her yet more closely:

“It shall be as you say, though my heart will break in the doing of it.”

“It will be the only way in which you can serve me,” she said solemnly, and then kissed me, much as Elizabeth Zane had kissed Teddy when she went out in the face of death.

The dear girl slipped down from the stockade, I holding her by the hand to ask :

“ You will come back soon ? ”

“ Yes, very soon. I am going to see mother, father, and—and—the others. ”

She did not speak Henry's name, and I could well understand why at such a time.

“ I shall stand by your side until the end comes, ” she said, looking back after having walked away a few paces, and I could make no reply.

For whatever fate might have in store, we would not long be kept in suspense, I realized, on wheeling around to continue my duties as sentinel.

Already were the shadows beginning to lengthen, and the sun was no more than half an hour high.

In two hours, before the moon rose, would come the darkest of the night, and then Simon Girty's cannon must be discharged.

Elizabeth Zane followed Esther, and Teddy came over to where I stood wrapped in painful thought.

“ It would seem as if the renegade had hit upon the proper plan at last, ” he said hoarsely.

“ Aye, and before many hours we shall know if it is successful. Will you stand here for me

while I go to speak with mother and the children ? ”

“ Yes, and then you shall do the same for me. It is time we said good-by, although perhaps such words had better remain unspoken. ”

I could not stand there calmly talking with him after my promise to Esther, and hurried away toward the block-house in search of my mother, who, so some of the women said, had gone there to make ready supper for her family.

She greeted me with a sad smile when I approached ; but spoke never a word concerning that loaded log which was pointed toward the gate.

“ You had better eat now, while there is time, ” she said, setting food before me, and added when I would have refused it, “ An empty stomach is a poor companion in a fight. Swallow something, Cornie dear, as your poor father would have done, for the children are looking upon you to guard them to the last. ”

It was difficult to obey ; but I did my best, although it seemed as if the food would choke me, and then, in nowise refreshed, made ready to return.

Mother kissed me on both cheeks, and whispered in my ear, most like to hearten me :

“ You have ever been a good son, Cornie dear, and will do your full duty to the last.”

I understood that this was her good by, for she could not have failed to know of the danger which threatened, and the tears were very near my eyelids when I went back to relieve Teddy.

He came down from the narrow platform without a word, and shortly after he had gone Esther Hubbard came, holding up her hand that I might aid her to gain a place by my side.

The darkness was creeping down upon us rapidly ; around Simon Girty's cannon stood a group of savages, and in the gloom I fancied it was possible to make out a large number drawn up behind the Zane house.

“ We shall not be called on to wait long,” Esther said in a low whisper, and while I held her close to me we saw a red glow from behind the building.

The brutes were bringing fire with which to set off the wooden gun.

Others beside us saw it, and Colonel Sheppard cried from somewhere in the darkness :

“ Have a care ! Keep close watch for those who will make the first rush, and if the gate is carried away, flee to the block-house, for our stand must be made there rather than in the open !” Then

to the women near at hand he said sharply, "See to it that you and all the children are inside the building as soon as may be. There is no time to lose!"

There was a scurrying to and fro as these orders were obeyed; but the fateful moment was not as near as we had fancied.

During a full quarter of an hour Esther and I stood side by side watching the glow of the burning brands, and then she exclaimed, pressing closer to me:

"Now it is to be done!"

It was as she had said. I could see, by the reflection of the torch he held, the painted face of the brute who was about to discharge the gun, and noted the look of exultation and satisfaction:

Then the brand was applied!

A great roar, a blinding flash of light; a noise as of huge hailstones falling upon the Zane house, and shrieks and groans!

Stupidly I leaned forward to see if the gate was shattered, although I had heard no shock, and an instant later came a joyful cry from Master Merrill:

"Simon Girty's cannon has burst, and all that crew standing near at hand must have been blown into eternity!"

CHAPTER XV.

A DESERTER.

I WAS not the only one in the stockade who stood as if bewildered, staring out into the darkness unable for the moment to realize that Simon Girty's cannon had simply been an engine of destruction to his villainous crew.

I question if there was a man among us who had not believed that, bound with chains and reinforced at the butt by a living tree, the wooden cannon would send, with reasonably true aim, at least one discharge, which might probably be sufficient to work our undoing.

Certain it is none foresaw such a result as followed the application of the fire, and all were more or less dazed because this apparently formidable engine of destruction had worked us no harm whatsoever.

Esther stood by my side silent and motionless, peering into the gloom which seemed all the greater because of having so lately been lighted up by the glare of burning powder, and then her

nerves gave way beneath the terrible strain which had been upon them.

She sank down upon the narrow platform, sobbing and crying as though overcome by deepest affliction.

In the hour of danger, at the moment when it seemed as if the end was near at hand, the brave girl had stood erect, facing the worst without so much as flinching; but now that we were safe again for the time being, her womanly nature asserted itself.

I leaned over the dear girl as if she was needing comfort; but immediately after understood that hers were tears of joy and relief, and it would be wisest to let them flow unchecked.

It was while I stood bending over her that the people in the block-house came to understand that they were respited once more, and all rushed out of the building into the open, the murmur of their voices sounding like as to the buzzing of bees.

Husbands embraced wives, lovers their sweet-hearts, mothers their children, and so on until it was, as Master Merrill expressed it, like as if one had suddenly come upon a kissing-bee, where each was striving to see how much execution might be done in the shortest possible space of time.

That remnant of the settlers on Wheeling Creek had good cause for rejoicing.

Twenty times over since forsaking their homes had they faced most imminent danger ; but never was death or captivity so near the women and children as when Simon Girty's cannon, loaded and primed, was aimed at the gate of the stockade.

How much damage the hollow log with its heavy load had done to those who fashioned it into a cannon, we could not say because of the darkness which shrouded everything from view ; but it was reasonable to suppose that all standing near about when the explosion came had been killed or wounded, to say nothing of those who were drawn up directly behind it, for the flying missiles, forced out by such a heavy charge of powder, scattered in every direction, and with fearful force.

We knew beyond a peradventure, however, that this experiment had cost the enemy dearly, and there was in the hearts of all most likely, as in mine, the great hope that, having been unable to lessen the number of the defenders, and yet suffering great loss themselves, the painted crew would grow disheartened and give up the siege.

Esther soon recovered her composure, begging

me to pardon her for having been so cowardly, and concerning what passed between us on that particular subject which can be of no interest to the reader, it is not necessary anything be set down on these pages.

When she was herself again, and had clambered down from the stockade to greet the members of her family, whom she had never expected to meet again in this life, I called out to Master Merrill, asking how much of damage he believed the cannon had inflicted upon the enemy.

“More than we could have done in two days of such fighting as has been going on, lad,” the old hunter replied, in a tone of satisfaction.

“And think you they will draw off now?” I asked hopefully.

“That is a question which none save Simon Girty can answer, lad. Were the savages here under the leadership of some Indian, I should say we might count on their dispersing 'twixt now and sunrise; but with that renegade to hold them up to their work, it is beyond me to even guess what is like to be done.”

Then the voice of Colonel Sheppard came out from the darkness, warning the sentinels to be on the alert, because in their desperation the blood-thirsty crew might make a rush for the gate, and,

taking us by surprise, as it were, succeed in effecting an entrance even while we were congratulating ourselves that the danger was well nigh passed.

“Do not be lulled into security by the probable injury which has been done them,” he said earnestly. “If the top of the log gave way, rather than the sides, it may be they have escaped with but trifling loss, and I warn you that now, more than at any other time, must we be on the alert. The women and children are to return immediately to the block-house, and there remain silent, at least until the moon has risen, for we must depend upon our sense of hearing while it is impossible to use our eyes.”

It was a wise command, and yet I regretted that it had been given so soon, because of having counted on meeting my mother, if for no longer time than would enable me to clasp her by the hands after that good-by which we believed would be our last.

We ceased our speaking to obey the orders of the colonel, and a few moments later such of the girls and younger women as previously had been detailed to aid the sentinels by recharging the weapons, came once more to their posts of duty.

Again Esther stood just beneath the platform

with the spare muskets and the store of ammunition ; but no words passed between us.

We were doing our feeble best to guard the others, and this was not a time when we might indulge in conversation.

Vainly straining our eyes into the darkness on the alert for the lightest sound which might proclaim another attack, it was necessary the utmost silence be preserved within the stockade lest the crafty foe should find it possible to creep up on us, and our duty was to prevent them gaining a position at the foot of the stockade, where we might not be able to come at them without exposing ourselves.

The moments passed slowly.

One could almost believe that something had occurred to prevent the rising of the moon, for it was to me as if midnight had already come before there was any lightening of the gloom.

Esther was only a shadowy outline, as I looked down upon her from my perch on the platform, and Teddy and Master Merrill, who stood nearest me on either side, could not be distinguished.

One needed not a vivid imagination to give him the impression that he was entirely alone within the stockade, and at such a time the task of standing watch was most trying to the nerves.

I believe there was more of timorousness in my mind during that short time than at any other, save during the first few moments when we found ourselves ambushed.

Then came that welcome light in the sky which told of the moon's rising ; faint at first ; but reviving a lad who was rapidly growing faint-hearted as nothing save a sense of absolute safety could have done, and I leaned over to whisper to Esther :

“ It will soon be light ; the moon is showing herself.”

A sigh of relief from the dear girl told that she had been suffering as much because of the darkness and the silence as myself, and then her hand was raised that I might aid her in clambering up beside me.

It was only the faintest lightening of the gloom over the tree-tops that had caused such a lifting of the burden from my heart ; but it increased slowly, yet surely, until we saw that thin line of golden hue, and knew there was no longer any immediate danger the enemy would make an attack.

Like unto a promise of safety was that disk of light which crept up higher and higher above the tree-tops until we could see all the intervening

space between the fort and the village, and knew that the most arduous of our labors were come to an end, during this night at least.

Now the anxious women came out from the block-house ; the sentinels permitted themselves to move to and fro on the narrow platforms where they had crouched motionless so long, and the hum of congratulations could be heard here and there as the besieged spoke with each other concerning all that occurred since the going down of the sun.

Esther was not minded to remain on this post with me in full view of all the garrison ; but insisted upon descending when the moon first showed herself, and those who glanced that way, when surrounding objects were revealed to view, saw her standing demurely in the position to which she had been assigned.

My mother ventured out from the block-house, and, looking around until seeing me, came directly toward the post, first saluting Esther affectionately, and then saying :

“ You have been long on duty, my son, and now is come the time when you may gain rest. Let me take your place, and between Esther and I we surely shall keep as sharp watch as you.”

Although it had been many hours since my

eyes were closed in slumber, I had no desire for rest ; all that had occurred since the rising of the sun affected me much as a long season of repose might have done, and I felt strong and courageous enough to remain there until morning without thought of weariness.

Nor was I pleased at the idea of being separated from the girl who had stood by my side so bravely when the danger was greatest ; yet I managed to say, much as if it would give me the greatest pleasure :

“Take Esther with you, mother. She needs rest more than I, and you may bring me something to eat. I could not sleep even though you and she took my place, as may well be imagined, therefore look to yourselves, you two women, in order to be fresh for the morrow’s work.”

“Go you into the block-house, my dear lad, and there get what you may in the way of food. If it so be you are not willing to accept our services, it is better you move about a bit than to stand in one place so long.”

I leaped down at once, really glad of an opportunity to look around the stockade, and talk with those who were better able to judge of the situation than I, while my mother, fearing lest the lack of one sentinel might work us

harm, clambered up on the platform, followed by Esther.

At any time those two were as well able to guard the post as I, and perhaps better, therefore no misgivings were in my heart as I went toward the block-house, taking in the line of stockade on my way.

On arriving at the post where Colonel Sheppard stood doing sentinel duty like the meanest among us, I halted to explain why I had seemingly deserted my station, and he replied with so much of friendliness in his tones that it was as if I spoke to a comrade :

“ You did well, lad, to take advantage of the opportunity. Your mother will keep strict watch, and those who have stood on duty so long need something in the way of a change.”

“ Have you seen anything of the enemy, sir ?” I ventured to ask, emboldened by his kindness.

“ Not so much as a feather since the moon arose.”

“ Think you the bursting of the cannon effected much injury among them ?”

“ I do not understand how it could have failed to kill and wound many ; but they have taken good care we shall not get any idea of what has been done, having not only carried away the dead

and the wounded, but removed all traces of the cannon, so far as I can see. It is certain there will be no further move made on this side the fort to-night."

Reassured by the positive tone in which he spoke, I continued on leisurely, speaking first with this man and then with that regarding the situation, and getting from each much of cheer.

I was not the only one who had left his post, for here and there I saw a woman on the platform, musket in hand, apparently as much on the alert as the oldest hunter in the garrison.

Just before arriving at the block-house Teddy McLaughlin came up breathless from running, and I asked, although there was little need of the question :

"Has Elizabeth Zane taken your post ?"

"Aye, even as Esther Hubbard relieved you. Your mother told me you had set out for something in the way of supper, and since that last scheme of Simon Girty's went so far awry, my appetite has increased wonderfully. For a time it seemed, Cornie Dunbar, as if we might never need food again."

Then he gripped me yet more firmly by the hand as if by way of congratulation, and we two lads went into the block-house, which was de-

serted by all save sleeping children and Henry Hubbard.

For the moment I was not troubled at seeing him there. It seemed but natural he should have gathered with the children, for in point of manliness he was the youngest among them.

Teddy and I helped ourselves to food wherever it might be found, regardless of ownership, and while we were eating, giving no more attention to young Hubbard than we would to a tame rabbit, a sudden thought came to me like a flash of light.

Turning upon him quickly I asked, perhaps with more of anger in my tone than should have been shown to one so weak-minded :

“When did you leave your post?”

I knew he had not been relieved from duty during the afternoon, and was positive that all who could be depended upon were stationed at that side the stockade nearest the settlement when the savages had made ready the chain-bound maple log.

“I came in at dark,” he mumbled, speaking so indistinctly that it was with difficulty I could understand the reply.

“Who took your place?”

“I don't know.”

“ Did Colonel Sheppard order you to come in ? ”

The coward hesitated, shifted his eyes here and there as if bethinking himself it were well to run away, and I, getting an inkling by this time of what had been done, stepped directly in front of him as I asked sharply, shaking the coward by the shoulder as warning that he speak quickly and truly :

“ Who ordered you to leave your post ? ”

“ No one.”

He was now half crying, and Teddy, understanding the drift of my questions, leaped toward us as he asked anxiously :

“ Did you come away leaving that portion of the stockade unguarded ? ”

“ It was dark ; I could see nothing, and there is no reason why any one remain there. Besides, I was alone, and if the Indians made an attack I had no means of checking them.”

It seemed strange then, as it does now, that a lad of Henry Hubbard's age, knowing full well all the dangers which threatened, and understanding what might come in case of carelessness or neglect, should walk deliberately away from his post of duty, because, forsooth, it was dark, and he was alone.

However, it was not in my mind at the mo-

ment that any serious misfortune could befall us because of this coward's action ; but only a sense of anger that he should thus have neglected his duty, exposing to peril, not only strangers, but his own kith and kin who must have been dear to him, however much of cowardice was in his heart.

But for Esther I would have given the lad such a tongue lashing as he could not soon forget ; the thought of her checked the angry words, and I turned away, striving with difficulty to veil the contempt which I felt for him.

Teddy had no reason for withholding harsh words, and during two or three minutes he read young Hubbard a lesson upon duty in general, and the neglect to perform his full duty at such a time in particular, until the culprit burst into a violent fit of tears.

“Leave him alone,” I said impatiently. “No good can come of bandying words with such as he.”

“I fail to see that we bandied words,” Teddy said with a laugh, having fully recovered from his anger. “He is too cowardly even to make a reply.”

Then he would have continued his interrupted supper but I, apprehensive of danger even when

it did not seem possible any threatened, proposed that we first have a look around that side of the stockade nearest the thicket, and then report to Colonel Sheppard why no sentinel was on duty there.

“Take the food in your hand; you can eat it as well while we are walking, as to sit here in comfort. I have a desire to see how matters may be going on that side the fort.”

“There is little need of it,” Teddy said laughingly, gathering up a handful of provisions as I had suggested; “but since it will please you, well and good. The savages are disheartened by the bursting of their cannon, and will keep well under cover until Simon Girty can revive their courage.”

I hastened to assure him that I was not giving myself up to foolish fears; but simply obeying a desire which was strong upon me because during two hours of black darkness no one had guarded this side of the stockade.

“It will take but a minute to make certain that all is well, as I know it must be, and then a sentinel can be placed at that point if the colonel thinks best.”

Well, we walked leisurely from the block-house, past the building where the men were quartered,

and thence to each sentry's post in turn, talking of this thing or of that, I pressing the conversation to drown the sense of apprehension which had suddenly come upon us.

So far as we could see on either hand everything was as it should be, and I was beginning to reproach myself for having given way to fears which were akin to timorousness, when it appeared to me as if along the foot of the stockade, inside, the earth had been thrown up since I was there last.

Certain it was that, at the base of the logs, extending twelve feet, perhaps, was a dark mass, and, saying no word to Teddy lest he should laugh at me who was raised in the woods at being scared by an owl, I left his side and stepped nearer this seeming bank of earth.

My foot was nearly upon it before I saw that which sent a chill of fear into my heart until I was nigh to crying aloud in terror.

Two half-naked savages had clambered up the stockade, and, most like hearing our voices, had thrown themselves down at the base of the logs in such a fashion that one might well mistake them for what I had at first supposed they were—a fresh bank of earth turned up to strengthen the timbers.



With a loud cry I threw myself upon the nearest brute, hoping to prevent him from rising.—Page 279. *Defense of Fort Henry.*

Teddy and I were unarmed, save for the knives in our belts, and in the merest fraction of time, as I hesitated whether it would be safe to first give an alarm and then attack the foe, a cry from my comrade caused me to look up quickly.

There above the ends of the logs I saw a tuft of feathers surmounting a painted face.

The two Indians who had already effected an entrance were waiting for reinforcements, and but for what was fear caused by timorousness in me, half an hundred might have gotten inside before any one of the defenders were aware of the fact.

There was no longer time for hesitation.

Teddy's cry betrayed the fact that we were knowing of this new danger, and those savages who had secreted themselves so cunningly started to leap to their feet, while he whose head we had just seen dropped suddenly out of sight.

With a loud cry, intended to warn those confident ones on the other side the stockade, I threw myself upon the nearest brute, hoping it might be possible to prevent him from rising, and at the same time believing that a hand-to-hand encounter, armed only with a knife as I was, would prove fatal to me.

Not until I had leaped did Teddy understand

the reason for my sudden movement, and then a second Indian was nearly on his feet.

I heard the lad cry out, even as I had done, and after that there was no opportunity for me to know what he might be doing, because the task which I had undertaken demanded all my mind and strength.

Fortunately I had gripped the scoundrel by the throat, throwing myself partially on his back in such fashion that he could not strike at me save by reaching around behind him, and to gain his feet it must be with my clutch shutting off his breath.

At the moment of leaping I saw the brute's musket lying close by the stockade ; but it was useless both for me and for him, since neither of us could come at it, or, having done so, could use it while thus struggling.

He raised his body upward, staggering to one knee, I clinging on his throat with all my strength.

Then it was he threw his full weight against the logs with the idea of crushing me.

It was as if I felt my ribs splinter ; the breath was literally forced out of my body ; but, fortunately, there was in my mind the knowledge that to relax the grasp ever so slightly would be cer-

tain death, and I believe, had my life been taken then, he would have found it difficult to wrench apart the fingers which encircled his throat.

I could not long hold myself in that position ; yet movement was beyond me even had it been possible.

To use my knife I must let go the hold with one hand, and that was not to be thought of.

I kicked against his legs, hardly conscious of what I did, most like causing no pain, and again he forced himself backward against the stockade until it seemed that my body must have literally been flattened.

Then with a mighty effort he put his shoulders back, bringing my head upon the logs with a force that caused seeming sparks of fire to dart before my eyes, and I knew nothing more.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDS.

WHEN I came once more to know that I was alive, a crowd of women surrounded me, and but a short distance away I could see Colonel Shepard and Master Merrill ; but Teddy was not in sight, and as memory came back until I understood that my last knowledge had been of grappling with the Indian, I feared that my comrade was dead.

There was in my mind a certain dim recollection that Teddy had not leaped upon his foe as quickly as I upon mine, and in that brief instant of delay the savage might readily have overpowered him.

Trying to move ever so slightly caused great pain, and then I realized that my enemy had pounded me against the wall, with greater force even than I was conscious of at the moment.

All this came into my mind as does a dream, until finally I saw that my mother and Esther

were bending over me, and then all my senses returned in full strength.

“What of the savages?” I asked.

While the question might have sounded like such an one as the bravest of brave men would ask, it was not spoken by me because my only thought was for the safety of others. I feared lest they had escaped observation, and were yet inside the stockade where they might aid their brutish companions to gain entrance.

“They will do no harm,” my mother said soothingly, and Esther added :

“You and Teddy McLaughlin must have been sent to this place by God, otherwise the foe had gained an entrance secretly.”

Stupid as I was from the effects of the pounding received, the words came to my lips which would have told her, if she did not know it before, that through her brother's cowardice and folly had it become possible for the foe to creep in on us ; but, fortunately, I realized in time to check my tongue, that this was no speech to make to the sister of him who had come nigh bringing death upon upon us all, but instead I asked :

“Where is Teddy?”

“Yonder, being cared for by those who have the right to be nearest him at such a time.”

“Is he wounded badly?”

“A knife thrust through the arm, is, I hope, the only injury he received,” Esther replied softly. “Master Merrill, having examined him, declares that it is not serious.”

It was sweet to be thus attended, and I lay back upon the pillow formed of some garment, yielding myself to the pleasure which under some circumstances comes to one who is helpless, when I understood as if never having known it before, the weakness of the garrison, and forced myself to sit upright, although the movement caused severest pain.

“Lie down,” my mother said, using gentle force with the command; but I insisted on sitting up, saying as I did so:

“Beyond the crushing that brute did, I am none the worse, and it is necessary every man be on duty, for where there are so few one cannot permit himself to give much heed to his own body.”

“Colonel Sheppard’s command is that you go into the block-house as soon as it is possible to rise, and there remain until morning, for he has little fear of an attack while the moon shines so brightly,” Esther Hubbard said, but I shook my head decidedly, replying with the air of a perverse boy:

“The moon was even brighter when those scoundrels crept over the stockade——”

“That will not occur again this night,” Colonel Sheppard said quickly, stepping to my side. “You two lads are not really needed on guard, and it is a duty to do all in your power toward recovering from the injuries, so you shall soon be able to stand at the post musket in hand. You may be sorely needed before morning, and a bit of care now will be much like the mending of a musket lock when it is worn, so that it may be ready for hard service later on.”

To such speech as this I could make no reply, save by saying that I was ready to do as he had ordered, and, leaning upon Esther when perhaps I did not really require the support, I suffered myself to be led to the block-house, whither Teddy was brought ten minutes later, his arm in a sling, but his face bright, as if the Indian who dealt the wound had done him a most friendly favor.

Shortly after I learned what had occurred while I was deprived of consciousness.

It appears that Master Merrill had just left his post in obedience to his wife's desire to come into the block-house for food, when he heard my cry, and, old hunter that he was, immediately guessed its meaning.

“The savages are coming in by this way,” he shouted, stopping only long enough to seize a musket from the hands of one of the women before he came to the rescue.

In a twinkling every post on that side of the stockade overlooking the settlement would have been abandoned, but for Colonel Sheppard’s presence of mind.

Comprehending the situation as quickly as had Master Merrill, he called off the names of those who were to remain as sentinels, ordering the others to follow him, and close upon the heels of the old hunter they came, as strong a force as could be spared from any one portion of the fortification.

When Master Merrill arrived within view of what was happening, the Indian whom I had grappled was tearing my fingers from his throat in order that he might turn and strike a fatal blow.

A bullet from Master Merrill’s musket put him beyond the possibility of shedding more blood.

Then the danger being over at this point, I was left lying upon the ground while the rescuers ran to where Teddy was rapidly being worsted, the Indian having inflicted one wound which, causing the blood to flow freely, would speedily have

weakened the lad so that he would not continue the struggle.

He had made a valiant fight, so every one said, and even though Elizebath Zane had not openly declared she did a wrong in accusing him of cowardice, that charge would have been disproven in the face of all within the stockade, for surely had Teddy and I saved that company of women and children from worse than death.

All this was told me by Esther while my mother made ready such simples as were at her command with which to bathe my bruised body, and it can well be imagined that the dear girl was not niggardly in her words of praise.

As for the matter of that, I understood from the looks and actions of all around me that my comrade and I were given the credit of having done a brave deed, when, as a matter of fact, we came upon the fight unintentionally in such manner it could not be avoided.

So far as the attack upon our settlement and the defense of Fort Henry is concerned, there is no good reason why I should set down all which was said and done by Teddy and Elizabeth Zane, Esther Hubbard or myself, while we two lads remained in the block-house coddled as invalids.

It is enough if I say that we remained there

until near about midnight, cared for by loving hands as if we had been children, and then reluctantly, so far as personal gratification went, I felt forced to make a change in the situation.

At first my mother and Esther refused to listen when I declared it was my duty to go out and join the little band of defenders ; but after showing that I was none the worse for wear, save in the matter of being sore and stiff at the joints, they ceased protesting, and no sooner had I gained my feet than Teddy, who was sitting a short distance from me, also sprang up.

“I can stand guard as well with one arm as though I had the use of both,” he said decidedly, “and while I watch some weary man may sleep.”

At this Elizabeth Zane broke out vehemently against his venturing forth ; but she also became silent when he made the same plea as had I ; but adding to it words, which, under the circumstances, could not be answered :

“If one who has been of some little service believes it necessary to remain off duty a full night because of a trifling wound, how long would we have any one left to stand guard ? Cornie and I can yet do the work of men, and surely it is needed.”

With that we went out from the block-house,

leaving the women behind, and having come to where Colonel Sheppard was posted, presented ourselves for duty.

“You should have stayed where you could be cared for,” he said sharply. “Such were my orders.”

“We remained, sir, until there was no longer any need, and are come now to relieve those who can sleep,” I said respectfully. “Later, when it is possible, we two lads will rest.”

He directed each of us without further parley to the posts which we should take.

As we were going to them, the thought came to my mind of the danger to which we had been exposed, and I asked in such a manner as could give no offense :

“Who is on guard nearest the thicket, sir ?”

“Merrill, the hunter, and you need have no fear that any other of the savages will find entrance, as easily as did those whom you discovered.”

Well, we went on duty again, well content with ourselves as can be fancied, and it so chanced that our posts were near each other where we might talk now, while it was so light that one's ears were not as useful in the sentinel duty as his eyes.

There was little to be done save keep one's self well protected, for as we were told by those whom we relieved, the savages were on the alert again to pick us off while keeping themselves screened from view in the dwellings of the settlement.

We decided, Teddy and I, that it was not probable there would be another alarm on this night, for unless the savages were more venturesome than such brutes had ever been known, there would be no attack upon the fort while it was so light and all hands remained on the alert.

Thus did we prove again how short-sighted even those whose senses are sharpened by danger, may be.

The hours passed on slowly, and yet not wearily.

When we had been there perhaps half an hour Elizabeth and Esther came out to aid in standing watch ; but we urged them to return to the block-house where it might be possible to sleep, for when morning came certain of the women must take our places because by that time exhausted nature would insist upon our gaining some rest.

They returned reluctantly ; but I could have sworn Esther Hubbard was more inclined to go than I to lose her company, for it would have been exceedingly pleasant to stand on guard with

her when one had no need to use all his faculties in the performance of duty.

These two were the only women astir at this time in the night, and it spoke eloquently of their desire to aid, that they should insist upon sharing the labors of the men.

When we were alone once more, save for the occasional tours of the posts which Colonel Shepard made, Teddy and I spoke much of the past, but never of that night when his brother and my father were in the hands of the savages, suffering all the tortures which their fiendish hands could inflict.

Without having any absolute knowledge of the passage of time, I should say it was past three o'clock in the morning when we who were guarding that side of the stockade nearest the village observed a motion among the foe, and had more than one opportunity of sending a bullet among them with proper effect.

Simon Girty's crew were running to and fro among the dwellings silently, as if mustering their full force, and Teddy said to me in a low tone, lest he should be overheard by the others:

“Now indeed has come the time when they will make a desperate assault, and unless fortune favors us far beyond our deserts, I fail to

see why they should not overrun us by sheer force of numbers."

I was of much the same belief as my comrade.

That some movement was about to be made we knew full well, otherwise the brutes, having kept out of sight thus far, would have been less willing to expose themselves to our fire, knowing by experience that we seldom wasted a bullet.

Our elders viewed this new skulking to and fro much as had Teddy and I, although it seemed strange the enemy should make an attack, when, thanks to the moon, not so much as a squirrel could have crossed the open space lying between us and the settlement without our noting the fact.

Colonel Sheppard walked hurriedly to and fro, enjoining each of us to be on the alert, ready to repel a rush which seemed imminent, and even went so far as to arouse a sufficient number of women that we might have aid in reloading our weapons.

Once more Esther stood just beneath the platform on which I crouched, and she took good heed that the two spare muskets allotted me were in serviceable condition.

Again other women stood ready to clean such guns as had become foul from rapid use, and the

little garrison was as nearly ready as might be to repel an assault, every one realizing what would probably be the result.

Then, suddenly, the report of a musket beyond the settlement rang out clear and distinct, and to my ears it sounded like thunder, but yet was the sweetest music I ever heard.

White men must be approaching, for the Indians would not have sent a shot in that direction otherwise.

That signal of relief was heard by all who were awake, and yet there was no cheering; no demonstration of joy, although it meant perhaps the saving of our lives, however small a party might be approaching, for with but half-a-dozen men added to our numbers we were in fair condition to hold out against Simon Girty's crew.

There was no exultant shout, as I have said; but from every side one could hear a low yet fervent exclamation, smothered as if there was danger in too much noise.

"Can it really be white men?" Esther asked anxiously, stretching forth her hands that I might help her on to the platform. "Can it be that at last we shall have the assistance which is so sorely needed?"

"It must be true," I replied, and then literally

wincing, as the thought came that there was little hope friends were coming in such numbers as would warrant their fighting a passage through that band of Indians.

After the single report of a musket one might have counted ten before another sound was heard, and then half-a-dozen guns spoke, replied to by a volley from the log-houses, and I said to Esther, clasping her hand in heartfelt thanksgiving :

“Whoever is near at hand has decided to give those brutes battle, and it is our work to take part in the struggle.”

I expected each instant to hear Colonel Sheppard call off the names of those who should sally forth to receive the newcomers ; but he remained silent until one man asked angrily :

“Are we to stand here idle while friends are doing their utmost to get at us ? Are we to raise no hand at such a time ?”

“Not with my consent,” Colonel Sheppard replied sharply. “It would be of no avail to send less than six or eight, and if they failed to return what would be the result ? God grant that those brave fellows who are coming toward us may succeed in gaining the stockade ; but our duty—the duty we owe the women and children—is to remain here doing what may be possible from within

the fort, never taking the chances of so reducing the small force that further defense would be impossible."

I realized fully the wisdom of his decision, and yet chafed under the restraint as the reports of muskets sounded out more rapidly, telling that those who would aid were doing desperate battle.

The hope which sprang up so suddenly in my heart after hearing the first shot died out quickly as I came to believe that it was almost impossible such number of settlers as might have been gathered in that region, could make their way through Girty's horde of savages.

We no longer saw an Indian ; but knew from the reports of the weapons that they must be beyond the settlement, and for the moment I believed our commander was doing a terrible injustice to those who were risking their lives in our behalf.

"Stand ready, men," the colonel cried a few moments later. "If those brave fellows succeed in beating back the savages ever so little, our time will come, and we should be able to do good work from the stockade. Take careful aim at the first who shows himself ; but be on your guard against shooting until it is known beyond a peradventure that your target be an Indian !"

It was absolutely painful to stand there musket in hand, burning for an opportunity to aid those gallant fellows who were pressing toward us, and yet unable to strike the lightest blow.

I panted as if from long running, because of my eagerness to do some execution, and unconsciously looked from side to side, thinking dimly that perchance those nearest might be more fortunate than I.

Thus it was that my eyes chanced to fall upon Teddy McLaughlin.

He had thrown off the sling from his wounded arm lest it should hamper his movements, and was standing with gun poised, immovable as a statue, ready to take advantage of the first opportunity which presented itself.

Colonel Sheppard was also on the stockade, and if the moment did come that we might take part in the battle, I doubted not that many of Girty's brutish following would be speedily put beyond the power to do mischief.

They fought well, those brave fellows who were coming to take part in the defense of the fort, and one could understand there was no wasting of ammunition, for the shots came singly, now and then, as if those who fired were certain of their aim before discharging the weapons, while it was

as though the Indians sent their bullets at random, the one desire being to make as much noise as possible.

I screamed with joy, and heard those nearest me shouting gleefully when finally the Indians were forced back until we saw a dozen or more running at full speed for the Zane house.

Then our muskets rang out, and we were of some assistance to those who came toward us, for at every volley we lessened the number of Simon Girty's villains by fully eight.

Esther had slipped down from her station on the platform even as I took aim, and when my musket was discharged she passed a loaded one up to me, as did the other women who served the sentinels, and we fired two volleys into the painted brutes before they slunk out of sight.

Five minutes later I was taking aim at a figure which had come out from behind one of the buildings to gain the shelter of the tree which had served as the butt of Girty's cannon, when I understood it was a white man.

An instant later and I might have killed a friend !

"They are working this way for a surety !" I cried with joy. "Look behind yonder tree !"

"Be careful of your aim," Colonel Sheppard

said harshly. "Be certain before you fire, else a great mischief may be done!"

And we were certain. One after another came in view, leaping from this point of vantage to that, and emptying their weapons as rapidly as it was possible to reload them, in order to keep back the foe, until I had counted fifteen.

Then they had gathered at the end of the Zane house nearest us, ready for a dash into the fort.

"There are fifteen of them," I cried to Esther, as she exchanged my empty musket for one that was loaded. "Fifteen, and if it so be all gain the fort, we may count ourselves as saved! Do you hear, Esther? Saved! When we had believed death could be our only portion!"

"They have yet to pass over sixty yards of open field," she said tremulously, and I checked my glee, lest an indulgence in rejoicing should bring yet greater despondency in case the attempt even now was a failure, for indeed there were many chances against all of them getting within the stockade.

Master Merrill, who had been relieved from duty on the opposite side of the fortification by his wife, now joined the colonel at the gate, and we standing guard understood that these two would open the way for those who should live

long enough to cross the cleared space which was commanded by the weapons of the savages.

I expected to see the whole force dart toward us, instead of which one man left the party, running like a deer toward the gate, the bullets of the Indians whistling around him as they had around Elizabeth Zane; but he came on more swiftly because of not being hampered by a burden, and we who viewed this chase against death, shouted for the colonel and Master Merrill to open the gate.

The man entered, and, as if his venture had been but nothing, leaped up on the platform beside me to share in the work of aiding his comrades when they should cross the clearing.

He was a stranger to me; but yet seemed like a dear friend because of the service he would render.

“You have come in good time, sir,” I said, “for until we heard the report of your weapons our case seemed hopeless.”

“We are not yet here,” he replied grimly, standing ready to shoot at the first sight of an enemy, and for the second time was I checked in my rejoicings.

CHAPTER XVII.

REINFORCEMENTS.

ALTHOUGH those who would aid us were so near, not above sixty yards from the gate of the fort, much time was spent before the last man stood inside the stockade, and we were again prepared to meet any attack which the Indians might make.

The party, as we soon learned, was led by Colonel Swearingen, who had come to our relief because of the information carried up the river by Master Mansfield, and had enlisted fourteen comrades to assist in the generous task.

This party numbered but fifteen when they started, and there were fifteen men uninjured after they gained the shelter of Ebenezer Zane's house.

These brave fellows, on arriving within sight of the foe which menaced Fort Henry, set about fighting their way through, fearing we might be so sorely pressed that an hour more or less would work irreparable injury, therefore instead of at-

tempting to gain the stockade by a detour or stratagem, they set at work in soldierly fashion, with little or no heed as to how soon they might be discovered, and fighting from tree to tree until, as I have said, they were come to the Zane house nearest the fort.

Now it remained for each man to run the gauntlet of fire across the open space which intervened, and from this ordeal there could be no shirking.

To make the attempt in a body would be to increase the danger, and they were satisfied the savages had no stomach for attacking them while they were thus under cover. Therefore it was not necessary the work should be done in other than a leisurely fashion.

The first man in—he who stood on the platform beside me—appeared to think the race across the open was not particularly dangerous, especially in the moonlight which distorted the shadows to the detriment of one's aim ; but when I told him that in the open day Elizabeth Zane had gone empty-handed, coming back laden with a keg of powder, he gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

“The girl who is willing to do such a thing as that, is braver than any man I know,” he said

emphatically. "Those are the kind of women needed on the frontier, and while we may have many a one, they are yet too few. I should like to see her."

"And so you shall, sir. Even now she stands yonder at the nearest post, handling the spare muskets."

He had no time to gaze at her just then, for the second of his comrades had begun the race across the clearing, and, as can readily be supposed, every one of us behind the stockade stood with uplifted weapon ready to fire when the first red face could be seen.

Not above a dozen shots were sent after the fleeing man, and he had hardly been given admission before two more, one ten or twelve yards in the rear of the other, left the protection of the Zane house, risking their lives again in our behalf.

Even as I stood there straining my eyes to note if any of Simon Girty's crew offered himself as the target for a bullet, I wondered what would be the result when but four or five men remained behind the dwelling.

The Indians, who had fought with them upwards of half an hour while the brave fellows darted from one place of vantage to another, each

movement bringing them nearer the goal they had set themselves, knew full well how many were in the company, and after ten or twelve were within the fortification, why might not the brutes safely make an attack upon the few remaining?

However, there was but little time to dwell on such a speculation, because all our wits were needed to protect the running men.

After these last two had entered, making four in all, several moments elapsed before another made the venture, and I, thinking something serious had occurred to prevent their coming, asked of him who stood beside me if he could guess at the reason for the delay.

“It is not well that they come in regular order, with just such an interval between them, otherwise yonder murdering beasts would know when to draw a bead on the next who started, doing so, perchance, from some hiding-place near one of the buildings which your muskets do not cover. They will come in good time, lad. I have no fear as to that; but the colonel is bound to be among the last, for he is a master hand at taking upon himself the greatest share of the danger.”

Well, our rescuers came at irregular intervals.

one after another, until eleven were inside the stockade, and but four remained behind the Zane house.

This was, to my mind, the most perilous moment of the venture ; but yet there was no hesitation on the part of those who must run the gauntlet of fire.

When the first man had advanced ten paces the second started, and thus, with such a short distance between them, did the entire four come, the Indians blazing away like mad men, and in their excitement shooting so high that I believe of a verity every bullet passed two feet or more above the heads of the runners.

Then the gate was barred for the last time, and only then did we, who had received such timely aid, set up a shout of welcome, the echoes of which must have been anything rather than pleasant to that savage crew who were trying to compass our death.

The defenders of the fort now numbered twenty-seven, and unless some serious accident befell us we would be able to do the duty properly, one party standing guard while the other slept, thus relieving us of the greatest anxiety, for there had not been a man or lad inside the stockade, with the possible exception of Henry Hubbard, who

did not at some time within the past twenty-four hours ask himself what might be the result when sleep overpowered us, as it must finally, for no man may keep his eyes open very long, however great the danger which threatens.

We cheered those brave fellows again and again, and when the tumult had subsided, it broke out anew on learning that each man brought with him three pounds of powder and from fifty to one hundred bullets.

It is beyond my power to describe the excitement among us who had been besieged, and from whom hope fled many hours before, when we thus realized that we might be able to hold the savages in check at least eight-and-forty hours longer.

It was as if the entire company, men, women and the elder children had grown delirious with joy ; each pressed the other's hand or embraced, speaking incoherently in almost overpowering joy, and more than one of the women fell on her knees before Colonel Swearingen, who, as my neighbor on the platform had predicted, was the last to enter the stockade.

When the excitement had subsided somewhat, Colonel Sheppard announced that each man who had been on duty should immediately betake

himself to rest ; but the command was not at once obeyed.

Our hearts were so full of joy and thankfulness that it seemed imperative we should remain and converse with those who had so bravely come to the rescue, at least until the sun rose again.

Meeting Esther and Elizabeth, I persuaded them to go into the block-house where nearly all the females had gone within a few moments after the arrival of Colonel Swearingen's company, and it was not a difficult task.

I believe of all the women these two were the most weary, because of having undergone the greatest excitement, and Esther parted from me for a few hours as I would have had her done, in a most affectionate manner.

The newcomers had at once taken upon themselves the work of standing guard, and as Teddy McLaughlin and I passed from one to the other, eager to learn regarding their hurried march to our relief and the battle with Simon Girty's scoundrels, wherein fifteen men had opposed themselves to not less than three hundred and fifty without receiving so much as a scratch, we learned yet more gladsome news.

Major McCulloch had been scouring the country in our behalf, and might reasonably be expected

to arrive at Wheeling Creek before the sun should set again, with a force numbering anywhere from twenty-five to fifty.

It was astounding intelligence, for we had not expected that the settlers would come to our aid from such a distance, although it was for their advantage to do so, since if the renegade Girty succeeded in capturing the fort it was well-nigh certain he would ravage the country round about within a radius of fifty miles or more, therefore for their own protection was it necessary that the savages be driven off before they were made stronger because of a decided victory won.

If the major did join us with even the smallest number of men named, then was the siege well-nigh at an end, for if twelve men and lads had held this force so long in check, surely fifty or more might whip them.

It was the first hour since the fatal ambush that I could draw a breath free from haunting dread, and never before nor since have I experienced such relief as came to my heart after the newcomers had told all their story.

Even though Major McCulloch should come alone, he would be in himself a host, for the savages knew him as their most skilful enemy, and I question whether Simon Girty feared any man

on the Ohio River as he did this brave hunter, who had proven his courage and knowledge of Indian warfare again and again to the cost of those who opposed him. He was a man who hesitated at nothing when duty called, and one whom the renegade had vowed should taste more of torture, if he ever fell into his hands, than had any other victim.

Girty might threaten what should be done to the major ; but the latter must be captured first, and so far that despicable villain—that white man leagued with the Indians against his own race—had not succeeded in his efforts.

Teddy and I finally ceased to ask questions, not that we were satisfied with the information gained ; but because we feared to weary those brave men with our chatter, and thus give them the impression that we were no more than foolish children.

It was not light when we went into the block-house for something to eat. The last time I had partaken of food it was as if each particle would choke me before it could be forced down ; but now I felt the pangs of hunger, as did my comrade, for much joy had brought with it a realization of our necessities.

We counted on finding the women and children

asleep ; but at least two of them were in much the same condition as ourselves, and Elizabeth Zane and Esther Hubbard came forward softly lest the others should be awakened, saying to us that they had made ready a meal for our benefit.

“ We could not sleep,” Esther replied, when I chided her for not taking better care of herself. “ You should be able to understand why, since neither you nor Teddy went to rest when the opportunity offered.”

“ The knowledge that we are now as safe as can be when nigh to four hundred savages are outside the stockade has propped my eyes open,” I said laughingly, seeing that she had turned the tables on me.

Then I told them of the good news regarding Major McCulloch’s coming, and when the sum of my information was imparted, we four made merry over the meal, as do those whom death has passed by after lingering long close at hand.

Before our feasting came to an end, for the girls had laid out a bountiful supply of dried venison, and corn-bread with pork fat, some of the older women awakened and at once set about the duties of the day, knowing that much cooking must be done now the garrison had so greatly increased in numbers.

I do not think happier people could have been found than were we, whose sorrows and dangers had been more than the ordinary even among those on the frontier, but after a short time our thoughts went back to those dear ones so lately and cruelly taken from us, and bitter tears mingled with the laughter.

There was no longer any need for the women to mold bullets or make cartridges, for we were rich in ammunition, and of such force that the men would be able to perform all the work pertaining to the defense ; but Elizabeth and Esther insisted that they be allowed to do duty at the stockade as formerly, when they took the place of men and held their own with unexcelled bravery.

After a time we fell to speculating as to what hour Major McCulloch and his party might be expected, and were yet discussing the question when a great shout arose from the outside, causing Teddy and me to run out of the building at full speed, the two girls following close at our heels.

The first man I saw on guard duty was Master Merrill, and him I asked for the meaning of the outcry.

“The first of the major’s force had just come in view,” he replied, whereat I clambered up on

the platform beside him ; but could see nothing save the log houses, all of which, as I knew full well, contained a certain number of savages.

The day was dawning, and the whole country lay clear before us, yet a stranger would have said that neither friend nor foe was within the range of one's vision.

Teddy joined me as soon as possible, Elizabeth and Esther remaining on the ground near at hand because, forsooth, there was no room for them on the narrow ledge of wood.

“Where did you see the man ?” Teddy asked, after searching in vain with his eyes.

“Yonder to the left. He was mounted, and rode into view for an instant as if spying out the situation. We shouted that he might know the savages had not gained possession of the fort.”

“What reason have you for believing he was one of Major McCulloch's force ?” I asked like a simple, knowing full well there could be no other white man near-about.

“He was on horseback, as Colonel Swearingen told us the major and his party would come, and I venture to say, lad, that we have no other friends within many a long mile.”

“Think you they will attempt to come in while it is light ?”

“It was allowed he would have not less than twenty-five, and we have already seen that fifteen good men could fight their way through when the moon was bright, therefore I’m counting on seeing them ’twixt now and noon.”

“And once they are here the siege will be at an end!” Teddy cried, as if to remind himself of a very pleasant fact.

Master Merrill looked to him gravely for an instant, and then asked curiously :

“Who has been telling you such yarns?”

“Is it not so?” the lad queried in surprise. “Will the savages be so foolish as to loiter around here after we have so many brave men to defend the fort?”

“Simon Girty is not one who may be easily frightened, and so long as he can hold his brutes to the work, he will remain. With so large a force much food will be needed, and it may not be a long job to starve us out, if the scoundrels keep well under cover, doing no more than pick off those who foolishly expose themselves.”

Here was a new danger; one that I had failed to count when speculating upon the possibilities.

It had seemed to me that after our store of ammunition was replenished we need fear nothing more; but now I knew, from the manner in

which Master Merrill spoke, that he and some of the others had been discussing the question of a famine.

A look of blank dismay came over Teddy's face, and I saw the two girls glance at each other in alarm.

We all had known, without realizing it, how small was the stock of provisions; but it had seemed ample while we were alone. Now that we were like to have added to our company fifty or more, it was little wonder that those who had discussed the matter were grave with apprehensions for the future.

The most serious of all, as it then seemed to me, was the probability that Simon Girty could come near to guessing the condition of affairs among us.

He knew, beyond a question, that we had fled to the fort with short warning, otherwise the store of powder would not have been so scanty, and it was reasonable to suppose that food might soon be lacking.

Five minutes previous I had been congratulating myself because it was likely Major McCulloch would bring a large force with him, and now I fell to hoping he might conclude not to make any effort at gaining entrance.

The forebodings in my heart were greater than had been the short-lived exultation, and my companions were even more depressed.

“But for the fact that you four have shown yourselves of the right stuff, I would not have spoken regarding what bids fair to become a serious matter for us,” Master Merrill said after a brief pause. “I hold to it that those on whom we depend should know the worst, in order that they may govern themselves accordingly, and while all hands were rejoicing because Colonel Swearingen and his men had come, I told my wife of the fear which fell upon me as the last brave fellow entered the gate. ‘They are like to starve here, with not a chance of fighting for life, save it be against such odds as no man should be willing to take.’ That I said to her while the others were mad with joy.”

“And what did she say, Master Merrill?” Esther asked, standing on tiptoes that he might the better hear her softly spoken words.

“That it was easier to starve than be tortured at the stake by such as Simon Girty has gathered around him.”

“In that she was right!” Elizabeth Zane cried emphatically. “It is an hundred times better to die here among our friends than in the midst of

those brutes, and if it so be starvation comes among us, I hope the gate will be fastened securely that the faint-hearted ones cannot wrench it open."

All this time it had seemingly gone from our minds that Major McCulloch's force was near at hand, seeking some means of entering the stockade, and whatever our plight, they were entitled to all the credit one could give them for having ventured out on such a desperate errand, when, perhaps, every one of us was a stranger to them.

We were reminded of their nearness, however, by a cry from the sentinel who stood at the western end of the fortification, and, gazing in the direction indicated by the man's outstretched finger, we saw no less than a dozen horsemen in a clearing less than a quarter of a mile from the village.

"They must have come in goodly numbers, if they can send out such a party scouting," I heard Master Merrill mutter, and ventured to suggest :

"Perhaps that is the entire company."

"I'm doubtful of it, lad, for the other showed himself in this quarter—There! Do you see four or five on the crest of the hill?"

I could see them, and plainly.

Both parties appeared to be searching for the best method of approach, and it was a certainty that Major McCulloch had gathered a band sufficiently large to push their way through whatsoever portion of the Indian lines best suited their purpose.

Truly we were at a sorry pass when, needing aid sorely, we trembled because of its coming !

Then Esther spoke eagerly, hearing us count the horsemen in the two parties :

“Surely, after arriving with so many, they may go out and drive the savages away !”

“I reckon that will be tried before we come very near starving ; but it'll cost considerable blood. I allow that Girty has got no less than three hundred and fifty men ; it doesn't stand to reason that he has lost more than fifty, counting those killed by the cannon. If it came to our 'driving them away,' we'd be obliged to leave enough here in the fort to make a good defense in case of such disaster as was the ambush, and the odds would be heavy against us, to say nothing of the fact that the brutes would be under cover, with us in the open.”

“That is, if they continue to hold possession of the houses,” I added.

“Aye, lad, and you can count on their doing so

now we've a larger force. There won't be any more assaults, that's certain; but I'm fearing they'll sit down there like hungry wolves, waiting till hunger drives us out."

The old hunter was interrupted by the reports of two or three muskets in the distance, just beyond the village, and we who stood at the stockade did not need any other evidence to convince us that Major McCulloch had decided upon his method of entering the fort.

"It won't be any long flight," Master Merrill said to me, as he peered out over the cleared space between the fort and the log houses in the hope of seeing a savage to whom he could send a message in the shape of a bullet. "Horsemen can't skulk from one tree to another; but must ride straight on, and the quicker the better, according to my way of thinking."

"Four men to stand by the gate!" Colonel Sheppard shouted, and Teddy and I would have obeyed the summons but that the order was executed before we could so much as move, for which I was thankful, because I burned to see the sight.

Mounted men opposed to savages was such a fight as I had never seen nor heard of, and despite all the danger I was eager to see how this

famous Indian-fighter, Major McCulloch, would manage the affair.

Even as I read over the lines just written it seems almost impossible that a lad, in danger of being shot down from the outside at any moment, and of dying from starvation, or of being forced to surrender to a merciless foe if the garrison held out many days—it seems impossible, I say, that a lad so situated should have a curiosity to witness a battle between his friends and enemies, however novel it might be, yet I have set down only the truth.

At the moment I forgot all else save that which was to be done, and gazed over the stockade eagerly, thinking not of the fact that I was exposing myself to an Indian bullet.

We had not long to wait.

From around the hill came a troop of men riding rapidly, with guns at their shoulders ready to fire, although for the life of me I failed to see how it would be possible to take aim while the horses were in motion, and then we saw that Simon Girty was ready to meet them, although not in such manner as necessitated coming out into the open at once.

It was as if a solid sheet of flame burst from the Zane house full upon that column of men and

horses, and immediately it swerved to one side, two or three of the brave fellows clutching the manes of their steeds to save themselves from falling when the Indian lead struck home.

“Three wounded, but none killed,” Master Merrill said, half to himself, as if counting the cost.

As the horsemen wheeled toward the left not a gun was fired, and I could readily understand why. It would have been folly to waste ammunition against the walls of a log house, and the charges might be needed.

Then it was that two score of savages started across the open just beyond range of our guns, to check the party from coming directly toward the gate of the fort, while another and a larger crew ran at full speed from the buildings in the rear of the village, to occupy the places in the Zane house just vacated by the first squad.

“Simon Girty is showing what he knows about fighting, and he got it all from Simon Kenton, at a time when he passed for an honest man,” Master Merrill muttered, giving no heed to the questions I asked regarding this last move of the savages.

If the renegade had counted that his forty brutes could check or drive back the same number

of white men, he must have been grievously disappointed at that moment, when the horsemen wheeled suddenly, riding directly down upon the painted scoundrels, discharging their weapons with accurate aim meanwhile.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAJOR McCULLOCH.

As nearly as I could guess, there were no less than forty mounted men who had made this gallant dash upon an equal number of savages ; but with the knowledge that only a short distance to the left, sheltered by the log house, lay three hundred or more brutes ready to spring out at the first favorable instant.

Instead of riding directly in advance of, or behind, his men, Major McCulloch was on the left of the body nearer the settlement, and fully thirty paces away.

It seemed as if he was not content with so much of danger as threatened in that mad dash across the open, but must needs seek out for himself a yet more exposed position, if indeed that were possible.

The reports of the muskets rang out faster and more furious, mingled with the thud of horses' hoofs, until it was as if peals of thunder were

coming from the clear sky, and now and then sharp, savage yells, which told of wounds, sounded high above all.

Surely it was a battle.

Forty against more than three hundred, and as its purpose the aiding of strangers whose skins were white like those of the brave horsemen who galloped on as if pleased by such deed of daring.

Since that day I have seen many desperate maneuvers; have taken part myself when the odds were nearly as great; but of a verity I never saw before nor since anything which equaled that onrush of mounted men in the very face of death.

We, to whose rescue they were riding thus recklessly, made no sound, save by the reports of our muskets.

There was in the venture such reckless disorder, such wondrous courage shown, all in our behalf, that we were breathless with fear lest the brave band would be shot down before our very eyes while we were helpless to aid.

However, we in the stockade were able to be of some little service, for there were few of Simon Girty's crew who dared come within range of our guns, and those who did thus venture were

quickly put out of the battle, for at a time like that no man could afford to miss his aim.

Before the horsemen had covered half the distance which separated them from us, we saw that Simon Girty did not depend alone upon the small force which he had sent to intercept the white men.

An hundred or more, most likely picked warriors, could be seen advancing at full run from between the buildings until sheltered by the Zane house, when they opened fire upon the major's little band, wounding three of the horses, and thus breaking the formation of the command, for the beasts, maddened by pain, plunged here and there in such fashion as to impede those directly in the rear.

Thus it was that the brave fellows who had ridden far to aid us of Fort Henry were thrown into seeming confusion, a situation which the savage foe did not lose time in turning to his own advantage.

Now it was almost a hand-to-hand encounter ; the white men working their way slowly toward the fort, and I noted that two saddles were empty.

From my poor way of telling the story it would seem as if much time was spent in this fight, when, as a matter of fact, I do not believe that

more than five minutes elapsed from the time it began until the conflict was virtually over.

It could readily be seen by us in the fort how Major McCulloch had earned his reputation for being a great fighter.

It seemed to me as if the man courted danger, rather than made any attempt at avoiding it, and when the Indians had succeeded in partially checking the speed of the animals by throwing them into confusion, he rode alone, fully fifty yards in advance of any of his comrades, into that body of Simon Girty's brutes which had first come out to intercept the rush, striking down savage after savage with the short saber he carried, until it appeared to me as if he might single-handed cleave every feather-tufted head among them.

Owing to this recklessness, and even at this day I can call it by no other name, he became so far separated from his command as to seem absolutely alone, and the men, true to their orders, were bearing down directly upon the gate.

"Stand by to open it!" I heard Colonel Shepard shout to those on guard, and he cried an instant later, "Now is the time!"

The heavy gate was swung outward, open to

its fullest extent, and one after another the brave fellows rode in at full speed, the two riderless horses following.

Major McCulloch was not with his command.

Being separated from them, as I have said, he found such a number of savages between himself and the stockade that it would have been worse than madness had he attempted to ride on, and there was nothing left but to put spurs to his horse, dashing forward toward that point where the fewest enemies could be seen.

A great cry of disappointment and fear burst from the lips of all who witnessed what of a surety appeared to be the greatest of disasters, for now was come the time when the major seemingly rode straight unto his death.

The direction which he had taken, forced on by circumstances, led him directly to the hill, and we could see even beyond the settlement the savages dividing to the right and the left in order to surround his place of retreat, leaving open only that bluff which was as if a mountain had been riven asunder at some time leaving a sheer descent, as I well knew, of not less than one hundred and fifty feet, at the foot of which flowed Wheeling Creek.

We could see that Girty's crew hemmed the hill in on either side, save where was this sheer descent of which I have spoken.

They were bent on making him a prisoner in order that the renegade might carry into effect his threat, and surely now was come the time when they had him in their power.

"He is lost!" I heard Master Merrill mutter, and Colonel Sheppard's face grew pale as I had never seen it since we were fallen into such dangerous straits.

At risk of setting some words down twice over, I must again describe the situation, that he who may chance to read this poor account of the defense of Fort Henry can understand beyond a possibility of mistake, how near was Major McCulloch come to the stake Simon Girty had threatened should be made ready for him.

He had ridden directly upon a hill which was near to two hundred feet in height, and with a base so small that this crew of three hundred or more could form a treble line around three sides, while the fourth was a cliff down which it seemed no man might leap without absolute certainty of death.

It is safe to say that every man, and nearly every woman, within the fortification was watch-

ing the terrible spectacle of the brave man riding directly to his doom.

We saw him appear, yet mounted, on the brow of the cliff, and there halt, a picture of courage and daring.

We heard shouts from round about the hill, and then saw the savages slowly ascend in a treble line, enclosing the man who above all others they would most delight to torture unto death.

Major McCulloch could not have failed of seeing us, as we saw him.

He raised his cap, swinging it about his head as if to say good-by.

Some of the women within the stockade screamed in their agony, and covered their eyes to shut out that fearsome moment when the brave man would be overwhelmed by the painted fiends who panted to lay hands upon him.

Strong men shuddered, and there was something very like a sob in the long breath which Master Merrill drew in as if nerving himself for some terrible work.

The major backed his horse straightway from this cliff at the foot of which flowed Wheeling Creek, and some one near me cried :

“ He is bent on making an attempt to break through the lines ! God grant he may succeed ! ”

“No man, however brave, could force his way through those eager fiends,” Master Merrill muttered. “McCulloch has come to his end, and the pity of it is that death will approach him so slowly !”

Then, suddenly we saw come in sight again, for the major and his steed had disappeared during a moment amid the foliage, the man and his horse.

The beast was plunging forward as if urged by the spurs, and straight at the sheer descent of the precipice he rode, bent, as it then seemed to me, on compassing his own death, rather than allow himself to be taken prisoner by that merciless foe.

We held our breath as animal and rider shot out like an arrow over the brow of the cliff, and then fell, straight down an hundred and fifty feet or more, like a stone dropped from a man's hand, into the waters below.

Remembering my poor father's fate, a feeling of thankfulness came into my heart that the gallant major had chosen this means of going out of the world, rather than afford sport for those wolves in human shape who had believed he was already within their clutches.

So near were the savages to him at the moment

he leaped that, while yet the great waves of water dashed into the air, fifty or more gathered at the brow of the precipice, wondering, no doubt, at the courage which this man had displayed, and then from every one within the stockade came a shout which was as much that of surprise as delight.

The heads of the horse and his rider could be seen above the surface as the beast swam sturdily on toward the opposite shore.

It had not seemed possible any living thing could take that plunge without being dashed to pieces, and yet, so far as we might tell from the distance, both horse and man were none the worse for having made the venture.

The Indians must have been literally stupefied with astonishment, even as we were, for not one of them gathered his wits sufficiently to send a bullet after the fugitive until he had passed beyond range.

Now I know that it may appear to some in the years to come as if I had set down that which was not true, so incredible is it that both man and horse should make that terrible leap for life.

Yet such is the fact, and any who lives near about the mouth of Wheeling Creek will give evidence that from the brow of the cliff to the

surface of the water is not less than an hundred and fifty feet.

In breathless suspense we watched the gallant man and his no less gallant steed as they made their way toward the opposite shore, and then went up a mighty shout from us all, when the horse clambered upon the bank, as the major raised his cap in salute to us, and the two disappeared amid the foliage.

During no less than three or four minutes after the leaves and branches had hidden Major McCulloch from view, it was as if we forgot that Fort Henry was besieged and ours the duty to defend it.

The tongues of the women and the men were loosened, and a tumult of cries, exclamations and words rent the air as each gave vent to his thoughts or his feelings.

“It is the most marvelous deed I ever witnessed,” Master Merrill said, wiping his brow as if it were covered with perspiration brought there by anxiety. “I would never have believed such a thing possible unless mine eyes had witnessed it.”

“He has given them the slip, and in such a fashion that I warrant you every savage on the Ohio River will look upon him from this time out

as being something more than human," another cried, while a third added :

"I venture he himself counted on meeting death when he spurred the horse over the cliff."

Each one of us who had been so long besieged, including Colonel Swearingen's party, made some remark which was listened to by all ; but those who had followed Major McCulloch from their homes so far away, to Wheeling Creek, remained silent.

They were doubtless looking forward to the dangers which must beset their leader, even though he had escaped from Simon Girty's crew, and were anxious regarding the outcome of the attack upon the fort.

With Major McCulloch in the fort every one would have been certain that the savages could not long hold out against us.

Those lately arrived were not acquainted with Colonel Sheppard, and, therefore, may be pardoned for doubting his ability at such a time.

But whatever the misgivings, the hopes, or the fears we may have had, the fact remained that the fort was yet besieged ; that Simon Girty would most likely do all he might toward capturing us, and last, but by no means the least, that our provisions were not sufficient to provide for so many

as were within the stockade, more than eight-and-forty hours at the longest.

This last fact was whispered to me by Esther Hubbard while we two stood listening to the remarks made by our companions concerning Major McCulloch's escape.

She had by accident overheard Colonel Sheppard as he gave the information to Ebenezer Zane; but, brave girl that she was, she repeated it to no one save myself.

"Do not let your mind dwell upon it," I said in as calm a tone as could be assumed. "In eight-and-forty hours many things may happen to our advantage, and we shall not lack for meat while the horses are within the stockade."

The thought of eating horse-flesh was not agreeable to me, although I fail to understand why it should not be a cleanly meat; but I tried to make it appear to Esther as if I would be pleased with such a diet, and believed for the time that her forebodings were banished.

It was now full day.

We had as defenders of the fort fifty-three men experienced in Indian warfare, for thirty-eight had come in from Major McCulloch's force, and our little party, exhausted by long watching, had no longer any need to remain on the alert.

We might seek such repose as was needed, and there was among us hardly one, with the exception of Henry Hubbard, who had not come to the verge of utter collapse, now the excitement produced by direst danger was at an end.

As for myself, it seemed as if I could barely put one foot before another, now I was no longer needed to defend the fort, and Teddy was not a single whit better off.

“It’s time you two lads took a turn at sleeping,” Master Merrill said, suddenly noting the fact that we were like to drop from sheer fatigue. “All hands of us who have kept our eyes open so long may lie down, knowing full well that matters will go on quite as well as if we still stood watch. Go into the block-house, lads, and do not venture out again before to-morrow morning.”

“These two girls need rest fully as much as do we,” I replied, pointing to Elizabeth and Esther, and the old hunter turned upon them as if in anger.

“Why do you not take better care of yourselves? You should have been asleep within half an hour after Swearingen’s party came in, for when they arrived we no longer needed to call upon the women for protection.”

“We could not sleep then because of excite-

ment," Elizabeth replied with a laugh, "and, afterward, it seemed necessary we watch the movements of Major McCulloch and his men. Think you, sir," she added, "that the major is in safety?"

"Not yet, girl; but he who could leap over yonder cliff and afterward ride off as if without having received a wound, may be depended upon to care for himself, no matter how many yelling fiends may be at his heels."

After a little more of conversation similar to this, we four went into the block-house, and it is safe to say that, within five minutes after lying down upon such beds as could be had, each was sleeping soundly.

It seemed to me as if I had no more than lost consciousness in slumber before I was awakened, although my mother afterward declared that I had been asleep no less than five hours.

It was the sound of lamentation which aroused me, and, sitting up suddenly, I stared around stupidly, wondering what new affliction had come upon us.

Women and children were weeping, some moving in and out of the building restlessly, while others crouched upon the earth that formed the floor, as they gave way to grief.

There is little wonder that I was alarmed.

During that terrible time after we few survivors came up out of the ambush, not a single sound of grief could have been heard, although many a poor woman had been sorely stricken, and when the wooden cannon threatened our destruction I heard no sobbing; but now all was sorrow, as if every hope had fled.

I looked in vain for my mother; but not seeing her, asked one of the women what had happened.

She made no answer, and, hastily catching up my musket, I ran out of the block-house while examining the weapon to see if it was charged, for I could but believe the Indians had received re-inforcements to such an extent as made it appear positive the fort would be captured.

Once in the open air, however, I came near to dropping my gun, understanding that this affliction which had come upon us would not be cured or prevented by bullets.

The settlement on Wheeling Creek was in flames! From every dwelling came clouds of smoke. The savages were bent on depriving us of all our little belongings after having shed so much noble blood, and on the instant the thought came to me that they were doing us an injury at their own expense, for no longer would the log

houses serve as shelter while they fired at our sentinels.

Colonel Sheppard was standing nearby where I had halted, transfixed with dismay, and while I looked at him he answered the question in my eyes :

“Aye, lad, the fiends are doing their worst ; but, thank Heaven, there is no victim for them to torture. Logs and household goods which are given over to the flames may be replaced. Would that we could as readily call back those who have fallen under their murderous fire !”

“But why is this thing done ?” I asked. “The dwellings served them in good stead if the siege is to be continued.”

“True, lad, and it is the belief of us all that Simon Girty finds it impossible to longer hold the brutes to such a task, else our homes would have been left standing.”

“Do you mean that the siege is over, sir ?” I asked in surprise.

“Not yet, my lad ; but it must soon be unless, perchance, they strive to starve us out by remaining beyond gunshot, and yet such a plan as that would have more chance of success while the villains had a shelter so near at hand as to prevent our sallying forth. The settlement is de-

stroyed ; but our hopes are rising rapidly, for in good truth it seems as if the end of the siege was near at hand."

Esther came to my side at this moment, and shyly slipped her hand in mine, with a pressure which told of sympathy.

Without a doubt her own home had been in ashes many hours ; but she could feel for us who were thus losing our little all.

"Come and speak with Master Merrill," she said in a whisper. "He is rejoicing over this token that the savages are making ready to depart."

"Aye, that he can well do, for his heart is not as sore as those whose homes are being destroyed."

I said more, and no little that was foolish when one realized how much greater might have been the trouble that had come upon us ; but I blush to set it down here, for however timorous I had shown myself at times, never before since these terrible troubles came upon us of Wheeling Creek had I proven myself quite so big a baby.

When my anger had partially spent itself in words I followed Esther, and on arriving near about where Master Merrill was gazing at the conflagration, we found that he had a dozen or

more companions, all of whom were discussing this new phase of affairs.

Then I found that opinions were divided as to whether the burning of the settlement meant the raising of the siege.

Some argued that the torch had been applied by those savages who set Simon Girty's commands in defiance ; that it was simply an exhibition of brutish rage and love for wanton destruction ; not an indication that they were about to draw off.

This reasoning seemed plausible, as did also the contrary.

One man urged that, unless the renegade himself had given orders for the burning, the flames would not have burst from every building so nearly at the same time ; that it was the last act of the enraged beasts in human form.

All agreed that with the destruction of the settlement the savages could do us no further injury, save through an attack upon the fort which was now ably defended ; but we soon came to learn that this was not to be the ending of our trials.

Thus we speculated, while the homes which had cost so much of labor and of privation, even suffering, were but a mass of seething flames, and I understood now why the women had given

way to tears when at more desperate times they were calm and courageous.

Great griefs may be borne in silence, for one battles against them ; but it is the lesser ones, and, perchance, the lesser ones following close upon the heels of the greater, that cause us to show weakness.

After the first flush of anger had passed away every man sprang to that side of the stockade nearest the burning buildings in the hope of being able to send death among the scoundrels, and once more Teddy and I stood upon the narrow platform, watching eagerly for an opportunity to strike down those who, having murdered the best among us, were wantonly destroying the fruits of long and arduous labor.

CHAPTER XIX.

DESTRUCTION.

THERE was many a good marksman on the stockade of Fort Henry, men who seldom missed their aim, and yet we were unable to inflict so much as the slightest wound upon those who were wantonly destroying our homes.

The savages took good care not to come within range of our muskets ; but danced to and fro at a safe distance, howling and shrieking in fiendish glee, perhaps in the hope that we might make a sally.

It would have been utter folly, and produced no good results, had our people gone out to punish the painted crew.

The flames had such hold upon the buildings that we could not hope to save them, and by venturing forth we should simply have given Simon Girty's savage following an opportunity to shoot us down.

Had we, by such a course, killed a dozen of

them, it would not have made amends for a single life that might have been sacrificed by our efforts.

Therefore it was that no one suggested such a movement as a sally, and all stood idly by, watching the destruction ; but on the alert for the lightest carelessness on the part of the enemy.

Now it was that more than one who had fled from the settlement into the fort bewailed his or her neglect in taking proper precautions.

Had the settlers done that which common prudence dictated, then indeed would nearly all of their household goods have been saved, and surely we had ample time for the removal of the most valuable of our possessions.

I was yet standing by Esther's side gazing at the spectacle, when my mother came up, and, linking her arm in mine, gazed out over the plain in silence.

There was in my mind the fear that this last affliction might have smitten her deeply, as it did the other women, and I would have turned away, taking both her and Esther with me, but that mother said :

“Let us remain here, my son. There is no reason why we should not see the last of our home.”

“I thought it might not be best for you to gaze

at such a cruel sight," I replied, whereat she answered with so much of cheeriness in her tone that I was surprised :

"After all the trouble that has come upon us, lad, the burning of the buildings seems so light as to be of little account. I would that all the settlers had saved as much as we."

"And yet our belongings do not occupy any great amount of space in the block-house," I said, with a feeble attempt at a laugh, whereat she and Esther fell to reckoning up how much we had brought away, and by the time they were finished it seemed as if we were rich, as compared with many another family.

A log house built substantially, as were those in the settlement, has in it a vast amount of fuel, and affords material for a fire many an hour after such dwellings as are built nowadays would be in ashes.

Therefore it was that the savages were wearied with dancing and yelling long before the conflagration had come to an end, and we saw them slink off in this direction or that until not more than a dozen remained in view.

It seemed to me as if these brutes had simply crawled away to rest, for they, like white men, need sleep at times, and because we three had

stood so long in one position I suggested that we return to the block-house, whereat mother, suddenly bethinking herself that I might require some rest, said readily :

“ It is well that we should do so. You are to lie down once more, and when next you awaken Esther and I will have prepared as substantial a meal as can be devised from the scanty stores.”

“ It is not well that you set forth much in the way of provisions.”

This caution was prompted by the knowledge that now was come the time when we ought to be on short allowance ; in fact, I had expected Colonel Sheppard would give some such order before this ; but even though he delayed in doing so, there was no good reason why I should waste food which might soon be needed sorely.

“ You shall have so much as suits your hunger, my son, however small the store, for you have not eaten an amount of food in the past eight-and-forty hours sufficient to make up one hearty meal.”

I was about to repeat that which was in my mind regarding our duty in the matter of economy, when the savages, as yet hidden from view, burst forth in prolonged shouts of triumph and joy.

Every one within the stockade turned quickly toward that direction from which had come the yelling, and the same question was in the minds of all.

What new disaster was about to befall us? What other mischief could they come upon after having destroyed so many lives, and taken even our poor shelters from us?

It would seem as if already were we reduced to that condition where there was nothing more to suffer or to lose, and yet the howls of the brutes told for a surety that they had found some opportunity of inflicting yet further injury upon us who had suffered so much.

“Can it be that they have caught Major McCulloch?” I asked, stepping forward quickly to where Master Merrill stood by the side of his wife on the alert for new danger.

“Not so, lad,” the old hunter replied confidently. “We last saw him on the other bank of the river, and the savages made no attempt at pursuit, for the good reason that it would have been useless. He has more sense than to venture back single-handed, after knowing that every one of his company, save those who were killed outright, had gained a place of safety.”

“Then it must be that other settlers have come

to our rescue, and been, perhaps, ambushed by Girty's crew!" I exclaimed, whereat Master Merrill shook his head.

"I know of none anywhere in the vicinity who are not already here, and besides, if it was an ambush, we should have heard the reports of fire-arms."

As with Master Merrill, so it was with all the others inside the stockade; not a man could so much as guess the meaning of the outcries which had alarmed us, and during fifteen minutes or more we stood gazing intently in this direction or that, but seeing nothing save the burning dwellings which were now little more than heaps of glowing embers.

Then we understood it all, and to our sorrow!

Half a dozen of the fiends came into view dragging one of the cows after them, forcing her to the ruins of the nearest building, where she was half butchered, and then flung on to the live coals.

We of the settlement owned in cattle near to three hundred head, all of which at the first alarm had been driven into the forest, and the cows, suffering because of not being milked, had probably made their way back in the hope of finding relief.

I had thought once or twice regarding the cattle ; but with no uneasiness, believing the reports of the muskets would keep them at a distance ; but here was good proof that I had been over-confident.

Although a few moments previous we had believed ourselves so destitute that nothing more could be taken from us, save life itself, yet it was that we were to be still further bereft.

It appeared as if much suffering had rendered us indifferent, for but few exclamations of anger or of sorrow could be heard as one after another of the cows or the oxen were dragged up to the ruins of our dwellings, half killed, and then thrown into the fire to be roasted.

Simon Girty's band of brutes were to feast this day, while we watched, knowing that very shortly, unless they were minded to raise the siege, we should be starved.

The odor of meat roasting assailed our nostrils, exciting hunger which was not allayed when we saw the fiends cutting long strips from the half-cooked carcasses, even though the spectacle was disgusting.

It appeared as if these brutes in human form had grown drunken with the blood, and while eating they danced to and fro, shaking the meat

that we might see it, yelling meanwhile like demons.

I had no desire to gaze at this orgy ; it only served to rouse my anger, and that lad makes a foolish show of himself who gives way to wrath when no good can come of it.

Teddy McLaughlin came up, and I asked if he had been assigned to any duty.

None save that which I have set myself," he replied moodily. "There is no good reason why I should look at the slaughter of the poor beasts, and I am minded to turn my back."

"The same thought had come to me," I said, linking my arm in his, and we went across the parade ground to a point where the block-house shut off a view of that scene of wanton destruction.

Before we had been in this comparatively secluded place half a dozen minutes I came to understand that my comrade was disposed to talk of nothing save Elizabeth Zane, and, much as I admired that brave girl, it was not pleasing to listen to a long list of her admirable qualities, particularly when there was in my mind another girl within the stockade who had equal claim upon the praise and admiration of us all.

However, there was no stopping Teddy now

that he had well launched himself on the subject, and I was forced, by my friendship for the lad if nothing more, to keep up an appearance of listening, although I could not for the life of me follow understandingly all that he said.

My eyes roamed here and there listlessly until I saw Henry Hubbard come out of the block-house in what appeared to be a stealthy manner, and with something under his hunting shirt which caused it to bulge in a most singular fashion.

It seemed very much as if the lad wished to escape notice, and, indeed, he must have believed himself entirely alone in this portion of the stockade, because nearly all the occupants of Fort Henry were at the opposite side, as I have already said, watching the butchery of the cattle.

Young Hubbard glanced around furtively ; but without looking toward us who were partially screened from view by a stack of fire-wood, and then stole across the grounds in the direction of the place where Teddy McLaughlin and I had fought with the two Indians.

There was no good reason, so far as I could make out, why he should be sneaking around the enclosure in such a fashion, and, distrusting the lad because of the cowardice he had already displayed, I fancied he was doing mischief.

“Look behind you,” I said in a whisper, interrupting Teddy in his praises of Elizabeth Zane’s skill as a housewife. “What reason can that lad have for sneaking about in such a manner?”

Teddy did as I had requested ; but without making any comment.

After remaining silent a moment I made as if to rise to my feet, saying in a low tone at the same time :

“I am minded to know what he is about. He can be up to no good ; but yet I question whether he dares do any wrong, cur that he is.”

“Stay where you are,” Teddy said quickly, clutching the skirt of my shirt to prevent further movement. “We are partially hidden here, and can watch the coward ; but once we show ourselves he will take to his heels, and I reckon you would not care to have any decided trouble with him, because of his sister.”

I at once sank to my knees in such manner that the stack of wood hid all save my head, and we two lads watched young Hubbard in silence.

Glancing furtively over his shoulder from time to time, he went straight on toward that portion of the stockade where the two Indians had succeeded in effecting an entrance, and halted close behind the timbers.

He looked toward the throng who were gazing at the wanton butchery, and must have satisfied himself that all within the enclosure were at that point.

Then he began digging in the ground where, during the struggle for life, the Indians and we two lads had cut up the turf with our feet until it was as if one had been working there with a hoe.

“What can he be doing?” I asked in a whisper, thoroughly mystified by the odd maneuver.

“Digging a hole,” Teddy replied grimly, and my eyes had already given me as much information.

Again I would have risen to my feet; but once more Teddy held me back, and we watched the lad's every movement, heeding not the savage yells in the distance, until he had made so much of an excavation as would have sufficed to bury his own worthless head.

When this was done he drew from beneath his hunting shirt some bulky object, the nature of which could not be determined from the distance at which we stood, laid it carefully within the hole, and began replacing the earth.

Not until his work was completed would Teddy allow me to move, and then, as we rose to our feet he walked rapidly toward the throng at the

other side of the stockade without having observed us.

“ We should have interrupted him in his task,” I said hotly, vexed with myself for having remained in hiding while the coward did his will, and to this petulant remark Teddy replied in a tone of satisfaction :

“ What can it matter whether we interrupted him at the moment, or waited until he could not shelter himself by a falsehood ? If by any chance he has been burying some article of value belonging to himself, then would you have cut a sorry figure before Elizabeth Hubbard, who might in good truth accuse you of having a grudge against the lad.”

In this Teddy was right, and now, instead of being in haste to advance, I hung back in the shadow of the wood-stack until the coward was lost to view among the women and children.

Then we two went quite as stealthily as had young Hubbard, toward the scene of the digging, and not many minutes were required for us to undo his work.

I already knew the lad to be a thorough coward, because of that we had had ample proof ; but never would I have charged him with that which he had done, unless for this evidence.

He had buried no less than ten pounds of bacon, taken from the stores inside the block-house as a matter of course, and all he was guilty of in the past seemed as nothing compared with this dastardly act.

Most likely he had heard the men talking of the possibility of a famine among us, and was minded to lay in a store of food for his own precious self, that he might feast while the remainder of us, perchance, were starving.

Teddy and I looked at each other in silence fully a minute before either could speak; we were literally overwhelmed by the enormity of such an offense.

“The cur is neither willing to aid in his own defense, or bear an equal amount of suffering with those who are striving to keep him from out the clutches of the savages!” Teddy finally exclaimed, and as he spoke there came to my mind with a great rush, the knowledge of how much sorrow this act would cost Esther, once it was made public.

“What is to be done?” I asked, so disturbed in mind as to be powerless for intelligent thought.

“I reckon we can give him a disagreeable surprise, by carrying this bacon back to the block-house.”

As he spoke Teddy had removed the meat, and was now covering the excavation as Henry Hubbard had left it.

“That is no fit punishment for such a crime !” I cried angrily.

“So much I’m ready to admit ; but, according to my ideas, it is for you to say what shall be done. There is little fear he’ll get another chance to hoard up provisions for himself, so the company will be none the worse because of him.”

“And are you willing to let the matter drop there ?” I asked in surprise, whereupon he laughed heartily.

“That you are a brave lad, Cornie Dunbar, every man, woman and child within this stockade can testify ; but you are exceedingly thick-headed at times. Think the matter over, and when you have decided what course ought to be pursued, I am with you ; but first we’ll carry the bacon back lest we be found with it in our possession and accused of such a deed as I had never believed could be committed by one with the blood of white men in his veins.”

I followed my comrade in silence, and during the short walk came to fully understand the situation, as had Teddy McLaughlin even while I stood like a simple, ready to bawl throughout the fort

that we had discovered one of our number to be worse than a traitor.

To show Henry up in the light which he richly merited, would be to overwhelm his mother and sisters. If I raised my voice against him, however great the wrong he would have done, Esther might well consider me her enemy, for the lad was already so far lost to all sense of manliness that the unmasking would cause him little shame ; yet the remainder of the family could not fail of being overwhelmed by the disgrace.

Clearly I was warranted in keeping secret that which we had learned by chance, and it was as if Teddy could read the decision in my eyes, for he said with a laugh as we entered the deserted block-house :

“ I can see that you are not so eager to make public all we have discovered. It appears to me that our mouths are sealed, because of the scoundrel's mother and sisters.”

“ In that you are right, Teddy, and I owe you much for preventing me from doing what would have cost great sorrow.”

“ We won't make overly long talk about that part of it, lad,” he replied with a laugh, throwing the bacon among the supplies which had been set apart for the use of those who had come to our

assistance. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to show the cur up as he deserves; but since it can't well be done, I propose that you and I give him a generous bit of advice."

"You shall take charge of the matter, for I am indeed thick-headed, and remember, that it will be impossible to speak too harshly."

"Don't fear that he will be let off easily, and if the cur is capable of shame, he won't hold his head very high after I am done with him."

Then we went out in search of young Hubbard, and while crossing the parade ground my mother and Esther came up arm in arm, sickened, most like, by the scene of destruction.

How fervently I thanked Teddy McLaughlin in my heart for preventing me from doing that which would have cost her so much sorrow!

Already was she as a daughter to my mother, and if there had been no other reason to restrain my tongue, I ought to have kept secret her brother's shame because of all the sympathy she had shown for my loved ones.

CHAPTER XX.

RAISING THE SIEGE.

Now that I am come so near the end of this poor tale, which was begun only that what we of Wheeling Creek did by way of defending Fort Henry might be the better known, it seems much like a wilful waste of time and words to spend any more on such a cur as Henry Hubbard.

It is well that he be dismissed from the story speedily, and without overly many words regarding the interview Teddy McLaughlin and I had with him while Simon Girty's crew slaughtered our cattle.

The cowardly lad did not attempt to deny that with which we charged him, for he could make no defense.

One would have said that he expected we counted on taking some revenge at once, and he slunk against the stockade with one arm partially raised to shield his face, as if anticipating a flogging.

During ten minutes or more, speaking in a

guarded tone lest the others should hear, Teddy told the fellow what he might look for if anything of the kind was attempted again, and gave him such a tongue-lashing as would have aroused almost any one who was not wholly lost to a sense of shame through cowardice.

Had I stood in the lad's place, I would have welcomed blows rather than such words, and I really hoped that, because of the sense of manhood which ought to be in every boy's heart, he might receive us with blows.

But never a word did he speak, and when we turned away he crawled off toward the block-house that he might, as Teddy suggested, be the first on hand when dinner was made ready.

By the time we two lads had finished this disagreeable task the savages had butchered the last of our poor cattle, and, evidently wearied by their labors and gorged with the half-cooked beef, were lying here and there on the ground just beyond range of our muskets.

The one question in the minds of us all was whether the siege would be raised, or if Simon Girty could persuade his wolfish following to wait until we should be starved out.

Thus far the siege had been a costly one for the Indians.

We estimated that they had lost between sixty and an hundred of their number, counting those who were probably killed by the bursting of the wooden cannon, and never a man of us had been so much as scratched since we gained the fortification.

But of a verity our loss had been heavy before the fort was regularly invested.

Twenty-three were killed in the ambush, and two of Major McCulloch's men were shot dead while fighting their way into the stockade; but since then the savages had not been able to do us the slightest harm.

Master Mansfield, who had come with the major's company, believed Simon Girty could persuade his crew to continue the siege, because it must be known that, with such an addition to our force, the supply of provisions would be speedily exhausted.

On the other hand, Master Merrill felt confident the worst was over, and spoke of setting out for his clearing within eight-and-forty hours, much as though he had received advices from Girty himself.

Colonel Sheppard did not venture an opinion; but took such measures as prudence dictated, chiefest among which was an allowancing of the

company to a certain quantity of bacon or pork, and corn-meal, for each person.

All the provisions were collected at one end of the block-house, and over them was stationed a guard, with orders to deal out only so much of each article as was set down in the paper drawn up by the commandant.

It would no longer be possible for Henry Hubbard to get more than did any other person, and even a single share was far in excess of what he deserved.

The ammunition was portioned out in the same manner, and after such work was done it appeared that we had sufficient food to satisfy our hunger during eight-and-forty hours.

If the siege should be continued longer than that, then would we begin on a diet of horse-flesh, of which there was plenty.

“We can hold out no less than two weeks in such fashion as is now decided upon,” Master Merrill said, in reply to a question of mine, “and if yonder villains are content to wait so long, you may set it down that I’ve forgotten all I ever knew about the brutes.”

“Then it is in your mind that we are no longer in imminent danger?” I said, with a question in my tone.

“He who comes to harm now can set it down to his own carelessness,” the old hunter said confidently, and I looked around for Teddy, that he might share in the relief of mind which was mine after receiving such a statement from one whom I believed knew the savages better than did any other within the stockade.

To go into detail of what we said and did from this moment until the next morning, would be simply to write down useless words, for the defense of Fort Henry was at a close—the destruction of the settlement on Wheeling Creek had been accomplished, and the siege was quickly raised.

As a matter of course careful guard was kept during the remainder of the day and throughout the night.

The women were no longer called upon for aid, because we had an ample force of men, and I saw Esther Hubbard only when I went into the block-house for my share of the provisions.

When the sun rose next morning not a tuft of feathers could be seen.

Since midnight the stillness had been unbroken by the crack of a musket, and Master Merrill said to me as we two stood side by side on the stockade overlooking the ruins of the settlement :

“The siege has been raised, lad, and sooner than I dared to hope. There is no reason now why we may not venture out whenever it pleases us so to do.”

“May it not be that this seeming abandonment of their plans is but a trick?” I ventured to ask. “How can you say that the brutes are not hidden close at hand, hoping to catch us in another ambush?”

“For my part I am certain they have given over trying to capture the fort. When the day first dawned I offered myself a fair target in this very place, and yet no bullet came my way. However strict orders Simon Girty may have given, he could not prevent one of those brutes from killing a white man when the opportunity offered, therefore do I know there are none near.”

There is no reason why I should set down the fact that I hoped the old hunter had spoken truly, and yet I was afraid to believe all he said.

Half an hour later, however, we had good proof that the siege was indeed raised.

Master Merrill went to Colonel Sheppard, asking permission to venture out, and for some time the commandant refused positively to open the gate.

When the hunter threatened, however, that he

would make his way over to the stockade if there was no other means of exit, and claimed that it was necessary we know exactly what had been done during the night, the colonel gave in ; but not until this argument had been put forth :

When we were few in numbers, I could well understand that one man must not risk his life, because he might be needed by the others. Now, however, we are no longer short-handed ; if I fall the fort can be ably defended by those whom I leave behind."

"You shall go out through the gate," Colonel Sheppard replied, in the tone of one who doubts the wisdom of his own decision. "If I had held firm when it was claimed that the savages were not near at hand, many who are now dead might be here alive and well ; but if a man is eager to throw his life away, it is difficult to restrain him."

Master Merrill made no reply ; but when the gate was opened he walked boldly out, making no attempt at sheltering himself by running.

It can well be fancied that he was watched by all within the stockade, and as he walked from one ruin to another while the silence remained unbroken, a great hope sprung up in our hearts.

Not until having made a complete circuit of

what had, a few hours previous, been a prosperous settlement, did the old hunter raise his voice, and then it was to cry in an exultant tone :

“ Yonder is the trail of the brutes ! They have gone back as they came, and you of Wheeling Creek need have no fear until the settlement is rebuilt once more, for now there is nothing left to be destroyed.”

Well, we soon learned that Master Merrill spoke only the truth ; but it was not deemed prudent for the women and children to come out of the stockade until eight-and-forty hours had passed, when there would no longer be any danger that stragglers from Simon Girty's crew might sneak back to catch us unawares.

In fact, there was no reason why any save the men should go outside.

Now that the log houses had been destroyed, the settlers must make their homes within the fort until other buildings could be erected, and, few in numbers as we were, this providing dwellings for all would prove a long task.

The first need was to lay in a store of provisions, and when our neighbors had departed we were told off in squads to attend to such work.

There is much of interest that might be set down, beginning from the hour when the settle-

ment was rebuilt ; but I am not the one who should do it.

My only purpose was to tell of the defense we made, and that came to an end when the painted crew drew off baffled.

When perhaps two weeks had passed, Master Hubbard visited the clearing where Teddy and I first saw him ; but only to find a pile of ashes where his house had stood, and, on returning, he decided to cast in his lot with us of Wheeling Creek, a decision which caused me great satisfaction, because my heart would have been sore indeed had Esther gone from us at that time.

Before Master Hubbard had begun work on his new home, however, a party of men halted overnight at the Creek, announcing that they were journeying to Pennsylvania, and the cowardly Henry pleaded long but successfully to accompany them.

Perhaps his father realized that the lad had not earned an enviable name in our section of the country, and finally gave his consent, for which I mentally thanked him. A cur like young Hubbard is not a desirable neighbor on the frontier, and I believe that all, outside the lad's own family, were heartily glad to see the last of him.

Both Teddy McLaughlin and I remained at

Wheeling Creek until it grew to be a veritable village, and we were counted as the heads of families ; but there has never been a moment in our lives when time could dim ever so slightly the lightest incident connected with the defense of Fort Henry.

THE END.



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