A HERO OF TICONDEROGA

Title: A Hero of Ticonderoga
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Release Date: January 25, 2011 [EBook #35080]
Language: English
Character set encoding: UTF-8

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By

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Burlington, VT.
Hobart J. Shanley & Co.
Publishers

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CHAPTER I—COMING INTO THE WILDERNESS

The low sun of a half-spent winter afternoon streaked and splashed the soft undulations of the forest floor with thin, infrequent lines, and scattered blotches of yellow light among the thickening shadows.

A solitary hunter, clad in buckskin and gray homespun, thridded his way among the gray trunks of the giant trees, now blended with them and their shadows, now briefly touched by a glint of sunlight, now casting up the powdery snow from the toes of his snowshoes in a pearly mist, now in a golden shower, yet moving as silently as the trees stood, or shadows brooded, or sunlight gleamed athwart them.

Presently he approached a narrow road that tunnelled, rather than seamed, the forest, for the giant trees which closely pillared its sides spread their branches across it, leaving the vast forest arch unbroken.

In the silence of the hour and season, which was but emphasized by the outcry of a suspicious jay and the gentler notes of a bevy of friendly chickadees, the alert ear of the hunter caught a less familiar sound. Faint and distant as it was, he at once recognized in it the slow tread of oxen and the creak of runners in the dry snow, and, standing a little aloof from the untrodden road, he awaited the coming of the possibly unwelcome invaders of the wilderness.

A yoke of oxen soon appeared, swaying along at a sober pace, the breath jetting from their nostrils in little clouds that arose and dissolved in the still air with that of their driver, who stood on the front of a sled laden with a full cargo of household stuff. Far behind the sled stretched the double furrow of the runners, deep-scored lines of darker blue than the universal shadow of the forest, a steadfast wake to mark the course of the voyager till the next snow-storm or

the spring thaw cover it or blot it out. As the oxen came opposite the motionless hunter, his attendant jay uttered a sudden discordant cry.

"Whoa, hush! Whoa haw, there! What are you afeard of now? That's nothin' but a jay squallin'." The strong voice of the driver rang through the stillness of the woods, overbearing the monotonous tread of the oxen, the creak of the sled, and the responsive swish and creak of the snow beneath feet and runners.

Unmindful of his voice, the oxen still swerved from the unbeaten track of the forest road and threatened to bring the off runner against one of the great trees that bordered it. The driver sprang from his standing place, and, running forward alongside the cattle, quickly brought them to a halt with a few reassuring words, and a touch of his long, blue-beech gad across their faces.

Looking into the woods to see what had alarmed them, he became aware of the man standing a little way off, as motionless as the great tree trunks around him. Seeing the oxen were now under control, the latter advanced a little and spoke in a low, pleasant voice:

"I didn't go to skeer your oxen, stranger, and was standin' still to let 'em pass, but thet jay squalled at me, an', lookin' this way, I s'pose they ketched a glimpse of my fur cap an' took it for some varmint. Cattle is always lookin' for some sech, in the woods. Your load's all right, I hope," he said, coming into the road and looking at the sled, which, though tipped on some hidden obstruction, was yet in no danger of upsetting its freight.

"Why, you've got women an' childern," and his face lighted up with an expression of pleased interest. "You're comin' in to make a pitch. How far might you be goin', stranger?"

"A little beyond Fort Ti, on this side," the driver of the oxen answered. "I made a pitch there last year. My name's Seth Beeman, and I come from Salisbury, Connecticut, and them on the sled are my wife and children." Seth Beeman knew that, according to the custom of the country and the times, this information would presently be required of him, and the hunter, for such the stranger's dress, long gun and snowshoes proclaimed him to be, had such an honest face he did not hesitate to forestall the inevitable questions.

"I want to know! A Beeman from ol' Salisbury," cried the other. "An' now I wonder if you be akin to my ol' comrade in the Rangers, 'Zekiel Beeman?"

"My father's name was Ezekiel, and he served in Roger's Rangers."

"Give me your hand, friend," cried the hunter, drawing off his mitten with his teeth, and extending his hand as he came near to the other. "Well, I never thought to meet an ol' friend here in these lonesome woods, to-day. Yes, an ol' friend, for that's what a son of 'Zekiel Beeman's is to me, though I never sot eyes on him afore. You've maybe hearn him speak of Job Carpenter? That's my name."

"Carpenter? Yes, the name sounds familiar, but you know father wa'n't a

man of many words and never told us much of his sojerin' days."

"You're right, he wa'n't. We all larnt to keep our heads shut when we was a-scoutin' an' a loud word might cost a man his'n an' many another life."

Seth wondered how long since the hunter had forgotten the lesson, yet he noticed the voice of the other was never high pitched and he never made a sudden, abrupt movement.

"An' so these is your wife an' childern, be they?" said Job, passing toward the sled, whose occupants were so muffled in bed-quilts and blankets that nothing of their forms, and but little of their features, were visible.

"How dedo, marm. How dedo, little uns. Tol'able comf'table, I hope?"

Ruth Beeman answered his kind salutation as audibly as she could out of her mufflings, and the children, a boy of twelve and a girl of three years younger, stared at him with round, wondering eyes.

"It's a hard life that lies afore women an' children in this wilderness," he said to himself, and then, in a louder tone: "Wal, I'm glad you're goin' to be nigh the Fort. There's always a doctor there, an' it's sort o' protection, if the garrison be reg'lars. Now, Seth, start up your team, an' I'll boost on the sled till it's square on the road again."

So saying, he set his shoulder to one of the sled stakes, while Seth carefully started the oxen forward. With a heaving lurch and prolonged creak, the sled settled upon evener ground without disturbance of its passengers or its burden of house gear and provisions, which, till now, had hidden from view of the hunter a gentle little cow in lead close behind it.

"How far be we from the Fort?" Seth asked.

"Nigh onto five mile," the hunter answered, after considering their whereabouts a moment. "After a spell you'll come to a better road on the ice of the crik, if you take the first blazed path beyend here, to your left. It'll fetch you to my cabin, where you'd better stop till morning, for you can't no ways git to your pitch till long arter nightfall. I know where it is, for I come across it, last fall, when I was trappin' mushrat up the crik. My shanty's the first thing in the shape of a dwelling that you'll come to, an' can't miss it if you foller the back track of my snowshoes. It hain't so great, but it's better'n no shelter, an' you're more'n welcome to it. Rake open the fire an' build you a rouster, an' make yourselves to home. I've got some traps to tend to, but I'll be back afore dark," and, almost before they could thank him, he disappeared among the trees.

Seth took his place upon the sled, and, as it moved forward, the forest again resumed its solemnity of silence, that was rather made more apparent than at all disturbed by the slight sounds of the party's progress. It was a silence that their lonely journey had long since accustomed them to, but had not made less depressing, for, in every waking moment, it reminded Seth and his wife how

every foot of it withdrew them further from old friends and old associations, and how long and wearisome the days of its endurance stretched before them.

The remainder of the day was made pleasanter by the chance finding of a friend in a strange land, and with a prospect of spending a night under a roof, for, however it might be, it could but be better than the almost shelterless bivouac that had many times been their night lodging since they entered the great Northern Wilderness, that, within a few years, had become known as the New Hampshire Grants.

More than once, when they had fallen asleep with only the mesh of netted branches between them and the serene stars, they had been awakened by the long howl of the wolves answering one another, or by the appalling scream of a panther. Then, with frequent replenishment of the fire, they had watched out the weary hours till morning, alarmed by every falling brand or sough of the breeze, or resonant crack of frost-strained trees.

Seth looked eagerly for the promised trail and was glad to discover the blazed trees and the netted imprint of snowshoes, that, if but briefly, as certainly, identified the path. He turned his oxen into the diverging road, which, though narrow, gave ample room for the sled. After a little it led to the winding channel of a creek crawling through a marsh, whose looped and matted sedges were in turn bordered by the primeval forest and its bristling abatis of great trees, prostrate and bent in every degree of incline.

At last, as the long shadows began to thicken into the pallid gloom of winter twilight, a little cabin was discovered in a notch of clearing, as gray and silent as the gray woods around it. A thin wisp of smoke climbed from the low chimney against the wall of forest, and a waft of its pungent odor came to the travellers. Even as they drew near, its owner also arrived, and gave them hospitable welcome to his hearth, and presently the little room was aglow with light and warmth.

Here Ruth and little Martha thawed away their cramps and chilliness by the big fireplace, while Seth and his son Nathan, with the hunter's help, unhitched the oxen from the sled. From this they brought the rations of hay and corn, and made the oxen and their comrade, the cow, contented with their roofless lodging behind the cabin.

Then the pork and Indian meal were taken inside. Ruth mixed a johnny-cake with hot water and salt, and set it to bake on its board, tilted before the fire. The frying-pan was filled with pork, and slices of moose meat contributed from Job's larder.

The little party, ranged on rude seats about the fireplace, so great as to be out of all proportion to the room, chatted of things near and afar, while they grew hungry with every sniff of appetizing cookery.

Nathan was all agog at the peltry that hung from innumerable pegs on the

rough log walls. There were skins of many animals that had long been rare, if not extinct, in the old colony where he was born.

There were the broad, round shields of beaver skins, the slenderer and lighter-hued skins of otters, besides the similarly shaped but smaller and darker-colored fisher, with a bundle of the lesser martins, that Job called "saple," and no end of muskrats and minks. There were, also, half a dozen wolf skins, and, conspicuous in size and glossy blackness, were three bear skins, and beside them hung a tawny panther hide, the huge hinder paws and long tail trailing on the puncheon floor, while the cat-like head seemed to prowl, as stealthily as in life, among the upper shadows and flickerings of the firelight.

Quickly noting the boy's interest in these trophies, Job made the round of them all, explaining the habits of each animal, the method of its capture, and giving brief narrations of encounters with the larger ones. He exhibited, with the most pride, a beautiful silver-gray foxskin, and an odd-looking spotted and coarse-haired skin, stuffed with moss into some semblance of its form in the flesh. This he brought to the fireside, and set on its fin-like hinder feet, for the inspection of his guests.

"What on airth is it?" Seth Beeman asked.

"'Tain't of the airth, but of the water," Job answered, with a chuckle. "I killed it on the ice of the lake airly in the winter. One of the sojers at the Fort see it, an' he says it's a seal fish belongin' to the sea, where he's seen no end on 'em. But them sojers to the Fort is an ign'ant set like all the reg'lars, that we rangers always despised as bad as they did us, an' it don't look no ways reasonable that sech a creatur' could come all the way up the St. Lawrence, an' the Iriquois River, an' most the len'th o' this lake. My idee is, it's a fresh-water maremaid, an' nat'ral to this lake."

If Seth had any doubt of this theory, he gave it no expression, and the hunter went on:

"An ol' Injin told me that there's always ben one o' these cretur's seen in this lake a spell afore every war that's ever ben. But I hope the sign'll fail this time. I've seen enough o' war an' I don't see no chance of another, all Canady bein' took an' the Injins in these parts bein' quilled."

The johnny-cake, having been baking for some time in its last turn on the board, was now pronounced done. The mixed contents of the frying-pan were turned out on a wooden trencher, and conversation was suspended for the more important matter of supper. Not long after this was disposed of, the host and his guests betook themselves to sleep in quilts and blankets on the puncheon floor, with their feet to the blazing backlog and glowing bed of coals.

CHAPTER II—THE NEW HOME

The light of a cloudless March morning pervaded the circumscribed landscape when the inmates of the cabin were astir again. Not many moments later, a sudden booming report broke the stillness and rolled in sullen echoes back and forth from mountains and forested shores.

"The sunrise gun to Fort Ti," Job said, in reply to the questioning look of his guests. "They hain't no other use for their powder now."

A fainter report, and its fainter answering echoes, boomed through the breathless air.

"An' that's Crown P'int Fort, ten mile furder down the lake. They help to keep us from getting lonesome up here in the woods." And, indeed, there was a comfortable assurance of human neighborhood and helpful strength in these mighty voices that shook the primeval forest with their dull thunder.

"I don't sca'cely ever go nigh the forts," Job continued. "I don't like them reg'lars an' their toppin' ways."

After fortifying themselves with a breakfast, in no wise differing from their last meal, the travellers set forth on the last stage of their journey, Job volunteering to accompany them upon it, and see them established in their new home. They had not gone far on their way down the narrow channel of the creek when it brought them to the broad, snow-clad expanse of the lake, lying white and motionless between its rugged shores, bristling with the forest, save where, on their left, was a stretch of cleared ground, in the midst of which stood, like a grim sentinel, grown venerable with long years of steadfast watch, the gray battlements of Fort Ticonderoga.

Here and there could be seen red-coated soldiers, bright dots of color in the colorless winter landscape, and, above them, lazily flaunting in the light breeze, shone the red cross of England. The old ranger gave the flag the tribute of a military salute, while his heart swelled with pride at sight of the banner for which he had fought, and which he had followed almost to where it now waved, in the humiliation of Abercrombie's defeat, and here had seen it planted in Amherst's triumphant advance.

In Seth Beeman's breast it stirred no such thrill. It had no such associations with deeds in which he had borne a part, and to him, as to many another of his people, it was becoming a symbol of oppression rather than an object of pride. To Nathan's boyish eyes it was a most beautiful thing, without meaning, but of beauty. His heart beat quick as the rattling drums and the shrill notes of the fife summoned the garrison to parade.

The oxen went at a brisker pace on the unobstructed surface of the lake, and the travellers soon came to a little creek not far up which was the clearing that Seth Beeman had made during the previous summer. In the midst of it stood the little log house that was henceforth to be their home, the shed for the cattle, and a stack of wild hay, inconspicuous among log heaps almost as large as they, looking anything but homelike with the smokeless chimney and pathless approach. Nor, when entered, was the bare interior much more cheerful.

A fire, presently blazing on the hearth, soon enlivened it. The floor was neatly swept with a broom fashioned of hemlock twigs by Job's ready hands. The little stock of furniture was brought in. The pewter tableware was ranged on the rough corner shelves. Ruth added here and there such housewifely touches as only a woman can give. The change, wrought in so brief a space, seemed a magical transformation. What two hours ago was but a barren crib of rough, clay-chinked logs, was now a furnished living-room, cozy with rude, homelike comfort.

Then the place was hanselled with its first regularly prepared dinner, the first meal beneath its roof at which a woman had presided. Job, loath to leave the most humanized habitation that he had seen for months, set forth for his own lonely cabin. Except the unneighborly inmates of the Fort, these were his nearest neighbors, and to them, for his old comrade's sake, he felt a closer friendship than had warmed his heart for many a year.

Though it was March, winter lacked many days of being spent in this latitude, and, during their continuance, Seth was busy with his axe, widening the clearing with slow, persistent inroads upon the surrounding forest, and piling the huge log heaps for next spring's burning. Nathan gave a willing and helpful hand to the piling of the brush, and took practical lessons in that accomplishment so necessary to the pioneer—the woodsman's craft. Within doors his mother, with little Martha for her companion, plied cards and spinning-wheel, with the frugal store of wool and flax brought from the old home. So their busy hands kept loneliness at bay, even amid the dreariness of the wintry wilderness.

At last the south wind blew with a tempered breath. Hitherto unseen stumps appeared above the settling snow, the gray haze of woods purpled with a tinge of spring, and the caw of returning crows pleased their ears, tired of the winter's silence.

Seth tapped the huge old maples with a gouge, and the sap, dripping from spouts of sumac wood, was caught in rough-hewn troughs. From these it was carried in buckets on a neck-yoke to the boiling place, an open-fronted shanty. Before it the big potash kettle was hung on a tree trunk, so balanced on a stump that it could be swung over or off the fire at will. Sugaring brought pleasure as well as hard labor to Nathan. There were quiet hours spent in the shanty with his father, with little to do but mend the fire and watch the boiling sap walloping and frothing, half hidden beneath the clouds of steam that filled the woods with sweet odor.

Sometimes Job joined them and told of his lonely scouts in the Ranger service, and of bush fights with Indians and their French allies, and of encounters with wild beasts, tales made more impressive in their relation by the loneliness of the campfire, with the circle of wild lights and shadows leaping around it in the edge of the surrounding darkness, out of which came, perhaps from far away, the howl of a wolf or the nearer hoot of the great horned owl.

Sometimes Martha spent part of a day in camp with her brother, helping in womanly ways that girls so early acquired in the training of those times, when every one of the household must learn helpfulness and self-reliance. But the little sister enjoyed most the evenings when the syrup was taken to the house and sugared off. The children surfeited themselves with sugar "waxed" on snow, and their parents, and Job, if he chanced to be there, shared of this most delicious of the few backwoods luxuries, and the five made a jolly family party.

One morning, when the surface of the coarse-grained old snow was covered with one of the light later falls, known as "sugar snow," as Seth and his son were on their way to the sugar place, the latter called his father's attention to a large track bearing some resemblance to the imprint of a naked human foot, and tending with some meandering in the same direction that they were going.

"Why," said Seth, at the first glance, "it's a bear, an' if he's been to the camp, I'm afraid he's done mischief, for they're meddlesome creatur's. But there wa'n't much left there for him to hurt," he added, after taking a brief mental inventory of the camp's contents.

"I can't think of nothing but the hunk of pork we had to keep the big kittle from b'ilin' over," said Nathan, "and a little mite of syrup that we left in the little kittle 'cause there was more'n we could carry home in the pails."

"He's welcome to that if he's left the pork; we hain't no pork to feed bears."

Now, as they drew near the camp, they heard a strange commotion in its neighborhood; a medley of smothered angry growls, impatient whines, unwieldy floundering, and a dull thud and clank of iron, the excited squalling of a party of jays, and the chattering jeers of a red squirrel. Running forward in cautious haste, they presently discovered the cause of this odd confusion of noises to be a

large black bear.

His head was concealed in the pot-bellied syrup kettle, held fast in that position by the bail, that, in his eagerness to lick out the last drop of stolen sweet, had slipped behind his ears. His frantic efforts to get rid of his self-imposed muzzle were so funny that, after their first moment of bewilderment, the two spectators could but shout with laughter.

Now upreared, the blindfolded bear would strike wildly at the kettle with his forepaws; then, falling on his back, claw it furiously with his hinder ones; then, regaining his feet, rush headlong till brought to a sudden stand by an unseen tree trunk. Recovering from the shock, he would remain motionless for a moment, as if devising some new means of relief, but would presently resume the same round of unavailing devices, with the constant accompaniment of smothered expressions of rage and terror.

But there was little time for laughter when a precious kettle and a fat bear might at any moment be lost by the fracture of one and the escape of the other. Seth had no weapon but his axe, but with this he essayed prompt attack, the happy opportunity for which was at once offered. In one of his blind, unguided rushes, the bear charged directly toward the camp, till his iron-clad head struck with a resounding clang against the great boiling kettle. As he reeled backward from the shock, half stunned by it, and bewildered by the unaccustomed sound that still rang in his ears, Seth was beside him with axe uplifted.

Only an instant he deliberated where and how to strike; at the skull he dared not with the axe-head, for fear of breaking the kettle, and he disliked to strike with the blade further back for fear of disfiguring the skin. But this was the preferable stroke, and in the next instant the axe-blade fell with a downright blow, so strong and well aimed that it severed the spinal column just forward of the shoulders. The great brute went down, paralyzed beyond all motion, to fall in a helpless heap and yield up his life with a few feeble gasps.

"Oh, father," cried Nathan, the first to break the sudden silence, with a voice tremulous in exultation, "to think we've got a bear. Won't mother and Marthy be proud? and won't Job think we're real hunters?"

Waiting but a moment to stroke the glossy fur and lift a huge inert paw, but such a little while ago so terrible, he sped home to bring his mother and sister to see the unexpected prize, while the jays renewed their querulous outcry, and the squirrel vociferously scoffed the fallen despoiler of his stolen nuts.

The flesh made a welcome addition to the settler's scanty store of meat, the fat furnished a medium for frying the hitherto impossible doughnut, and Job promised to bring them a handsome price for the skin, when he should sell it with his own peltry to the fur traders. But the praise he bestowed upon Seth's coolness in the strange encounter was sweeter to Nathan than all else.

As the days went on the advance of spring became more rapid and more apparent. Already the clearing was free from snow, and even in the shadow of the forest the tops of the cradle knolls showed the brown mats of last year's leaves above the surface, that was no longer a pure white, but littered with the winter downfall of twigs, moss, and bits of bark, and everywhere it was gray with innumerable swarming mites of snow fleas. Great flocks of wild geese harrowed the sky. Ducks went whistling in swift flight just above the tree tops, or settled in the puddles beginning to form along the border of the marsh. Here muskrats were getting first sight of the sun after months of twilight spent beneath the ice.

In the earliest April days of open water, when the blackbirds, on every bordering elm and water maple, were filling the air with a jangle of harsh and liquid notes, and the frogs, among the drift of floating weeds, were purring an unremitting croak, Job took Nathan out on the marshes, and instructed him in the art of shooting the great pickerel now come to spawn in the warm shallows.

"Never shoot at 'em," said he, when a shot from his smooth-bore had turned an enormous fellow's white belly to the sun, and he quickly lifted the fish into the canoe; "if you do, you won't hit 'em. Always shoot under, a mite or more, accordin' to the depth o' water."

Powder and lead were too precious to waste much of them on fish, so the old hunter made his pupil a hornbeam bow and arrows with spiked heads. With these weapons the boy soon became so skilled that he kept the table well supplied with this agreeable variation of its frugal fare.

Song-birds came in fewer numbers in those days of wide wildernesses than now, but there were bluebirds and song sparrows enough to enliven the clearing with sweet songs, and little Martha found squirrel cups blooming in the warmest corners of the field. As the days grew longer and warmer they grew busier, for Seth was diligently getting his crops in among the black stumps.

Job, having foreseen his friend's need of some sort of water craft when the lake should open, had fashioned for him a log canoe from the trunk of a great pine, and modelled it as gracefully as his own birch, though it was many times a heavier, as it was a steadier, craft.

One pleasant afternoon in early May, when the lake was quite clear of ice, Seth and his son, with Job as their instructor in the art of canoe navigation, made a trip in the new boat. They paddled down the creek, now a broad bit of water from the spring overflow. When they came to the lake, rippled with a brisk northern breeze, they found their visit well timed, for a rare and pretty sight was before them, so rare and pretty that Job paddled back with all speed for the mother and daughter that they, too, might see it.

A mile below the mouth of the creek a large vessel was coming, under all sail, with the British flag flying bravely above the white cloud of canvas. They

could hear the inspiring strains of martial music, and, when the noble vessel swept past not half a mile away, they could see the gayly dressed officers and the blue-jacketed sailors swarming on her deck.

"It's the sloop from St. Johns," said Job. "She comes two or three times, whilst the lake's open, with stores for the garrison to the Fort. It's an easier trail than the road from Albany. Pretty soon you'll hear her speak."

Almost at his words a puff of smoke jetted out from her black side, and, as it drifted across her deck, it was followed by the loud, sullen roar of the cannon. In response a smoke cloud drifted away from the Fort, and a moment later a roar of welcome reinforced the failing echoes. Again and again the sloop and the Fort exchanged salutes, till the new settlers ceased to be startled by such thunder as they had never before heard under a cloudless sky.

"They hain't nothin' to do with their powder nowadays, but to fool it away in sech nonsense," said the Ranger, as the sloop came to anchor in front of the Fort. "Arter all it's a better use for it than killin' folks, erless," he deliberately excepted, "it might be Injins."

CHAPTER III—A VISIT TO THE FORT

The summer brought more settlers to these inviting lands of level, fertile soil, and when the woods were again bright with autumnal hues, their broad expanse of variegated color was blotched with many a square of unsightly new clearing. Job Carpenter looked with disfavor upon such infringement of the hunter's domain, but it was welcomed by the Beemans. Though Seth's active out-door employment and the constant companionship of nature made him less lonely than his wife, yet he was of a social nature and glad of human companionship; while Ruth, sometimes lonely in the isolation of her new home, rejoiced in the neighborhood of other women.

Only a mile away were the Newtons, a large and friendly family, and within three miles were four more friendly households, and another at the falls of the turbid Lemon Fair. At this point a saw mill was being built and a grist mill talked of. With that convenience established so close at hand, there would be no more

need of the long journey to the mill at Skeenesborough, a voyage that, in the best of weather, required two days to accomplish.

The settlers at first pounded their corn into samp, or finer meal for johnny-cake, by the slow and laborious plumping mill, a huge wooden mortar with a spring pole pestle.

"Oh, mother," said Nathan, one summer afternoon, as for a while he stopped the regular thump, thump of the plumping mill to wipe his hot face and rest his arms that ached with the weary downpull of the great pestle, "when do you s'pose the folks to the Fair will get the gris' mill done?"

"Afore long, I hope, for your sake, my boy," she answered, cheerily, through the window. "Let me spell you awhile and you take a good rest."

Laying her wool cards aside, she came out and set her strong hands to the pestle, while Nathan ran out to the new road to see what ox-teamster of unfamiliar voice was bawling his vociferous way along its root-entangled and miry course. Presently the boy came back, breathless with the haste of bearing great news.

"Oh, mother, they're carryin' the stones and fixin's for the new mill, and the man says they'll be ready for grindin' before winter sets in. Then it'll be good-by to you, old 'Up-an'-down,' and good riddance to bad rubbage," and he brought the pestle down with energy on the half-pounded grist of samp.

"Don' revile the plumpin' mill, Nathan. It's been a good friend in time o' need. Mebby you'll miss the trips to Skeenesborough with your father. You've always lotted on them."

"Yes, but I'd rather go to the Fort and play with the boys, any day, and I'll have more time when samp poundin' is done and ended."

He had been with his father twice to the Fort to see its wonders, and, brief as the visits were, they sufficed to make him acquainted with the boys of the garrison, and, for the time, a partner in their games. Before the summer was out, the little Yankee became a great favorite with the few English and Irish boys whose fathers were soldiers of the little garrison. He taught them how to shoot with his hornbeam bow and spiked arrows, and many another bit of woodcraft learned of his fast friend Job, while they taught him unheard-of games, and told him tales of the marvellous world beyond the sea, a world that was as a dream to him.

His Yankee inquisitiveness made him acquainted with every nook and corner of the fortification, and he was even one day taken into the commandant's quarters, that the beautiful wife of that fine gentleman might see from what manner of embryo grew these Yankees, who were becoming so troublesome to His Majesty, King George. She was so pleased with his frank, simple manner and shrewd answers that she dismissed him with a bright, new English shilling, the

largest sum that he had yet possessed.

"Really, William," she afterwards remarked to her husband, "if this be a specimen of your terrible Yankees, they be very like our own people, in speech and actions, only sharper witted, and they surely show close kinship with us in spite of such long separation."

"You little know them," said Captain Delaplace, laughing. "They are a turbulent, upstart breed. I fear only a sound drubbing, and, perhaps, the hanging of a score of their leaders, will teach them obedience to His Majesty."

"I would be sorry to have this little man drubbed or hanged," said she, with a sigh; "surely he is not of the stuff rebels are made of."

"The very stuff, my dear. Bold and self-reliant, and impatient of control, as you may see. If ever there comes an outbreak of these discontented people, I warrant you'll find this boy deserving the drubbing and getting it, too, for His Majesty's troops would make short work of such rabble."

CHAPTER IV—THE NEW HAMPSHIRE GRANTS

A year later, the dispute of the Governors of New York and New Hampshire, concerning the boundaries of the two provinces, was at its height, and the quarrel between claimants of grants of the same lands, under charters from both governors, became every day more violent. The disputed territory was that between the Connecticut River and Lake Champlain, and was for a long time known as the New Hampshire Grants.

If a New York grantee found the claim which he had selected, or which had been allotted to him, occupied by a New Hampshire grantee, when the strength of his party was sufficient he would take forcible possession of the land, without regard to the improvements made upon it, and without making any compensation therefor. He was seldom left long in enjoyment of possession thus gained, for the friends of the New Hampshire grantee quickly rallied to his aid and summarily ousted the aggressor, who, if he proved too stubborn, was likely to be roughly handled, and have set upon his back the imprint of the beech seal, the name given to the blue-beech rod wherewith such offenders were chastised. The

New Hampshire grantees were as unscrupulous in their ejectment of New York claimants who had first established themselves on the New Hampshire Grants. Surveyors, acting under the authority of New York, were especially obnoxious to settlers of the other party, and rough encounters of the opposing claimants were not infrequent. Seth Beeman and his neighbors had all taken up land under a New Hampshire charter, without a thought of its validity being questioned.

One bright June morning, Nathan was watching the corn that, pushing its tender blades above the black mould in a corner of the clearing, offered sweet and tempting morsels to the thieving crows. It was a lazy, sleep-enticing occupation, when all the crows but one, who sat biding his opportunity on a dry tree top, had departed, cawing encouragement to one another, in quest of a less vigilantly guarded field. There was no further need for beating with his improvised drumsticks on the hollow topmost log of the fence, to the tune of "Uncle Dan, Uncle Dan, Uncle Dan, Dan, Dan," which would not scare the wise old veteran from his steadfast waiting.

The indolent fluting of the hermit thrushes rang languidly through the leafy chambers of the forest, and the wood pewees sang their pensive song on the bordering boughs, too content with song and mere existence to chase the moth that wavered nearest their perch. The languor of their notes pervaded all the senses of the boy, and, with his body in the shade of the log fence and his bare feet in the sunshine, he fell into a doze.

Suddenly he was awakened by an alarmed outcry of the crow, now sweeping in narrow circles above some new intruder upon his domain. Then he became aware of strange voices, the tramp of feet, the swish of branches pushed aside regaining their places, a metallic clink, and occasional lightly delivered axe strokes. Mounting the topmost log of the fence, and shading his eyes with his hands, he peered into the twilight of the woods. To this his eyes had hardly accustomed themselves, when he saw what sent flashes of anger and chills of dread chasing one another through his veins. But a few rods away, and coming towards him, were two men, one bearing the end of a surveyor's chain and a bundle of wire rods, the other carrying an axe and gun. A little behind these were two men similarly equipped, and still further in the rear, half hidden by the screen of undergrowth, more figures were discovered, one of whom was squinting through the sights of a compass, whose polished brass glittered in a stray sunbeam. Nathan was sure this must be the party of the New York surveyor of whom there had been a rumor in the settlement, and he felt that trouble was at hand.

"Hello, here's a clearin'," the foremost man, as he ran to the fence, called back to the one at the other end of the chain. "Jenkins, tell Mr. Felton there's a fenced clearin' here,—and boy," now deigning to notice so insignificant an object.

"Stake," cried Jenkins.

As the first speaker planted one of the wire rods beside the fence, Jenkins pulled up the last one stuck in the woods, at the same time shouting the news back to the surveyor.

"Hold on, boy," the first speaker said, as Nathan jumped from the fence. "You stay here till Mr. Felton comes up."

"I'm going home," Nathan answered boldly; "if Mr. Felton wants me he can come there."

"You sassy young rascal," cried one of the men, who carried a gun, bringing his weapon to a ready; "you stand where you be or I'll—" and he tapped the butt of his gun impressively.

"You wouldn't dast to," Nathan gasped defiantly, but he went no further, and stood at bay, grinding the soft mold under his naked heel while he cast furtive glances at the intruders, till the remainder of the party came up. The surveyor, impressed with the dignity of his position, maintained a haughty bearing toward all the members of his party save one, a swarthy, thick-set, low-browed man, whom he addressed as Mr. Graves.

"A fine clearing, indeed," said Mr. Felton when he came to the fence. "I wonder what Yankee scoundrel has dared to so seize, hold and occupy the lands of the Royal Colony of New York."

"Mayhap this younker can tell you, sir," said the man guarding the boy, and lowering his gun as he spoke.

"Boy, what scoundrel has dared to steal this land and establish himself upon it without leave or license of His Excellency, the Governor of New York? Yes, and cut down the pine trees, especially reserved for the masting of His Majesty's navy," and he tapped the top log impressively.

"It's holler, Mr. Felton," Jenkins suggested, satisfying himself of the fact by a resonant thump of his axe.

"Who stole this land? Where's your tongue, boy?" Mr. Felton demanded sharply.

But the boy, out of mind an instant, in that instant was out of sight. Many a time he had heard Job recount the manner of retreat practised by the Rangers, and now the knowledge served him well. While the surveryor's party was engaged with the pine, he slipped down on the same side of the fence, gained the veiling of a low bush, wormed his way a few feet along the ground, reached the protection of a large tree trunk, when he leaped to his feet, and, fleet and noiseless as a Ranger himself, fled from tree to tree in a circuitous route to his father.

Seth Beeman was hard at work on an extension of his clearing to the westward when Nathan came up, panting and breathless.

"Oh, father, there's a whole lot of Yorkers come and they're runnin' a line right through our clearin'."

Seth listened attentively until the men and their work had been described minutely, and then, without a word, resumed the trimming of the great hemlock he had just felled. As Nathan waited for some response, he knew by his father's knitted brow that his thoughts were busy. At length, breaking off a twig of hemlock, he came to his son and said, handing the evergreen to him:

"Take this to Newton's and show it to the men folks, and say 'There's trouble to Beeman's,' and then go on and do the same at every house, 'round to Job's, and show it to him and tell him the' same, and do whatever he tells you. Be spry, my boy; I must stay here and ta' care of mother and Sis. Keep in the woods till you get clear of the Yorkers, then take the road and clipper."

CHAPTER V—THE EVERGREEN SPRIG

Understanding the importance of his errand and guessing its purpose, Nathan skulked stealthily along the heavily-wooded border of the highway till past all chance of discovery, when he took the easier course of the road. The ecstatic melody of the thrushes' song and the pensive strain of the pewee had not changed, yet now they were instinct with cheer and acceleration, as was the merry drumbeat of the flicker on a dry branch overhead.

Presently, as he held his steady pace, splashing through puddles and pattering along firmer stretches, he heard sharp and loud footfalls in rapid approach. Before his first impulse to strike into the ready cover of the woods was carried into effect, a horseman galloped around the turn, and he was face to face with a handsome stranger, whose tall, well-knit figure, heightened by his seat on horseback, towered above the boy like a giant.

"Hello," said the man, reining up his horse, "and where are you bound in such a hurry, and who might you be?" His clear gray eyes were fixed on Nathan, who noticed pistols in the holsters, a long gun across the saddle bow, and, in the cocked hat, a sprig of evergreen.

"I'm Seth Beeman's boy," Nathan answered, pointing in the direction of his home, "and I'm goin' to neighbor Newton's of an arrant."

"Ah,—Beeman,—a good man, I'm told. And what might take you to neigh-

bor Newton's in such a hurry? Has that hemlock twig in your hand anything to do with your errand?" demanded the stranger, in an imperative but kindly voice. "Speak up. You need not be afraid of me."

Nathan looked up inquiringly at the bold, handsome face smiling down on him.

"Did you ever hear of Ethan Allen?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, yes; only yesterday father told about Ethan Allen's throwing the Yorker's millstones over the Great Falls at New Haven."

"Right and true! Well, I am Ethan Allen." As he gave his name in a deep-toned voice of proud assurance, it seemed in itself a strong host. "Your father sent you with that twig to say there's trouble at Beeman's, didn't he?"

Nathan looked up in wonder, admiration, and gladness, and then, with the instinctive, unreasoned confidence that the famous chieftain of the Grants was wont to inspire, told unreservedly his father's troubles and directions. When Allen had heard it, he wheeled his horse beside the nearest stump and bade Nathan mount behind him.

"My horse's feet will help you make your rounds quicker than yours, my man. We've no time to lose, for there's no telling what those scoundrels may be at. Eight Yorkers! Well, we'll soon raise good men enough to make short work of them."

Nathan mounted nimbly to his assigned place, and, clasping as far as he could the ample waist of his new friend, was borne along the road at a speed that soon brought them to the log house of the Newtons. A man of the herculean mould so common to the early Vermonters came out of the house to meet the comers, with an expression of pleased surprise on his good-humored face.

"Why, colonel, we wa'n't expectin' on you so soon, but we hain't no less glad to see you. 'Light and come in. Mother'll hev potluck ready to rights. Why, is that the Beeman boy stickin' on behind you? Anything the matter over to Beeman's?"

"No, we can't 'light," Allen replied; and then, looking down over his shoulder, "Do your errand, my boy, and we'll push on."

Nathan held out the carefully kept sprig of evergreen and repeated his message.

"Trouble to Beeman's, now."

"Yea, verily," said Allen to Newton, whose face flashed at the boy's words. "Rise up and gird on your swords, you and your sons. The Philistines are upon you even as it has been prophesied. Felton and his gang of land thieves. The son of Belial was warned to depart from the land of the elect, but he heeds not those who cry in the wilderness. Confound the rascal! He must be 'viewed'! You and your two boys take your guns and jog down that way, and as you go cut a goodly

scourge of blue beech, for verily there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. We'll rally the Callenders, and Jones, and Harrington, and North, and my friend Beeman here will tell Job. We'll gather a good dozen. Enough to mete out the vengeance of the Lord to eight Yorkers, I'll warrant!"

Strange and abrupt as were the transitions from Allen's favorite Scriptural manner of speech to the ordinary vernacular, no one thought of laughing. As the boy dismounted, Allen said:

"You go straight to Job and do as he tells you;" and as he rode away called back, "everybody lay low and keep dark till you hear the owl hoot."

Soon Nathan turned from the road into an obscure footpath that led in the direction of Job Carpenter's cabin. The gloom and loneliness of the mysterious forest, through which the narrow footpath wound, so pervaded it that the song birds seemed awed to silence, and the woodpeckers tapped cautiously, as if afraid of being heard by some enemy. No boy, even of backwoods breeding, would care to loiter had his errand been less urgent, and he gave but a passing notice to things ordinarily of absorbing interest.

A mother partridge fluttered along the ground in simulated crippledness while her callow brood vanished among the low-spread leaves. A shy wood bird disclosed the secret of her nest as he sped by. Against a dark pine gleamed the fiery flash of a tanager's plumage. A wood mouse stirred the dry leaves. His own foot touched a prostrate dead sapling, and the dry top rustled unseen in the wayside thicket. There was a sound of long, swift bounds, punctuating the silence with growing distinctness, and a hare, in his brown summer coat, wide-eyed with terror, flashed like a dun streak across the path just before him, and close behind the terrified creature a gray lynx shot past, eager with sight and scent of his prey, closing the distance with long leaps. Before the intermittent scurry of footfalls had faded out of hearing they ceased, and a wail of agony announced the tragical end of the race. The cry made him shiver, and he could but think that the lynx might have been a panther and the hare a boy.

His heart grew lighter when he saw the sunshine showing golden green through the leafy screen that bordered the hunter's little clearing. He found Job leaning on his hoe in his patch of corn, looking wistfully on the creek, where the fish were breaking the surface among the weeds that marked the expanse of marsh with tender green, and where the sinuous course of the channel was defined by purple lines of lily pads. The message was received with a show of vexation, and the old man exclaimed:

"Plague on 'em all with their pitches and surveyin' and squabblin'. Why can't folks let the woods alone? There's room enough in the settlements for sech quarrels without comin' here to disturb God's peace with bickerin's over these acres o' desart. I thought I'd got done wi' wars and fightin's, exceptin' with

varmints, when the Frenchers and Injins was whipped. But I guess there won't never be no peace on airth and good will to men for all it's ben preached nigh onto eighteen hundred years. Plague on your Hampshire Grants and your York Grants, the hul bilin'! Wal, if it must come it must, and I'll be skelped if I'll see Yorkers a runnin' over my own Yankee kin. Yorkers is next to Reg'lars for toppin' ways. I never could abear 'em."

While he spoke he twirled Nathan's hemlock sprig between his fingers and now set it carefully in the band of his hat and led the way to his cabin.

"And Ethan Allen's in these betterments? Well, them Yorkers'll wish they'd stayed to home. He's hard-handed, is Ethan."

The two were now in the cabin, and Job set forth a cold johnny-cake and some jerked venison that Nathan needed no urging to partake of. "'Tain't your mother's cookin', but it's better'n nothin'," Job said, as between mouthfuls he counted out a dozen bullets from a pouch and put them in his pocket. Then he held up his powder horn toward the light after giving it a shake, and, being satisfied of its contents, slung it over his shoulder. Their hunger being satisfied, he took the long smooth-bore from its hooks, examined the flint, and, nodding to Nathan to follow, went down to his canoe, that lay bottom up on the bank.

"It's quicker goin' by water'n by land," said Job, as he set the canoe afloat and stepped into it, while Nathan took his place forward. Impelled by the two paddles, the light craft went swiftly gliding down the creek, and then northward, skirting the wooded shore of the lake.

CHAPTER VI—THE YORKERS

Though the presentation of claims, under the authority of the New York government, to the land which Seth Beeman occupied by virtue of a title derived from the Governor of New Hampshire, had for some time been expected and resistance fully determined upon, Seth's heart was as hot with anger and heavy with anxiety as if invasion had come without warning. Tenacious of his rights, he yet hated strife and contention. Nor could he foresee whether he must lose the home he had wrought with toil and privation out of the savage wilderness, or whether, after a sharp, brief contest, he would be left in peaceable possession

of it, or whether he could then hold it only by continued resistance.

Nathan had not been long away when he shouldered his axe and hastened toward the house. When it came in view, between the tall pillars of tree trunks that paled the verge of the clearing, the rough-walled dwelling had never looked more homelike nor better worth keeping. It had overcome the strangeness of new occupancy and settled to its place. The logs had begun to gather again the moss that they lost when they ceased to be trees. Wild vines, trained to tamer ways, clambered about the doorway and deep-set windows, beneath which beds of native and alien posies, carefully tended, alike flourished in the virgin soil. The young garden stuff was promising, and the broader expanse of fall-sown wheat, grown tall enough to toss in the wind, made a rippling green sea of the clearing, with islands of blackened stumps jutting here and there above the surface. The place had outgrown its uncouth newness and transient camp-like appearance and become a home to cling to and defend.

"What is it, Seth?" asked Ruth, coming to greet him at the door, her smile fading as she saw his troubled face.

"The Yorkers have come." And then he explained Nathan's mission. "Our folks'll come to help as soon as they can, but the Yorkers'll get here first. Look a there," and, following his eyes, Ruth saw the surveyor's party approaching the border of the clearing, just as the Beemans passed into the house.

"It won't come to that, will it?" she asked, in a low, awed voice, as Seth took down his gun.

"I hope not, but I want the gun out of their reach and where I can get it handy. There ain't a bullet or buckshot in the house," he declared, after examining the empty bullet pouch. "Give me some beans. They're good enough for Yorkers."

As he spoke he measured a charge of powder into the long barrel, rammed a tow wad upon it, poured in a half handful of the beans that Ruth brought him in a gourd, rammed down another wad, put priming in the pan, clapped down the hammer, then mounted half way up the ladder that served as a stair, laid the gun on the floor of the upper room, and was down at the door when the surveyor led his party to it. He saluted the party civilly, and, upon demand, gave his name.

"Well, Mr. Beeman," began the surveyor, in a pompous tone, "I sent your son to bring you to me, but it seems you did not please to come."

"No," said Seth quietly; "it does not please me to leave my affairs at the beck and call of every stranger that comes this way."

"Well, sir, I'd have you understand that I am Marmaduke Felton, duly appointed and licensed as a surveyor of His Majesty's lands within his province of New York. Furthermore, be it known, I have come here in the regular discharge of the duties of my office, to fix the bounds of land purchased by my client, Mr. Erastus Graves," bowing to the person, "of the original grantees, with patent from

His Excellency the Governor, who alone has authority to grant these lands. I find you, sir, established on these same lands belonging to my client. What have you to say for yourself? By what pretended right have you made occupation of lands belonging to my client?"

"I have to say for myself," Seth answered, in a steady voice, "that I bought this pitch of the original proprietors, and I have their deed, duly signed and sealed. They got their charter of His Excellency Benning Wentworth, His Majesty's Governor of the Province of New Hampshire."

"Your title is not worth the paper it's written on," scoffed Mr. Felton. "Governor Wentworth has no more authority to grant lands than I have. Not a whit. The east bounds of New York are fixed by royal decree at the west bank of Connecticut River, as everybody knows, and Wentworth's grants this side that limit are null and void. No doubt you have acted in good faith, but now there's nothing for you but to vacate these betterments forthwith; yes, forthwith, if you will take the advice of a friend," and the little man regaled himself with a pinch of snuff.

"I shall not go till I am forced to," Seth answered with determination. "When it comes to force both parties may take a hand in the game."

"Very well, very well! I have given you friendly advice; if you do not choose to take it the consequences be on your own head. Come, Graves; come, men, let us go about our present affairs;" adding, after some talk with Graves, "We shall be back to spend the night with you, Mr. Beeman. You cannot refuse Mr. Graves the shelter of his own house."

Seth flushed with anger, but answered steadily: "I can't help it, but you will not be welcome."

The men who had been idling about, taking little interest in the parley, now followed their employers back to the woods, trampling through the young wheat in their course.

"I wish you a pleasant night on't," said Seth under his breath, and turned to reassure his wife. "Don't be frightened, my girl. They won't get us out of here. Keep a stout heart and wait."

With a quieter heart she went about her household affairs, while her husband busied himself nearby, weeding the garden and giving to his wife's posy beds the awkward care of unaccustomed hands. He often stopped his employment to listen and intently scan the border of the woods. The shadows of the trees were stretching far across the clearing when an owl hooted solemnly in the nearest woods on the bank of the creek, and, presently, another answered farther away.

"Do hear the owls hootin', and it's clear as a bell," said Ruth at the door, looking up to the cloudless sky. "It can't be it's a-going to storm."

"I shouldn't wonder if it did," said Seth with a mirthless laugh. "Where was

that nighest hoot?"

As he spoke the solemn hollow notes were repeated, and some crows began to wheel and caw above the spot, marking it plainly enough to the eye and ear, and he set forth in the direction at a quick pace.

"Why don't Nathan come home?" little Martha asked. "I hain't seen him all day. I wish he'd come. He'll get ketched in the storm."

"Oh, don't worry, deary," said her mother after she had watched her husband disappear in the thickening shadow of the woods. "We might as well eat, for there's no telling when father'll be back." They were not half through the meal before he came, and, as he took his seat at the table, he said with a deep sigh of relief: "I'm afeard our York friends won't enjoy their lodgin's overmuch. The owls are round pretty thick to-night."

"Well, I guess they've ben talking to you," said Ruth, as her face lighted with a comprehension of his meaning.

"Can owls talk?" Martha asked, agape with wonder.

"Well, the old knowing ones. Owls are turrible knowing creatur's," her father said.

The twilight possessing the woods had scarcely invaded the clearing when the surveyor and his party came to the house, bringing in blankets, provisions, guns, tools, and instruments, till the one small room was crowded with them and the uninvited guests. Felton and Graves made themselves offensively and officiously at home. The cook took possession of the fire, and set two frying-pans of pork sputtering grease upon the tidy hearth, to the disgust of the housewife, who sat with her husband and child in a dark corner. At last Felton brought forth a bottle of spirits from his leathern portmanteau and drank to Graves.

"Here's to your speedy installment in your rightful possessions. Now, help yourself, and give the men their tot."

Graves stood filling his measure of grog in the tin cup, grinning with satisfaction, when a loud knock came on the door.

CHAPTER VII—THE "JUDGMENT SEAT"

Without waiting to be bidden, a man of massive mould entered the room. He strode into the firelight, and, wheeling on the hearth, faced the company, his shadow filling half the room.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Good evening, Mr. Felton and Graves."

The latter stood with the untasted dram half way to his gaping mouth, the other was as motionless, save as his face expressed successively astonishment, anger, and exultation.

"Colonel Ethan Allen," he said at last, emphasizing the title. "Most happy to receive a call from so distinguished a person. A very fortunate meeting." Then changing his tone of mock politeness to one of command: "You are my prisoner. Men, lay hold of him! A hundred pounds are offered for his head! It is Ethan Allen! Lay hold of him, I tell you!"

There was a reluctant stir among the men. One advanced toward the corner near the fireplace where the guns were set. With deliberate celerity Allen drew his hands from the skirts of his coat, a cocked pistol in each, and, with one of them, he covered the man skulking towards the guns.

"The first man that draws a pistol or raises a gun gets a bullet through his carcass," he said with authority.

At Allen's first words Seth had mounted the ladder and as quickly reappeared with his gun. The movement was seen in the dancing shadows, and he was covered by the other pistol, which was lowered as he was distinguished to be helping a woman and child to mount to the chamber.

"Down with your gun over there! Oh, it is our friend Beeman! All right!" Then Allen called in a voice that made the pewter dishes ring on their shelves:

"Come in, men!"

The door swung violently open, and Job Carpenter, with all the arms-bearing men of the wide neighborhood, to the number of a dozen, came marching in, in Indian file, with rifle or smooth-bore at a trail. In the rear was Nathan, unarmed, but eager to see all that should transpire.

Felton and Graves lost their bold demeanor, yet held their places, while their men slunk to the farther side of the room in dumb affright, save Jenkins, the cook, who, dodging this side and that of Allen's burly form, hovered near his frying-pans in a divided fear for his own safety and that of his pork.

"Keep every one of these men under close guard, my boys," Allen commanded, "especially these two chief offenders. Now, Mr. Felton, perhaps it is made plain to you that I am not your prisoner, and that the gods of the valleys are not the gods of the hills. Behold how riches take to themselves wings and fly away even before they are possessed. In witness whereof, consider the hundred pounds offered by your Governor for an honest man. No wonder he longs for the sight of one, with such a pack of thieves and land jobbers as he has about him."

"An honest man?" cried Felton, trembling with rage. "A ruffian! A rioter! A defier of law!" and he poured forth a torrent of opprobrious names, and a full measure of curses, till out of breath.

"Go on, Master Felton, go on," said Allen, smiling benignly upon him. "Ease yourself. Unless it be prayer, which you rarely employ, I doubt, there is nothing like good round cursing to relieve an overburdened heart. Upon occasion I avail myself of the remedy. Pray go on, or give your friend a chance. Mr. Graves, you have the floor," but the man addressed only glowered savagely.

"Well, if you have offered all your burnt offerings of brimstone, let the men have their supper and make themselves strong for their journey. Dish up the pork, cook, that you have been bumping my legs to get at, and bring out your bread bag. Stir yourselves. We have weighty business pending."

The men ate their meat and bread with the appetite of those whom no emotion can cheat of a meal, but Felton and Graves would have none of it. The Green Mountain Boys sat apart, chatting in low tones, till the smokers were filling their pipes after their meal, when Allen rapped the table with the butt of his pistol, and his clear, deep voice broke the silence that ensued.

"Friends of the Grants, you all know we have come here to erect the 'Judgment seat' this night, and mete out such punishment as doth unto justice appertain. Yea, verily, for wrongs done or sought to be done upon the people of these New Hampshire Grants. We will at once elect a judge. To save time, I will nominate Ethan Allen as a proper person for that office. You that would elect him say 'Aye.'"

There was a unanimous affirmative response, even Nathan, proud of the opportunity of giving his first vote, made his piping treble heard among the deep voices of the men.

"Contrary minded, make the usual sign."

There was only a sullen "No" from Felton.

"You are not entitled to vote in this meeting, sir. I have a clear majority and will take my seat." So saying, Allen seated himself upon the table.

"The plain facts of the case are these: This Mr. Felton and this Graves, also, were taken by me, and certain other good men, about one month ago, in the act of surveying, under the pretended authority of the tyrannical New York government, lands already granted by His Excellency Benning Wentworth, His Majesty's duly appointed Governor of New Hampshire. The said persons were ordered to desist from such unlawful business and to depart from these Grants, and were duly warned not to return for a like purpose under pain of being 'Viewed.' Furthermore, they were suffered to depart without bodily harm. Here the surveyor comes again, like a bad penny as he is, bearing the King's mark, but a base counterfeit none the less. And this Graves pretends to own this

pitch by right of purchase under York government. Other than them I do not recognize any among this crew who have been 'Warned.' Now, friend Beeman, tell us your story."

Seth told what had passed between him and the surveyor, and then Nathan was called to relate his meeting the party in the woods, which he did in a straightforward manner, except for his boyish bashfulness.

"Now, you have it all. Felton and Graves are here, as you see, in prosecution of their unlawful business, as the testimony of this boy and his father shows. In further proof whereof, see the surveyor's instruments here in view. What say you, men of the Grants, are they guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," said the various voices.

"What shall be their punishment? That they be chastised with the twigs of the wilderness?"

There was general affirmative response, some answering loudly, others faintly and hesitatingly. Then Job Carpenter stepped forward, and, making a military salute, said:

"I don't go agin these men a gittin' what they desarve, but I don't want to have them skinned. Their skins hain't worth a-hevin' only for their selves, and I hate to see white men whipped like dogs. If they was Injins I wouldn't say agin it. But, bein' they hain't, I move they hev jest nine cuts o' the Blue Beech apiece."

"Forty, save one," was the customary award in such cases, and there were a few dissenting voices, but the milder punishment was finally agreed upon.

If the two men under sentence felt any gratitude for the mitigation of the severity, they expressed none. Graves maintained a sullen silence, though his vengeful scowl expressed as much hatred of the prosecutors of the informal trial as did the storm of oaths and abuse that Felton let forth upon them in intermittent gusts.

So the night passed, with snatches of sleep for some, with none for others, while the prisoners were kept under constant guard. With daylight came the summary infliction of the punishment awarded. It was a scene so cruel that Ruth and Martha could not bear to hear, much less to witness it, and Nathan, when an old man, said it was a horrible memory. Yet, severe as was the chastisement inflicted by the Green Mountain Boys upon their persecutors, it was no more cruel than the legal punishment of many light offences in those days, when the whipping post was one of the first adornments of every little hamlet. In conclusion, Ethan Allen gave to Felton and Graves a "Certificate," written by himself, to the effect:

"This is to Certify that the Bearer has this day rec'd his Just Dues and is permitted to pass beyond the New Hampshire Grants. He Behaving as Becometh. In witness whereof, see the Beech Seal upon his back and our Hands set Hereunto.

Signed, Ethan Allen and others."

Felton cast his upon the ground and stamped upon it, but Graves folded and put his carefully in his pocket, glowering in silence upon his enemies. Then Ethan Allen broke the surveyor's compass with his own hands and tossed the fragments away.

"Now," said he, in an awful voice, "depart, and woe be unto you, Marmaduke Felton and Erastus Graves, if you ever set foot in the land of the Green Mountain Boys. You other men, if you come in peace and on honest business, you shall not have a hair of your heads hurt. But if you ever venture to come on such an iniquitous errand as now brought you, by the Great Jehovah, you shall repent in sackcloth and ashes! Forward, march!"

At the command, the surveyor and his men filed off, and the last of the sullen and chap-fallen crew soon disappeared among the trees. They were accompanied some distance by the Green Mountain Boys, when their beloved chieftain rode away to redress wrongs of settlers in other parts.

By noon the clearing was occupied by none but its usual tenants, and, henceforth, though they suffered frequent apprehension of further trouble, they were not molested by any New York claimants.

CHAPTER VIII—A NOVEL BEAR TRAP

"You don't know of anybody hereabouts that wants to hire a good hand, I s'pose?" asked a stranger one August afternoon, as, without unslinging his pack, he set his gun against the log wall beside the door, and leaned upon his axe at the threshold.

By degrees Seth Beeman had enlarged his clearing so far that he already needed stronger hands than Nathan's to help him in the care of the land already in tilth and in the further extension of his betterments, but he scanned the man closely before he answered. Though unprepossessing, low-browed, and surly looking, he was evidently a stout fellow, and accustomed to work. At length a reply was made by asking such questions as were a matter of course in those days, and are not yet quite obsolete in Yankeeland.

The stranger readily said his name was Silas Toombs, that he was from Jersey way, and wished, when he had earned enough, to take up a right of land hereabouts, in a region he had often heard extolled by his father, who had served here in Captain Bergen's company of Rogers's Rangers. Seth had previously ascertained that no grown-up son of any of his neighbors could be spared to help him, so he finally hired this man, who proved to be efficient and faithful, although not a genial companion, such as an old-time farmer wished to find in his hired help. Ruth treated him with the kindness so natural to her, though she could scarcely conceal her aversion. This, if he understood, he did not seem to notice any more than he did the undisguised dislike of Nathan.

The remainder of the summer and half of the fall passed uneventfully, till one day, when Ruth had been called to the bedside of Mrs. Newton, who was ill of the fever so prevalent in new clearings, Nathan and his sister were left in charge of the house, while their father and hired man worked in a distant field.

The children spent half the pleasant forenoon in alternate rounds of housework and out-door play, now sweeping the floor with hemlock brooms, now running out into the hazy October sunshine to play "Indians" with Nathan's bow and arrows and Martha's rag doll. This was stolen and carried into captivity, from which it was rescued by its heroic little mother. Then they threw off their assumed characters and ran into the house to replenish the smouldering fire, and to find that the sunshine, falling upon the floor through the window, was creeping towards the "noon mark," making it time to begin dinner.

Nathan raised the heavy trap-door to the cellar and descended the ladder, with butcher knife and pewter plate, to get the pork, but had barely got the cover off the barrel when he was recalled to the upper world by a loud cry from his sister:

"Nathan, Nathan, come here quick!"

He scrambled up the ladder and ran to her, where, just outside the door, she was staring intently toward the creek.

"Who be them?" she asked anxiously, as she pointed at two figures just disclosed above the rushes, as they moved swiftly up the narrow channel in an unseen craft.

"I guess they're Injins," said Nathan, after a moment's scrutiny, "and I guess they're a-trappin' mushrat. Let's run over to the bank and see."

So they ran to the crown of the low bank, where they could command a good view of the rushy level of the marsh, and the narrow belt of clear water that wound through it, reflecting the hazy blue of the sky, the tops of the scarlet water maples, the bronze and yellow weeds, and, here and there, the rough dome of a newly built muskrat house. At each of these the two men, now revealed in a birch canoe, halted for a little space, and then, tying a knot in the nearest tuft

of sedge, passed on to the next. There was no mistaking the coppery hue of the faces, the straight black hair, though men of another race might wear the dirty, white blanket coats, and as skilfully manage the light craft.

"Yes, they be Injins," said Nathan, "and I wish they'd let my mushrat alone. But I s'pose there's enough for them and me."

Presently the Indians passed quite near them, and one, speaking so softly that the children thought his voice could never have sounded the terrible war-whoop, accosted them:

"How do? You Beenum boy?"

"Yes," Nathan answered; and then, obeying the Yankee instinct of inquiry, asked: "Be you gettin' many mushrat?"

"No ketch um plenty," the Indian replied. "Ol' Capenteese ketch um mos' all moosquas," and Nathan understood that he attributed the scarcity of muskrats to Job, whose fame as a hunter and trapper was known to every Waubanakee who visited this part of the lake.

"Me come back pooty soon," the Indian said, pointing up the creek with his paddle. "Den go house, see um Beenum. Buy um some pig eese.[1] S'pose he sell um lee'l bit?"

Nathan nodded a doubtful assent, and then, reminded of dinner-getting by the mention of pork, caught Martha's hand and hurried homeward, while the Indians resumed their way upstream.

When the children entered the open door, they were for a moment dumb with amazement at the confusion that had in so short a time usurped the tidiness whereof they had left the room possessed. The coverlets and blankets of one bed were dragged from their place, two or three chairs were overturned, and the meal barrel was upset and half its contents strewn across the floor.

"What in tunket," cried Nathan, when speech came to his gaping mouth. "Has that old sow got outen the pen?" Then he saw in the scattered meal some broad tracks that a former adventure had made him familiar with, and he heard a sound of something moving about in the cellar.

"It's a bear," he cried, "and he's down cellar."

As quick as the thought and words, he sprang to the open hatch, and heaved it upright on the hinges, to close it. But just as it hung in midway poise, the bear, alarmed by the noise overhead, gave a startled "whoof," and came scrambling up the ladder. His tawny muzzle was above the floor, when Nathan, with desperate strength, slammed down the hatch, and its edge caught the bear fairly on the neck, pressing his throat against the edge of the hatchway. The trap door had scarcely fallen when the quick-witted boy mounted it and called to his frightened

[1] Pork

sister to mount beside him, and with their united weight, slight as it was, they kept him from forcing his way upward, till in his frantic struggles he dislodged the ladder and hung by the neck helpless, without foothold.

The children held bravely to their post, hand in hand, while to the gasping moans of the angry brute succeeded cries of anger, that were in turn succeeded by silence and loss of all visible motion but such as was imparted to the head by the huge body still slowly vibrating from the final struggle. When this had quite ceased they ventured off the trap door, and, pale and panting, they stood before the ghastly head as frightful now in death, with grinning, foam-flecked jaws, protruding tongue, and staring, bloodshot eyes, as it had been in living rage. Nathan caught his sister in his arms and hugged her, shouting:

"We've killed him. We've killed a bear," while she, in the same breath, laughed and cried, till they both bethought themselves of the dinner-getting not yet begun.

"I can't get down cellar," said Nathan, "for I dasn't open that door. What be we goin' to do?"

A grunt of surprise caught his attention, and, looking up, he saw the two Indians at the door, staring with puzzled faces on the strange scene. Then one, with a hatchet half uplifted, cautiously approached the grim head, which, after an instant's scrutiny, he touched with his hatchet and then with his finger.

"He dead. You boy do dat?" And Nathan told him all the adventure. The Indian gave the boy an approving pat on the head that made Nathan's scalp shiver.

"You big Nad-yal-we-no. Too much good for be Pastoniac. You come 'long me to Yam-as-ka, I make you Waubanakee. Den be good for sometings. Nawaa," he said to his companion, and the other coming in, the two reached down and laid hold of the bear's forelegs, and when, by their instructions, Nathan lifted the door, they dragged the limp, shaggy carcass out upon the floor.

When the full proportions of the huge brute were revealed, the boy's rejoicings broke forth anew, just as his father and the hired man came hurrying in, when he received fresh praise for his deed. The dinner was bounteous, if late, and the Indians, Toksoose and Tahmont, had their full share of it, with a big chunk of pork and as much bear's meat as they cared to take, which was small, since they liked better the daintier meat of the musquash, wherewith their trapping afforded them an ample supply.

When toward nightfall the mother returned, she was told the story by the victors, and with equal delight was it rehearsed when Job happened to come, and the unstinted praise of the old hunter was sweetest of all. Many a day was the tale rehearsed for the benefit of new listeners. Even when Nathan was an old man, and looked back on the many adventures of his life, not one stood forth so clearly in the haze of the past as this adventure with the bear, wherein he had

borne the chief part.

CHAPTER IX—A FRONTIER TRAGEDY

One autumn day after the leaves had faded and fallen, Nathan was busy husking corn, with less thought upon his task and the growing pile of yellow ears than of a promised partridge hunt on the morrow with his good friend Job. His father was chopping in a new clearing. Silas had been sent with the oxen to take some logs to Lemon Fair Mill. His mother grew uneasy at her spinning, for Seth did not come home to dinner, nor yet when the afternoon was half spent. After many times anxiously looking and listening in the direction of the clearing, and as often saying to herself, "What does keep father so?" she called to Nathan.

"I guess you'd better go and see what henders father so. I can't think what it is. I hope it hain't anything."

"Perhaps he's gone over to Callenders or some o' the neighbors," said Nathan. "I hain't heard a tree fall for ever so long nor his axe a goin' for a long time."

"Mebby he's cut his foot or something," said Martha, beginning to cry.

"I can't hear nothin' of him for all the air's so holler and everything sounds so plain," said Ruth, listening again. "You'd better go and see what henders him. Mebby he can't git home."

As the boy anxiously hastened to the new clearing, the intense stillness of the woods filled him with undefined dread. His ears ached for some sound, the tapping of a woodpecker, the cry of a jay, but most of all, for the sound of axe strokes or his father's voice. Silence pervaded the clearing also.

There, on a stump, was his father's blue frock, one bit of color in the sombre scene. And yes, there was some slight flitting movement near the last tree that had been felled and lay untrimmed just as it had fallen, but it was only a bevy of chickadees peering curiously at something on the ground beneath them, yet voiceless as if their perennial cheerfulness was dumb in the pervading silence. So sick with dread he could scarcely move, the boy forced himself to approach the spot, and look upon that which he felt was awaiting him, his father lying dead

beneath the huge, prone tree, that had crushed him in its fall.

The glowing sunset sky and the glistening waters of the lake grew black, the earth reeled. With a piteous groan of "Father! father!" the boy sank down as lifeless, for a space, as the beloved form that lay beside him in eternal sleep.

He awoke as from a terrible dream to the miserable realization that it was not a dream. Then walking, as still in a dream, not noting how he went nor by any familiar object marking his way, he bore home the woeful tidings.

Simple as were the funeral rites in the primitive communities, they were not lacking in the impressiveness of heartfelt sorrow nor in the homely expressions of sympathy for the bereaved and respect for the dead. So Seth Beeman's neighbors reverently laid him to rest in the soil his own hand had uncovered to the sunlight. They set at his head a rough slate stone, whose rude lettering could be read half a century later, telling his name and age, and the manner of his death.

Ruth was left in a sorry plight, so suddenly bereft of the strong arm she had leaned upon, without a thought that it could ever be taken from her. Now she had only her son, a sturdy lad, indeed, but of an age to be cared for rather than to care for others. Toombs had proved better than he looked, kind enough, and a good worker, and familiar with the needs of the farm. When his time was out she had no means to pay his wages nor could she well get along without him. So he staid on, taking a mortgage, at length, on the premises in lieu of money, and becoming more and more important in Ruth's estimation, though regarded with increasing dislike and jealousy by her son, who found himself less and less considered.

Months passed, dulling sorrow and the sense of loss, and bringing many a bitter change. The bitterness of Nathan's life was made almost unbearable presently. His mother, of a weak and clinging nature, inevitably drifted to a fate a more self-reliant woman would have avoided. Worried with uncomprehended business, and assured by Toombs that this was the only way to retain a home for herself and children, yet unmoved by the kindly advice of Seth's honest friends and neighbors, as well as the anger and entreaties of her son, she went with Toombs over to the Fort, where they were married by the chaplain stationed there.

With such a man in the place of his wise and affectionate father, Nathan's life was filled with misery, nor could he ever comprehend his mother's course. Though bestowing upon Martha and his mother indifferent notice or none at all, towards the boy the stepfather exercised his recently acquired authority with severity, giving him the hardest and most unpleasant work to do, and treating him always with distrust, often with cruelty.

"I hate him," he told Ruth. "He's sassed me every day since I come here, and I've got a bigger job 'an that to settle, one that I'd ha' settled with his father,

if he hadn't cheated me by gettin' killed."

"Oh, what do you mean?" Ruth gasped. "I thought you and Seth was always good friends."

"Friends!" he growled, contemptuously; "I hated the ground he walked on. Look here," and Silas pulled out his leather pocketbook and took from it a soiled paper which he held before her eyes.

She read the bold, clear signature of Ethan Allen, and, with a sickening thrill, that of Seth Beeman under it.

"Yes, Ethan Allen and Seth Beeman and his neighbors whipped a man for claimin' his own, and your boy went and gethered 'em in. Mebby you re'collect it."

"I couldn't help it," she gasped. "I didn't see it. I run and hid and stopped my ears."

"Well, 'Rastus Graves 'ould ha' settled his debts if he'd ha' lived. But he died afore his back got healed over, and afore he died he turned the job over to his brother, that's me, Silas Toombs, or Graves—they're the same in the end."

Ruth stared at him in dumb amazement and horror, while he proceeded, pouring forth his long concealed wrath.

"Well, I've got Seth Beeman's wife, and, what's wuth more, his farm, an' his childern right 'nunder my thumb. I hope he knows on't. And now, ma'am," lowering his voice from its passionate exultation, "you don't want to breathe a word o' this to your nice neighbors or to your young 'uns. It wouldn't do no good and it might be unpleasant all round. You don't want folks to know what a fool you be."

After this disclosure, Ruth lived, in weariness and vain regret, a life that seemed quite hopeless but for looking forward to the time when her son could assert his rights and be her champion. Her nature was one of those that still bend, without being broken, by whatever weight is laid on them.

CHAPTER X—REBELLION

One day Nathan was gathering ashes from the heaps where the log piles had been burned and storing them in a rude shed. Close by this stood the empty leach-tubs

awaiting filling and the busy days and nights when the potash-making should begin. It was hard, unpleasant work, irritating to skin, eyes, and temper. It was natural a boy should linger a little as Nathan did, when he emptied a basket, and quickly retreated with held breath out of the dusty cloud. He looked longingly on the shining channel of the creek, and wished he might follow it to the lake and fish in the cool shadows of the shore. He wished that Job would chance to come through the woods, but Job lately rarely came near them, for he was vexed with Ruth for mating with this stranger, and the new master gave no welcome to any of the friends of the old master. His hands were busy as his thoughts, when he was startled by his stepfather's voice close behind him.

"You lazy whelp, what you putterin' 'bout? You spend half your time a gawpin. You git them ashes housed afore noon or I'll give ye a skinnin', and I'll settle an old score at the same time," and Toombs switched a blue beech rod he held in his big hand. After seeing the boy hurry nervously to this impossible task, he went back to his chopping.

The shadows crept steadily toward the north till they marked noontime, and still one gray ash heap confronted Nathan. As he stood with a full basket of ashes poised on the edge of the ash bin, Toombs appeared, with his axe on his shoulder and the beech in his hand. "You know what I told you, and Silas Toombs doesn't go back on his words; no, sir."

"I couldn't do it. I tried, but I couldn't get 'em all done!"

Silas strode toward him in a fury, when Nathan hurled the basket of ashes full at his head, and dodging behind the shed was in rapid flight toward the woods, when his assailant emerged from the choking, blinding cloud, sputtering out mingled oaths and ashes. In a moment he caught the line of flight and followed in swift pursuit. The boy's nimble feet widened the distance between them, but he was at the start almost exhausted with his severe work, so that when he reached the woods his only hope lay in hiding.

Silas, entering the woods, could neither see nor hear his intended victim. Listening between spasms of rushing and raging, he heard a slight rustling among the branches of a great hemlock that reared its huge, russet-gray trunk close beside him. Looking up, he saw a pair of dusty legs dangling twenty feet above him.

"Come down, you little devil, or I'll shoot you."

"I won't," said Nathan, half surprised at his own daring; "you can't shoot with an axe."

"I'm glad you made me think on't. Then come down or I'll chop you down!" As an earnest of his threat he drove his axe to the eye into the boll of the tree.

The boy only climbed the higher, and disappeared among the dark foliage and thick, quivering rays of branches. Parleying no more, Silas began chopping

so vigorously that the great flakes of chips flew abroad upon the forest floor in a continuous shower, and soon paved it all about him with white blotches. When the trunk was cut to the middle, he shouted up another summons to surrender, but got no answer. Then his quick, strong strokes began to fall on the other side, steadily biting their way toward the centre, till the huge, ancient pillar of living wood began to tremble on its sapped foundation. Standing away from it, he peered up among the whorls of gray branches and broad shelves of leaves, but they disclosed nothing.

"Hello! Come down! Don't be a fool! An' I won't lick you. The tree's comin' an' it'll kill you." Still no answer nor sound, save the solemn whisper of the leaves, came down from the lofty branches. "You're a plucky one, but down you come!"

In a sudden blaze of passion at being thus scorned, he drove his axe deep into the tree's heart. A puff of wind stirred the topmost boughs. A shiver ran through every branch and twig. Fibre after fibre cracked and parted. The trunk tremulously swayed from its steadfast base. The sighing branches clung to the unstable air. A tall, lithe birch, that had long leaned to their embrace, sprang from it as in a flutter of fear, and then, with a slowly accelerating sweep, the ancient pillar, with all its long upheld burden of boughs and perennial greenery, went through its fellows to the last sullen boom of its downfall. Toombs breathlessly watched and listened for something besides the shortening vibration of the branches, some sound other than the swish of relieved entanglement, but no sound or motion succeeded them.

"Nathan, Nathan," he called again and again.

He ran along the trunk looking among the branches. He felt under the densest tangles, then cleared them away with quick but careful axe strokes, dreading, in every moment of search, that the next would reveal the crushed and mangled form of the boy. Not till the shadows of night thickened the shadows of the woods did he quit his fruitless search. He knew the boy was dead, and, if found, what then? Well, for the present a plausible lie would serve him well enough.

"Your boy has run off, Mis' Toombs. You needn't worry. He'll git starved out 'fore long and sneak back. And he'll work all the better when he does come. Boys has got to have their tantrums an' git over 'em." This device served so well to quiet any graver apprehensions that Ruth entertained, he the more insisted on it. "Like's not he's over to the Fort. They'll make him stan' round, I tell ye."

He intended in the morning to renew his search, but when it came he dared not go near that fallen tree, the dumb witness and concealer of his crime. When, from afar, he saw the crows wheeling above the spot, or when at night he heard from that direction the wolf's long howl, he shook with fear, lest they had dis-

covered his secret and would in some way reveal it.

CHAPTER XI—ESCAPE

When the accidental shaking of the branch disclosed his refuge, Nathan wished he had taken the easier shelter of a hollow log or the tangle of a windfall. The more so, when he caught brief, swift flashes of the axe gleaming up through the dark foliage and felt the tree shiver at every sturdy stroke. But he had no thought of surrender. The trunk of the leaning birch, so slender that his arms and legs could clasp it, had given him access to this coign of vantage and now offered a retreat from it.

Toombs was intent upon his work, with his back turned squarely toward the foot of the birch, though barely six paces from it. Escape, if at all, must be made while the chopper was on this side of the hemlock. Very cautiously he regained the birch where it hid trunk and lithe branches in the embrace of the great evergreen, and then worked downward, with an eye ever on his enemy underneath, making swiftest progress when the axe fell and its sound overbore the rustle of the birch's shaggy, yellow mane, that his buttons scraped along. At last his toes were tickled by the topmost leaves of a low, sprangling hobble bush, then lightly touched by the last year's fallen leaves and the soft mould. Then, as a flying chip struck him full on the cheek, he loosed his hold on the trunk and stole stealthily to the shelter of the nearest great tree.

The axe strokes ceased, but a glance showed him that Toombs was only wiping his sweaty brow on his sleeve, as he looked up into the tree and addressed its supposed occupant. As the futile chopping was resumed, Nathan crept off through the undergrowth till beyond sight and hearing, when he ran upright so swiftly that he was a mile away when the roar of the tree's fall came booming through the woods.

He sat down to get his breath and determine where to go, for so far he had only thought to escape his stepfather. Should he try for the Fort? How was he to cross the lake without a boat, and, if there, on what plea that he could offer was he likely to be harbored, for Toombs was on very friendly terms with the commander! Not there could he find protection. His old friend Job was the only

one to whom he could look, and in his secluded cabin he might hope to escape detection.

With this determination he arose and went his way, too well skilled in woodcraft, for all his youth, to lose it while the sun shone. Pushing steadily on he saw at last the slanted sunbeams shining golden green through the woodside leaves, then saw them glimmering on the quiet channel of Job's creek, and following the shore upstream, presently emerged in the little clearing. It was as quiet as the woods around it, and seemed more untenanted, for through them the songs of the thrushes were ringing in flute-like cadences, while here nothing was astir.

Nathan made his way so silently to the open door that he stood looking in upon the occupants of the cabin before they became aware of his presence. Job was squatting before the fireplace engaged in frying meat, and a great, gaunt, blue-mottled hound sat close beside him, intently watching the progress of the cooking. Presently his keen nose caught a scent of the intruder, and he uttered a low, threatening growl that attracted his master's attention.

"Be quiet, Gabriel; what is't troubles you?" Then seeing his visitor hesitating at the threshold, "Why, Nathan, come in my boy, come in, the hound won't hurt you. Ain't he a pictur'? Did you ever see such ears? Did you ever see such a chest and such legs? And he's as good as he is harnsome. I went clean to Manchester arter him and gin three prime beaver skins for him. He's one o' Peleg Sunderland's breed and'll foller anything that walks, if you tell him to, from a mushrat to a man. And as for his voice, good land! You hain't never heard no music till you hear it. That's what give him his name, Gabriel. But what's the matter with you, Nathan?" when, withdrawing his admiring gaze from his new acquisition, he noted the boy's wearied and troubled countenance. "You look clean beat out. There hain't nothin' the matter with your folks?"

Nathan told the story of his treatment since his mother's marriage to Toombs, and his unpremeditated flight, and all the particulars of his escape.

"I'd ha' gin a dozen mushrat skins to seen him when he got the tree down and didn't find you, and him like a fool dog a barkin' up a tree an hour arter the coon'd left it. You done right to come to me, for he won't come here to look for ye right off. And then when he's had time to cool off and git ashamed of himself, you can go home."

"No," said the boy quickly; "I'll never go back till I'm old enough to lick him and make him sorry I come."

"Oh, well, you think you will. But you won't never. The rough edge'll be wore off afore you git round to it. Once I swore I'd thrash a schoolmarster I hed, and when I went to do it we jes' sot down and talked over old times, like ol' friends. But what'll your mother and sis do without you?"

"They'll be better off without me. I can't help mother any, nor she me, yet awhile. Can't you let her know I'm safe some way?"

"Oh, yes, I'll happen round there some day to rights. How in tunket did she ever come to mate wi' that surly red-haired dog? You know I hain't seen her since they was married. Women is onaccountable critters, anyhow, an' I've been marcifully presarved from ever bein' tackled to one on 'em;" yet he sighed, as he looked about the littered room, that showed so plainly the lack of housewifely care.

After the supper of fried venison and johnny-cake was eaten, they sat in the twilight and firelight talking over the past and plans for the future, till the boy, worn out with the events of the day, was given a nest of furs in the loft, where he would be safe from detection by any chance visitor, and Job, after barring the door and carefully covering the fire, betook himself with the hound to their accustomed couch on the floor.

CHAPTER XII—A FREE LIFE

The borders of the clearing were dimly defined in the dusk of the next evening, and Nathan was beginning to feel lonely, though he had the hound for company, when Job came in with his gun on his shoulder.

"Well, what news?" Nathan asked, after a little impatient waiting for Job's account of his trip abroad.

"Well, I happened in just arter noon. Your nice stepfather sot by the fireplace a smokin'. 'Where's Nate,' says I, an' he up an' answered mighty quick, 'Run away, but he'll be back quick enough.' Your mother was lookin' turrible worrited, an' it was quite a spell afore I could git a chance to do my arrant with Toombs right in the room. Bimeby I made out to have a turrible pesterin' sliver in my right hand an' got your mother to pick it out wi' a needle. I'd ruther have a leg took off 'an to have a woman jabbin' at a sliver. Whilst she was at it, me wi' my back towards Toombs, I whispered you was at my house and all right, an' you'd ortu seen her face light up. Then we played the sliver was out, an' arter I'd wished you was to home to go fishin' with me an' wondered what on airth you'd run away f'm such a good home for, I come off. An' I tell you, boy, that ere ol' scoundrel thinks he's killed you. When I come off towards where he chopped

that tree, he follered along to see if I went nigh it, an' all the time I could see he was scairter'n he was mad."

"I don't care, I can't go back if you'll let me stay with you."

"Sartainly, an' glad to have you."

Nathan readily adapted himself to the ranger's way of living, helping him in the cabin work and that of the clearing. At intervals, through his friend, he sent his mother tidings of his welfare and learned of her own. Through the same way, and his mother's ready assistance, he gained possession of his other clothes—a tow shirt, a blue frock, a pair of gray breeches, and two pairs of thick woolen stockings, as large a wardrobe as most backwoods dwellers could boast of.

"Your mother stuck this out of the loft winder as I come away," said Job one day, handing him his father's cherished gun.

"Oh, I am glad to get this, and see, it is longer'n I be yet. But I'm growing, for I measured when Toombs put this up loft so't he could hang his gun on the hooks over the fireplace. See, I can hold it at arm's length long enough to see to shoot," and he stretched out the long-barrelled gun with pride.

"Toombs was out a burnin' log heaps," Job went on. "She says he's dretful narvous an' jumps at every sound. I ruther guess he's gittin' his pay as he goes along, my boy."

In preparation for the fall trapping, which was the ranger's chief dependence, the two, accompanied by Gabriel, made long ranges through the forest, marking their line by blazed trees, to build deadfalls for martens on the upland and for mink along the brook and larger streams, and larger traps for martens, otters, fisher, and beaver, and when the leaves began to fall they daily gathered their furry harvest. Day after day, too, the woods rang with Gabe's deep, melodious voice as he drove the deer to water. Many an adventure on lake or in forest spiced the half wild life, and the loving trust of the old man so sweetened it that time glided swiftly past. Many a lesson of woodcraft the boy also learned, as well as the priceless one of love and charity to all created things, if Indians and Toombs were excepted. Perhaps, in time, their turn for forbearance would come.

One day late in the fall Nathan ventured to the Fort, as much to visit the garrison boys, for whose companionship he often longed in his isolation, as to carry some fine partridges to the commandant's lady. He had shot them himself with his father's gun, in the use of which he was becoming expert.

"Whativer has coom o' your redheaded stepfather? He didn't coom here sin he coom marryin' your mother," said one of the English boys.

After this information, visits to the Fort were more frequent, since there was no fear of meeting Toombs. The sentinel, who, with his musket shouldered high above his left hip and his clubbed queue bobbing in unison to his slow, measured steps, always paced before the gate, made but a show of challenging

him, and Nathan was almost as free as the inmates to every part of the Fort, excepting the officers' quarters and the vigilantly guarded magazine. The drill and parade of the soldiers, in their spotless scarlet uniforms and shining arms, though there were less than fifty, rank and file, seemed a grand martial display, and he was always thrilled with the stirring notes of drum and fife. Occasionally he met the commandant's wife walking on the parapet, so refined and different from the toil-worn women he had been accustomed to see, that she seemed a being of another world.

Once that fall Job and his young companion went far back into the solitude of the primeval forest to hunt moose. Even the thunder of Ticonderoga's guns was never echoed there, and from morning till night they heard the sound of no human life but their own. At night the dismal chorus of the wolves was heard far and near, and now and then, what was a pleasanter sound, the call of a moose, soft and mellow, in the distance. With a birch bark horn Job simulated this call, and lured a moose into an ambuscade, where, within short range, the huge creature was killed. When with much labor the meat was transported and safely stored in the cabin, they were in no danger of a winter famine. Soon winter came, with days of snowbound isolation, and its days of out-door work and pleasant, healthful pastime.

The gloom of a blustering, snowy February day was thickening into the gloom of night, when a traveller and his jaded horse appeared at the door of the little log house.

"I've somehow missed my way on the lake," said he to Job, when the door was opened. "I'm bound for Bennington. Can you give me and my poor beast shelter till morning and then set me on the right road?"

"Sartainly, come in, come in," was answered, heartily. "You're welcome to such as I've got of bed an' board, an' your hoss'll be better off in the shed wi' corn fodder'n he'd be a browsin' in the woods."

When the stranger had seen his jaded horse cared for and had come in, the firelight revealed a man in the prime of life, of fine face and figure and of military bearing, though he was clad in the plain dress of a civilian. He proved a genial guest, and amused his companions with stories of his recent journey to Canada, and of his home in Connecticut, and with relations of the stirring events in that and the other colonies that portended a revolt against the mother country. In turn he was interested in everything pertaining to the New Hampshire Grants, the progress of the quarrel with New York claimants, the temper of the inhabitants toward England, but, particularly, was he curious about the condition of the adjacent fortress. Concerning its garrison and the plans of the fortification he found Nathan well informed.

"I like to remember such things about a place that has been so famous," the

stranger observed, as he made notes in a memorandum book.

"I would like to visit the fort sometime. How many men did you count the last time you saw them parade, did you say?"

It was well into the night when the precious embers were covered and the three betook themselves to sleep, with the wind roaring in the woods and the snow driving gustily against the oiled-paper windows of the cabin. When they awoke the storm was spent. Beneath the cloudless morning sky the forest stood silent as the army of spectres that its snow-powdered trunks resembled. After breakfast Job put on his snowshoes and led his guest to the desired road to the southward settlements. This break in the winter monotony was often dwelt upon by the fireside in the little log house. A chance visit, if aught occurs by chance, yet it proved of vast importance.

CHAPTER XIII—FOREBODINGS OF STORM

After many days of fair promises tardily fulfilled, spring had come. The soft air was full of its sounds and odors, the medley of harsh and liquid notes of the myriad blackbirds that swarmed in the trees along the creek, the crackling croak of the frogs, the whimpering call of the muskrats, the booming of bitterns, the splashing and quacking of wild ducks, and the murmur of running waters. There were the spicy fragrance of pine and hemlock, and the fresh smell of warming mould and bursting buds, while the perfume of wild flowers added a moiety to the spring time odor. The shad trees shone like snowdrifts in the gray woods, and the yellow catkins were alive with humming bees.

Amid the pleasant sights of nature's progress, Nathan and his friend sat near the door, taking off and stretching on pliant bows the skins of the last catch of muskrats.

"It's about time to quit trappin' for this year," said Job, as he slipped a skin onto the bow that he held between his knees. "They're gettin' a leetle off prime, though better'n they be in the fall an' no kits as there is then," and he fastened the skin in place, with a cut near its edge, into each horn of the bow. "Good land! What's Gabe hullabalooin' at now, I wonder?"

Nathan peered cautiously around the corner and whispered:

"It's neighbor Newton. I'll go up loft." Accordingly he climbed the ladder and crept softly to the side of the loft above the door. Through the wide cracks of the loose flooring he could see a patch of the chip strewn, sunlit earth outside, with Job's long legs stretching across it and his hands idle a moment as he called in the hound, who presently appeared, and behind him the stout stockinged legs of neighbor Newton.

"Job, have you heard the news?" Newton asked excitedly.

"News? What news?" Job's knife stopped half-way in the slit it was making along a muskrat's throat.

"There's ben a fight down in the Bay Colony 'twixt our folks and the king's troops and our folks whipped 'em."

"Our folks a fightin' the king's troops?" said Job incredulously.

The other hastily related such particulars of the momentous conflict as he had learned. Nathan, whose heart was beating fast at the stirring news, saw the muskrat drop to the ground.

"I al'ys said them reg'lars, shootin' breast high at nothin', couldn't stan' agin our bushfighters, aimin' to kill," Job said exultantly; "but what next, Dan'l?"

"War—it means war. The country's all a-risin'. Every man's got to choose the side he'll take. Which side is yourn, Job?"

There was a silence, and the answer came with slow deliberation. "I hoped to end my days in peace. I've had enough o' fightin', the Lord knows. When I've fit it was for the land I was born in—if it was under the British flag—an' I shan't never fight for no other."

"Every man in these clearin's is all right, so far as we know, exceptin' that aire sour-faced Toombs. He hain't no good will towards our side. A Tory in Seth's shoes, and him red-hot for liberty. He's got a Canuck a-workin' for him, and I'd livser trust a wolf'n one o' them pea-soupers. I hain't no patience wi' Ruth for marryin' that critter. Where do you s'pose her boy is?" There being no reply the speaker went on: "I b'lieve that devil has made way with him. He acts turrible cur'us, scared and startin' at every sound," and the two walked off towards the creek.

Half an hour later when Job returned, he asked Nathan: "Well, what do you think o' the news, my boy?"

"Oh, is it true about the fight? How I wish I could go and help our folks. Father'd go quick."

"Well, well, stay where ye be. If it goes on, it's sure to strike the ol' war-path," and the old ranger swept his arm towards the lake. "There'll be work for us here. The sign o' that fresh water mairmaid is comin' true agin."

They passed a week in restless, impatient waiting, when, unheralded by the

hound, Newton again entered the cabin and chanced to come face to face with the boy.

"Well, here you be," he said, without surprise and smiling good-humoredly; "I s'pected as much t'other day when I see the extry knife an' pile o' mushrats. Say, Job, how is't? Can I speak out afore him consarnin' the business we was talkin' on?"

"To be sure. He's close-mouthed an' he's achin' to go an' jine our folks down in the ol' Bay Colony."

"Good; he's the same stuff as his father." He laid his friendly hand on Nathan's shoulder and continued in a low, earnest voice: "There's a plan all fixed to take Ti and Crown P'int. It seems a Connecticut feller named Brown started the thing a-goin' some weeks ago. There's nigh ontu two hunderd and fifty men in the Grants engaged to do the job. Ethan Allen commands. We muster at Beeman's Crik, day after to-morrow night. You'll be there?" Job stretched forth his hand to his friend, who warmly clasped it.

"Me, too; let me go, too." Nathan's heart swelled with pride, and he felt himself suddenly leaping to manhood and a place among men.

"He's a stout lad an' he handles a gun like a man. Let him come," said Job. "But how be we goin' to git across the lake? There hain't boats enough hereabouts to take more'n thirty men to oncet."

"Colonel Skeene's is goin' to be borrowed, an' there's a plan to git some more without askin' at Crown P'int; with them an' what we can pick up we'll make enough. How many'll your birch carry?"

"Six men that's used to such craft, but not one lummax."

"Well, bring it along. Everything of the boat kind'll be needed. Toombs troubles me most. He's on the fence, which means he ain't to be trusted. He'll see our men a musterin' an' s'pect what's up, an' let the garrison know some way. He and his Canuck has got to be watched."

"Easy done! We can tie 'em, neck an' heels, an' leave 'em to take keer o' theirselves."

"Well, I'll send a guard an' see to that," Newton said as he hurried away to warn other settlers of the projected enterprise.

Those left began to clean their weapons carefully and prepare to mould some bullets. Job rehearsed his long disused manual of arms, in which he found Nathan familiar through his close observation of the soldiers' drill at the Fort.

"You don't want to aim that way," the old man said, when, at the command, Nathan held his piece ready to fire with the butt end under his elbow. "Lord, how I've heard Major Rogers swear to see the reg'lars wastin' lead, shootin' int' the tree tops wi' the enemy fair afore 'em! Fightin' hain't no foolin'. Aim to kill, jes' as ye would at a pa'tridge. There—that's the talk," when Nathan, following his

instructions, laid his cheek to the stock and flashed the priming at the breast of an imaginary foe.

CHAPTER XIV—GABRIEL'S GOOD SERVICE

On the afternoon of the 9th of May, 1775, Job and Nathan laid their guns in the canoe and stood beside her ready to set her afloat in the brown water, whose ripples softly lapped the drift of dried sedges along the shore. Job looked anxiously about, and once more, as he had several times previously done, he whistled a loud shrill note through his fingers.

"Where on airth is that dog? He mistrusted somethin' was up and run off. He'd ortu be tied up, but we can't wait any longer, an' he'll hafter run loose. Wal, le's be off."

Lifting the canoe, they set her afloat, stepped lightly on board, and, kneeling in the bottom, sent her flying down the creek. They skirted the lake almost beneath the spreading branches of the maples, now already dappled with the tender green of budding leaves. A little back from the naked, western shore, with its crumbling ruins of the old French water battery, uprose the gray battlements and barracks of Ticonderoga, and the blazoned cross of England floating lazily in the breeze.

"I've follered it for many a day," said Job sadly, "an' I never thought to go agin it. But I b'lieve I'm right," and he turned his face resolutely forward.

The turmoil and horror of war seemed far removed from the serene sky, the rippled water kissing the quiet shores, and the pervading sense of the earth's renewing life, enforced by bursting buds and opening flowers and songs of birds. Even the grim fortress seemed but a memento of conflict long since ended forever.

Sweeping into the broad mouth of the creek, they joined the motley crowd already gathered there. The assemblage was composed of all who were capable of bearing arms, from gray-headed veterans of the last war, to the striplings who had not yet been mustered on a training field. Job received hearty greetings from more than one old comrade whom he had not seen since they ranged this region, then an unreclaimed wilderness, under the leadership of the brave and

wary Robert Rogers, and he was soon in reminiscences of scouts and ambuscades, while Nathan watched and noted everything, a most interested spectator of what was passing so unobtrusively into history.

Presently there was a stir and gathering together of the detached groups and an expectant hush. Then he saw towering among them, in cocked hat and military garb of blue and buff, the stalwart figure of Ethan Allen.

"Fall in, men," said the deep-toned voice of Allen, and the groups formed in line as best they could among the trees.

As they moved forward to take their places Nathan noticed an unfamiliar form skulking among the tree trunks near him—a swarthy little man wearing a tasseled, woolen cap and gray coat unlike the Yankee garb. It flashed across his mind that this was the Canadian employed by his stepfather, and he tried to keep watch of his movements. But there was much else to engage him, and just then he felt a touch on his leg, and, turning, saw Gabriel's sorrowful face looking wistfully up to his own. "Down, Gabe," he said in a low tone, and the hound crouched behind. Just then Ethan Allen, having passed slowly down the line, accosting one and another, broke the silence:

"Friends of the Grants, we are already enough for this business in hand, but there are more to come. There will be boats enough to cross us all in good time. Keep quiet. Cook your rations and eat your supper. To-morrow we'll eat our breakfast in Ticonderoga, or know the reason why."

As Nathan's entranced gaze was for a moment withdrawn from the beloved commander, he caught a glimpse of the little unknown man stealing away among the shadows. Being more accustomed to the rigid discipline of the garrison than to the free and easy customs of volunteers, he did not dare to leave the ranks till many of his comrades had straggled away. Then he sought Job and told him his suspicions.

"I thought Newton was goin' to tend to them critters. Newton," he called to his neighbor, "didn't you put a guard over Toombs and his man?"

"Toombs is safe in care of a good man, but his Canuck couldn't be found. I guess he's too stupid to do any mischief, anyway."

"Well, he's ben a sneakin' round here an' now he's gone, an' there's no tellin' where. Where's Toombs's boat?"

"Here," and Newton pointed to the landing, where it lay among many others.

"Gabe's round here somewheres," said Nathan inadvertently.

"Jest the one I was a wishin' for," said the old man, aroused from his troubled pondering. "He can help when nob'dy else can." He then sent one of his shrill whistles into the woods, and then another, with such good effect that Gabriel presently appeared, loping easily along. "Good fellow, good fellow. Now, New-

ton, we'll ketch that skunk. Here, here, old boy," and he hurried swiftly away with the hound at heel.

Arrived at the house they found Toombs unconfined, but under the vigilant guard of a lynx-eyed Green Mountain Boy. When Job inquired for the Canadian, he detected a gleam of triumph in the glowering eyes of the surly, half-defiant prisoner.

"The fox has slipped," said Job; "but never mind. If he can fool Gabe he's a smart 'un. Ruth, where's somethin' that 'ere Canuck has wore?"

Ruth, who stood near her idle spinning wheel, half dazed at the unwonted commotion and afraid of she knew not what, pointed covertly to a much worn pair of moccasins hanging near the fireplace to dry.

"Hisn? There couldn't be nothin' better. See here, Gabe."

The hound snuffed eagerly at the soiled footgear, slowly wagging his tail, and then looked inquiringly at his master.

"Sarch him out, boy. Sarch him out," Job encouraged him, pointing along the ground.

The hound circled about the yard a little, and then, finding the trail, followed it silently and steadily down to the creek to where the men were mustered. There, on the much trodden ground, it baffled him for a while. Resorting to his usual tactics, he made widening circles and again found the trail and went off upon it in a steady, untiring pace southward in the direction of Ticonderoga.

"I knowed it," said Job to himself, "and I'll bet ye there'll be a Canuck treed afore sundown." Guided by the deep, mellow baying of the hound, he set off, with his gun at atrail, in rapid pursuit.

The agile little Canadian had at least an hour's start, and made such brisk use of it that he was on the shore opposite the Fort when he was overtaken by the hound, who at once set furiously upon him. Being unarmed, he was forced to scramble up a tree, from which, when he had recovered his breath, he began lustily to hail the Fort, and at intervals to curse the hound. His shouts, and Gabriel's insistent deep-mouthed bayings, could scarcely fail to attract the attention of the garrison, and Job, pushing forward at his best pace, presently appeared upon the scene.

"Hello de Forrt," the Canuck was shouting. "Hey! Hello de Forrt! Sacre chien! Go home, Ah tol' you! Hello, Carillon. Tac-con-derrrque! All de Bastonais was comin' for took you, Ah tol' you! Sacre chien! Stop off you nowse so Ah can heard me spik."

"Shut yer head an' come down out o' that mighty quick," Job commanded in a low voice.

"Me no onstan' Angleesh," and again the voice rang out over across the water: "Hello de Forrt!"

Peering through the overhanging branches, Job saw a group of red-coated soldiers gathered on the other shore, and presently saw a boat putting out from it.

"Looka here," said he sternly, as he cocked his piece and aimed upward; "I don't want tu be obleeged tu hurt you, but stop yer hollerin' an' come right down."

"Me no onstan', Ah tol' you! Hello—." The lusty hail was cut short by the report of the long smooth-bore. The Canadian's cap went spinning from his head, and he came scrambling down in a haste that threatened to leave half his clothes behind.

"Ah comin'! Ah comin'! Don't shot some more!" he cried in a voice trembling with fright.

Job arrested his descent till his gun was reloaded; then, when his captive slid to the ground, he quickly tied his hands behind with a fathom of cord, one end of which he held. Then he removed the woolen sash from the Canadian's waist and bound it about his mouth.

A glance upon the lake showed the boat half-way across, and approaching as fast as two pairs of oars could impel it. Job hurried his man into an evergreen thicket some twenty yards away, and, leaving him tied to a tree in charge of the hound, he stealthily returned to ascertain if possible whether the nature of the alarm had been comprehended by the soldiers. The boat drew rapidly toward the place where he lay concealed, and, at a little distance, the occupants lay upon their oars while they held consultation, so near that he could hear every word of it.

"Well, boys," said the sergeant in command, "whathiver it was, Hi don't hear nothink more of it. But Hi'll 'ail the shore. 'Ello there, whathiver is the row?" An answer was silently awaited till the echoes died away.

"Ah't was some o' thim Yankee divils huntin' just," said one of the soldiers, "and that's all about it. Divil a word could I make out but the dog yowlin' an' a man phillalooin', an' thin the shot. They kilt whativer they was at an' thin wint away."

"Hi believe you're right, Murphy, an' we'll no bother to go ashore, but just pull back and report to the captain," and off went the boat to the western shore.

With a sigh of relief Job sped back to his prisoner, to whom he motioned the homeward way, and set forth with him in front at a break-neck pace, which was occasionally quickened by a punch of the gun muzzle in the rear, and so was the captive driven to the camp.

Ticonderoga's evening gun had long since boomed its vesper thunder, and the shadows of evening were thickening into night in the forest, when Job emerged from them into the glare of the camp fire with his hound and pris-

oner, and received the warm commendations of Allen and his associates for his promptly and skilfully performed exploit.

"I don't claim no credit for't. It was all Gabe's doin's, an' if I'd left him tied up to hum as I laid out to, our cake would all 'a' ben dough."

"Here, Newton, here's your man. Put him under guard with that Tory, Toombs," said Allen.

A tall man of noble, commanding presence, but of a quiet, modest mien, stooped to caress the hound. "Why," he said, "it's one of Sunderland's dogs, that haven't their equal in New England."

"You've got an eye for houn' dogs, Capt'n Warner. He sartain is one o' them dogs an'll foller anything he's told to, though 't ain't no gre't trick to track a Canuck more'n an Injin. They're both strong-scented critters."

CHAPTER XV—LEADERS AND GUIDE

Even while Nathan watched Gabe and his master depart into the forest southward, he became aware the assemblage was moved by some new object of interest. Turning, he saw Colonel Allen and another gentleman, eagle-eyed, eagle-beaked, in handsome military dress, talking angrily in the midst of an excited group. At length Allen turned his passionate face toward the men and called in a loud voice:

"Men, fall in for a moment. Here," waving his hand toward his companion, as the men rapidly fell into line, "is Mr. Benedict Arnold. He bears a colonel's commission from the Connecticut Committee of Safety, and claims the right to command you to-night. Men of the Green Mountains, whom do you follow—Arnold or Allen?"

"Allen, Allen," came in response, loud and decided.

The chosen chief turned a triumphant smile upon his rival, who strode away in silence of restrained passion. Soon returning, however, he addressed Allen in a clear, steady voice:

"Sir, I submit to the will of these men, but let me be a volunteer in this glorious enterprise. The Green Mountain Boys and their famous leader are too

generous to refuse this."

Allen, touched at a vulnerable point, grasped the speaker's hand heartily and answered:

"Indeed, so brave a man as I well know you to be, is most welcome, and, by the Great Jehovah, if the men don't object, you shall be second in command."

A shout of approval went up from the men, who gathered around their camp fires again, while Allen and Arnold, together with Warner, walked apart in amicable consultation. Soon the first called loudly for any information concerning a lad named Nathan Beeman. At the sound of his name, Nathan started, blushed, hesitated, and then stepped bashfully forward, and was quickly recognized by Allen in spite of his added stature.

"Here, this is the youngster, Colonel Arnold, that Mr. John Brown tells of in this paper, whom he saw and conversed with last winter about Ticonderoga."

The two colonels then asked the boy many questions about the Fort, its entrance, the interior, the number of the garrison, and the disposal of the sentinels. Evidently satisfied with his straightforward replies, Allen said, low and impressively:

"You have such a chance to serve your country as don't often fall to a boy. Will you lead us into the Fort to-night? Will you do it faithfully?"

Nathan looked steadily into the earnest, searching eyes fixed upon him, but did not answer.

"Speak," cried Allen, sharply.

"If the commandant's lady won't be hurt, I will," he said at last, his left hand thrust into his pocket, fumbling his cherished shilling piece.

Allen laughed good-humoredly. "So the lady is a friend of yours. Well, never fear. We may disturb her morning nap, but she shall not be harmed. We are not waging war in the wilderness against women and children. Here, my boy, stick this twig of hemlock in your hat. Don't you see we've all mounted it? There, now," as he himself put the evergreen sprig in Nathan's hatband, "you wear the Green Mountain Boy's cockade. See that you never disgrace it."

The boy thrilled with pride as he walked with measured step behind the stately chieftain and his lithely built companion. Presently the sound of oars was heard and a large batteau swept into the landing, navigated by two of Newton's sons, who gleefully related how, with a jug of rum, they had lured Skeene's old negro with the coveted craft into their toils, as he was voyaging homeward from Crown Point. It was capable of carrying twenty-five persons and was a welcome prize. Though one by one, and in little flotillas, boats continued to arrive, still, at two o'clock in the early May morning, there were not enough to transport half the men gathered. After brief consultation, it was determined that as many as possible should at once cross to the other shore and there await the coming of

the others in the returning boats.

Embarkation began at once under the superintendence of Allen, Arnold, and Warner. Nathan found himself with the first two in the leading boat, Warner being left in charge of the party remaining on the eastern shore. At a low word of command, the flotilla swept out of the flickering glare of the fire into the darkness. It passed down the creek and was soon upon the lake, heading for the other shore, being guided to the chosen landing by the mountain peaks that loomed black against the western sky. The night was windless. The shrill piping of hylas, the monotonous trill of toads, and the rush of running brooks filled the air. Such sounds faded out as the middle of the lake was reached, where nothing was heard but the light plash of muffled oars, to rise again in increasing volume from the other shore.

As the last boat grounded on the shelving beach, Nathan was startled by the loud, hollow hoot of an owl, uttered thrice, almost in his ear. A few moments later there came, like an echo from the distant creek, the answer to this preconcerted signal of safe arrival. The men quickly disembarked, and the boats returned to those who, under Seth Warner, were eagerly awaiting their turn.

Those who had made the passage tramped to and fro to stir their blood, for there was a creeping chill in the night air. The first light of dawn was stealing up the eastern sky, the woods and mountains showing in sharp relief against it, yet no signs came to strained eyes and ears of the returning boats.

"The lazy-bones," growled Allen, forgetting the long distance. "What has gone wrong? Daylight will betray us if we wait much longer. What do you say, my men—shall we wait, and maybe lose our best chance of success, or go on with what strength we have?"

There was a murmur of universal assent, and Allen commanded:

"Fall in, in three ranks!"

Instantly the men formed in the order of the ranger service. "I want no man to go against his will. You that wish to go with me, poise arms." Every gun was brought to the position.

"Shoulder arms! Right face! Forward, march!"

Before the last word was fairly given, Arnold stepped in front of the speaker.

"I swear," he cried, shaken with his passion, "I will not yield my right. I planned this enterprise. My money set it on foot. I swear I will command, and not yield my right to Ethan Allen or the devil."

There was a muttered growl of dissatisfaction among the men, and Allen was raging. "What shall I do with this fellow? Put him under guard?" he asked, turning to one of his captains.

"Gentlemen," said Captain Callender, a staid and quiet man, "for the sake

of the good cause, don't quarrel. Yield a little, both of you. Share the command equally, and enter the Fort side by side."

Allen returned his half-drawn sword to its scabbard and said bluffly: "For the sake of the cause I agree to this." The Connecticut colonel sullenly assented, and the three columns moved briskly along the shore, led by the two colonels marching side by side, till, through the branches of the budding trees, the leaders saw close before them the walls of Ticonderoga, looming dark and vague in the gray of the morning.

CHAPTER XVI—TICONDEROGA

A halt was silently signalled, and Job, the skilfullest scout of all this band of woodsmen, was sent forward to reconnoitre. Silently, as a ghost, his tall figure melted into the obscurity of dawn, and presently appeared, out of the blur of shadows, bearing whispered tidings that all was quiet within the Fort, and only one sentinel carelessly guarding the open wicket of the main entrance.

A whispered word of command drifted back along the ranks and the troops moved forward. They mounted a slight declivity and advanced to the right toward the gate. Now the sentinel could be seen pacing his beat; now the white cross-belts and the facings of his uniform made out, and still he maintained his deliberate pace, unconscious of the enemy, while, perhaps, his thoughts were far away in the green fields of merry England, where the hawthorn was blooming and the lark singing "at heaven's gate."

The heads of the files were close upon him when his wandering thoughts were suddenly recalled. Too much surprised to challenge or call an alarm, he levelled his fusee at Allen's towering figure and pulled the trigger. The life of the bold chieftain hung for an instant in the trembling balance of fate, but not a spark followed the stroke of the flint. The guard turned and fled through the open wicket with Allen and Arnold, side by side, close upon his heels. After them came Nathan; and the crowding files of men swarmed through the narrow gate in an impetuous rush, and, guided by the boy, onto the parade. This was enclosed on three sides by lofty stone barracks. Here they caught a last glimpse of the flying

sentry dodging into a bombproof, like a woodchuck into a hole. Another sentinel made a bayonet thrust at Nathan, when Allen's sword fell quick as a thunderbolt upon the man's head in a downright blow that must have cleft the skull, had it not glanced on a metal comb that held his hair in place.

The assailants quickly formed in two ranks, facing outward upon the east and west lines of barracks, and gave three cheers that made the gray walls ring with quick, rebounding echoes.

"Quick, my boy, show me the commandant's quarters," said Allen, and his guide led to a flight of outer stairs arising to the upper story of the south barracks. Ascending them, Allen shouted:

"Come forth, commandant, come forth." But receiving no answer he thundered on the door with the pommel of his sword and shouted still louder:

"Come out of your hole, you damned old skunk," and thereupon the door was drawn a little ajar. Allen flung it wide open, and disclosed the bewildered face and undignified figure of Captain Delaplace, clad only in his shirt and nightcap, with his breeches in his hand. Behind him stood his night-gowned wife, her pretty face pale with alarm. For a moment the captain gaped at his unceremonious visitor.

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"I want the Fort and all it contains. Surrender, instantly."

"Surrender? Is this a mad joke or treason?"

"Neither; but honest men claiming their own. Surrender."

"In whose name? By whose authority?" asked Delaplace, assured of the earnestness of the summons.

"In the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress."

"I know no such authority."

"Sir, do you deny the authority of the King of Kings? And Congress seemeth to have some power here this morning. Waste no more time. We are four to your one. Do you surrender?"

"I see no choice. But it consoles me that you rebels will hang for this."

"You are welcome to the consolation of the hope, but it gives me no uneasiness and I run no new risks. I am Ethan Allen. You may have heard of me and have lusted for the shekels the sons of Belial offer for my head. But get on your clothes and parade your men without arms. Madam," bowing low to the lady, "pardon the intrusion, but my business is urgent. Permit me to close the door." So doing he awaited the reappearance of the commandant.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish," the chopfallen captain groaned. "Courage, my dear; this handsome giant has something of the manners of a gentleman, and will not let a lady be maltreated by his rebel band."

"Oh, William, the Fort surprised, and we prisoners, and not a blow struck

for defense."

"There could be no defense with such numbers. Well, there's no use crying over spilt milk. Did you see that pet cub of yours with the big rebel? What did I tell you?" said the captain, putting the finishing touches to his hasty toilet.

He rejoined Allen and proceeded to the parade, where, presently, he mustered his little force without arms and formally delivered them to the captors, who marched them away to their quarters under guard. Two days later, with an armed escort, they were on their way through the wilderness to Connecticut, and Nathan saw the last of the lady of the Fort.

Warner and the remainder of the men arrived at Ticonderoga soon after its surrender, disappointed that they had not participated in its achievement.

Still guided by the boy, the officers made a tour of investigation, which revealed a wealth of guns and ammunition—supplies greatly needed by the army of patriots then gathered at Boston. As the boy listened to the rejoicings, his heart was full of proud thankfulness that he had borne so important if humble a part in this service of his country.

Warren and Sunderland and a hundred men set forth for the easy conquest of Crown Point and its insignificant garrison, while, on Lake George, another party took possession of Fort George and its garrison of a man, his wife, and a dog.

Arnold hastily fitted out a schooner taken at Skeenesborough, and, with Allen in a batteaus filled with armed men, sailed down the lake to capture the British sloop at St. Johns. Job's knowledge of the lake, gained in years of ranger service upon it, made him valuable as pilot, in which capacity he accompanied Allen; and where Job went there went Nathan. The brisk south wind swiftly wafted Arnold's craft far in advance of her sluggish consort, whose crew saw their chances of glory lessening and fading with the white wings of the schooner.

The voyage was a pleasant one to Nathan, for beyond the mouth of Otter Creek everything was new to him, with strange and changing shores and such an expanse of water as he had never seen. His old friend pointed out to him notable landmarks and scenes of past adventure. Here was the cleft promontory of So-baps-kwa and the opposite headland of Ko-zo-aps-kwa, there the solitary rock of Wo-ja-hose. Then they passed the isles of the Four Winds and Valcour, and Grand Isle's low, wooded shore stretching along the eastward water line. At last, as they were nearing the northern end of the lake and saw on their right the ruin of an old French windmill, the only vestige of civilized occupation they had seen except the ruins of Fort St. Anne on Isle la Motte, they descried two sail rapidly bearing down toward them from the north before the shifted wind.

For a few moments they were in an excitement of alarm, not knowing whether these were friends or foes. Soon Allen, who had been watching through

a glass, lowered it, and, waving his cocked hat above his head, shouted:

"Hurrah, boys, it's our friends with the British sloop. Give her three cheers."

While the last lusty cheer was scarcely uttered, an answering salute from the cannon of the sloop and schooner was thundered forth.

"Give 'em powder for powder, boys. Fire," Allen shouted, and a rattling volley of muskets, rifles, and long smoothbores reawakened the echoes.

The crew of the batteau was then transferred to the schooner and her prize—the same armed sloop Nathan so well remembered seeing when she brought supplies to the Fort he had just borne a part in surprising. While amid loud rejoicings the story of her bloodless capture was told, they went merrily bowling homeward with the clumsy batteau surging along in tow at such speed as she had never known before.

CHAPTER XVII—HOME COMING

As the sloop swept past the massive battlements of Crown Point where they guard the narrowing channel of the lake, Job said to his young comrade:

"We're getting towards home."

"Yes, I've been thinking of home and mother and sis. Guess I needn't be afraid of ol' Toombs any longer, but I don't know as I could keep my hands off'n him. I always meant to give him a thrashing when I could."

"Mebby you could, now, but he's a cordy critter and a soople one; but mind what I tell you, you never will."

Nathan's answer was a short, incredulous laugh, as he helped Job make ready for disembarkation. As they marched in straggling ranks toward Fort Ticonderoga, Nathan was accosted by one of the young Newtons, who had remained there during the northern expedition.

"Look a-here, Nate," he said, drawing him aside, "there's some trouble to your mother's. She's sent word for you to come right home. Old Toombs is dead or run off to Canerdy, or something. I don't know the rights on't. But, anyhow, she wants you bad."

Either the death or the absconding of his stepfather was too good news to

be true, and his first duty was to serve his mother. He and Job readily obtained leave of absence, though it was scarcely needed, so lax was the military discipline of the crudely organized forces. The two at once set forth, and an hour's paddling of the light birch canoe brought them to the landing in the creek.

As they emerged from the shadow of the woods into the broad sunlight of the clearing, their first glance sought the house standing in the midst of green grass and springing grain. The scene was in such apparent peace and quietude as it might have been lapped, if all the turmoil of war and strife were a thousand miles removed. As Nathan's eyes ran over the familiar fields in which he had spent so many hours in the companionship of his father, his heart was softened with the sad and solemn memory. Then it hardened in a fire of wrath that flamed up at the remembrance of what he had suffered from his father's successor, and he felt if he should meet the wretch he would wreak summary vengeance upon him.

Soon they were at the open door and looking in upon the homely kitchen. It was empty but for the figure of a man slouching inertly in an armchair before the fireplace. There was no mistaking the shock of grizzled red hair, nor the brawny shoulders, though they were stooped and curved together.

The light tread of Nathan's moccasined feet did not disturb the melancholy figure, with its drooping head and vacant eyes staring into the fire, nor did it move till he laid his hand on its shoulder. Then the face turned upon him a slow, dazed stare, that as slowly kindled into recognition, then froze into a rigid glare of inexpressible terror. An inarticulate cry came from the white lips, while the helpless form strove to arouse itself from the living death of palsy.

Nathan cast upon Job a look of appalled, beseeching inquiry. As he met its answer in the awed face of his friend, resentment of past injuries faded out of his heart, as he realized that a mighty hand had forestalled his revenge, and he felt nothing but pity for the abject being that crouched before him.

"It's come out about as I told you," said Job, "but I wan't expectin' nothin' like this, poor critter. He thinks you're a spirit come to haunt him." Then he called loudly to the figure, "It's the boy. It's Nathan, alive and well. Don't be afeared, he won't hurt ye."

There were footsteps at the threshold, and Ruth and Martha entered, pausing a moment with wondering faces, which presently kindled with joy, and Nathan was clasped in their arms. When the first flush of joyful meeting was spent, Ruth explained in answer to her son's whispered question and his nod toward the dumb figure:

"He sort o' broke down after the guard went away, an' t'other day we found him all of a heap down by a big hemlock log that he never got round to cut up. He hain't seemed to sense much since. He's been dreadful worried about you,

Nathan, all along, ever since you went away."

She did not know the terrible cause of the speechless self-condemnation the wretch had suffered, nor did she ever learn it.

"I wouldn't tell her," counselled Job. "She'd feel bad, an' that wouldn't pay any more'n it does to nurse a grudge. Vengeance don't belong to us, poor critters."

Thenceforth, till Silas Toombs sank from his living death to eternal sleep not long after this, his stepson gave him thoughtful and kindly care.

At length the young frontiersman took his place among the defenders of his country. By the side of his old comrade and guardian, he fought in the losing fight of Hubbardton and helped to win the glorious victory of Bennington. Yet he is best remembered by the descendants of the old Green Mountain Boys as the guide who led their fathers in the conquest of Ticonderoga.

———

Where once stood the pioneer's log house, spacious farm buildings now stretch their comfortable quarters. From it, away to the southwest, across meadows, thrifty homesteads, low woodlands, and the narrowed waters of Lake Champlain can be seen rising against the foothills of the Adirondacks the hoary ruins of Ticonderoga. Within the house, upon a pair of massive moose horns, rests the old flintlock once filled with beans, "good enough for Yorkers," and later loaded with a leaden death message for Tory and Hessian. Cherished with as fond pride by its fair possessor, is a worn pocket-piece—the silver shilling given her ancestor by the beautiful lady of Fort Ticonderoga.

Transcriber's Note

Spelling and punctuation inaccuracies were silently corrected.
Archaic and variable spelling is preserved.
The author's punctuation style is preserved.
Hyphenation has been made consistent.

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