



1897

The Boys of Fort Schuyler

James Otis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/settler-literature>

Recommended Citation

Otis, James, "The Boys of Fort Schuyler" (1897). *Settler Literature Archive*. 31.
<https://commons.und.edu/settler-literature/31>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Settler Literature Archive by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact zeinebyousif@library.und.edu.



HN 26CC \$

75-PORT SCHOTTEK





This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

KE 84

HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY



The Gift of

Mr. & Mrs. Henry Herrick Bond
of Waltham, Massachusetts



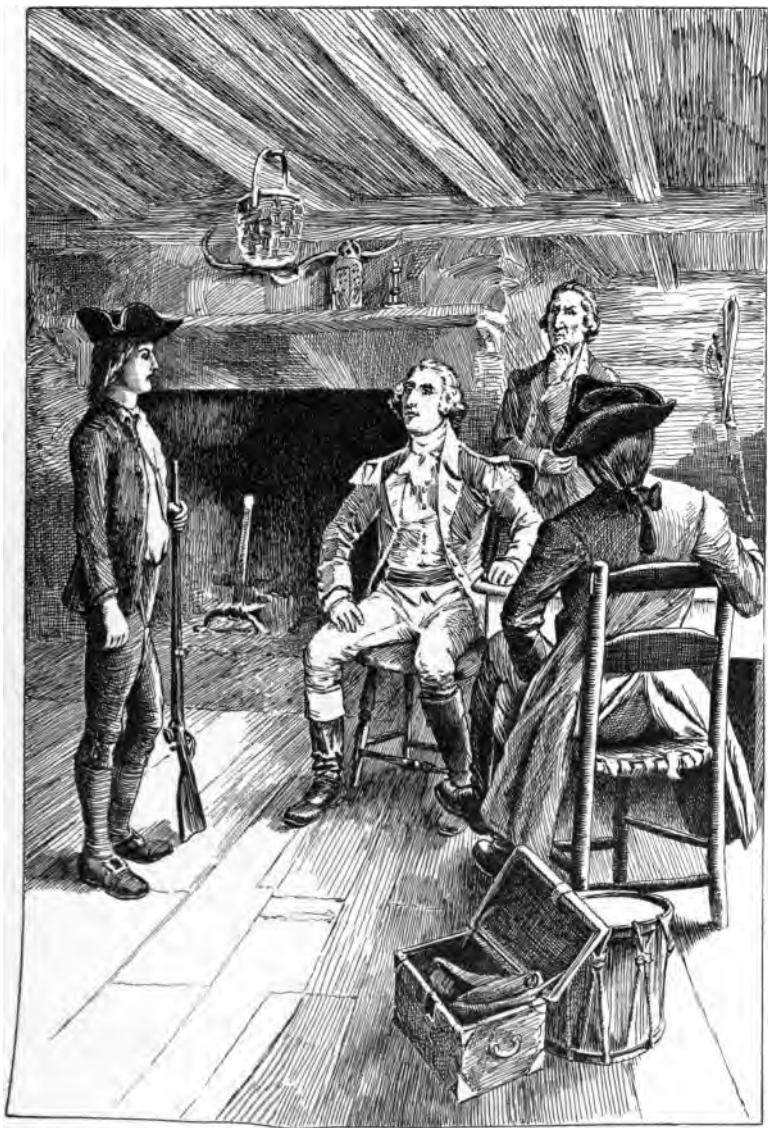


THE BOYS
OF
FORT SCHÜYLER



“HOW OLD ARE YOU, PETER?” THE COMMANDANT ASKED, KINDLY.”





“HOW OLD ARE YOU, PETER?” THE COMMANDANT ASKED, KINDLY.”

THE BOYS
OF
FORT SCHUYLER

BY

JAMES OTIS

AUTHOR OF "TOBY TYLER," "JENNY WREN'S BOARDING-HOUSE,"
"TEDDY AND CARROTS," "JERRY'S FAMILY," ETC., ETC.

Illustrated by

GEORGE FOSTER BARNES

BOSTON
ESTES AND LAURIAT
PUBLISHERS

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. FORT SCHUYLER	I
II. THE VOLUNTEER	15
III. THROUGH THE SWAMP	28
IV. FORT DAYTON	42
V. THE ADVANCE	57
VI. THE AMBUSH	71
VII. A TORY STRATAGEM	88
VIII. A DEARLY WON VICTORY	101
IX. SERJEANT FONDA'S STORY	114
X. THE DEMAND	128
XI. A TIMID VOLUNTEER	141
XII. THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES	155
XIII. ON RECRUITING SERVICE	171
XIV. SIR JOHN'S PROCLAMATION	186
XV. GENERAL ARNOLD	199
XVI. HON-YOST	212
XVII. A REHEARSAL	227
XVIII. A FAILURE	240
XIX. SUCCESS	253

1

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
“‘HOW OLD ARE YOU, PETER?’ THE COMMANDANT ASKED, KINDLY”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
PETER STRUGGLING WITH THE INDIAN	33
“IT WAS THE AMBUSH GENERAL HERKIMER HAD PREDICTED”	73
“AT THIS POINT PETER DISCHARGED HIS RIFLE”	83
“HORRIBLE EVIDENCES OF THE BATTLE IN THE SWAMP BEGAN TO PRESENT THEMSELVES”	167
“‘THEY ARE TURNING DOWN THAT PATH!’”	183
PETER AND THE MOTHER OF HON-YOST SCHUYLER	215
“‘DON’T YOU KNOW ME? I’M PETER KIRKLAND!’”	261

THE BOYS OF FORT SCHUYLER.

CHAPTER I.

FORT SCHUYLER.

ON the Mohawk River. August, 1777. Five hundred men and officers, some in uniform, some in homespun clothing, and others in garments of smoke-dried deer skin, the garrison of Fort Schuyler, forgetful alike of rank or order, were clustered just in front of the rude fortification, listening intently to the information given by the half-breed, Thomas Spencer, a blacksmith of the Cayugas, whose arrival had plunged them into a state of mingled surprise and apprehension.

He told of the near approach of the enemy. Seventeen hundred British soldiers, Tories, and Indians were, he declared, within twenty-four hours' march of the fort.

At their head was Colonel St. Leger, an officer of marked ability; Sir John Johnson, son of that Sir William who gained such ascendancy over the Indians while acting as his Majesty's superintendent of Indian affairs; and last, but by no means least, Thayendanegea, or Joseph Brant, the ablest strategist to be found among the Six Nations.

"During the past five nights have I hovered around their camp-fires, certain as to what would be my fate if discovered,

and this I have learned," the half-breed said, with a certain rude eloquence, understanding full well his words would receive due credence, for he was known to the majority of his hearers as a true friend of the struggling colonists, and one possessing a thorough knowledge of Indian warfare and Indian treachery. "You all remember that after Sir John fled from the Mohawk Valley, leaving behind him the largest estate owned by any one man in the Colonies, he was commissioned as colonel in the King's service, and from those who accompanied him in his flight, and such mercenaries as could be found in Montreal, he raised two battalions under the name of the Royal Greens. It is said that when St. Leger sailed from Montreal to Oswego, to meet Sir John and Thayendanegea, who now holds a British commission as captain, he had with him four hundred men. The Tories and Indians whom he met numbered thirteen hundred. The plan of the campaign is to crush the patriots in the Valley, and then continue on to join Burgoyne at Albany."

"And you say this force will soon be here?"

"The advance is not twenty-four hours behind me. I remained spying upon their movements until nothing more could be learned, and then pushed on to give you warning."

Colonel Marinus Willett, second in command, whispered to Gansevoort, the commandant, and immediately afterward the latter beckoned for the half-breed to follow him to his quarters inside the fortification.

The soldiers, many of whom looked anxious but not frightened, separated into little groups, as if each wished to discuss with his particular friends the danger which menaced.

The fortification had been built in 1758, during what is commonly known as the "Old French War," by General Stanwix, and was given his name.

In 1776 Colonel Dayton had been sent by the Continental Government with orders to rebuild Fort Stanwix with the utmost energy, because it would afford the only barrier against an invasion from Canada.

When, in April of 1777, Colonel Gansevoort was placed in command of the fort, he "found it not only indefensible, but absolutely untenable; the only improvement accomplished by Dayton being the change in its name, to Fort Schuyler. But Gansevoort set to work with a brave heart to better, if possible, his condition; and, being soon after joined by Colonel Marinus Willett and his regiment, succeeded — hampered as he was by sickness, bad roads, lack of food, and a woefully incompetent engineer — in so renovating and strengthening the ruinously dilapidated old fortress" as to render it, in appearance at least, serviceable.

It was now the first day of August in the year 1777. The garrison of the fort, including boys, invalids, and servants, numbered five hundred and fifty. The supply of ammunition was nearly exhausted. The commissary department was chiefly noticeable by the lack of nearly everything necessary, and Thomas Spencer, whose word was to be thoroughly relied upon, had brought information that the enemy, seventeen hundred strong, were within twenty-four hours' march of the place.

On the bank of the river, as if it had been their desire to get as far as possible from the more noisy soldiers, were two boys and a man, discussing, quite naturally, the same news which had so startled their comrades.

"I allow seventeen hundred agin less than a third of that number is big odds; but if the Continentals had allers stopped to reckon up the chances, there wouldn't be much of a war goin' on by this time."

“ But do you think we can hold the fort against so many ? ” one of the boys persisted.

“ I ain't figgerin' on what we *can* do, 'cause it's enough for me to know what it's my duty *to* do. Likewise it aīn't for you to spend time on sich things, Peter Kirkland. When your uncle, Parson Samuel Kirkland, settled down among the Oneidas as a missionary, he didn't *ask* if any special work could be did, but set about it, otherwise he'd never got sich a hold on them Injuns that Guy Johnson, knowin' what a bred-in-the-bone rebel the parson was, shipped him off so's he couldn't bring the whole tribe over to the Continentals.”

“ But that was different — ”

“ Not a bit of it, lad. Parson Sammy went there to do his duty, an' did it like a man. Likewise you're here for the same purpose, so there ain't any need to argue about it. What's that you say, Joe Sammons? Have you got the heart to talk of what the Britishers can do, after your father, old Sampson, headed the crowd that pulled my brother Jacob out of jail, where he'd been put by that arch Tory, Alexander White, jest because he was a-givin' vent to his sentiments? White didn't cut a very wide swath after that, though,” the old man added, with a chuckle. “ On the same night we battered down the jail door; pulled Jake out of the cell, and would have made a prisoner of White himself but that he succeeded in makin' his escape, bein' took under the wing of Sir John.”

“ Tell us, Serjeant Fonda, about the Johnsons at the Hall! Why is it they've been allowed to do very nearly as they pleased ? ”

“ Well, they haven't, when you come to think of it, my boy. Now, there was Sir William; everybody — Injuns an'

all — liked him, for he was mighty nigh what you might call a man, even though he *was* on the wrong side of this 'ere trouble. When he died, and young John took his title and estates, while Guy Johnson, who married his daughter, fell heir to the office of Superintendent of Indian Affairs, things begun to be different. To be sure, they still had Thayendanegea to help 'em, an' his sister, who'd been housekeeper for old Sir William, an' wasn't to be sneezed at when it come to givin' advice, was on their side. But somehow they couldn't carry things with as high an' mighty a hand as the old baronet did. Why, bless your heart, it was only a year ago that General Schuyler come to the conclusion young Sir John, who had five hundred men in his pay stationed at the Hall, was livin' a leetle too much like a small-sized king, an' doin' too much mischief agin the Continentals. So the general marched over there with three thousand men, an' I was one of 'em. He made Sir John surrender all his arms, ammunition, an' military stores, an' disperse the troopers he called 'Highlanders.' But, you see, Sir John didn't live up to the agreement he made with Schuyler at that time, 'cause he begun workin' the Injuns over to King George's side, an' when that was found out Colonel Dayton went up there to take this 'ere titled Tory a prisoner. Young John ran away, leavin' everything behind him, an' the biggest estate in these 'ere Colonies was confiscated for the benefit of the Continentals. Then, as Spencer says, Sir John was given a commission in the British army, an' he raised two battalions. Now he's comin' down to wipe out them as are tryin' to hold the Mohawk Valley where it belongs. What's more, he's most likely bringin' with him all the Tories who ran away when he made his escape. It'll be hot times, lads; but we're bound to do our best, an' never stop to ask which side is the strongest."

"I have heard it said we have but little ammunition."

"An' I reckon it's true. But we can use what we've got, an' make every ball count."

"The store of provisions won't last many days," Joe Sammons suggested.

"All the more reason why we should fight the harder, seein' as there's no time to be lost."

"But what about Burgoyne?" Peter asked.

"Hark ye, lad! We've got nothin' to do with Burgoyne; leastwise, not yet awhile. He ain't the one we're expectin to face, an' there are other stout hearts as will meet him. Our work is here, an' there's enough cut an' dried already to keep us busy, so we won't cross bridges till we come to 'em."

"It makes a boy feel brave to talk with such men as you, Serjeant Fonda," Peter said, emphatically.

"You don't need what little I can say to perk you up, lad. You're bred from good stock, an' I'm allowin' to see both you an' Joe give a brave account of yourselves in this 'ere scrimmage what's bound to come."

Before Peter could reply, the old man sprang to his feet as he gazed intently down the river.

"What is it?" Joe asked in a whisper.

"It looks mightily like a canoe, lad, an' if it's the one Colonel Gansevoort has been expectin', we're in great luck."

A warning cry from the sentinel, stationed on the river bank below the fort, brought those who had been so earnestly discussing the probable outcome of the British advances to a state of utmost activity, and ten minutes later Peter and Joe saw a white man in the uniform of a Continental officer leap from the birchen craft as its prow grated on the sand, making his way rapidly toward the commandant's quarters.

“Perhaps Burgoyne’s coming this way to meet St. Leger,” Joe said, apprehensively.

“Now don’t get fanciful, my lad. There’s nothin’ of that kind like to happen, leastwise, not yef’ awhile. Unless I’m way off my reckonin’, an’ I don’t allow I am, that ’ere soldier has come to tell Colonel Gansevoort that the ammunition and provisions we need are on the way. Now it’s only a question of hurry.”

Twenty minutes later it was rumoured among the idlers that the officer brought by the friendly Oneidas was a messenger from Lieutenant-Colonel Mellon of the State troops, who, with a detachment of two hundred men, was advancing as rapidly as possible against the current with two bateaux of ammunition and provisions.

No news could have been more welcome, and as the old serjeant said, musingly, it was “now only a question of time as to whether the reinforcements or St. Leger would arrive first.”

“We’ll allow, lads, that luck is with the Continentals this time, an’ we shall be in reasonably good shape for meetin’ the Tories an’ Britishers when they come. There’s nothin’ to do now but get what sleep we can ’twixt this an’ mornin’, for to-morrow’ll be a busy day, I reckon.”

“Did you hear how far down the river the reinforcements are?” Peter asked.

“The lieutenant who has just landed says they should be here before this hour to-morrow.”

“And that is about the time Thomas Spencer has set for the coming of the enemy,” Joe added.

“Yes, lad, an’ as I said before, it’s a question of which gets here first. Now turn in. Each of you will have a man’s work to do before the sun goes down again, an’ you must be in shape for it.”

The old man had given advice which he found impossible to follow himself.

It appeared positive to all that the fate of the fort depended upon the fact as to which of the approaching forces would first make its appearance.

Brave as the little band of Americans was, it had seemed hardly within the range of possibility that the present force, with but a scanty supply of provisions and ammunition, could hold out for even forty-eight hours against the enemy who was advancing to overwhelm them. With the addition of two hundred men and such stores as might be carried in two boats, the opportunity for defence seemed brighter, although an impartial judge would have decided that, even with this increase of numbers, the defenders of Fort Schuyler could not hope to long resist the attack which must soon be made.

The little army of patriots, however, was confident that, if Lieutenant-Colonel Mellon should arrive in time, they would be able to give a very satisfactory account of themselves when their Tory neighbours came, and, with but few exceptions, the defenders of the fort spent the hours of darkness in watching.

Peter and Joe, literally forced to do so by Serjeant Fonda, lay down in their quarters; but it was not to sleep.

At midnight the old soldier spoke in a whisper, and, because of receiving no answer, probably fancied they were asleep. Then he stole cautiously out, and the boys understood that his mind was in as great a whirl of anxiety as theirs, although he strove so hard to prevent the fact from being apparent.

“If the serjeant, who has been a soldier so long, cannot

sleep, it doesn't stand to reason we should succeed, no matter how many hours we lie here," Peter whispered to his friend, and Joe replied by leaping to his feet, as he said :

"What's the use of trying when we want to be outside? Serjeant Fonda can't say anything against it now, and I am going where the others most likely are."

Lights were burning in the commandant's quarters when the boys emerged from their barracks, and the shadowy forms of men flitting here and there in the darkness told that anxiety had made of slumber a stranger, for that night at least.

Not until the sun had risen did the boys see their old instructor, and then he would have made it appear as if he had but just risen had not Joe said :

"We followed you out last night, serjeant. It wasn't to be expected Peter and I could sleep when every one else was on the alert."

"No, I allow not, lad. It was askin' a little too much, I'll admit, an' if there was one man in this 'ere fort that closed his eyes after the lieutenant arrived, I'm mistaken."

"Will there be any attempt made to meet the boats?" Peter asked.

"Not with our force, lad. We are too few in numbers to admit of takin' away any for that purpose. If Mellon's two hundred men can't fight their way through, we shall have to do without 'em, an' that's a fact. Sentinels have been stationed every hundred yards for nigh on to a mile down the river, so as to give word of the approach of the boats, and Spencer, with half a dozen men, is out scoutin' for the Tories. We're likely to hear the news, if there is any, mighty soon."

In this Serjeant Fonda was correct.

He had scarcely ceased speaking before the sentinel nearest the fort reported that the word had been passed from those below him that the boats were in sight.

This welcome intelligence had but just been received when, from out the thicket a quarter of a mile away, two of Spencer's scouts appeared running at full speed.

"It is likely to be mighty close shavin', however it turns," the old soldier said, excitedly, first starting forward as if he would go down the river, and then wheeling about suddenly as he realised that he was thus turning his back upon the enemy.

Now all was bustle and confusion, from out of which could be heard the beating of drums calling the men to ranks, and a few moments later the entire garrison stood to their arms, ready to defend with their lives that which would enable them to meet the enemy on more nearly even terms.

The two boys were literally trembling as they stood in their places next to Serjeant Fonda, and the latter whispered, encouragingly :

"Get hold of yourselves, lads ; you're in no condition for any kind of work as you are now. Remember, quick action may be called for at any moment, and it isn't your business to think of what is in the rear or the front until the order has been given."

Older soldiers than Peter and Joe found it difficult to remain in position just at that time, and a long sigh of relief, not unlike the sound of the wind soughing through the trees, was heard along the line as the foremost of the two boats, laden to the gunwales, appeared around the bend in the stream.

A half-suppressed cheer burst from the lips of the nervously expectant soldiers, to be stilled almost instantly as the order was passed for perfect silence.

Then came the word for certain of the men to stack arms, and while one-half the force stood at "attention," the remainder were marching to the bank of the stream, there to assist in the work of unloading, which must be pushed forward as rapidly as possible.

Peter and Joe, unfortunately, so they thought, were among those forced to remain inactive during this time when the moments were so precious, and as they handled their muskets uneasily, thus betraying the painful excitement under which they laboured, the old serjeant whispered encouragingly :

"It's a soldier's duty to do what he's bid, lads, an' he'll never be good at his trade till he learns to obey. I know your hands are itchin' to get hold of that cargo ; but we're needed right here, for it can't be many minutes before the Tories show themselves. Half an hour more, please God, an' we'll be in better kind of shape to give the renegades a proper reception."

Fifty additional men were told off to assist in the work of unloading ; but Peter and Joe were still forced to remain in the ranks.

Then came the moment when a hearty cheer burst from the lips of those nearest the stream, telling their comrades that the last bale of provisions, the last keg of powder, had been removed from the boats, and at the same instant the report of musket shots rang out from among the foliage, as Spencer, with two of his scouts, burst into view.

The enemy had arrived.

The troops were hurriedly ordered into the fort, but before the rear guard could execute this command a battalion of men, led by Thayendanegea himself, was upon them.

It was not Colonel Gansevoort's purpose to take the

chances of even so much as a scrimmage outside the fortification, and, regardless of the musket-shots which brought down here and there a man, the troops were marched at double-quick into the fort.

The little force of patriots was so hard pressed that the last man, who chanced to be the captain in charge of the bateaux, was taken prisoner by Thayendanegea's warriors.

The sorely needed ammunition and provisions were safely inside the fortification, and if the lives of a dozen men had been the cost, this strengthening of the defence would have been cheaply purchased.

Peter and Joe fancied that the battle would begin without delay; but in this they speedily discovered their mistake, and on referring the matter to Serjeant Fonda, were considerably enlightened as to the customary methods of warfare.

"We sha'n't see anything of that kind, lads, till the whole force is here; leastwise, nothin' to speak of. I allow Joe Brant's men will pick us off if they can get a chance; but this 'ere fort, ramshackly as it is, can't be taken in a hurry, an' nobody knows it better than Thayendanegea. He'll lay low out there till the others arrive, an' then it'll be a case of a reg'lar siege, which is something I don't hanker after. I can stand a good rough, off-hand fight as well as the generality of men; but when it comes to settin' down like a rat in a hole waitin' for the cat outside to come into position, so that we don't dare so much as show our noses out, why, I say it ain't soldierly. Howsomever, we've got to take what they're pleased to give, an' —"

He was interrupted by the voices of men a short distance away, and ceased speaking in time to hear the words:

“There isn’t white man or Injun could get through from here to Fort Dayton now. An hour ago it might have been done.”

“What’s that?” the old soldier asked, excitedly.

“Colonel Gansevoort gives some one of us a chance of offerin’ to go to Fort Dayton an’ report the news. The man what volunteers for that service is the same as volunteerin’ for his grave.”

The serjeant remained in a thoughtful attitude an instant, as if speculating upon the wisdom of such an attempt, when Peter whispered, timidly :

“Do you suppose the colonel would allow a boy to go, instead of a man?”

“Are you thinkin’ of tryin’ for it, lad?”

“I would be willing, serjeant, and it seems better a fellow like me should go, if the danger is so great, than an old soldier.”

“How do you make that out?”

“Because by killing me the Tories wouldn’t cripple our force as much as if they should shoot an old and brave soldier like you, who could be of great assistance here.”

The serjeant looked at Peter an instant, and then, seizing both the boy’s hands, said, in a voice tremulous with emotion :

“You don’t want to talk about the loss of brave men, lad, when you’ve got the pluck to volunteer for such a mission.”

“Do you think the colonel would accept me?”

“I believe you could do the work as well as any one in this ’ere fort, an’ if it so be you’re ready to take your life in your hands for the sake of them you leave behind, I say, my boy, may God bless you, an’ only ask that you give me a

chance to go with you when you tell the colonel what it is you're willin' to do."

"I'd like to have you go with me, serjeant," Peter replied in a matter-of-fact tone, and, flinging his arm over the boy's shoulder, the old soldier led him towards the commandant's quarters.

CHAPTER II.

THE VOLUNTEER.

THERE was no fear in Peter's mind as he walked towards the commandant's quarters with Serjeant Fonda by his side; perhaps because of the fact that he did not realise the full extent of the danger to which he would be exposed.

When he had learned that a volunteer was wanted for a particularly perilous piece of work, his only thought was that he could be spared from the fort better than an abler soldier, and spent no time in speculating upon what might be before him.

The old serjeant was proud that a boy, who was looked upon in the fort as a protégé of his, should display more courage than veterans, and he walked unusually erect and dignified as he led him to the commander.

There was no difficulty in gaining an audience with Colonel Gansevoort; discipline was not as strict in the camp of the Continentals as in the British quarters, and Serjeant Fonda and the boy made their way directly to the room where Colonels Gansevoort, Willett, and Mellon were discussing the situation.

The commandant looked up quickly, as if vexed because of the untimely intrusion, and the old soldier saluted hurriedly, as he said :

“ When this boy heard you wanted to send out a messen-

ger, colonel, he volunteered for the service, an' I hope you'll accept his offer, seein's how he's the first among us all that has showed himself willin' to do the work."

The three officers gazed at the young private scrutinisingly.

"Who is he, serjeant?" Colonel Gansevoort asked.

"Peter Kirkland, nephew of that missionary Kirkland who was run out of the Valley by Colonel Guy Johnson."

"Does he fully realise the extent of the danger to which he will be exposed?"

"He allowed it would be better he should be killed, if blood must be spilled, than one of the men who would do more work here in the fort than he could."

"If he volunteers in that spirit his services should be accepted," Colonel Willett said, quickly. "One would think Parson Samuel had dictated the words."

"How old are you, Peter?" the commandant asked, kindly.

"Seventeen last March."

"Are you well acquainted with the country hereabouts?"

"I have been over considerable of it, sir."

"He has worked at freightin' goods from Schenectady," Fonda added.

"Would you have much difficulty in finding your way to the German Flats?"

"I think not, sir, although I have never been there."

"And you understand that the enemy has completely surrounded the fort?"

"Yes, sir."

"That the service for which you would volunteer is dangerous in the extreme?"

"Yes, sir."

The officers conferred together a few moments in whispers, and then Colonel Gansevoort said :

“ You shall make the attempt, my brave lad. I will give you no written instructions, because in case you are made prisoner, anything of the kind might work to your harm. At the first opportunity after nightfall you will leave the fort at whatsoever point you may decide upon, and, if it is possible to get through the enemy’s line of sentinels unobserved, travel in a direct course to the German Flats, giving information of our situation to all whom you may meet who are friendly to the cause. Should you arrive at the proposed destination, repeat there what I now tell you : We are besieged by nearly two thousand white men and Indians under command of Colonel St. Leger. Our effective force consists of less than seven hundred, and we have only sufficient ammunition and provisions to admit of our holding out three weeks — not longer. However, here we shall remain, and if it is not possible for our friends to send reinforcements, here our dead bodies will be found, for we shall not surrender. I think that is the feeling among the men, serjeant ? ”

“ If there’s any that think different, colonel, they haven’t dared to speak their thoughts. It seems to be a tight fix we’re in ; but I don’t believe five men could be found willin’ to go home, even if the Britishers should agree to give ’em safe passage through the lines.”

“ I hope that spirit will continue to animate them. The situation may not be as desperate as now seems, particularly if Peter succeeds in his mission.”

“ Have you any more instructions to give him, colonel ? ” the serjeant asked, with a salute.

“ No ; his story will be sufficient to arouse our friends,

and if it be possible to get assistance to us, we shall receive it. You are a brave lad, Peter," Colonel Gansevoort continued, as he took the boy by the hand. "I pray God you may be spared yet many years longer to the service of your country; but if the fortunes of war should go against you, my boy, and you are taken prisoner, bear in mind that any information given the enemy—and you will be threatened with death if you do not give the fullest particulars as to our force and condition—may lead to the slaughter of all your comrades."

"They won't get anything out of me, sir, if it so be I'm captured," the boy replied, stoutly, and Serjeant Fonda gripped him firmly by the shoulder in token of his admiration for the brave words.

"You can depend on Peter, colonel," the old soldier said, as the other two officers pressed the young volunteer's hand, and then the interview was at an end.

"Don't think of startin' till after dark," Fonda said, when the two were in the open air once more.

"Why not now? Only a portion of the Britishers have come up, and the lines are not as strong as they may be when the remainder of the force arrives."

"Well thought of, lad, yet I don't agree with you. The scouts are out now surveyin' the land, so to speak; but when that job is finished, and I allow it'll be by sundown, only the regular sentinels will be on duty. Then is your time, so take things easy this day. It won't do any good to listen to what the men may say about your chances, so there's no reason why you should be much with them."

At this point Joe Sammons, who had been waiting for his friend to reappear, came up as he asked, eagerly:

"Are you to go, Peter?"

“ If I can.”

“ And Colonel Gansevoort said nothing against it ? ”

“ Why should he, lad ? ” the old serjeant asked, sharply. “ Peter is here as a soldier, an’ he counts on doin’ a soldier’s duty, nothin’ more.”

“ But the men say a mouse couldn’t get through the lines ; that he’ll surely be killed, for the Tories won’t make prisoners after what’s been done to them in the Valley, and it’s worse than an ordinary death to fall into the hands of the Indians.”

“ Even in that case, which I don’t allow is certain to happen, Peter will be doin’ no more than his duty, for the most any of us can do is to die for our country, if it so be that’s necessary.”

Joe stood holding his friend’s hand for an instant, as if taking a final leave of him, and then whispered in a tremulous voice :

“ Why shouldn’t I go with you, Peter ? I’m not as brave as you, or I would have been the one to volunteer ; but I had rather share your danger, than be left behind.”

“ You’re a good lad, Joe Sammons,” the old serjeant said, gruffly, as he placed his huge hand on the boy’s shoulder, “ an’ I believe you’d follow Peter, however much you might be afraid ; but it would do no good, an’ might work harm. It stands to reason one can get through the lines easier than two, an’ after that’s been done it’s only a matter of hard work, so you wouldn’t be doin’ any real service. If it’s a hot job you’re after, we shall see more of it here, once the Britishers are in position, than Peter will, pervidin’ he gives them Tory beasts the slip.”

The young volunteer would have been decidedly well pleased with Joe for a companion ; but Serjeant Fonda had

treated the proposition as one which could not even be entertained, and he refrained from making known his wishes in the matter.

It seemed as if the men in the fort knew intuitively that Peter's services as a messenger had been accepted, for within a few moments after he came from headquarters, and before either he or the old serjeant had had an opportunity to speak with any one save Joe, a dozen or more came forward to congratulate him on his zeal and courage.

"It'll be a brave thing if you do it, boy," one of them said, deliberately; "but you stand about as much chance of getting from here to the German Flats, as you do of flying."

"It is a brave act he has done, whether he succeeds in passing the sentinels or not!" Serjeant Fonda said, hotly. "I see no reason why those who did not dare volunteer to do the same thing should predict evil. The boy knows that he walks within the shadow of death from the moment he attempts to leave the fortification, an' instead of remindin' him of the fact, we who are men ought to encourage him."

"If I'm only saying what he knows, why should you interfere?" the man asked, angrily.

"Because there's no use dwellin' on the subject, Dave Fielding. If you were countin' on makin' the attempt, you'd hold him your enemy who should prate about your not bein' able to do it. Let the boy alone; he has shown himself a man, an' unless I'm greatly mistaken, won't allow himself to be frightened by your croakin'."

Then, as if it cost him an effort to refrain from speaking yet more harshly, the old soldier led Peter across the parade-ground, saying, as he pointed to a certain aperture in the stockade:

"I'm allowin' you'll find that your best startin'-point. Slippin' off by yourself will be better than bein' escorted through the main entrance. Besides, if you can keep on a bee-line from that point you'll run plump into the German Flats. You're not thinkin' of what that fool Fielding said?" he added, noting the grave look on Peter's face.

"I am not thinkin' of the fact because he spoke it; but yet the idea has been in my mind from the moment I proposed to carry the message."

"Growin' scared?" and the old man looked alarmed.

"I was frightened by the idea when I first heard that Colonel Gansevoort wanted a messenger, and am not more alarmed now. You said it was only a soldier's duty."

The serjeant's face brightened.

"I declare, lad, you came mighty nigh givin' me a chill. I began to think you was sorry because of volunteerin'."

"Don't be afraid of anything like that, Serjeant Fonda. I offered to go, and shall do my best to get through. It isn't cowardly to hope, if I am discovered, that a bullet will kill me, rather than that I fall into the clutches of the Indians."

"Of course it isn't, boy. I doubt if there's a man of us who goes into action without thinkin' the same thing. But I wouldn't brood too long over the like of that. It won't do any good, an' may be of disadvantage when the scrimmage comes. Listen to me! If you take my advice, you'll slip through that 'ere weak place in the stockade after dark to-night, without sayin' a word to anybody. It might be well for me to walk this far with you, but don't trust yourself to say good-by to Joe. Once outside, be careful not to make the mistake of bein' in a hurry. Do the work leisurely like; you'll have all night before you, an' it don't pay to take foolish chances. We can hold our own here two or

three weeks, so you've got plenty of time. It's a good deal —"

The old man ceased speaking very suddenly as a bullet hummed through the air within an inch of his ear, and straightway he forced Peter behind a convenient shelter.

"One of the Britishers' scouts ; perhaps some old neighbour of our'n who's tryin' to settle a grudge. You see, lad, there'll be plenty of danger here for them as you leave behind, so you won't meet the whole of it."

"I am not so foolish as to think anything of the kind, Serjeant Fonda. There is no need for you to try to give me courage ; I have sufficient to make the attempt, and that is enough."

"True, my lad, an' perhaps I'm sayin' jest as foolish things as Fielding did. We'll put the whole matter out of our minds till the last minute, an' report for duty, as our comrades are doin'. I don't count on the Tories makin' much work for us before to-morrow ; but yet they may, an' I'm hopin' they will."

"Why?"

"Because then your chances would be jest so much better. While the bulk of 'em were pepperin' away at us they couldn't be watchin' you. Come on, our company has been called out!"

From that hour until sunset Peter found plenty with which to occupy both his time and attention. That portion of the enemy now before the fortification was busily engaged in trying to pick off the defenders, and it was a game at which both sides could and did play in mortal earnest.

Now and then some member of the Continental troops would recognise a former neighbour or an old acquaintance among the King's forces, and try to attract his attention

with a leaden messenger. Again, those on the outside would, while partially hidden among the foliage, boast of what was to be done in revenge for their having been driven from their homes, and very seldom was the threat entirely completed; the report of a musket drowning the speaker's words, or cutting short the power of speech.

Peter was at his proper post behind the earthworks when Joe Sammons joined him, as he whispered tremulously:

"It's like murder. I never believed a battle could be as bad as this. I thought there would be music, cheering, and charging; but not waiting quietly for a chance to kill one another."

"This isn't a battle, Joe, and perhaps that makes the difference. Of course it is our duty to kill one of the enemy if we can."

"I understand that, Peter, and I've done my best with the rest of them, except that I don't try to find out if I have hit the mark."

"Where have you been stationed?"

"The third man from Serjeant Fonda; but a squad of us was just relieved from duty, and I hunted for you. Is there no hope I'll be allowed to go with you to-night?"

"I don't think we had better speak of it again. You heard what the serjeant said, and much as I'd like to have you with me, I suppose it isn't right even to wish you could go."

"Why not?"

"Because every musket will be needed here for the defence of the fort. I hope you'll be all right if — if —"

Peter could not complete the sentence because of a big sob which came unbidden into his throat, and, fearing lest he should break down before his comrades, he suddenly dis-

charged his musket in the direction of the enemy, as if he would have Joe believe he could see a red-coat through the film of moisture which veiled his eyes.

Perhaps it was well for both that Joe was at this moment ordered to assist in carrying a wounded man to the log hut which served as hospital, and when, an hour later, the old serjeant came up, Peter was apparently as calm and collected as the comrade on either side of him.

“Don’t fire unless you’re reasonably certain of hitting your man,” one of the officers said, sharply, as he observed two of the soldiers discharging their weapons as rapidly as they could be loaded.

“I allow it’s time that order was given,” Serjeant Fonda said, irritably, as he threw himself down by the side of Peter, wiping the perspiration from his powder-begrimed face.

“Then I sha’n’t shoot very often,” the boy said, with a sigh of relief. “I haven’t seen more than the branches moving for the last half-hour.”

“An’ nineteen out of every twenty could say the same thing; but yet we’ve been usin’ up powder an’ ball as if we’d got ’em to waste, instead of bein’ on short allowance. I reckon you an’ I’d better get supper, Peter.”

“It isn’t anywhere near night.”

“That’s where you’re mistaken.. The minutes pass mighty fast when a man is at sich work as this. We’ll take our time, an’ cook somethin’ a little extra, so’s you can start in good order. I don’t allow you’ll have much chance for anything of that kind till the journey’s ended.”

From that moment until the meal had been eaten, the old serjeant did his best to appear cheerful and unconcerned. Joe was present at what seemed very like a feast, but not once was he permitted to speak of Peter’s departure, or even

to speculate upon what might be the result after St. Leger's entire force was before the fortification.

"This isn't the time for anything of that kind," the old man would say, sharply, and, as a matter of course, Master Sammons was instantly silenced.

When the night came Peter fully expected to be summoned to headquarters again, even though the message he was to carry had already been repeated to him. He thought also that Colonel Gansevoort might wish to give him certain directions as to the course he should pursue; but yet no messenger arrived.

As a matter of fact, the commandant, having said that which he wished the boy to repeat, had no intention of burdening him with instructions, and there was no good reason why he should give any orders regarding the supplies or weapons Peter ought to take. He knew the serjeant would see to it the young messenger had all things needful, and perhaps he realised that Peter's courage would not be strengthened by anything in the nature of a farewell.

When darkness shrouded the land Serjeant Fonda said, gruffly, as he brought out from some hiding-place a small, well-filled bag:

"Come on, lad, an' come quick. You an' I have business to do that should be begun at once. Stay where you are!" he cried, sharply, as Joe arose to his feet, and almost before Peter was aware that the final moment had arrived, the old serjeant was hurrying him toward that portion of the stockade which he had previously pointed out.

"In this 'ere bag is as much food as I allow you can safely carry," the veteran said, as he forced his companion to a rapid pace. "I don't reckon money would do you any good, even if we had plenty; but here's somethin' you may need."

As he spoke he handed his companion a pistol, belt, and ammunition.

"But this is the only one you own, Serjeant Fonda," Peter said, as he would have refused the weapon.

"That makes no difference, lad. If it's a case of sich close quarters with us that pistols are needed, I reckon this one won't do me much service. I'm not thinkin' you'll really need it; but yet the time may come when it'll do you a power of good. Remember what I said about hurryin'. If you get through the lines between now an' sunrise you'll be makin' big headway, an' it's said as how them what go slow stand the best chance of winnin' a long race. Don't take any needless risks, an' bear in mind that you can better serve your country by holdin' on to life, than by givin' it up when it ain't absolutely necessary. To say the same thing in different words, Peter, my lad, fight the best you know how, an' don't give in so long as you have strength an' a chance to tackle the enemy."

"How far are you going with me?" the boy asked, as the old man paused.

"I sha'n't leave the fort. Once outside the stockade you're an independent command, lad. Do you count on goin' barefoot, or shall I hunt up a pair of moccasins?"

"I'll travel easier as I am while the weather is warm."

"An' you're not sorry you volunteered?"

"Not a bit of it, Serjeant Fonda. I only hope I'll —"

"We're talkin' too much, lad. You can't forget that the course is straight ahead, an' you'll likely remember what the colonel said you was to tell our friends."

"I sha'n't forget a word; but —"

"Here's the place I showed you, an' now, Peter, my boy, go quick. Everything appears to be still, though we well

know there are plenty of them painted heathen close around. God bless you, lad, God bless you. Now you go through, an' be off!"

The old man had literally thrust Peter through the narrow gap in the stockade, and allowed him no time to reply; but walked quickly away, brushing his eyes with an impatient movement, as if angry because a certain moisture was gathering in them.

At a distance of a dozen paces he halted, and stood in a listening attitude fully ten minutes.

The silence, save for the hum of the soldiers inside the fort, was profound, and Serjeant Fonda gave vent to a sigh of deep relief, as he muttered:

"Leastwise he's started, an' there was no Britisher or Injun who saw him leave."

Then he posted himself at the gap, nor did he move from this position until some of his comrades called him loudly by name, when he walked slowly and thoughtfully across the parade-ground.

CHAPTER III.

THROUGH THE SWAMP.

WHEN Peter was forced through the gap in the stockade by the old serjeant, he stood silent and motionless several seconds, literally unable to advance or retreat.

As he afterward admitted to Joe, he was so frightened that his legs trembled under him. He knew beyond a question that the forest in the immediate vicinity was teeming with Tories and Indians, all seeking an opportunity to kill a Continental, and every movement of the foliage was magnified by his fears into the shadowy form of an enemy.

After a time courage returned, and he mentally braced himself for the ordeal.

Even when most under the influence of fear he would not have ignominiously returned to the fort, although his life had been the price of remaining outside, and now, when the first sensations of terror had in a measure passed away, he was prepared and ready for whatever fate might have in store for him.

“I won’t be taken prisoner!” he muttered to himself, as he clutched the pistol nervously. “They would be certain to kill me unless I gave them the information demanded, which, of course, I’d never give, and the worst of all would be the torture before I died.”

Then Peter realised that such thoughts did not tend to put him in the best possible mental condition for any struggle

which might ensue, and resolutely he banished them from his mind as he advanced slowly into the thicket.

He obeyed Serjeant Fonda literally in regard to being cautious and making no effort to travel rapidly.

At each step he stopped to listen for sounds betokening an enemy, and his progress was not more than a yard every two minutes.

An hour passed, during which time he had pressed steadily forward in the direction of the German Flats, and was now so far into the forest that he could no longer hear noises from either army.

It seemed as if he had really passed the danger-line, and that nothing more serious than hard work would be necessary for the accomplishment of his mission.

He was just congratulating himself upon this supposed fact, and had determined to push rapidly ahead without such excessive caution, when an unusual noise among the underbrush caused him to stop suddenly, while his heart beat so loudly that it seemed to him as if its pulsations could be heard a long distance away.

A heavy body was coming directly towards him, but with the utmost caution, and he understood it was not a beast, otherwise the noise would be greater.

There could be no question but that he was in the immediate vicinity of an enemy, and the sense of impending danger appeared to rouse, rather than dissipate, his courage.

Realising that his safety would be the better assured if the impending struggle could be conducted in silence, lest this fellow who was approaching might have companions near by, he placed the pistol securely in his belt.

It was not easy to say exactly from which direction the stealthy noises proceeded, therefore he neither dared move

to the right nor the left, but remained silent and motionless, hoping the enemy might pass him by.

Nearer and nearer came the foe, moving so cautiously that any one a whit less skilled in woodcraft than the boy would have declared positively there was no living being within hail, and then, at the instant when the young messenger least expected it, a heavy body was in contact with him.

Peter had the advantage of anticipating something of the kind, while the stranger was probably ignorant that a human being stood between him and the fort, and, therefore, the struggle began with the odds slightly in the boy's favour.

Swinging himself partially around that he might not stand face to face with his antagonist, Peter seized the foe by the throat, putting all his strength into the clutch, and understanding at once that the enemy was a member of Thayendanegea's band.

The boy would have considered himself equal in agility to either a Tory or an English soldier; but he knew full well that the Indian was his superior, therefore, if his slight advantage should be lost, the struggle would be speedily ended by his defeat.

The Indian had made no attempt to give an alarm when he first encountered the boy, probably being taken completely by surprise, and a few seconds later it was impossible to do so because of the death-like grip upon his throat.

Almost immediately after Peter seized him, he had flung his arms around the latter's body in such fashion as was possible while the boy stood partially behind him, and had gained only a slight hold, but one sufficient to partially loosen the grasp upon his throat.

By dint of much struggling, and at the risk of being taken at a disadvantage, Peter succeeded in raising his right knee

to such a height that he could press it against the Indian's side, and was thus the better able to prevent the foe from turning.

The boy knew everything now depended upon retaining his hold. The Indian might strike at him with his knife, but such injuries must be borne without any attempt at defence, for his only hope lay in strangling his antagonist.

In almost perfect silence each struggled to take the life of the other. The Indian was rapidly losing strength, and, at the same time, the boy realised that he could not hope much longer to continue the pressure upon his enemy's throat.

Then the man released his hold in order to use his weapons, and Peter knew the opportunity had come.

Swinging himself still further behind the foe, he pressed his knee stoutly against the fellow's back, at the same time pulling vigorously at his throat.

The Indian had drawn his knife, but now it was no longer possible to use it, owing to the change in Peter's position, and while waving it wildly in the air he was pulled to the ground.

From this instant the battle was in the weaker antagonist's favour, for he had simply to retain his grasp until all struggling should cease.

Not until many minutes had elapsed did Peter think it safe to release his hold, and then the enemy lay passive upon the ground.

The first peril had been met and overcome ; but the boy was so weak that not until after several efforts could he rise to an upright position.

Then there came upon him the realisation that he had killed a human being, and he stood trembling like one in an ague fit,

until the thought came that his own life was in as much danger as before ; if he would render that service to his besieged comrades which he had promised, he must not think of what might weaken him mentally.

He was struggling not only for himself, but to aid the little band who were so sorely pressed, and the knowledge of what their fate might be, in case he failed, was sufficient to render him stout-hearted once more.

The Indian's hatchet and scalping-knife might be of service to him, and, overcoming with an effort the repugnance to do anything of the kind, he took them as trophies of the battle.

There was a hymn of thanksgiving in his heart that he had been given the victory, and he pressed forward with more confidence, but not less carefully, until he arrived at the swamp which he knew lay between him and his destination.

To avoid this bog, over which it would be difficult to make his way, was impossible save at the expense of a long détour, and, as he had planned before leaving the fort, he pushed straight ahead.

Before he could advance a hundred yards, and when he was at a point where the mud and water were waist-deep, he heard that which betokened the coming of a large body of men.

There was no question but that they were enemies, but why they were approaching the fort from this quarter puzzled him not a little.

There was no attempt made to move silently. The soldiers were calling one to the other ; grumbling because of the difficulties of the way, and finding fault with those who had led them into such a place.



PETER STRUGGLING WITH THE INDIAN.

1

2

3

4

5

6

Now and then he heard what he believed were the voices of Indians, and as the party came nearer he understood that the guides had mistaken the way, although yet fully aware of the location of the fort.

Peter was forced to remain where he had halted, hoping against hope that they would pass him by in ignorance. To move ever so slightly might be to give token of his whereabouts, for most probably the Indians were in advance, on the alert for whatever might signal the presence of an enemy.

Resistance would be useless, in case he was discovered, and Peter remained silent and motionless, expecting each instant to feel a naked arm encircle his body, or to hear the whistling of a hatchet as it was swung upward to descend upon his head.

As the force approached nearer, the boy overheard scraps of conversation which told him that the newcomers were a portion of St. Leger's army, who, having made a *détour* at the request of one of the Tories, had been forced to cross the swamp, or, by retracing their steps, march a much longer distance.

He heard them speculating upon the resistance the defenders of Fort Schuyler might make, and was dismayed at learning they knew the strength of the little army it was expected would be overwhelmed by sheer force of numbers.

In fact, they were so well informed that Peter knew there had been a traitor in the fort, who found some means of communicating with the enemy, and for an instant he resolved to return, if that was yet possible, to make known his discovery to Colonel Gansevoort.

A moment later he realised that his friends would be benefited but little by such information, for the mischief had

already been done, and he turned his face once more towards those who would take his life without compunction if they discovered him.

Nearer and nearer the noisy party advanced.

Peter saw the Indians like shadows in the gloom as they pressed on silently, and then he was completely surrounded by the soldiers.

They were on either hand, so near that he might have touched them, but yet no one had apparently observed him in the darkness.

Then he very nearly screamed in terror as a hand was laid upon his arm, and a gruff voice said :

“This is not the place to sulk, man! There must be no halt until we are on firm ground, so come along!”

Now he understood that the fellow had mistaken him for a comrade, and he moved forward with the party several paces, but lagging further and further in the rear until they had outstripped him, and once more he was alone in the swamp, with the voices of the enemy sounding far away in the distance.

Even then it was possible there might be stragglers, and the boy remained waist-deep in the water, sheltered behind a partially fallen tree, until fully half an hour had passed, when he resumed his journey, a song of praise going up from his heart that the Lord had brought him out of such great danger unharmed.

To make his way through the morass absolutely without noise was impossible, but an hour after the ill-guided detachment had passed, he believed there was no longer anything to be feared from those under St. Leger's command, and pressed forward almost regardless as to whether he might be heard.

He believed it now only a question of walking, and was putting forth every effort to travel rapidly, when he was suddenly brought to a standstill by a cry from the rear.

His first thought was that some one from the vicinity of the fort had followed him, and he was at a loss to know exactly what course should be pursued, when once more he was hailed :

“If you are Peter Kirkland, I would have a word with you!”

“Who are you?” and Peter’s voice trembled despite all his efforts, as he asked the question.

“Thomas Spencer.”

“But that may not be. He is at Fort Schuyler.”

“So he was, lad, when you left ; but since an hour after you started he has been doing his best to overtake you.”

Peter was by no means certain this was not some trick of the enemy, and he remained hidden beneath the shadow of the trees until his fears should be dispelled.

“Don’t be afraid, boy. Come here and look at me,” the alleged Spencer said, in a tone of seeming honesty. “Had I known that Colonel Gansevoort called for a volunteer to carry word of his plight to our friends, I should have insisted on being allowed that honour. It was not until Serjeant Fonda told me of his anxiety concerning you, that I heard of what had been done.”

“Have you come to take my place?” Peter asked, still remaining in hiding.

“No, you are Colonel Gansevoort’s messenger, and all I ask is to be allowed to act as your escort. I wonder much that you escaped the notice of the Britishers who came through this way.”

“I was in their very midst, but it was so dark I could not

be distinguished from others of the party, unless, by chance, they had seen my weapons."

By this time Peter fancied it was safe to show himself, and came out from his place of partial concealment to where he could have such a view of the newcomer as was possible in the gloom.

The man stepped directly in front of him, bending down until the boy could see his face.

There was no longer any ground for doubt. He recognised the blacksmith of the Cayugas, the one who had brought to the fort the news of St. Leger's approach, and all fear was dispelled.

"Where did you get that hatchet?" the half-breed asked, as he noted that which Peter held in his hand. "Are they serving out such weapons at the fort?"

"I was met by an Indian, and when the fight was over thought it would be best to take his hatchet and knife, because I had nothing save this pistol, which Serjeant Fonda lent me."

"And you came off best in a fight with one of Thayendanegea's warriors?" Spencer asked, in astonishment. "The serjeant said you were a brave lad, but did not tell me you could play a man's part so well. I doubt whether Serjeant Fonda himself would have won such a battle in the darkness."

"He could if he had gotten the same advantage I did at the start."

"Perhaps, lad; but it is getting the advantage over such warriors as Thayendanegea leads into battle, that marks the skill. I shall be proud to travel with you. Where did the fight take place?"

"About a mile from the fort; the Indian was coming

straight toward me without knowing I was near, and I could not keep out of his way. How did you get past the detachment?"

"I was at the edge of the swamp, and, by striking around it a mile or more, gave them free road without chance of being seen."

Then Peter told his companion of what he had overheard the men say regarding the position of affairs at the fort, and suggested that, since the request for reinforcements could be carried by the half-breed, it might be well for him to turn back in order to warn Colonel Gansevoort.

"It is too late to do anything of that kind, lad. The mischief has been done, and most likely the traitor is with the enemy; but if not, he will take good care to arouse no suspicions at this time. The colonel knows full well that two or three of his men have a leaning towards the Tories, and will watch them as closely as if you told him what you have heard. Besides, you are the one sent by him, and it is not for you to turn back until the message has been delivered."

"But you could carry it."

"Yes, if I had received it; but now I shall do no more than act as your guide, until we have met some one to whom you can deliver that which you are charged to repeat. Afterward I will push on further in search of other friends, or join the party who goes to relieve the besieged. There is no reason why we should stand here when we may talk as we walk, and it will be well if we finish our journey before the end of another day."

Peter followed his guide with just a shade of disappointment because this assistance was to be rendered him. Having performed that portion of the journey where the greatest

danger was to be met, he would have preferred to finish it alone, that the praise might not be shared by another.

This thought was dismissed very soon, however, and in its place came a sense of relief that Spencer was with him. Now there seemed to be little question but that the mission would be successfully accomplished, and he realised it was not the part of a brave man to begrudge honours to another, when that other has shared or undergone the same dangers.

Until the first gray light of the coming day was seen in the eastern sky, Spencer led the way through the swamp on to the higher land, at a rapid pace, and then he threw himself down on the ground as he said :

“ We'll break our fast here, lad, and a short halt will put us in better condition for the task before us. Have you provisions ? ”

Peter produced the small stock of food provided by the old serjeant, and would have shared it with his companion, but that the latter refused to accept any portion.

“ I have enough for myself, and all that will be needed by you before night. ”

Then the two ate, quenching their thirst at the brook beside which the blacksmith had halted, and while they were thus employed Peter asked :

“ What kind of a force has the British colonel ? ”

“ A good one, so far as equipment goes. ”

“ Do you think the Tories will fight bravely ? ”

“ I am certain of it. If they were in another part of the country I would not say that ; but all of them have been driven from this valley, and believe they are righting their own wrongs by capturing Fort Schuyler. Sir John himself is not a brave man, but he has Thayendanega with him, and that Indian is a great general. I believe the fort will be

captured unless reinforcements can be hurried forward, and that there is no time to be lost. I should have little fear if none but British stood before it, even though they are trained soldiers, for they do not understand such fighting as is to be met with; but Thayendanega is there to direct, and our friends must not only stand against overwhelming numbers, superior weapons, and all that is needed in warfare, but against the craftiness of the greatest Indian the Six Nations ever produced."

"You speak gloomily, sir."

"And there is good cause, my boy, although it is not well to indulge in forebodings, lest our hearts grow weak when strength is most needed. It is our duty to fight whoever stands before us as an enemy to our country, and just now the most important aid that can be given the Cause is the defence of Fort Schuyler, for without it we should be powerless to prevent many a foray."

Peter made no reply, and Spencer arose to his feet.

The moment for continuing the journey had come, and it was not the half-breed's intention to call another halt until they were safe among friends.

CHAPTER IV.

FORT DAYTON.

PETER'S powers of endurance were severely tried during this last stage of the journey. He was not in the best possible condition for the forced march, having remained comparatively inactive within the fort for at least two weeks before starting on his perilous mission, and that which he could readily have done before he volunteered as a soldier, was now a task almost too great to be performed.

To the boy it seemed as if the half-breed's muscles were of iron, and his body incapable of fatigue, for, after the halt in the early morning, he pressed steadily onward at a rapid pace, like one who is familiar with the road, stopping only now and then to quench his thirst at some running stream, when he drank most sparingly.

More than once was Peter tempted to declare he could go no further without a rest, and allow Spencer to continue on without him; but the thought that as Colonel Gansevoort's messenger he should be the one to deliver the appeal for help spurred him to renewed exertions, and when the time came that it seemed absolutely impossible to advance a single pace further they had arrived within sight of the little settlement at German Flats.

"Your work is well-nigh done, lad," the half-breed said.

“Once it is known that St. Leger is before Fort Schuyler with a force of nearly two thousand men, there will be an uprising in the Valley such as has never been seen.”

“It is well we are almost there,” Peter replied, panting heavily, “for I am nearly winded, and if it was necessary to walk a mile further, I do not think I could do it.”

“I allow I have given you a pretty tough pull, my boy; but time is precious to our friends at the fort, for if St. Leger begins to press them as he should do, they will soon be in sore need.”

“But you could have gone on without me.”

“And that I should have done, lad, even though you are Colonel Gansevoort’s messenger, and I marching under my own command, if you had failed to keep the pace. But you have done bravely, and will soon have a chance for rest.”

“Is it necessary to tell others besides these people who live here?”

“Do not fear but that they will soon send out fresh messengers, rather than leave the work to us who are tired. Here comes one of them now, and by the uniform coat he wears I should say he was a friend to the cause.”

“Why, that is Mr. Sammons — Joe’s father!” Peter exclaimed, with mingled surprise and delight. “I do not think he is a soldier, though, and can’t understand why he should be here.”

“Where are you from, friends?” Sampson Sammons cried, while he was yet some distance away, and the half-breed said in a low tone, as he urged Peter forward:

“Make the reply, lad. It is your duty as the colonel’s messenger. That is to say, repeat the words which were spoken to you at the fort, if you are certain this man is a friend.”

“There is no question about it. It is said that no one has a truer love for the Cause than Sampson Sammons.”

“Where are you from, friends, if it so be you are friends?” Joe’s father cried, impatiently, and Peter replied :

“Fort Schuyler, with a message from Colonel Gansevoort.”

“Why, bless my eyes, but it’s Peter Kirkland! What are you doing here, lad, and why have you left your company? Where is Joe?”

“Joe is in the fort, sir, doing his best to help hold that place against seventeen hundred Britishers under Colonel St. Leger, and Colonel Gansevoort has sent us here to ask for reinforcements. He has provisions only sufficient for three weeks, and a scanty store of ammunition.”

“St. Leger in the Valley!” Sammons repeated. “Who is with him?”

“That I will answer,” Spencer interrupted, “although the boy is the colonel’s messenger, and I but act as his escort.”

“But who may you be, sir?”

“Thomas Spencer of the Cayugas.”

“Spencer, the blacksmith! I have heard of you often, friend, and long wanted to take by the hand one who has rendered us such signal service. Can it be true our people are so sorely pressed?”

“There is no doubt about it, sir. I followed St. Leger’s army from the lake to within twenty-four hours’ march of the fort. He has with him about four hundred British soldiers, and the remainder of the force is made up of Tories and Indians.”

“Those we drove out of the Valley have made their way into it again, and count on staying, eh?”

“Yes, and they will likely get a good foothold, unless assistance is sent without delay. As this boy can tell you,

Colonel Gansevoort sent him to say that it will be impossible for them to hold out longer than three weeks at the best, and hardly that time if St. Leger pushes them stoutly. Fortunately, Colonel Mellon, with two boat-loads of provisions and ammunition, guarded by two hundred soldiers, arrived there yesterday, and that makes the effective force not more than seven hundred poorly armed men, as against seventeen hundred with a generous equipment."

"To whom did Colonel Gansevoort send you, Peter?" Sammons asked.

"To any friends of the Cause I might chance to see. I think my story should first be told to an officer of the Continental Army."

"Then your mission is ended, my boy, for I now hold a commission as lieutenant, and will see to it that the startling news is spread in every direction as rapidly as fleet-footed men can carry it. Is Joseph doing his duty?"

"Yes, sir, and would have shared the danger of coming with me, but that soldiers could ill be spared from such a small force, and one would make his way through as well, and even better, than two."

"But there are two of you here."

"This boy bravely volunteered to bring the message when men shrank from the task," Spencer said, quickly. "I did not know the colonel had called for volunteers until an hour after he started, and then, being a free man because I am not a soldier, I decided to follow in order to act as his escort, for I doubted much whether he would get through in safety. As it was, a hand-to-hand fight with one of Thayendanegea's men became necessary; but he came off conqueror, as that scalping-knife and tomahawk prove."

"There is a good bit of the old parson's blood in you,

Peter, and that I always maintained," Sammons said, as he shook the boy vigorously by the hand. "But it isn't for me to stand here gossiping like an old woman, when prompt action is necessary. I'll show you two where you may obtain food and lodging until you are in proper condition once more, and meanwhile Colonel Gansevoort's message shall be sent abroad. There will be no lack of true-hearted friends of the Cause to respond, that I'll answer for. Even those who would not come to the rescue simply to prevent the fort from being captured, must rally to his aid to protect themselves. We in the Valley know, from experience during the French war, what would be the result if the Indians and Tories should come off victorious. In looking to the safety of the fort we are really protecting our own homes. Every able-bodied man who hears the news you have brought, Peter, will be under arms before to-morrow morning."

Then Lieutenant Sammons led the way to the nearest dwelling, where, after a hurried explanation had been made, the messengers from the fort were treated with the utmost hospitality.

Peter, thoroughly fatigued by rapid travelling, and his eyelids heavy from lack of slumber, had no sooner eaten the coarse but generous meal which was set before him, than he lay down on a bear-skin in one corner of the room, and was hardly in a reclining position before his eyes were closed in sleep.

He might have remained thus unconscious until far into the next day had he been left undisturbed, but those who received the message he brought were so eager to render the desired assistance, that it was not yet daylight when the trampling of many feet in the room where he lay awakened him.

“I was counting on letting you stay there until the very last minute,” Spencer said, as Peter sprang to his feet, surprised by the number of strangers in the room. “But you haven’t lost much by awakening now, for we shall start in half an hour.”

Looking around, the boy saw the half-breed cleaning his rifle in one corner of the room, and he asked quickly, as he gazed at the visitors who were regarding him with friendly looks :

“Where are we going ?”

“To Fort Dayton.¹ General Herkimer will be there, and from what I have already seen, I should say we shall go back to Fort Schuyler with a brave force.”

The master of the house, seeing that Peter was awake, said, as he came forward and laid his hand on the boy’s shoulder :

“I have seen to it that a breakfast was cooked for you, my lad, and allow you need one. My will is good to feed all who are gathered to answer Colonel Gansevoort’s summons, but provisions are not plentiful. You and Spencer will find your food in the oven by the fireplace, and I reckon you can look out for yourselves. The women-folks are at neighbour Piper’s moulding bullets.”

Peter was not accustomed to being waited upon. The tin oven had been placed near the fire that its contents might be kept warm, and he and the half-breed ate a more satisfactory breakfast than it was often their good fortune to receive.

The young messenger was still sore and lame from his long and fatiguing journey ; but when the occupants of the

¹ Fort Dayton was a stockade fort built in the year 1776, on the site of what is now known as the town of Herkimer.

building were ready to set out for Fort Dayton, he followed without delay or thought of weariness.

He had shown himself a man first by volunteering for the dangerous service, and then by successfully battling with the Indian, all of which had been freely told by the half-breed, and while those in whose company he was did not think it necessary to praise him, for brave deeds were not rare in those days, all treated him as one worthy to be considered a comrade, which was, as the boy thought, the greatest honour that could have been bestowed upon him.

Thomas Spencer, called upon by this man and that to repeat what he had already told many times concerning the condition of those in the fort and the number of the enemy, had no time for any conversation with Peter during the short journey, but the boy was by no means alone, for the men around him insisted on his giving again and again all the details of the encounter with the Indian.

Each moment the number of the little party was increased by recruits, who joined them from nearly every house, and concerning whom it has been written :

“ Never had a more heterogeneous mass of men gathered together in the Valley of the Mohawk, for the most part sturdy, resolute, square-jawed farmers, clad, some few in uniform, the majority in homespun or leather, with tanned, rough faces, and alert, keen, sparkling eyes, rude in speech and bearing, gathered in little groups, with trusty flint-locks under their arms, and pipes in mouths, conversing excitedly in a jargon of villainous German and worse English. Scattered here and there through these knots of stalwart, burly borderers might be seen figures arrayed in blue and buff, with powdered hair, and thin, clear-cut features, white hands fringed with whiter ruffles, and, clattering and clanking with each stride, as with long, straight swords and jingling spurs they flit about, uttering half-whispered words of command. These last are gentlemen of the county, and, as such, of vast importance — in their own minds. On

the whole, there is small regard for discipline or authority existing in this motley, eager, talking crowd; to the contrary, magnified conceptions each of his own individual prowess and sagacity. But differ as they might in form of dress, in shape of weapons, in sense of subordination, these thousand settlers possessed in common a savage, half-fiendish itching for the meeting face to face with their long dreaded foe, for a glimpse of the whilom Tory neighbour over the sight of their old familiar flint-locks; for these uncouth men, a short time since peaceful, phlegmatic farmers, dwelling content upon the little oases they had wrought out of the wilderness, are now transformed into little else than savages, and are longing with all their souls for the approaching fray.”¹

The bearing of his companions pleased Peter quite as much as did their prompt response to the summons.

Boy though he was, he knew that even if the inhabitants of the Valley should rally in such numbers as to equal those of the foe, the reinforcements would not be as strong as the besiegers, because of the disparity of both weapons and discipline.

He was tired of telling how he had struggled with the Indian in the swamp, for it seemed such a trifling matter as compared with the duty yet to be performed, and there was a sense of decided relief in his heart when they finally arrived at the stockade dignified by the name of Fort Dayton.

“That is General Herkimer,” Spencer said, stepping back from the side of Lieutenant Sammons, and pointing to the most commanding figure within the enclosure.

The following pen picture, written by a master hand, describes him at the very moment when Peter first saw the brave old soldier :

“Pacing up and down, with steady tread, is an elderly man, also in buff and blue, of tall stature and commanding mien, with cocked hat

¹ *Harper's Magazine.* 1877.

pulled down tight over his eyes, with lips firmly pressed together, thinking and listening deeply, stopping now and then to settle, with a quiet, decisive word, some vexed question, and again resuming his march, with a look of troubled responsibility upon his brave face that intensifies as the morning wears on, and which all his self-confidence and intrepid courage cannot overcome or hide. This is General Nicholas Herkimer, a brave man and true, who for many years has served the cause of humanity faithfully; has for many years been a man of might in the Valley settlements; has held innumerable councils with the Indians, and led many expeditions through forest defiles and dismal swamps after them when, in the judgment of the colonies, they stood in need of correction or chastisement; and now has, unwittingly, reached nearly the goal of his earthly labours. Through no pleasant means did the brave, bluff old patriot attain this goal. His way is anything but clear to him now, as he paces with folded arms and perplexedly thoughtful brow; on the contrary, very dark indeed. This impatient growling of his men, heard faintly from without, savours ominously of insubordination, of possible revolt."

As the party whom Peter and the half-breed accompanied entered the stockade, the old general looked up quickly, scanning the faces of each member, and his countenance lightened as his eyes fell upon the blacksmith of the Cayugas.

"Here is a man who understands thoroughly well the art of Indian warfare, and I who am leader, whose advice is as unheeded as my commands are futile, call upon him to say whether it is the part of wisdom, either when prompted by our feelings or the necessities of our friends, to march directly towards Fort Schuyler before certain military precautions have been taken — before we are fully prepared?"

Those in the immediate vicinity of Spencer and Peter fell back a few paces, leaving the two standing alone, and the half-breed was about to reply to General Herkimer's appeal, when a voice from amid the group of young officers shouted:

“We don’t want advice; we simply ask to be led on to those who have sent for us!”

“But we are in no condition to meet the enemy while we are without formation, without supplies, without any concerted plan,” General Herkimer cried, impetuously.

“We need neither the one nor the other when the enemy is before us!” Lieutenant Sammons said, angrily. “Our friends are besieged, and shall we dawdle our time away here simply to put on a military appearance, while they may be overcome by the odds against them?”

“Speak to them, Spencer,” Peter whispered. “Surely General Herkimer knows what is best,” and the boy pushed the half-breed forward a pace or two.

“One of the ablest English officers is in front of Fort Schuyler,” Spencer began, his voice rising clear and distinct above the mutterings of the men. “He has with him Thayendanegea, who, as you all know, is the most skilful warrior among the Six Nations. The Tories whom Sir John has brought with him have been drilled in military movements ever since they were driven out of the Valley. Sir John may not be either a brave or a wise commander; but he has made soldiers of his Tory brethren. The utmost caution in an advance is necessary, and the strictest discipline will be needed in the ranks, if you would do that which Colonel Gansevoort desires.”

“It is folly to spend our time here when we are needed at Fort Schuyler,” some one shouted, and others raised the cry:

“Lead us on! Lead us on! We have not left our homes to fight with our tongues, nor to spend our time here marching and countermarching, while the besieged garrison is being starved into submission!”

“Would you go like a mob?” Spencer asked, hotly.

“We will go in any way, so that we get there quickly.”

“But, at least, a scouting party must be sent ahead, otherwise you are rushing to almost certain destruction. Thayendanegea is not one who sits idly in his camp watching that which is before his eyes; he is aware of all that may be going on around him, and it is well known that he was never ambushed or surprised.”

“We do not count on doing one or the other. There are nearly ten hundred of us who have left our homes at a moment’s notice to gather here, with the idea of marching at once to those who have sent for us. Now we will go!”

Spencer attempted to make one more appeal; but in vain. It was as if each man was bent on giving his views in the loudest possible tone, and nearly every volunteer was of the same mind — to push forward without loss of time, and regardless of military precautions.

There may have been among the older men those who knew General Herkimer was right in his demand for a brief delay; but no one gave words to such an idea, and the younger volunteers clamoured — demanded, that the general either lead them immediately, within an hour’s time, or resign the command.

“There are so many here that they might possibly force their way through to the fort,” Peter suggested to the half-breed, obliged almost to shout in order that his companion might hear him above the tumult.

“There is not one chance in a hundred. They will sacrifice their own lives, and destroy all hope of reinforcing the garrison,” Spencer replied. “Thayendanegea will know who comes from this direction, for he understands full well that the people in the Valley would respond to any call for help. These fools will simply run into an ambush.”

“Is there no way to convince them they are wrong?”

“If General Herkimer, whom they all know, has failed, how can any one else succeed?”

The next half-hour was a time of indescribable tumult, and Peter noted, with sadness, that Joe's father was one of the most vehement in denouncing the old general's policy.

Then the scene was changed.

“If you *will* go, after I have assured you that by such an ill-advised move you cannot hope to succour those who need us, and that the death of very many of this company must be the result, I will obey your commands, and lead you on,” General Herkimer cried. “It is against my better judgment; but I am powerless, and will not remain behind when you set out on such a mission, even though I believe it must end disastrously.”

His horse was tethered near by, and, leaping into the saddle with the agility of a boy, he said to the officers nearest him:

“I will join the rabble, gentlemen, instead of leading the command, as might have been possible.”

Ten minutes later, so eager were the volunteers, the entire party was in motion. There was not even the semblance of military formation. Each man pressed forward, eager to be at the head of the column.

One wagon was hastily loaded with such provisions as had been brought into the stockade during the night, and this comprised the entire supply train.

Spencer and Peter marched in the rear, not lagging behind, but by no means desiring to be in the thick of what could be termed little better than a mob.

The road to Fort Schuyler was hardly more than a path through the woods, with the foliage so dense at some points

that only three could walk abreast, and because of such difficult travelling, the progress was exceedingly slow despite the desire of all to press forward.

An hour after leaving the stockade, General Herkimer, with two officers, fell back from the head of the column, and reined their horses in by the side of Peter and the half-breed.

"I have come to ask you for a detailed account of affairs in the fort, and all the particulars you can give me regarding the enemy," General Herkimer said to Spencer.

The half-breed explained how it chanced that he was familiar with St. Leger's forces, and then gave the desired information, adding in conclusion:

"Peter Kirkland can tell you more regarding affairs at the fort, perhaps, than I can. He has been there four weeks, and it was he who volunteered to bring Colonel Gansevoort's message."

"Repeat to me, my lad, what the colonel said."

Peter did so.

The general remained silent several moments, and then asked Spencer, in a tone so low that he could not be overheard by those of the men immediately in advance:

"Will you undertake, in company with two or three others whom you can rely upon, to enter Fort Schuyler at the earliest possible moment? I desire that Colonel Gansevoort shall know we are approaching, and make some plan for concerted action. It is my duty now to do all I can towards saving these hot-headed patriots from the natural result of their indiscretion."

"I am willing to obey any order which you may give, General Herkimer," the half-breed replied, promptly.

"But this is not an order, sir, it is a request."

"The wishes of General Herkimer are to me the same as a command, for I have every confidence in his judgment."

"I thank you, my man, and all the more because I have but lately learned how few are of the same opinion. Then I may depend on you?"

"Always."

"And me, too, General Herkimer," Peter cried. "Colonel Gansevoort trusted me to come out of the fort, and the danger will be no greater in going back."

"You are a brave lad, and I may need your services later. There are so few here who are willing to obey that I hesitate about sending away two such good soldiers. It is not likely we shall travel many miles on the other side of the river before sunset, eager though the men are to push ahead. I desire that you report to me as soon as a halt is made."

As he said this, General Herkimer rode to the head of the column once more, and Peter asked :

"Did he mean that both of us were to report to him?"

"I hope he didn't, my lad."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it isn't necessary you should risk your life so soon again. There will be fully as much danger, if not more, in going back, and you have already done your duty."

"Serjeant Fonda says it is a soldier's duty to die for his country, and I am a soldier."

"If he said that, I am very much disappointed in the man. Of what service to one's country are a lot of dead soldiers?"

"He meant if it was necessary, a man shouldn't hesitate, I suppose."

“Exactly, and in this case, Peter Kirkland, it is not necessary you should die, so I say again I hope the general didn’t mean that both of us are to report for orders to make our way in advance of the force to Fort Schuyler.”

CHAPTER V.

THE ADVANCE.

DURING the remainder of this day's march Peter was considerably troubled in mind, not because of the premature advance, but owing to his fear that he would not be allowed to accompany the party which was to be sent ahead to apprise Colonel Gansevoort of the coming reinforcements.

Having brought the message from the fort, it seemed to him that it was his right to carry forward the welcome news, and all idea of danger was lost sight of in the thought of completing his mission in such a victorious fashion.

He said very little regarding this to Spencer, knowing that the latter was opposed to his being called upon for anything of the kind ; but resolved to press his claim — and in his own mind he had a good one — if the opportunity presented itself for an interview with General Herkimer.

As has been said, the advance was slow, despite the eagerness of the men, owing to the narrowness and roughness of the road, and just before sunset they crossed the river near the old stockade which had also been known as Fort Schuyler.¹

Here, owing to the fast-gathering darkness, it was necessary to halt for the night, and but little preparations were made for the encampment.

The men, accustomed to hardships, looked upon a bed

¹ The old Fort Schuyler stood on the site of the present city of Utica.

under the trees on this August night as a luxury rather than otherwise, and each stretched himself out wherever fancy dictated, giving no heed to the fact that sentinels might be needed.

Some few of the officers, and notably those who had seen the most service, seconded General Herkimer's efforts to have the column partially guarded, and a dozen sentinels were stationed at different points. But to Peter's mind their work would be poorly performed, judging from the manner in which they set about it.

He saw two of the men, who had been stationed in the rear, deliberately leave their posts, immediately the officer left them, to take part in a discussion between their comrades as to how General Herkimer might best be forced to press on at the utmost speed regardless of military precautions, and it was fully half an hour before they returned to duty.

"If the other sentinels are acting in the same fashion, Thayendanagea's men might make short work of us before morning," he said to Spencer, as the two were eating the provisions brought from the house in which they had spent the previous night.

"It is not to be supposed that any of the men are more vigilant than those two," the half-breed replied. "In their ignorance they fail to realise what may be the result of such carelessness. However, there is little danger now; but at this time to-morrow, unless there has been some great change made in the method of advancing, the reinforcements will be in more danger than the besieged whom they hope to aid."

"Why doesn't General Herkimer insist upon preserving military formation?"

"You have seen of what avail his words were at a time

when he was wholly in the right. Even those who call themselves his officers know as little about military matters as the privates. What can one man do alone among a thousand ? ”

As Spencer ceased speaking he arose, having finished the meal, and moved in what he intended should be an aimless fashion up the path on either side of which the men were lying.

For a moment Peter fancied the half-breed was going to meet General Herkimer according to instructions ; but later he decided such could not be the case, and when the blacksmith passed the little group of officers, who were reclining on the ground a short distance away, he concluded that his comrade was simply bent on gaining a general idea of the position of the men.

Half an hour passed.

The lengthening shadows had been merged into the darkness of night, and Spencer was still absent.

Peter walked up the pathway opposite to where he had last seen General Herkimer ; but, owing to the gloom, could distinguish no one amid the many in the vicinity.

Then he returned to the spot where Spencer had left him, for, much as he desired to speak with the general, he could not muster up sufficient courage to approach him without a summons.

After fully an hour had passed Spencer returned, looking here and there as if in search of some one, and Peter, recognising him, called out, softly :

“ Are you hunting for me, Mr. Spencer ? ”

“ Yes, lad ; but it is only to say good-bye. ”

“ Then you are going off for the fort, and without me. ”

“ It can't be helped, my boy. I assure you I said nothing

against your going. On meeting General Herkimer, he announced to me that Adam Helmer and Ezra Johnson were the men whom he had selected to accompany me."

"Then I suppose he has forgotten that there is such a person as Peter Kirkland following him?"

"It is not that, lad. I think the old general really wants with him some one whom he knows he can trust implicitly to obey an order, and, unless I am very much mistaken, he will need a faithful messenger before these men arrive at Fort Schuyler."

Peter was thoroughly disappointed, and, observing his dejection, the half-breed said, kindly :

"You have had glory enough for this short campaign, my boy, in being sent from the fort, and shouldn't feel sad now."

"But I do," Peter replied, positively. "It was my right to go back to tell Colonel Gansevoort I had delivered his message."

"Then you are ready to join the others in grumbling at any order the general may give?"

"Not a bit of it. I consider myself under his command, and will do as he says; but that doesn't prevent me from feeling I haven't been treated fairly. You said last night you hoped I wouldn't go with you —"

"But, at the same time, I would never have done anything to prevent it. That you must believe, Peter Kirkland, for it is true. The duty with which we are entrusted is not important, save so far as it announces the approach of this body of men. The work of getting through the lines is dangerous, perhaps; but, after that, we shall impart what will not be entirely welcome news."

"Why not?"

"Because Colonel Gansevoort needs soldiers, and not a

rabble. He is to discharge a cannon three times to let General Herkimer know he has received the message, and then our part will have been done. I am leaving you in a far more dangerous position, my boy, than I shall occupy myself, for some disaster must overtake this ill-advised advance. Good-bye, lad; I shall tell the colonel how well you performed your mission, and I charge you to be cautious. It is no part of bravery for this force to push on as they are doing. Remain in the rear rather than with the headstrong ones who rush into danger because they refuse to believe it threatens, and who cannot render the assistance which is needed unless they are first ready to obey."

Then, without waiting for a reply, the half-breed hurried away, as if fearing Peter might make yet further complaint against being left behind.

For some moments the boy remained silent and motionless after his comrade left him, and then, arousing himself with an effort, he said :

"This is a poor way to learn a soldier's lesson. If Sergeant Fonda were here, he would be very angry because I so much as dare to think the commanding officer hasn't done right. From this out I'll hold my tongue, and try to do as he has taught me."

Then Peter set about making himself comfortable for the night, and among all that company none slept more soundly, or more restfully, than did the boy who had complained only because he was not allowed to share the greatest danger.

When morning came, those who would aid their friends in the fort pressed forward once more in the same straggling, independent fashion that had marked their march on the previous day, and Peter followed after such a manner as he believed became a soldier.

Two hours before noon the word to "halt" was passed here and there among the throng, and immediately the men looked at each other suspiciously, believing this delay betokened an intention on the part of their commander to force upon them military discipline.

It so chanced that when this word had been given, Peter was where he could see the old general in the midst of his officers, and, boy though he was, he noted with decided dissatisfaction the attitude which the young colonels, Cox and Paris, assumed towards their commanding officer.

That they, as well as the privates, were angry because a halt had been called thus early in the day, could plainly be seen, and even Colonels Visscher and Klock did not appear to approve of this last delay.

As if by common accord, the men gathered around the officers, a scowling, impatient, murmuring mob.

It was Lieutenant Sampson Sammons who first gave words to the question that was in the minds of all, and he called in a loud, petulant tone to Colonel Klock :

"Why have we halted? How are we to aid the friends who sent for us, if we stand here idle? Which is worse, to remain in the forest where we can effect nothing, or push on, each man for himself?"

"That is it! That is what we want to know!" a dozen voices cried, angrily, and General Herkimer, looking for an instant at his followers, as if in pity because of their ignorance, urged his horse forward a few paces in order to command attention.

"Listen to me as neighbours and friends, if you will not as soldiers!" the old general began, and instantly the murmurs were hushed. "Yesterday, in obedience to your commands, against my better judgment, I allowed you to go

recklessly into danger without the satisfaction of knowing you might render material assistance. We have halted here¹ because it is absolutely necessary those in the fort should know of our approach, and prepare for a sally, in order that we may effect an entrance. Last night, as you well know, Thomas Spencer, Adam Helmer, and Ezra Johnson went forward to notify Colonel Gansevoort of our coming. Three discharges of a cannon will be the signal that they have arrived, and then we shall know that our friends are prepared to receive us. Until then it would be folly to move from this place, for we should meet the enemy in the swamp, where is every opportunity for an ambush, and no chance for you to display the courage which renders you thus impatient under restraint. The entire force could be cut to pieces by a hundred soldiers advantageously placed, and we know that St. Leger has under him nearly two thousand well-armed and well-equipped men, one-third of whom are Indians who have fought under the leadership of Thayendanegea. I implore you, neighbours, to remain quietly until the signal from the fort has been given, and then you shall be led forward with all possible despatch. By moving now nothing could be effected save the wasting of your lives, which are precious to those whom you have left behind, if not to yourselves. It would be worse than folly — it would be madness, for this company of a thousand poorly equipped men to attack an entrenched force of twice that number, who are supplied with all the appliances of warfare. I beseech you not to undervalue that portion of the enemy led by Thayendanegea, for they are the flower of the Six Nations, and well versed in such fighting as we must have before gaining the fort.”

¹ This halt was made a little west of the present village of Whitesborough.

General Herkimer looked around upon his unruly volunteers a moment after he ceased speaking, and then, backing his horse among the foliage, disappeared from view, as if to give them an opportunity to discuss the matter.

Peter, who had received many a lesson in obedience from Serjeant Fonda, was thoroughly surprised at the mutinous spirit displayed by those for whose safety the old soldier was doing wordy battle.

When the general began to make this plain statement of facts, Peter fully expected that all show of insubordination would cease; but, now, on the contrary, it increased tenfold, and loudest among those who boldly accused General Herkimer of cowardice, was Sampson Sammons.

As a matter of course, there was nothing the boy could do or say in behalf of order and discipline, for the men would not only refuse to listen to one so young, but might, in their present spirit, have treated him roughly for presuming to offer advice.

"I wish Serjeant Fonda were here," he said, as, disappointed in the bearing of these patriots from whom he had expected so much, he strolled into the woods to shut them out from view. "He would soon show them that it is a soldier's duty simply to obey orders, and when one presumes to question a command given, he is guilty of mutiny, if not of absolute treason."

"And it comes very near being that, my boy," a voice replied, and, looking up quickly, his cheeks reddening because he had been giving words to his thoughts, he saw General Herkimer sitting on a log smoking a pipe. "Thomas Spencer said you were spoken of as one who would be a good soldier after you'd had a bit more experience; but such a scene as that yonder is not calculated to educate a youngster."

"If he had ever complained to himself because of an order given which did not seem fair, it would make him ashamed, sir," Peter replied, warmly. "I suppose the men are eager to relieve the garrison, and do not stop to think what may happen if they are allowed to do as they choose."

"The only trouble is," the old general said, slowly, as he took his pipe from his mouth, "that the lesson they will receive, if we push on simply as a rabble rather than a disciplined body, will do them no good in this world."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because they will no longer be in the flesh to profit by it. Fancy what may be the result if we continue to advance like a party of school-children, and are met by Thayendanegea's warriors."

"But these men are brave."

"Yes, and also foolhardy. Few of them have had any experience in Indian warfare, and their bravery will be of no avail if, as we have every reason to expect, we are led into an ambush. But I should not criticise too harshly, and more particularly to a boy. Were you disappointed at not being allowed to go on with Spencer and his companions?"

"I confess I was, sir; but I don't venture to say anything against your commands."

"It should give me great pleasure that there is one among this thousand who won't refuse to obey orders. I suppose you wanted to carry the good news to your comrades?"

"That would have been pleasant."

"Are you curious to know why I wished you to remain here?"

"It is not necessary to tell me unless you choose, sir."

"But I do choose, and for a very good reason, as you will understand. It is by no means certain the three who were

sent last night will succeed in making their way through the lines, and if they fail we shall never know it, except from the fact of their continued absence. If we do not hear the signal I requested Colonel Gansevoort to give, before to-morrow night, I shall conclude they are dead, and you will have an opportunity to make the venture. Are you willing?"

"I should go wherever you sent me, sir."

"That is bravely spoken. Now listen, lad. In case we should be attacked soon, which is not improbable, for Thayendanegea's scouts will soon tell him of our advance, your orders are, not to remain with us, but make your way toward the fort with all speed."

"What message am I to carry, sir?"

"You will simply tell that which you have seen, and bear witness that I am not responsible for such an advance as we are making; but have been forced into it. Unless I am willing to endure the shame of turning my back upon the foe at a time when our friends are in sore need, — for that is what would be said if I refused to remain with these men, — I must make the pretence of commanding them. Remember that if we are suddenly attacked, you have strict orders to go towards the fort, and at least *try* to enter. If you find the enemy too watchful for you, keep on down the river until you arrive at a place of safety."

Peter would have asked several questions, so emboldened was he by the general's friendly manner, but that the old soldier walked abruptly away, as if desirous of being alone.

During an hour or more the boy sat on the log just vacated by the man whom he had always heard spoken of as "one of the bravest," and then he went toward the encampment, if such it could be called when there were neither tents nor shelter of any kind, save that afforded by the foliage.

The men had calmed down somewhat in manner; but their words were quite as intemperate as before, and on every hand he heard General Herkimer denounced as a coward and a Tory.

"We will go forward to-morrow morning, or he shall go back," Lieutenant Sammons said, with a swagger. "We didn't leave our homes to be marched here and there in drill, like a lot of children, simply to please him."

"Right you are, Sampson. The next time we talk to him it will be plain and to the point."

Peter was literally trembling with the desire to tell these mutinous men how their conduct would be viewed by those whom they wished to aid; but he succeeded in holding his peace, although it was necessary he should go beyond sound of their voices before he could control his temper.

The remainder of the day he spent apart from the rabble. His small store of provisions had been exhausted when he ate breakfast, and he searched for the wagon which had left Fort Dayton filled with provisions—not enough to have provided two meals for the thousand men.

Thanks to the fact that each of the volunteers had brought a certain amount of cooked food with him, the general supply was not exhausted, and Peter received as much corn bread as would suffice him for dinner and supper.

Building a hut of fir boughs, he retired almost as soon as the sun had sunk behind the western hills, for he yet felt the effects of his hurried journey from the fort.

He was one of the first to awaken next morning, and strolled through the encampment, hoping the volunteers, having had time to reflect upon the intemperate words of the previous day, would be more tractable.

In this he was disappointed. As each man arose, the first

question was as to whether any order for an advance had been given, and on receiving a reply in the negative, he declared most positively that "old Herkimer must be prodded sharply before the day was much older."

The men were in a more mutinous mood than before they lay down to rest, and as the general passed through the encampment, he was boldly and openly threatened as to what might be the result if the order to march was not given.

There was no question, even in Peter's mind, but that mischief would be done if the commander refused to accede to the demands of the men, and Serjeant Fonda's pupil took it upon himself to remain very near the general, fearing lest some outrage should be attempted.

He had only a vague idea as to what he could do in such a case, but was determined that if any violence was attempted he would play a soldier's part.

General Herkimer himself understood that it would be impossible longer to control his men, and, evidently as a last resort, called his officers to a council of war.

As a matter of course, Peter did not venture to move so near as to overhear what might be said, although many of the men had no scruples about doing so. He stood some distance away, where he could see the group of officers, and watched every movement keenly.

During several moments he saw the general speaking to those nearest him, and then one and another replied until several were talking at the same moment, while the men pressed more closely as if to join in what was now little more than a noisy clamour.

Every man was apparently in a state of the highest excitement, and Peter believed it necessary to advance if he intended to take sides with the rightful leader.

As he forced his way through the noisy throng, he heard Colonel Visscher cry, in an angry tone :

“I came here to fight, not to watch others fight against an overwhelming force. You refuse to lead us to Fort Schuyler, giving as an excuse that we are but an undisciplined mob, instead of an army. Let me tell you, sir, we can assist our friends without discipline, and you who would hold us back at such a moment must be a coward and a Tory !”

Peter literally ceased to breathe as these insulting words were spoken, and would have answered them himself, but that the press was so great he could not force his way through to the side of the old man who was being abused because he was not willing the men should rush blindly on to death.

General Herkimer remained silent an instant, as if making a brave effort to hold in check the wrath aroused by the epithets so undeserved, and then replied, calmly :

“I have proven many times that I am not a coward, and every man present knows I am not a Tory. I consider myself in the position of a father to you, and am unwilling you should plunge headlong into difficulties or dangers from which I cannot extricate you. You who are now so eager to fight will be the first to run away when you smell burnt powder.”

“We are not cowards, or unfaithful to the Cause,” Colonel Visscher cried, in a fury of passion, “and you speak thus only to serve your own Tory ends. If you are not afraid — if the welfare of your country and the lives of her soldiers are nearest your heart, lead us on now, or go back among the women where you belong !”

Long and loudly did the men applaud the speaker, and

each instant the brave old general grew more angry, as Peter understood by his rapidly crimsoning face.

“If you *will* go as a mob to meet a well-disciplined army, march on!” he shouted, as he mounted his horse, and instantly the entire force was pressing forward without order or precautions, even though it was known the enemy must be near at hand.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AMBUSH.

SO rapid were the movements of the men after General Herkimer had thus reluctantly given his consent to the advance, that almost before Peter realised what was being done the entire force had departed from the encampment, not confining themselves to the pathway, which was here almost broad enough to be called a road, but stretching out through the forest on either side until the front of the column, if such an irregularly disposed body could be so termed, extended over a distance of more than four hundred yards.

Although but a day's journey from the fort, where they knew were seventeen hundred of the enemy, no precautions were taken for their own safety.

It was as if each man formed an independent command, and troubled himself about nothing save to arrive at Fort Schuyler in the least possible time.

The hindermost of the reckless patriots were fully fifty yards away on what seemed more like a race than an advance of armed men, before Peter realised that it was his duty to follow.

Then he trudged on in the rear, expecting every moment that the force would voluntarily halt to form some concerted plan of action, rather than continue long at such speed, and in so careless a manner.

An hour passed, and then came the labour of ascending a steep incline, beyond which, in the ravine, Peter knew would be found the swamp.¹

The only passage over this treacherous bog was a narrow causeway of logs hardly more than of sufficient width for three men to walk abreast.

Arriving at the height of this elevation, the would-be reinforcements dashed at full speed, and, as can well be imagined, in the greatest disorder, down the steep incline, as if each man was determined to be first upon the causeway.

Peter, knowing there must necessarily be a halt made in the ravine by the greater portion of the party, unless those in the rear were willing to flounder through the morass, stood on the brow of the hill gazing at the men, who were already crowding toward the narrow passage like a flock of sheep.

Many, eager to outstrip their companions, were wading knee-deep in the mud and water, and nearly all had left the firm ground for this treacherous footing, when suddenly a volley of musketry rang out, followed almost immediately by the crackling of shots in every direction, until it seemed to the horror-stricken boy as if the entire ravine were filled with the enemy, while from many points came sharp cries of distress, telling that scores of foolhardy men had been wounded unto death.

It was the ambush General Herkimer had predicted.

Unquestionably Thayendanegea's scouts had given timely warning of the coming of the reinforcements, and that wily warrior made preparations for their reception at this, the most difficult portion of the journey.

As Peter stood motionless, like one paralysed by terror, he

¹ This ascent was about two miles west of the present town of Oriskany.



“IT WAS THE AMBUSH GENERAL HERKIMER HAD PREDICTED.”

noted the fact that the smoke was rising above the trees in a circle, broken only at the starting point of the causeway, thus showing that the Continentals were almost surrounded.

At the opening of this deadly ring were a portion of Colonel Visscher's regiment, and they, the forces of the officer who had accused the old general of being a coward, turned instantly the first volley was fired, fleeing for their lives up the slope, led by their commander, and pursued by a large body of Indians.

"The general said you would run when you smelled powder," Peter shouted to the foremost. "You were so brave this morning that you could call a man who would have saved you a coward. You said you came here to fight; now why don't you do it?"

"All of Thayendanegea's force must be in that swamp," the colonel, whose livid face gave evidence of the terror which had taken possession of him, cried, wildly. "It is death to go forward; come back with us!"

"I was ready yesterday to do as the general wished, and now that he has been forced into this trap I am not willing to leave him," Peter shouted, defiantly, as he ran obliquely toward the right, hoping the Indians might pass in pursuit of the fugitives, and thus afford him an opportunity to join General Herkimer.

He forgot for the time being the orders given him, and thought only of doing his full part in the battle which had been brought about through folly and ignorance.

Before the pursuing Indians were sufficiently near to observe him, he had gained the dense bushes which lined the edge of the ravine at that point, and was making his way, at the best pace consistent with safety, toward the causeway.

Before gaining the road he learned that the enemy had completed the encircling ambuscade, actually enclosing all the force save that portion who had so cowardly sought safety in flight.

Now was the moment when he should have pushed with all speed towards the fort, and he began to realise the fact.

"It looks too much as if I were running away," he said, halting in a thicket so dense that he was entirely concealed from view; "but Serjeant Fonda would say it was my duty, once the order has been given, no matter what people may think."

He tried to decide in which direction he should begin the journey. The Indians were between him and the direct road to the fort, consequently a *détour* would be necessary.

To circle completely around the swamp would involve such a long journey that he could not hope to arrive at his destination, even though he should not be molested, until nightfall, while if he pushed straight ahead the distance might easily have been traversed in four hours.

"If I do not get there before night I shall be of no service to General Herkimer, and it is worth the risk to travel in as nearly a straight line as possible. The Indians will not pay much attention to anything save those who have been surrounded, and I ought to be able to slip past them, even though I shall be forced to wade the greater portion of the way."

He also realised that the almost incessant discharge of muskets, the cries of the wounded and groans of the dying, would aid him in his purpose, for above such a terrible medley the noise of his advance must necessarily be drowned.

He was about a hundred yards to the right of the causeway, and, having thus decided upon the course to be pursued,

pushed resolutely forward, wading through the water, which oftentimes came nearly to his waist, darting from tree to tree in order to conceal himself as much as possible, and all the while holding his pistol and ammunition high above his head, lest they should be submerged.

He had thus advanced two hundred yards when, from the left, toward the causeway, came frantic appeals for help.

Without stopping to think of the danger to himself, he dashed forward in the direction from which the piteous cry had sounded, and, a moment later, saw an Indian torturing a white man by cutting deep gashes on his cheeks with a scalping-knife.

The unfortunate man's leg appeared to have been shattered by a musket-ball, and the Indian had probably dragged him from the vicinity of the causeway.

There was no time to be lost if Peter would relieve the poor fellow from his sufferings. With the utmost speed he ran, discharging his pistol at random, and then shifted the captured hatchet from his left hand to his right.

By a fortunate chance the bullet hit its mark, and the savage wheeled half around as he lurched a few paces backward.

He was wounded in the left shoulder, but yet capable of mischief.

Peter sprang forward, with upraised hatchet, but before he was sufficiently near to strike, the white man put an end to this portion of the battle by shooting the enemy through the body.

The Indian fell, and Peter was about to take possession of his musket when the volunteer cried, imploringly :

“Don't waste time on him or his; help me back to the road! I sha'n't live much longer, but you can save me from

more torture, and what you do must be done quickly, for it seems as if every other tree hid an Injun."

"How far are we from the rest of the party?" Peter asked, as he raised the sufferer by the shoulders.

"Half a musket-shot off. I wasn't more than ten yards from the road, tryin' to pull myself through the swamp, when that devil got hold of me."

"I'll do the best I can, friend; but you must shut your teeth hard, for I can't be very gentle in such a place as this."

"You won't hurt me as bad as these red demons will if they get hold of me again. Work quick, boy, for there's no tellin' how soon more of the savages may be upon us."

There was little need for the man to urge Peter thus; the boy understood full well how slight were the chances that he could succeed in his mission of mercy, for he had a better idea than any one else as to the number of the enemy in the swamp.

Now he had forgotten that it was his duty to push on toward the fort. He was not sufficiently hardened to such scenes to be able to leave a dying man unaided, more particularly when a direct appeal had been made to him.

With his arms clasped just beneath the sufferer's shoulders, he worked his way backward step by step, forced to move his feet cautiously lest he be tripped by a submerged root, but each instant approaching nearer the spot where the rapid discharge of musketry told the battle was raging the most fiercely.

The wounded man made no sign of the terrible suffering he was enduring. His only desire was to be saved from such torture as the enemy would inflict, and all pain seemed light by comparison.

"Are many of our men killed?" Peter asked, when they

were where he could drag his companion through the water with comparative ease because of a slight opening among the trees.

“It seemed to me that a full half fell at the first volley. I was among the leaders, trying to get through the swamp as fast as them on the road could force their way along, and the three men close by me were all killed.”

“Was it there you were wounded?”

“No; I wasn't hit then, and was makin' my way back to where I heard General Herkimer shouting, when the bullet struck me. There's this about it, lad: we brought it all on ourselves. If we had only listened to the old man's advice—been willin' to obey his commands, I'll venture to say we wouldn't have walked into an ambush.”

“It was exactly what he feared.”

“Yes, and he told us a dozen times over that sich a trap was certain to be laid; but we thought we knowed too much. If he—For God's sake, go faster! The Injuns are after—”

The words ended in a scream of fear, as a musket-ball cut its way through the foliage within an inch of Peter's head.

“Keep quiet! You'll only bring more of them down on us, and the one who just fired must stop to load—”

“He's coming! Leave me, 'an save yourself!”

Peter raised his head in time to see a painted savage close upon him, and he dropped his burden suddenly, but not to fly. He was still bent on succouring the helpless man, however great the peril.

By the time he could draw his hatchet, which had been replaced in his belt when he began the laborious journey, the foe was upon him, knife in hand.

The Indian probably believed the boy could easily be overcome, otherwise he would not have departed from the tradi-

tions of his race by venturing a hand-to-hand encounter, and because of this he was, most likely, less cautious than usual.

However it may have been, he rushed wildly at Peter with upraised knife, and the intended blow was readily parried by the hatchet, the savage literally tumbling against a tree as the boy stepped quickly aside.

Before he could recover his balance Peter was upon him, and the battle was lost so far as that particular member of Thayendanegea's band was concerned.

"A brave blow, my lad!" the wounded man cried, exultantly. "If the red imps would give our poor fellows as fair a chance as that, the tide would soon be turned."

"I doubt not but that they are giving a good account of themselves," Peter replied, as he raised the helpless man once more to continue the journey. "*All* the ammunition they are using is not wasted; some of the bullets are finding the mark."

"But the odds are against us; the surprise was so complete that it took time to recover from it. Hark! Did you hear that cry?"

"It's General Herkimer; we can't be far from him now. Brace yourself for one more tug, and we shall be there."

"Don't pay any attention to my hurts; anything is better than being left out here in the swamp!"

Half a dozen yards were traversed, each foot of the distance costing Peter the most severe exertion and his companion the most intense agony, and the journey was ended for the time being.

The boy had arrived at a bit of solid ground a short distance to the right of the causeway, where General Herkimer, sitting with his back against a tree, the blood slowly oozing through the bandages of woollen which partially covered one

leg, and his pipe in his mouth, was giving an order to Sampson Sammons, who now listened as if he had never sanctioned a charge of cowardice against the brave old officer.

"What's that?" the general said, sharply, as Peter dragged his burden up on the bank.

"A poor fellow I found in the swamp, sir."

"This is not a time for able-bodied men to play the part of nurse! The wounded must care for themselves until the safety of the living has been assured."

"An Indian was torturing him, sir, and I could not pass by without giving the poor fellow some aid."

"You are the boy who came with a message from Colonel Gansevoort," the general said, as if he had but just recognised Peter.

"Yes, sir."

"I gave you orders, in case of an attack, to make your way with all speed to the fort."

"Yes, sir, and I was obeying when I ran across this poor fellow. I thought to make my way through the swamp, instead of travelling so many miles as would be necessary to go around it; but found myself almost in the midst of the fight. I am now ready to try it again."

"It is too late — was, perhaps, too late when you started. Stay where you are. Find a musket and ammunition, and do your duty as a soldier."

Two weapons were lying on the ground where they had fallen from the hands of their dying owners, and, from a body within a few feet of where the general sat, Peter secured a supply of ammunition.

"Which way had I best go, sir?"

"Stand where you are; there have been half a dozen savages a short distance to the right, and you can see what

kind of marksmen they were. Both these poor fellows have been killed at this post."

Peter looked in the direction indicated by the general's extended finger, and saw the bark of the tree just above his head, cut and scored by half a hundred bullets.

"Did you sit here while that was being done?" he asked, in surprise.

"I was as safe in this place as any other."

"Yet you have been wounded."

"I didn't get that bullet here. Ten minutes after the first volley was fired, and while I was on the causeway encouraging some of the fainter-hearted to hold their position, a ball killed my horse, passing directly through his body and shattering my leg. At about the same time Colonel Cox was killed. Do you —"

At this point Peter discharged his rifle; a wild yell rang out, and the general said, approvingly:

"That shot told, lad. Keep cool; don't think of danger, and you'll be the better able to pick them off. Our people are fighting like brave men, and badly though we are placed, it may be possible to hold the savages in check. Here, Sammons," he cried, as the lieutenant passed a short distance away, "tell our friends not to fight singly behind trees, but in couples. These Indians rush in as soon as they see a man fire his musket, and kill him before he can reload. See to it that all hands take their station in pairs. Let one reserve his fire, that he may be able to care for the painted devil who sneaks up to do murder."

Sammons hurried away to execute this order, and Peter said, half to himself:

"It's a pity he couldn't have obeyed as willingly this morning."



“ AT THIS POINT PETER DISCHARGED HIS RIFLE.”

“Right you are, lad; but it is of no use to talk about that at this hour. The poor fellows have paid in blood for their foolishness, and are now doing their best. Run out to the causeway, and tell the first officer you see to send a squad of men back on the slope; let them force their way through, if the approach to the road is guarded, and keep the passage open. We may find it too hot here, and be forced to retreat.”

Peter obeyed, running at full speed through the swamp, and the first officer whom he saw was Major Frey.

He repeated the message hurriedly, and the young officer said:

“It shall be done at once. Is the general seriously injured?”

“I don’t know, except that one leg is useless. Will you excuse me for saying that there ought to be a better guard for him? I am the only live man there, and the Indians are very close.”

“Wait here till I bring you some men, and if more are needed come to me. Will you say to the general that if I live long enough I want to beg his pardon on my knees; that no words are strong enough to express my shame and humiliation.”

The major hurried away as he spoke, and an instant later three men came up to Peter, as if reporting for duty. They were begrimed with powder, covered with the mud and slime of the swamp, and the blood on the face of one told that he had been “scratched” by a bullet.

“Did Major Frey send you?” Peter asked, hurriedly.

The wounded man nodded; the plug of his powder-horn was between his teeth, for he had been loading his musket as he walked.

“The general is over here, and to the right of him the Indians are creeping up. I stopped one, and there must have been others behind him.”

Then Peter plunged into the morass again, the men following close at his heels, and when they reached the little spot of solid ground, where sat a hero, two of the men stationed themselves by the side of the general, while the third raised the old soldier's hand in which he was holding his pipe, and kissed it.

“I understand what you mean, neighbour, and don't bear any ill will. You didn't know, that's the only trouble; but will wipe everything out now by making a good fight.”

“Those of us who are left, sir, will do so, if for no other reason than because we want a chance to say we are sorry for what has been done.”

“That I will believe without the telling. Where are you from?”

“The outer end of the road, where the enemy seemed the strongest.”

“How goes it there?”

“We have come nigh to holdin' our own; it was the first half dozen volleys that did the most mischief, as likely you know. Out of eight who were with me then, there are but these two left,” and he motioned towards his companions who, one on either side of Peter, were peering intently into the swamp at the same time they sheltered their bodies behind the trees.

Before the general could speak again all three discharged their muskets, and the old soldier said, grimly:

“One at a time, boys; we can't afford to waste so much lead on a single Indian.”

“There are five or six over behind that clump of trees,

sir," one of the men replied in an unusually respectful tone.

"And how many are alive now?"

"That's hard to say, sir; but I'll answer for one, an' I allow the boy took care of another."

"Do you know of any part of their line where there's a chance the lad could slip through?"

"I don't believe it could be done at this end of the road, sir, though if you want to send a messenger, I'd like to make a try for the sake of squarin' what I've said agin you since we left Fort Dayton," the man by the side of Peter replied.

"Don't trouble your head about that now, neighbour. We are in too tight a fix to remember old scores. I want to send that boy to the fort, and if any of you see a show to put him through the line they've drawn so precious close around us, let me know, or tell him."

CHAPTER VII.

A TORY STRATAGEM.

PETER was speculating upon the general's remark relative to sending him to the fort if an opportunity should present itself, and trying to form in his mind some plan for getting through the line, when Sammons came up with information from Colonel Paris.

The enemy was drawing nearer, evidently bent on crushing the crippled force by a sudden onset, and the colonel wanted instructions.

After questioning the lieutenant closely, General Herkimer gave his orders as calmly as if he were on a parade-ground, and instructed Sammons to send back a messenger with information as often as practicable.

Five minutes later, when Peter and the three men were firing with the utmost rapidity to prevent that portion of the enemy immediately in front of them from coming to closer quarters, one of Colonel Paris's men made a report.

"Captain Jacob Seeber has formed his men in a circle, and by such means is doing good work. The colonel wants to know if you approve of it?"

"Certainly I do if such tactics appear to be of any advantage," General Herkimer replied, promptly. "Tell Colonel Paris to follow his own best judgment in any matter of that kind. Where is Colonel Visscher?"

"He, with a hundred or more of his men, started back

for Fort Dayton about as soon as the first gun was fired, and we hope the Injuns who went after them could travel the fastest," the man replied, grimly ; and then, as no further orders were given, he returned to his post of duty.

Ten minutes later the rattle of musketry appeared to be dying away near the front, and the wounded general looked anxious.

During half an hour prior to this the firing had been more steady than at any other time, and the sudden cessation boded no good for the patriots.

"Peter!" the general called, sharply, "make your way up the road and find out what is being done there. Come back at once after gaining the information."

The boy started at full speed, and was soon looking upon a portion of the battle which seemed most strange.

The combatants were all white men. Not an Indian was to be seen, and, instead of using muskets, nearly every man on this portion of the field was struggling with the enemy in a hand-to-hand fight.

"What soldiers are they?" he asked of a Continental who was apparently mortally wounded.

"The Royal Greens, some of the battalion Sir John raised from the Tory brood that fled to Canada with him. Every man of 'em is a fugitive from Tryon County, an' this end of the battle is between former neighbours. There's many an old grudge bein' settled now."

Of this particular portion of the engagement, an eye-witness has written :

"As the Greens advanced and were recognised, all the resentments, hatreds, and grudges that long years of controversy and mutual injury had engendered burst forth in a perfect whirlwind of fury. The Provincials fired upon them as they drew nearer, and then, springing

like infuriated beasts from their covers, attacked them with their bayonets and musket-butts; or, each party, throwing these aside, rushed at each other in a very delirium of passion, throttling, stabbing, biting, and, in many cases, literally dying in one another's embrace."

There was something inexpressible in the scene — a horror such as did not accompany ordinary warfare, and Peter turned away with a shudder, glad that he had been commanded to return immediately.

When he hastened back at full speed over the causeway, which had been literally covered with the blood of brave men as they endeavoured to atone for their unjustifiable conduct during the past thirty-six hours, and had explained to the general why the firing slackened at that point, the old warrior said, with a sigh :

"I have believed such a meeting must come some day ; but hoped to have no part in it. When old neighbours turned enemies stand face to face under circumstances like these, it is no longer war, but a bloody battle for revenge, during which the Cause is entirely lost sight of. Is the road open in the rear ?"

"It appeared to be. The tactics used by Captain Seeber serve to keep the enemy at a greater distance. They no longer —"

Peter started as a heavy crash was heard, which seemed to shake the earth, and General Herkimer said, with a smile, as he pointed toward the dark, ominous-looking clouds in the sky :

"There is a conflict above us, and we shall soon feel the strength of a tempest. I have seldom seen the elements marshalling in grander force than during the past ten minutes."

"I thought at first it was the guns of the fort," Peter replied, with a sigh of disappointment.

“And you hoped the besieged might be able to help us?”

“For a moment I did.”

“I doubt not but that they have heard the reports of our weapons, and are on the alert to give us every assistance if we come within range; but Colonel Gansevoort is too good a soldier to make a sally, however many of his friends may be in danger, while the enemy oppose him in such force. We are where we must hold up our end unaided, my boy, or go under, as many good men have done before us. Here comes the rain, and I reckon it means a cessation of hostilities for a time.”

Even as the general spoke, the waters descended from the clouds literally in torrents, rather than drops. It was as if a solid flood was poured down upon the combatants, and the crack of musketry ceased instantly.

The peals of thunder were almost deafening, and the flashes of lightning so nearly incessant that it was as if the heavens had suddenly burst into flames.

There was no longer any necessity of guarding against an attack by the foe. In that deluge it would have been impossible to load a musket without soaking the powder into a sodden mass, and those who a few moments previous had been fighting so desperately now looked about for shelter from the elements.

Peter's first thought was of his helpless general, and, regardless of his own discomfort, he set about trying to form a shelter of boughs to protect the old man.

In this labour he was assisted by those who were guarding that portion of the line, and before they had hardly begun the work men came running from every direction, such as had blankets bringing them to form a covering for the

general they had but lately so abused, and all animated by the same thought — to protect him from the downpour.

It was in vain he insisted they should attend only to their own comfort. Those who had been the loudest in denouncing him as a coward and a Tory were the most active in trying to make a shelter, and not until he had been cared for as well as was possible, under the circumstances, did the men think of themselves.

The staff officers who were yet alive crowded around their commander for advice, and the unexpected cessation of hostilities gave them a welcome opportunity to devise means of a better defence.

While he was assisting in building the shelter, Peter suggested to the general that perhaps he could now make his way through the lines, but received no encouragement.

“You may be certain we are even more closely guarded than before the tempest broke. The enemy have nothing to do save keep watch, and their officers know full well that we are eager to get a message through to the fort. The time has not come yet, my lad. Should we gain a slight advantage after the battle begins again, you may be able to do the work ; but I no longer command you to make the attempt.”

“Such were your orders last night, sir.”

“Yes, for I counted on their being obeyed before we were regularly invested, and when there was some little hope the task could be accomplished. Now all is changed ; there will be so much danger attending the attempt that you must go as a volunteer, if at all ; but I forbid your trying to do so at present.”

“I should have obeyed you, sir, but it was as if I could not move because of fear when the trap was sprung,” Peter said, sorrowfully.

“ I am not casting any blame upon you, lad. I know the spirit was willing, and it is not strange the flesh should prove weak in the face of such a disaster.”

By the time the general ceased speaking the men had begun to come in from the causeway, and Peter was crowded aside by those repentant ones who were eager to receive some word of forgiveness from him whom they had wronged.

Left thus to himself, and already so wet from repeated immersions in the waters of the swamp that it seemed of little consequence whether he was exposed to the downpour of rain or not, Peter bethought himself of the poor wretch whom he had saved from torture.

The wounded man had perforce remained near the general, where the boy left him, and Peter saw him still lying with upturned face behind a clump of bushes.

The rain was beating down upon him mercilessly, but he heeded it not. His eyes, wide-open and staring, were covered with the film which death had stamped upon them that his soul might not look upon earthly objects while it was departing from the mortal frame, and Peter knew he would suffer no more.

During such times as he had acted as messenger for the general he saw dead men by the score ; but none appealed to him as forcibly as this one in whose welfare he had perilled his own life.

He turned away sick at heart, assailed once more by the same terror which took possession of him when the attack was first made.

Close by a large force of merciless foes was waiting for an opportunity to renew the slaughter, and on every hand he could see how sadly the number of his companions had been reduced.

“The danger cannot be greater if I try to force my way through,” he said to himself. “Hemmed in as we are, it will only be a question of time before all are killed, or reserved for a worse fate, and I may succeed in getting through to the fort. If I fail, these poor fellows will be in no worse situation, for I can be of little service in case I stay.”

He would have started immediately, and had already advanced to the very edge of the knoll for the purpose of plunging into the swamp, when he suddenly remembered that he had been given positive orders to remain where he was.

“Serjeant Fonda would blame me as severely for coming, after what the general has said, as he will for not starting at the moment when I should have gone,” he muttered to himself, and drew back within a few paces of the poor shelter under which the general was lying.

Here Peter heard that which gave him renewed courage.

General Herkimer, still smoking his pipe and repressing all show of suffering, was discussing the situation with his officers, devising plans for a better defence, and endeavouring to animate those around him in a manner which caused Peter to feel ashamed because he had been so despondent.

The brave old officer directed that the men, instead of preserving separate formations in circles, should merge all their force into one cordon around the more solid portions of the causeway, taking good care, however, to keep open a way for retreat.

In addition, portions of the causeway were to be torn up in order to form breastworks at those points where the enemy might most readily obtain a foothold on the solid ground, and it was strictly enjoined upon all that they should fight in couples, only one of a pair discharging his weapon at a time.

“Hold firm in that formation, and we shall keep them in check,” the wounded general said, in a cheery tone. “Those in the fort must have heard the firing, and Colonel Gansevoort will see to it that the enemy in front of him do not have time to reinforce their fellows. We cannot rectify any mistakes that have been made ; but we can prove ourselves men, as you who are here surely have done, and the enemy will not prevail.”

From that moment the defenders of the causeway were in a more hopeful mood, and while the rain was yet pouring down in torrents, the thunder crashing as if the heights of heaven were falling, and the lightning flashing almost incessantly, the Provincials set about strengthening their position with the scanty material at hand.

During an hour the storm raged furiously, and then, as the black clouds rolled back from before the sun, the battle was resumed.

At the first report of a musket General Herkimer demanded that he be carried out on to the causeway where he might see all that was being done, and Peter assisted in the task of conveying the helpless man to a position of greater danger.

“Stay by me,” the general said to the boy, as the latter was about to take his place in the line of defenders. “I shall need an aide, and you will answer my purpose as well as an officer.”

Now it was that hope grew strong in Peter’s breast.

As he went here and there with messages he heard the same cheering word. The Indians, great numbers of whom had been killed, owing to the tactics pursued by the Provincials of fighting in couples, were showing signs of wavering, and even the Tories were less impetuous than before.

"Tell the general that their spirit is broken," Colonel Paris said to Peter. "All along this side of the line they are keeping at a respectful distance."

Before the message could be repeated, Major Frey shouted to the boy :

"If General Herkimer asks how we fare here, say the enemy is growing disheartened. The Indians appear to be moving off."

Peter hastened to deliver the cheering messages, and they had hardly been repeated when Lieutenant Sammons came running in excitedly from the right, shouting to Captain Gardenier, his superior officer :

"Here comes a company of soldiers from the fort!"

"Are you positive?" the captain asked, incredulously, as his men began to cheer.

"There can be no mistake. They are wearing American hats, and coming directly towards us."

"Run, boy!" General Herkimer cried, as he heard the words. "Caution Gardenier to be careful. It is not reasonable the enemy would allow our friends to come up without making some resistance, and it seems impossible Gansevoort would weaken his force by sending a company to our assistance."

Peter darted forward just as the captain disappeared among the dense foliage of the swamp, and following closely saw, before there was an opportunity to repeat the general's warning words, one of Gardenier's men run towards the newcomers with a cry of welcome.

There seemed no longer any doubt but that reinforcements had come from the fort, and Peter halted irresolutely where he could see the approaching force.

The soldier from the causeway had hardly gained the first

rank of the supposed friendly company, when he was seized and passed through the line in anything rather than a kindly manner.

“Look out!” Peter cried, loudly. “They are not friends!”

At that instant Captain Gardenier, picking up a spear from the ground, rushed forward, and Peter, drawing his pistol, followed close at his heels.

The captain ran his weapon through the body of that supposed friend who had seized the too credulous Provincial, and liberated his man just as Peter came up; but there was no opportunity for the boy to deliver his message.

The newcomers, who were none other than a body of the Royal Greens poorly disguised by hats taken from the Continentals who had been killed or made prisoners, now rushed upon the captain, and Peter saw an opportunity to render material assistance.

He shot down a man who was about to run his bayonet through the captain’s side, and rushed forward, hatchet in hand, just as Gardenier, having slain one of the foe and wounded another, was hurled to the ground by his spurs catching on the garments of the dead Tory.

Peter fought like a man against the overwhelming force, wondering dimly why assistance was not rendered, when Adam Miller, a member of the captain’s company, joined in the fray.

As Gardenier fell, two of the enemy pinned him to the ground by thrusting their bayonets through his legs, and a third would have delivered the fatal blow full at his breast, but that he seized the renegade by a quick movement of his left hand, pulling the fellow down upon himself, and using him as a shield until Miller and Peter could fight their way towards him.

Then, as the nearest Tories turned upon these two, the captain, half rising despite the terrible anguish which the movement must have caused while the bayonets were fastened in his flesh, drove his spear into the breast of a man who had levelled his musket at Peter's head.

Even yet those on the causeway appeared to be in ignorance of the true character of this force which pretended to be friendly, and as Peter was knocked down by a glancing blow on the shoulder, he heard Lieutenant Sammons shout :

“For God's sake, captain, you are killing your men !”

“They are Tories !” Gardenier cried, fiercely. “Fire at them ! Have your wits about you, man, or we're undone !”

The enemy was pressing forward, hoping to reach the causeway before the main body of the Provincials understood what was going on, and Peter found himself trampled under foot, but by no means disabled.

The leader of the party walked directly over him, and he seized the Tory by both legs, as he shouted :

“Shoot, Lieutenant Sammons ! Quick, or they'll kill the captain !”

As a matter of course Peter's prisoner fell headlong when the boy seized him, and for several moments the two struggled beneath the feet of the remainder of the party, one doing his best to rise, and the other to prevent it.

Owing to the press around and above him, Peter found it impossible to disable his enemy, and could only retain his hold, hoping a charge would soon be made from the causeway.

The captive struck out viciously with both feet, cutting a cruel gash on the boy's shoulder with his heel, but yet Peter held fast, heeding not the pain while he could prevent the officer from directing the movements of his men.

It seemed to him as if twenty minutes had elapsed, although, in fact, it was hardly more than sixty seconds from the time Gardenier gave the order before a volley rang out, and, at the same instant, half a dozen Americans rushed down from the causeway to succour the wounded captain.

By this time the Indians, who had crept up in the rear of the Royal Greens, were within range, and the first volley killed or wounded not less than thirty of the savages, and as many of the Tories.

The fire was too murderous for the enemy to withstand, and before a second volley could be discharged all able to do so were in rapid retreat, while Peter, now free to move as he wished, succeeded in disarming his prisoner.

“Get up!” he said, as he levelled one of the officer’s pistols at his head. “Get up, or I’ll shoot you where you lie, and that would be too merciful a death for one who took part in this ambush, and then tried to pass himself off as our friend.”

The man obeyed, sullenly, and those on the causeway greeted the boy with a hearty cheer, as he drove the captain ahead of him to that portion of the road where General Herkimer was seated.

“Who captured this man?” the general asked, as Peter halted the prisoner directly in front of him.

“I did, sir.”

“Alone?”

“There were a good many near, but I did most of the work, though I don’t deserve any credit, because it was all an accident. I was where I could do nothing, unless I laid still and allowed them to kill me.”

“You are wounded, boy.”

“That is only where he cut me when he kicked.”

“Turn him over to some of the men, and say that it is my positive order he be kept in safety. No doubt many will be wanting to revenge their comrades through him ; but we must be careful not to follow the example of those savages whom our enemy has taken into his ranks. Come back here that I may look to your wound.”

Peter was a very proud boy as he turned the Tory captain over to Lieutenant Sammons, and returned to the general whom he revered.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DEARLY WON VICTORY.

NO very critical examination was necessary to ascertain that Peter's wound was painful rather than dangerous, and not sufficiently deep to require even so much as a bandage.

"I don't think it is serious," the general said, finally. "It won't look as bad after the blood has been washed away."

"A fellow should be ashamed to complain of such a scratch as that after seeing so many men mangled terribly."

"A soldier must expect incidents of that kind, and thank the fortune of war if he comes out of an engagement alive, no matter how many limbs he may have lost. Except for a cause like ours, I do not believe war is justifiable, never mind what provocation a nation may have received. I have—"

A fresh outburst of Indian yells from the further end of the causeway, followed by rapid firing, interrupted the general, and in obedience to his look Peter hurried forward to learn the cause of the commotion.

He found Lieutenant Sammons directing the movements of a hundred or more men, and apparently on the point of making a sally into the swamp.

"What is the matter?" the boy asked, hurriedly, and,

knowing he was acting as the general's messenger, Sammons cried, excitedly :

“ Tell the old man that the Injuns made a dash just now, capturing Colonel Paris and Major Frey. Ask him if I have his permission to follow in pursuit. Be quick, lad, for every moment is precious ! ” and the lieutenant began to give orders as if confident the request would be readily granted.

At full speed Peter ran down the causeway, repeating the lieutenant's words even while he was yet some distance from the general, and the answer he received literally staggered him.

“ Tell Sammons under no circumstances to allow a man to leave our lines ! It is a devilish trick of the savages to divide the force, and once any number started out through the swamp, the remainder would be exposed to a merciless attack. Quick, lad, before that hot-headed fellow can leave us ! ”

Wheeling around to his best speed, Peter returned to what may be called the “ front, ” arriving just as the lieutenant, with a large force, had started towards the water on the right of the causeway.

“ Come back, Lieutenant Sammons ! Come back ! ” he cried, at the full strength of his lungs. “ The general says it is a trick of the Indians to divide our force. You are not to allow a single man to leave the lines ! ”

Sammons halted his force, and looked around angrily.

“ Does the general know who have been taken prisoners ? ” he asked, sharply.

“ I told him exactly what you said. ”

“ And he is willing those brave fellows shall be tortured to death, for that must be their fate unless we can rescue them ? ”

"I have repeated what he said."

"I suppose he thinks they deserve it, after having refused to do as he wished yesterday," Sammons cried, in a passion.

"I am positive he never had anything of the kind in his mind when he gave the order," Peter replied, indignantly. "He is only thinking of the safety of the greater number, and that you will acknowledge when you are not angry."

The unreasoning lieutenant stepped in front of his men, and asked, hurriedly :

"Shall we stand idly by and allow those brave officers to be killed, when by a quick pursuit we may rescue them?"

"No! No! Push ahead without orders!" one of the soldiers cried, but before Sammons could speak again an old man in the ranks said, warningly :

"Neighbours, it seems to me that we're already responsible for many deaths by refusing to listen to General Herkimer, an' it ain't well to go contrary to his advice again."

"But this is a case where we may save two lives if we move quickly!" the lieutenant cried.

"That is possible; but the old general knows the Injun tricks, an' if he's as nigh right now as when he wanted us to get into shape before runnin' headlong towards the fort, we may lose more lives than we shall save."

"I'm not a man who can stand idly by talking when my friends are in danger! Who will follow me?" and Sammons brandished his sword vigorously.

Not more than a dozen volunteers stepped forward, and it is possible the lieutenant would have started on his errand of mercy with that small force, had not the old man spoken again.

"You do not even know the direction in which they have

been taken. You can only flounder blindly through the swamp, a target for every Tory an' Injun in front of us. We're no match for Thayendanagea's men at such tricks."

This remark caused five of the dozen to return to their places, and Sammons stood irresolutely at the edge of the causeway, when there sprang up from every side hosts of painted faces, and instantly it was understood General Herkimer had been right when he suspected that taking the officers prisoners from the very midst of their men was but another stratagem.

Now the battle was renewed with increased fury, but this time the Colonists had the odds in their favour, by being drawn up in line.

It was a hot fire which saluted the Indians, half drunk with the unusual allowance of rum the British commander had caused to be served to them that morning; but Peter did not stay to witness its effects.

He knew the general would be impatient to learn the reason of this furious rattle of musketry, and hastened back, explaining to the old soldier, in the fewest possible words, all that had been said and done.

"Sammons is an impetuous fellow, and not to be relied upon," the general said, musingly. "He repents at one moment, and is immediately ready to follow his impulses the next. I must go nearer the hot work, my boy. Let me use you as a crutch."

Peter ventured to remonstrate, but before he could say half a dozen words he was interrupted by the stern question:

"Am I to see more insubordination?"

"I do not intend to be insubordinate, sir; but only to try and convince you that you, of all others, should remain out of harm's way as much as possible, for what would be-

come of those who are left if you were killed or taken prisoner?"

"You're a good lad; but need considerable more disciplining before you can call yourself a thorough soldier. My place is where danger is the greatest, and I fear what Sammons may do, more than the enemy himself."

Peter was silenced, and stepped forward to assist the general to rise, when he heard in the distance the repeated cry: "Oonah! Oonah!"

This was followed by vigorous cheers from the defenders of the causeway, the general himself joining in with a hearty "hurrah!"

Peter looked up in amazement.

"You do not understand, my boy? That was the Indian order for retreat, and we are victorious, though God knows it is a victory that has been dearly bought."

"They are in full flight, Tories as well as Injuns!" Sammons cried, joyfully, as he ran down the road. "Shall we pursue them? It will be possible to make them feel our sting before they can reach the main body!"

"Wait until you are certain it is a retreat, and not a ruse to draw you on," General Herkimer replied, gravely. "I have no doubt but that they have fled; yet it would be in the highest degree unwise to make any attempt at pursuit. We are too few in numbers, and have too many wounded on our hands to act on the offensive."

This time Sammons did not rebel.

Had he done as he wished a few moments previous, the remnants of the volunteers must all have been slaughtered, or led away to a worse fate even than death, and he was now thoroughly well aware of the fact.

"What are we to do, sir?"

“Keep one-half your men in line of battle with orders to be on the alert for the slightest unusual sound, and let the remainder succour the wounded. Remember, Mr. Sammons, that we cannot afford to neglect any precautions which may ensure the safety of our command.”

The lieutenant saluted, wheeled stiffly around, and disappeared up the road.

“Now, lad, it is your turn to go, and may God have you in His holy keeping.”

“Am I to leave you, sir?” Peter asked, in surprise.

“The moment has come when I believe you will be able to make your way to the fort in comparative safety, and it is necessary Gansevoort has the earliest information of our condition. There is little question but that the Indians and Tories have met with too hot a reception since the storm cleared away, and are so discouraged and disheartened that they will not halt until arriving at the encampment. By following in their footsteps, you should make your way with but little difficulty.”

“I am ready, sir,” Peter replied, promptly. “What shall I say to Colonel Gansevoort?”

“Tell him all you have seen from the time we started, and say that I intend to fall back on Fort Dayton, at which point more volunteers will undoubtedly be raised. Owing to my wounds I shall be carried to my own home, a distance of not more than thirty-five miles; but there are other and abler officers in the Valley who will see to it that reinforcements are sent forward.”

Peter waited several seconds after the general ceased speaking, as if believing he had yet more to say, and the old man held out his hand to bid him good-bye.

“Continue as you have begun, my boy. Remember that

your country needs you, and strive each day to do something, however slight it may be, for the Cause. Now go."

Peter could not trust himself to speak. The tears were too near his eyelids to permit of words, and it would have caused him deepest shame had they flowed before this brave man, who seemed able to banish his own suffering and anxiety in order to care for and protect others.

He walked slowly up the causeway, turning now and then to take one more glance at the wounded hero, until the foliage shut him out from view, when he set his face resolutely towards his destination.

"What now?" Lieutenant Sammons asked, as the boy approached.

"I am going to carry a message."

"Not to the fort?"

"Yes."

"And the general believes you can get there?"

"He knows I can make the attempt, and it is necessary Colonel Gansevoort should learn why the reinforcements do not come up."

"May God speed you, lad; it seems a cruel thing to send you off alone."

"I shall be as safe as if there were a dozen with me — perhaps safer. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, lad. Warn Joe to do his duty, and, listen, lad, when you tell the story, as you'll have to do, about how we walked into this ambush, don't let Joe think his father was one who helped bring all this slaughter about, by refusing to obey the orders unless they were to his liking. The boy must know I was among the insubordinate; but if it can be helped, I'd like to keep from him the fact that I was one of the longest-tongued when we the same as mutinied."

"I understand, Mr. Sammons. Joe sha'n't hear anything against you from me; but I'll tell him how bravely you fought here on this causeway when it seemed certain we were all doomed."

"You're a good lad, Peter, and if you tell my boy that which will make him proud, instead of ashamed, because I'm his father, I'll bless you to my last day. Say to Joe that his mother sent her dearest love when I left home, and that she prays for him every hour. A good woman and true, is Joe's mother!"

Peter thought it best to bring this rather painful interview to a close, and did so by plunging boldly into the swamp, where he was soon hidden from the view of those who, for the past eight hours, had been standing face to face with a cruel death.

Once on the trail of the retreating forces it was plain to be seen that they had fled panic-stricken, most likely fearing a fierce pursuit.

Scattered here and there along the entire distance were weapons, articles of wearing apparel, and even ammunition, while the bushes and shrubs bore ominous stains which told where some wounded wretch had dragged himself along lest he should fall into the hands of those he would have killed.

Twice during the first half-hour he met with a dying man who had abandoned the effort to reach his army, and was waiting for death to relieve him from his sufferings.

Each time Peter stopped in the hope it might be possible for him to give some relief, but there was nothing that could be done, since he had neither food nor drugs, and water was everywhere in plenty.

At the expiration of an hour he stood beside a young man, who was so nearly submerged in the ooze and slime of

the swamp that only his face was above the surface, and him the boy dragged to where the roots of a huge tree would afford a resting-place until his sufferings had come to an end.

He was a member of the Royal Greens, and appeared pleased when Peter lingered a few moments to talk with him.

According to his story the Indians had gone into the battle wild with rum, which had been served out to them unsparingly, and when the effects of this had died away, they were seized with a panic.

"We were getting the worst of it after the rain-storm," he said. "Then the stratagem of sending a portion of our company in as if they had come from the fort failed most disastrously. The capture of the two officers was the result of a plan laid by Thayendanegea himself, to be tried if the battle was going against us; and when your men refused to follow, the Indians suddenly lost heart. Our situation was no worse than it had been, but must have been bettered after we deprived you of two leaders, yet the savages suddenly raised their cry of 'Oonah,' and instantly they were in full retreat, the Greens following them without knowing why."

"When were you wounded?"

"Just after the rain ceased, but I held on, knowing I could not make my way through the swamp unaided, until I was too weak, from having lost so much blood, to be of any service. When the retreat began I joined my comrades, and some of them helped me as far as this; but it seemed as if the longer we travelled the more frightened they grew, and finally I was left to die."

"I am trying to reach the fort, and will do what I can to

help you get there," Peter said, his sympathies speaking rather than his better judgment, for he knew it was necessary he should see Colonel Gansevoort at the earliest possible moment.

"I can't help myself even so much as was necessary to get out of the mud, and you could not carry me. I shall die here, and very soon. You are in danger, for some of our forces may come back to hunt for the wounded, and however kind you have been to me, they would turn you over to the Indians in case of capture. Go now, and God bless you for having stopped to aid an enemy."

Again Peter was too deeply moved to be able to speak, and after a hand-clasp which would not have been given to a Tory under other circumstances, he pushed forward once more, feeling much as if death were stalking by his side during all that difficult tramp across the swamp.

After gaining firm ground, he pressed on at his best speed, seeing everywhere traces of the fleeing enemy, but meeting no other who might be cheered by a kindly word.

Then he was so near the fort that it was necessary to proceed with the greatest caution, lest he find himself in the clutches of the scouts, who were unquestionably keeping close watch over the besieged.

The sun was sinking behind the hills when he arrived at a point where he could see the rude fortification he wished to reach, and then he stood staring like one suddenly deprived of all power of motion.

Floating over the stockade were five British flags!

While one might have counted twenty, he stood gazing at these emblems, believing the fort had been captured, and then he saw that hoisted above them was the rudely made stars and stripes he had seen often before.

That emblem of liberty would not be occupying such a position if the enemy were in possession ; but how to account for the others was beyond his powers of conjecture.

“There couldn’t have been much of a battle,” he muttered, as he moved forward slowly, pausing every dozen seconds to listen for the movements of an enemy. “If any very severe fighting had been done, there would be some signs of it, and everything about the fort appears as usual.”

It was a matter which perplexed him not a little, and rendered him uncertain as to how he should approach, until he forced himself to accept the fact that the enemy’s flags were there, without speculating as to the reason.

In order to advance as cautiously as seemed necessary, an hour was spent in traversing five hundred yards, and then he had arrived at the place where he made his exit from the fort when starting on the mission entrusted to him by Colonel Gansevoort.

It was no longer possible to make his way through the stockade, for the aperture had been carefully closed, and he was forced to creep around the walls to the main entrance, knowing full well that this was the most dangerous portion of his journey.

Twice he was forced to conceal himself among the bushes as some of the enemy’s scouts came up, and once an Indian passed so near that he could have touched the savage by stretching out his hand.

Not until nearly midnight was he where it seemed prudent to hail a sentinel, and then, pressing close against the gate, he called, softly :

“Friends! Hello, friends!”

“Who’s there?” a voice called.

“Peter Kirkland, private in the State troops. Open quickly, for I am in greatest danger!”

“Is Serjeant Fonda there?” he heard the voice ask, and a moment later the gate was opened.

“Is it really you, Peter, my lad?” the old serjeant asked, as he pressed the boy’s face in his rough hands. “Where are you from?”

“The swamp, with a message from General Herkimer to Colonel Gansevoort. I’ve been with —”

“Not a word to me, lad, as to where you’ve been. Have you forgotten that a messenger to the commandin’ officer must give no information to any other man till his duty has been performed? Afterward I’ll be proud to have you tell me what you please, for you’ve done credit to your teachin’, my lad, by goin’ through that nest of savages an’ comin’ back alive. I hope you’ve not allowed yourself to forget how a soldier should deport himself.”

“I’m afraid I have, serjeant.”

“Then I’m sorry, but will try to forgive it because of the pluck you’ve shown. If Colonel Gansevoort has no further orders for you, I allow you’ll report to your own company?”

“Of course I shall, and mighty glad of the chance. Serjeant Fonda, how does it happen that there are, or were, five British flags on the fort?”

“That’s a story, lad, that I shall enjoy givin’ you, an’ it’ll keep till you’ve discharged your duty. I’ll spend a good part of the rest of this night tellin’ you about it, pervidin’ your private report to me don’t prevent.”

“Is Joe all right?”

“Well an’ hearty, my lad. Do you know I’m beginnin’ to have hopes I’ll get him into shape some day? He has the makin’s of a soldier in him; the only question is how best to

get it on the outside, for as it is, he's a livin' disgrace to the company every inspection day. Here we are at headquarters, an' I'll do myself the honour to report your comin' back."

The old soldier left Peter standing in front of the small building in which Colonel Gansevoort was lodged, and when he returned it was to say :

"You're to enter, lad, an' remember that I'm the one who's entitled to receive your private report, if it so be that the colonel don't lay you under orders not to talk of what you've seen."

"I sha'n't forget, Serjeant Fonda, and I'll be mighty glad when I'm alone with you once more."

"I'm allowin' a full day's rations won't come amiss, lad, an' I'll draw them for you."

Then the old serjeant drew himself up stiffly as an intimation that he expected a salute from his subordinate, and after that had been given in due form, Peter entered Colonel Gansevoort's quarters.

CHAPTER IX.

SERJEANT FONDA'S STORY.

COLONEL Gansevoort was lying on a cot, partially undressed, when Peter entered his apartment, and before the young messenger could do more than salute his superior officer, the latter asked, eagerly :

“How went the battle this afternoon?”

“The Tories were beaten off; but General Herkimer called it a dearly won victory,” Peter replied, wondering how the colonel knew there had been a battle, and why he did not ask if his messenger had succeeded in reaching the German Flats.

Almost instantly this thought came into his mind, he realised that which had, since the beginning of the engagement, been forgotten — that Thomas Spencer and his companions had been sent to the fort to report the coming of the reinforcements.

“Did Mr. Spencer get through, sir?” he asked, eagerly, forgetting it was his duty simply to answer questions, not to ask them.

“Yes, Spencer and Helmer arrived safely; but their comrade was killed. Did the general hear the signal he wanted me to give?”

“He heard nothing whatever from the fort, sir, and it was the general belief among the men that the three messengers had been captured.”

"Where did the engagement take place?"

"In the swamp," Peter replied, and then, without waiting for further questions, he proceeded to give the colonel the particulars of the engagement, forced to go into the minutest details because of the inquiries the commandant made as the story progressed.

"It was a most disastrous affair, most disastrous!" Colonel Gansevoort exclaimed, sadly, when Peter had finished his recital. "It seems incredible that any native of the Valley, and particularly officers like Cox, Visscher, and Paris, should question even the wildest order that might be given by a man like General Herkimer, who is more familiar with Indian warfare than almost any other soldier in this section of the country. You say Visscher beat an ignominious retreat before firing a single shot?"

"So it was reported. I know of my own knowledge that he and his men fled in the wildest confusion."

"One should not speak harshly of those who are dead, or in such sore trouble as Paris and Frey at this moment," Colonel Gansevoort said, as if thinking aloud. "Theirs will be a most horrible death, for it is not within the range of probability they can escape." Then, looking up quickly, he asked: "Did you understand from the manner in which General Herkimer spoke, that he believed more volunteers would be found to relieve the garrison?"

"He seemed positive of it."

"Yet when the survivors of his force arrive at their homes the report will be so disheartening that I question if many can be persuaded to enlist in what seems a forlorn hope."

"If they would defend their own homes they must prevent this fort from being taken," Peter suggested, timidly.

“That is an opinion you have heard from Spencer, and I grant the argument is a good one. Yet if, however, as your report would indicate, one-half of a force of a thousand men have been killed in an ambush, not forty-eight hours' march from their starting-point, it will have a most disastrous effect,” the colonel said, sadly. “Would you be willing to make the attempt to go back?”

“I should obey orders, sir.”

“Would you volunteer as you did before?”

“If you need a messenger, sir, I hope you will consider it my privilege to be the one sent.”

“Thank you, Peter Kirkland. I shall not forget your devotion to the Cause, and if my efforts are of any avail, you will not be long a private.”

“Surely you will never deprive me of an opportunity to do what little I can for my country?” Peter cried, in alarm.

“No, no, my boy. My meaning was that I should do all in my power to see that you are rewarded for your noble work and entire forgetfulness of self, by being given a commission.”

Peter could hardly believe the commandant was in earnest. It seemed to him sufficient to receive such words of praise, and the question of rising from the ranks appeared just then of minor importance.

He attempted to thank the colonel; failed most signally in his efforts to choose the proper words, and concluded by saying:

“Serjeant Fonda will tell you, sir, that I am not yet a good private; therefore how could I become an officer?”

“Serjeant Fonda is the strictest of strict disciplinarians,” the colonel replied, with a smile, “and I may be pardoned if

I venture to differ from his opinion. When you report to your company officer, say that you are relieved by me from routine duty until further orders. Now, my boy, you have the liberty to seek the repose which must be sadly needed."

Peter understood this as an intimation that the interview was at an end, and, saluting the commandant after Serjeant Fonda's most approved fashion, he withdrew.

The sentry at the door would have detained the boy to learn something regarding the battle, for, as Peter was afterward told, the firing had been heard at the fort, and, as was most natural, every one was eager to hear the news; but, remembering the old serjeant's positive commands, he hurried away.

Five minutes later he was received with due ceremony by the veteran, and, after the proper salute had been made and returned, the latter said, in the friendliest of friendly tones, as he pointed to the generous supply of provisions, spread out on a portion of a tree-trunk, which had been fashioned into a stool:

"You can see, lad, that I have drawn your rations, so fall to with a will, for the sooner you're through eatin', the sooner I'll learn what I'm precious anxious to know, if it so be the colonel hasn't given orders to the contrary."

"He did not forbid my repeating what I told him, so I suppose I am at liberty to give you all the particulars, and it isn't necessary to wait, serjeant, for I can eat and talk at the same time."

"Then fire away, lad. I've got a pretty good general idea of how you behaved 'twixt here and the German Flats, and the condition the volunteers were in when Spencer left them. Now start from that point, my boy, to spin your yarn. Don't try to shorten it up, for I want every word."

Peter obeyed literally, and during the next half-hour, interrupted now and then by exclamations of anger or impatience from the listener, he gave a spirited account of the mutiny of the men, the ambush, and the battle.

"That's all there is to it," he said, in conclusion. "And now, if you are not tired, Serjeant Fonda, I'd like to know how it happens that there were five British flags floating over the fort when I saw it at sunset?"

"It is a story I never could be too tired to tell, lad; but first I want to find a bit of complaint with the account you've been givin' me."

"In what way? Didn't I explain everything?"

"About the others, yes; but I haven't heard a word of what you did, and a boy who got the best of one of Thayendanega's scouts in a hand-to-hand battle couldn't have been idle while so much fightin' was going on."

"But you must remember that I acted as the general's messenger, and even if I had been as brave as the others, except that portion of Colonel Visscher's regiment which ran away, I should have had no chance to display courage."

"Accordin' to Spencer's account you are fit to hold your own with the best of them, lad, although I'm not yet allowin' that you're a good soldier when it comes to the manual of arms and discipline."

"But I didn't do anything, Serjeant Fonda, except to bring in from the swamp a man who was wounded, and then we had a little scrimmage with the Indians."

"An' got the best of them, I'll be bound."

"The wounded soldier did."

"I like to see that you are modest, lad; but to-morrow you shall give me the particulars you've left out to-night, concernin' yourself. Now it's my turn to do the story-

tellin', an' here goes to account for the presence of them St. George's crosses you saw floatin' over the fort: You must know first, that Spencer an' his comrades had a bit of a skirmish before they got into the fort, an' Ezra Johnson was killed. The half-breed reported Herkimer as advancin' with a force of a thousand men, who were that mutinous as to be unwillin' to listen to the advice, let alone the commands, of as good an Injun fighter as ever walked out of the Valley of the Mohawk. When I heard this part of the report I said to myself, says I, 'Serjeant, the reinforcements will never reach Fort Schuyler,' an', sure enough, here I am proved to be right. A body of men without discipline is of precious little account against the savages. The trouble comes about in this way: Two or three start off by themselves at some time, meet four or five Injuns; get the best of 'em, an' set themselves up as great fighters. They allow one white man can stand agin four or five of the savages, an' come out best. But when it comes to reg'lar war with sich a man as Thayendanegea to handle the red devils, they'll count for as good, if not better'n any frontiersman. Your volunteers allowed, every one of 'em, that he was a match for three or four of the enemy, an' so he would have been if old General Herkimer had had his own way."

"But you were to tell me how the British flags happen to be on the fort, Serjeant Fonda," Peter interrupted.

"Yes, lad, so I was, an' it's a sign I'm gettin' old when I hark back in my stories after sich a fashion. Well, to begin: Spencer told that three reports of a cannon was the signal General Herkimer wanted to hear that he might know the messengers had got through in safety, an' that Colonel Gansevoort was ready to create a diversion so they could get

into the fort. The cannon was fired inside of ten minutes after the half-breed arrived."

"But we never heard them."

"I allow all hands was so busy fightin' agin the general, an' you was so taken up with seein' how it was goin' to turn out, that you wasn't listenin', or else the wind was the wrong way. Leastwise, the cannon was fired, an' we stood to our arms ready to make a sally, if so be that could be done, the minute you appeared. We was listenin', consequently heard the reports of the muskets when the engagement began, an' had a pretty good general idee of what had happened. I said to Joe Sammons, says I, 'Joe, they're ambushed in the swamp. Them bloomin' idjuts from the Valley have held to their own way without payin' any attention to General Herkimer's commands, an' now they're gettin' it in great shape.' I shouldn't have been surprised if every mother's son of 'em had been killed in his tracks, for it was a nasty place, on that 'ere causeway, with no chance to form a line of battle, or to shift men from one point to another. You see, when so many soldiers are crowded together in sich a narrow spot, there's precious little show for manœuvrin'."

"But you were to tell me about the flags."

"Yes, lad, an' that's what I'm comin' to. Here goes : When we heard the rattle of musketry, of course the Brit-ishers heard it too, an' there was a stir in their camp like you see in an ant-hill when part of it has suddenly been knocked away. As it turned out, St. Leger himself hadn't come up ; but Sir John an' Thayendanegea were engineerin' the business, thinkin', I reckon, to get all the credit of wipin' out General Herkimer's reinforcements before their commander arrived. Sir John is a youngish man, an' as such believes he knows a good bit more'n his elders, which is a

fault you'll find in young folks generally. I ain't sayin' Sir John's father didn't know his business, for tell me, lad, where will you find a man in peace or in war who can handle the Six Nations, as well as his neighbours, in a like manner to Sir William? He was every inch a soldier and a gentleman, an' — ”

“But about the flags, serjeant.”

“I'm comin' to that, lad, I'm comin' to that. As I was sayin', when the Britishers began to hum 'round, Colonel Gansevoort said to himself, says he—that is, I allow he did: ‘It's time I was makin' things lively here at my end, for it don't stand to reason I can send any of this force down into the swamp; but I can prevent the Britishers from reinforcin' their friends, if it so be them howlin' savages are gettin' the worst of it.’ That's what I allow the colonel thought, even if he didn't say it. Leastwise, we was called to arms; there was a mighty short conference at headquarters, an' when I saw Colonel Willett step out,—the Injuns call him ‘Devil,’ an' I allow they've got good cause,—when I saw him step out with that solemn look of his like he has when he's goin' into battle, I says to myself, says I, ‘Serjeant, we're goin' to have a mighty pleasant little tussle, an' you'll be in luck if you're in it.’ An' I wasn't no ways disappointed. Colonel Willett called for volunteers to make a sally. Why, bless you, lad, there wasn't a single man in this fort who didn't step forward, an' that conceited little Joe Sammons was as much as two paces ahead of any of 'em. Then there was nothin' to be done but take the first rank, and Joe an' I happened to be there. Two hundred and fifty men all told, with the colonel stiff as a ramrod at the head of us, an' out we went. Double-quick—light marchin' order—twenty rounds of ammunition—bayonets fixed—not a drum—

and every man, so I allow, feelin' that he'd give a true account of himself that day. They had skirmishers 'twixt us an' their line, but we went through 'em same as a bear goes through a bees' nest. All Tories, every mother's son of 'em—ready to fight; but couldn't understand our manoeuvrin'."

"What manoeuvres were you making, serjeant?"

"None, and that's what confused 'em so. You see we was marchin' straight on without payin' any more attention to them than if they'd been so many mosquitoes, till we saw Sir John's regiment ahead of us, an' then, lad, we let fly! It seemed to me that minute I was a match for any dozen of 'em, but of course I wasn't—that's only the way I felt. Well, Sir John's bloomin' Royal Greens didn't want any part of that fight. We went through 'em on the double-quick, an' I'm blamed if the first man that I saw makin' his heels save his neck wasn't Sir John himself. He didn't stop to put on his coat, but was strikin' out for Canada at the best clip he knew how."

"Then Colonel Visscher and his men were not the only cowards to-day?"

"No, lad, Sir John could rank right up with 'em. He led his troop a good ten yards, an' I'll venture to say there wasn't a dozen shots fired till we'd broke through the Tory line, an' come full agin the Injun encampment. It seems that the most of the howlin' savages was busy down in the swamp; but what was left raised the cry that the devil was after 'em, an' joined Sir John's beauties. There was a chance, lad, for one of the prettiest fights that has ever been seen in these 'ere colonies. If them Tories had stood right up to their guns, backed by what Injuns was in camp, they could have cut us off, an' their show of takin'

Fort Schuyler would have been just so much better. But no, old Willett,— I mean Colonel Willett,— with that long face of his, roughin' on like he was hungry an' counted on eatin' a few of 'em, with us holdin' our formation in great shape, an' payin' precious little attention to any of 'em, did the business. Scared? Why, them Injuns went all to pieces. If Willett had really been the devil, as some of 'em believe he is, they couldn't have cleared out quicker."

"Then you didn't really have a fight?"

"Not what you could right up an' down call an engagement, lad; but bless your soul, it was pretty enough to make up for what we'd lost in the way of a scrimmage. When Colonel Gansevoort saw how we was rushin' things, he hurried out all the wagons in the fort, an' we took back here into this blessed place twenty-one loads—for I counted 'em myself—of stuff out of their camps. There were fryin'-pans an' pork, blankets, ammunition—everythin' you could think of that we needed, we brought in, without a soul bein' there to say us nay. I'm told that all the private luggage of the British officers, their papers, plans, an' what you call diaries, the five flags you saw floatin' over the fort, an', best of all, Sir John's dandy coat—we brought 'em all in, but the time was up right then an' there, 'cause jest as the twenty-first load came inside the gates, who should appear on the other side of the river but Colonel St. Leger, with from seven to eight hundred men. The old man—I mean Colonel Willett—swung 'round like he was goin' to give a salute, put up his sword till it pretty nigh touched that long nose of his, whirled us to the left till we stood in line along the riverside, an' then we gave it to 'em. Two volleys, an' I'll venture to say, lad, that three bullets out of every five struck the mark. Then it was by

the right flank, right wheel into line, double-quick for the fort, an' the gates were shut before them Tories and Britishers had got over their surprise. We didn't lose a man. I allow there was no blood spilled on our side, except when Joe Sammons tripped over an Injun tent-stake, an' barked his nose. It was a case of what you might call despoilin' the Egyptians, an' the Egyptians must feel mighty sore over it this night."

"That story is a good deal better to hear than the one I had to tell, serjeant."

"Indeed it is, lad; but there was reason for the disaster in the swamp, an' there's reason for our addin' to our stores as we did, an' it was all the same—discipline. General Herkimer's men lacked it; we had it, that's the difference, an' that difference meant victory or defeat, though I ain't allowin' but what the forces in the swamp came out conquerors, seein's how the Injuns an' Tories retreated; yet it stands to reason they lost a good many more men than did the enemy."

"Joe did his duty?"

"Like a man, an', as I said before, he's got the makin' of a soldier in him, if we can only get him into better shape for inspection. You say his father was with the old general? Now, if I know Sampson Sammons, he didn't hold his tongue while the rest was howlin'; but yet you don't seem to say anythin' about it."

Peter showed signs of confusion, and the old serjeant asked, quickly:

"What is it, lad? What have you kept back?"

"Nothing more than I promised should not be spoken of. Joe is a good friend of mine, and it would make him feel badly, as his father said—"

"I understand what you mean, lad, an' am glad you're holdin' your tongue. So Sammons was afraid the boy might know that he was one of them as helped make Thay-
endanegea's ambush a success?"

"He fought bravely, serjeant, while he was on the causeway, and afterward begged the general's pardon."

"That's all well enough; but when a thing's done, this askin' for forgiveness don't straighten matters out. Howsomever, I reckon Sammons wasn't any worse than them as was higher in rank, so we musn't give him *all* the blame. It's likely Joe'll hear somethin' of the kind, for every man in this fort won't hold his tongue when the thing's generally known, an' you'll have to smooth it over the best way you can."

"I shall tell him how brave his father was when we were standing face to face with death, and with little hope any of us would leave the place alive. That should be enough for him."

"I hope it will, lad, for it's mighty rough when a boy's cheeks are coloured because of anythin' his father's done, an' it's likewise just as rough when a father has to blush for his son. Howsomever, you an' I have given about as much time to yarnin' as we ought to. It's near daylight, an' I allow you haven't had any great amount of sleep since the night I shoved you through the stockade. There's your bed made up with plenty of the Britishers' blankets, so it will be soft, an' I'll take good care nobody wakens you in the mornin'. If Colonel Gansevoort has relieved you from duty, as was only right considerin' what you've done, you'll sleep eight an' forty hours, if it so be it pleases you."

Peter was not really sensible of fatigue until he stretched himself out on the unusually soft resting-place, and then it

was as if he had hardly closed his eyes before slumber overcame him.

When he awakened he was alone, and the sun was already beginning to decline.

"I have obeyed Serjeant Fonda's orders with a vengeance," he said to himself, as he leaped to his feet. "It must be past noon, and never mind how hard I worked yesterday, there is no excuse for sleeping so late."

Then, feeling rather ashamed of himself, because of what he termed his indolence, he went into the open air, and was both surprised and confused by the reception which awaited him.

The half-breed had sounded his praises generously. It was known by all, probably through Serjeant Fonda, that he had acted as General Herkimer's aide during the engagement in the swamp, and the fact that he was again in the fort proved that he had for the second time run the gauntlet of Indian scouts.

This was sufficient in the eyes of the soldiers to entitle him to praise, and generously was it bestowed upon him.

Joe Sammons had been waiting outside the quarters for Peter's appearance, and when he showed himself was the first to clasp him by the hand; but before a word could be spoken the men crowded around, with words of congratulation, until Peter was really ashamed because he had done so little to merit their approbation.

The soldiers, although Serjeant Fonda had told them the story over and over again, insisted on hearing from Peter himself of the ambush, and the gallantly contested battle which followed, and he was forced to repeat the account already given to Colonel Gansevoort and the old serjeant.

His listeners were eager to learn why these frontiersmen,

to a greater or less degree versed in the methods of Indian warfare, should have thus walked blindly into an ambush where there was every reason to expect one would be laid, and Peter was obliged to go into more detail regarding the mutiny of the volunteers.

He was very careful to refrain from mentioning Lieutenant Sammons in particular, and allowed it to appear that it was chiefly the officers who influenced the men.

In touching upon these facts, however, he endeavoured on every occasion to soften the harsh account by telling again of the bravery they had shown, and the contrition displayed.

Thus it was that, at least while they were in the fort, Joe had no suspicion his father was one of the foremost to denounce General Herkimer as a coward and a Tory, and one of the most persistent in demanding that the undisciplined forces be allowed to push forward recklessly, without even a show of precaution, into that fatal place where more than six hundred met their death.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEMAND.

NOT until nightfall was Peter at liberty to do as he pleased, owing to the fact that his comrades insisted on hearing again and again the story of the battle on the causeway, and it seemed to him as if he had repeated it at least a hundred times before the eager listeners would admit they had heard enough.

Then the men discussed the probability other reinforcements would be sent to their relief, some arguing that the young men of the vicinity must be disheartened by the disaster, and others declaring the inhabitants of the Valley understood how important to their own safety was it that Fort Schuyler's garrison be composed only of Continental troops.

Peter was glad of an opportunity to leave his comrades, and, in company with Serjeant Fonda and Joe, slipped away to the tiny room in the barracks which the old veteran claimed as his, although why he should have been better lodged than any other of his rank, no one but himself ever understood.

"It's a great pity the men are so eager to hear of your adventures," he said, as he unbuttoned his coat and threw himself upon a pile of blankets.

"I reckon they've had enough by this time, and I sha'n't be obliged to tell the story again."

"That may be true; but yet the mischief has been done."

"Mischief?" Peter repeated, as he looked up in perplexity. "What do you mean?"

"Jest what I say, lad. This 'ere day has put you an' Joe back in your trainin' more'n three weeks."

"I don't understand you," and Peter looked at Joe as if to ask whether he were better informed.

Joe shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. He had long since ceased to be surprised at anything the old veteran might say, and this odd remark did not interest him very greatly.

"Why, it's like this, lad. A week ago you an' Joe were ready to learn whatever I might say should be learned, and went at it with a will; but after bein' coddled as you've been this day by every private and non-commissioned officer in the fort, you'll be gettin' so high an' mighty as to think you know it all, an' give over workin' as you should."

Peter laughed long and loud. The idea seemed comical to him, and even Joe allowed himself to be slightly amused, although he did not believe the serjeant really intended the reproach for him.

"Unless I've been asleep all this time, nobody has tried to coddle me," he said, grimly. "I ain't of importance enough, seein's how I've never fought Indians single-handed, or been aide to a general."

Peter looked up quickly, thinking for the instant that Joe was really jealous because of praise bestowed upon his comrade, but the twinkle in Master Sammons's eye told there was nothing to be feared on that score.

"I grant you're right, lad; but yet it begins to look to me as if you was hoardin' up a good bit of the praise, thinkin' you must be somethin' out of the ordinary simply

because your chum appears to be. Now, I ain't sayin' a word agin what Peter's done; it makes me proud to think he was able to accomplish so much before I'd got more'n half through trainin' him; but at the same time I want you two lads to remember what you are."

"I know that without fear of forgetting it," Joe replied, quickly. "I'm a volunteer in the State troops, and have got a cross-grained old serjeant for a drill-master."

"You ought to have a dozen drill-masters, an' each ten times more strict than the other. Now here's what you two really are, never mind how much pettin' you get jest because of an accident that gives one the chance to play aide to a general: you're half-baked soldiers — nothing more. I don't say but what I may be able to put you into some kind of fairly respectable shape, enough so to save me from a wiggin' on inspection days; but till that's been done, you're only half-baked, an' mighty raw in spots at that. Don't forget it, lads, when idle soldiers want to hear you spin yarns."

"It looks a good bit as if you were flogging me over Joe's shoulders," Peter said, laughingly. "Why don't you spit it all out at me, instead of bringing him into the squabble?"

"If the shoe mostly fits you, wear the whole of it; but I mean it for both. Boys who start in as soldiers don't often have sich chances to win promotion as you've had, Peter, an' you must remember that it was more luck than merit, with some pluck thrown in, that put you in the way of bein' as high an' mighty as you are."

"That's where you are wrong, Serjeant Fonda," Joe cried. "If Peter hadn't volunteered to carry the colonel's message, he would never have been in the way of what you call luck."

"Yes, lad, an' I'm admittin' that part of it; but it doesn't

affect the truth of what I've said. Now after this, don't get puffed up, either of you, when the men praise one or both; but remember what poor sticks of soldiers you are when all's said an' done, an' buckle right down to the work of makin' yourselves better. I ain't sayin' you won't turn out somethin' pretty fair in time; but that can't happen unless you keep on tryin' to learn."

"It doesn't seem to me that there is any good reason for such a lecture, Serjeant Fonda," Peter interrupted. "It may be needed when Joe and I refuse to do as you wish, but not until then."

"I'd like to see you refusin', my hearties! Haven't I been put on as drill-master over you?"

"Certainly you have."

"Then it would be a precious tough job for the one who refused to do what I bid."

"But no one has refused, or even so much as thought of doing so. I said the lecture wasn't needed until we *had* done something of the kind."

"But hark ye, lad. If I—"

The veteran was interrupted by the entrance of an orderly, who announced that the commandant wished to see Peter Kirkland at headquarters.

"There it is!" the old soldier growled, after the officer had left the barracks. "More chance of your bein' puffed up! If this sort of thing goes on another day I shall tell the commandant that I don't feel called upon to keep up my good work jest for the sake of havin' it spoiled."

"Then you'll be guilty of insubordination, Serjeant Fonda, for your orders were to drill us. Besides, it is no good soldier who complains, so you can't so much as open your mouth!" Joe cried, emphatically.

Peter was hurriedly washing his face, the only approach to a "dressing up" that was possible, and the serjeant, paying no attention to Joe's remark, criticised his elder pupil's movements.

"You don't move around lively enough, lad. When you're ordered to headquarters it's your business to get there at once; this stoppin' to prink ain't down in the manual. If you was the kind of a soldier you an' Joe seem to think you are, you'd always be ready for a visit to headquarters."

"But I'm not certain I shall go," Peter said, with a meaning look at Joe.

"Not go?" and the veteran leaped to his feet in mingled anger and surprise. "Not go after you've been ordered? Have you gone crazy?"

"Not exactly; but it don't seem safe, if I'm in so much danger of being spoiled; and besides, I'm not just certain whether my drill-master would be pleased—he doesn't appear to approve of such things."

Then Peter, dodging the blow Serjeant Fonda aimed at him, ran laughing out of the barracks, and the veteran said, with a long-drawn sigh, when the boy had disappeared:

"O Joe, Joe, I wish you were half as good a soldier as that lad is!"

"You just told him he was only half-baked."

"But of course I didn't mean that, an' you know it."

"Then I don't reckon you mean what you say about me."

"Indeed I do, you little rascal, and I don't intend to let you slip through the drill as easy as I've been doin'."

"Then it's precious little good I shall ever be able to do my country."

"What are you drivin' at now?"

“I mean you’ll kill me before I have a chance to see any fighting. I’m nearly worn out with your whims as it is.”

Then Joe, in turn, was obliged to run out of the barracks in order to escape a blow, and he went directly to headquarters, where he loitered around at a respectful distance, waiting until his one particular friend should reappear.

His patience was nearly exhausted before Peter showed himself ; but nothing in the way of the ordinary happenings of life could have driven him from the spot until he saw his comrade again.

“What was wanted of you?” he asked, eagerly, as Peter approached, looking well pleased.

“Colonel Gansevoort counted on my telling the story over again before some of the other officers, that is all.”

“And they praised you generously for what you did.”

“How do you know that?”

“I can tell by your face ; but don’t think I’m jealous, Peter, because you’re getting all the soft words. I am not brave enough to do what you did, and I know it, therefore I feel nothing but gladness when you are spoken of so highly.”

“Look here, Joe, you’re getting as bad as Serjeant Fonda. What is said by those who hear the story isn’t for me alone, but for all who held the causeway so gallantly. You are as brave as I, that is certain, and will soon have a chance to prove it.”

“What do you mean?” and Joe looked up in surprise.

“It is a secret, even from the serjeant ; but I know that when the proper time does come you’ll show yourself a good soldier, even though you are not as well acquainted with the manual as our drill-master thinks necessary. Now let’s go to bed. Although I stayed under the blankets half the day, I don’t feel as if I had gotten my share of sleep yet.”

Serjeant Fonda was snoring, or pretending to, when his pupils entered the barracks, and there was nothing to prevent them from acting upon Peter's suggestion without loss of time.

On the following morning both boys were aroused as early as the veteran believed necessary in the interests of discipline, and they fully expected to be given a double lesson in order to make amends for the time Peter was absent, but in this they were mistaken.

"Hark ye, lads," he began, as soon as they were out of bed and had given him the proper salute. "My will is good enough to keep you trudging back an' forth on the parade-ground half the day; but I'm powerless to carry out my intentions."

"What is the matter? Are you sick?" Peter asked, solicitously.

"Am I sich a poor soldier as to be sick when I'm needed for duty? It's not that which gives you this day of ease; but the commandant's order was that Peter was to be excused — it's beyond me to say for how long — an' I'm not disposed to keep Joe at the manual alone. Make the most of your time now, lads, for I shall inquire into the matter to-day, an' have no doubt but that the drill will go on the same as ever from to-morrow."

There was an expression on Peter's face which told he did not believe they would be drilled by Serjeant Fonda very soon again, and, remembering his words of the previous evening, Joe speculated long, but in vain, as to what might be in store for him.

Until this day, not once since they had been in the fort were the boys idle during the forenoon, and now they enjoyed themselves hugely, although there was nothing new

to be seen, while the prospect of being eventually conquered and taken prisoners seemed more than probable.

Even the poor satisfaction of watching the enemy was denied them. St. Leger's forces were on the alert, firing at every man who incautiously showed himself above the earthworks or the stockade, and strict orders had been given that none but those on special duty should venture to expose himself, however slightly.

The Indians were lurking in the thicket everywhere around the fort, as could be told when a hat was shoved up on a ramrod, when it would draw half a dozen shots in as many seconds, and the marksmanship displayed showed that the besiegers were no raw recruits.

Hardly a moment passed without two or more shots being exchanged during the earlier part of the day, and when this noise of conflict suddenly ceased, so far as the enemy was concerned, every one inside the fort was curious to learn the cause.

Thus it was that the entire garrison was on the alert, when, from the thicket which hid that portion of the enemy's lines directly in front of the fortification, came a soldier carrying a white flag.

Secure in the knowledge that this bit of bunting would protect him from injury, the man advanced steadily, and, ten or twelve paces in his rear, came an officer on foot, with his sword in its scabbard.

"A messenger! A flag of truce!" the men said, wonderingly. "Can it be that St. Leger is going to cry quits because of the drubbing he got yesterday, both here and at the swamp?"

"Do you suppose that is the reason for the flag of truce, Serjeant Fonda?" Peter asked, eagerly.

“Not a bit of it, lad; St. Leger’s neither a coward nor a fool, although Sir John may be a little of both. Here comes Colonel Gansevoort, and by listenin’ we shall soon know the meanin’ of it all, though I allow I can come mighty nigh guessin’ before a word is said.”

The officer hailed the fort, and was answered by one of the sentries.

He then asked to speak with the commandant, and the request had hardly been made before Colonel Gansevoort, in full uniform, stood out in view.

“I am instructed by Colonel St. Leger,” the messenger said, “to demand the capitulation of this fort.”

“You have come on a useless mission, sir, as your colonel’s better judgment should have told him.”

“In event of a refusal, I am ordered to say that all the Valley settlements shall be devastated by fire, sword, and tomahawk, in addition to which, this fort will be speedily reduced.”

“Is it Colonel St. Leger, a British officer, who threatens to torture and kill harmless women and children unless we surrender a fortification we are amply able to hold against the force he has with him? Is that the idea of honourable warfare which English officers have?”

“You have received his ultimatum. Surrender, and you shall be treated as prisoners of war. Refuse, and you will not only be whipped into surrender, but the Valley settlements shall be wiped out.”

“A flag of truce should not protect a soldier who comes with such a threat. Tell St. Leger we shall hold this place, despite his Tory and Indian allies, and that every man here would prefer to die at his post than think even for an instant of treating with an officer who could make such threats.”

Without the courtesy of a salute the officer wheeled stiffly, preceded the soldier with the flag, and marched slowly back into the thicket.

The Americans were astonished almost to the verge of bewilderment that they should have been summoned to surrender, when, thus far, the fortunes of war had been in their favour.

While Colonel Gansevoort was descending and marching back to his quarters not a word was spoken, and then Serjeant Fonda said, with a loud laugh :

“ St. Leger takes us for fools. He thinks we haven't heard how the fight in the swamp ended, an' counts on frightenin' us into his terms before we learn that his beauties beat a retreat from men who were penned in like rats in a trap. We might be more humble if Peter Kirkland hadn't got through the lines last night.”

“ Hurrah for Peter ! ” some one shouted, and instantly the hearty cheers rang out until the boy's cheeks were crimsoned with blushes.

The noise of this outburst had hardly died away before the crack of a musket was heard from the outside, and one of the men on guard fell, with a bullet through his head.

The demand had been made and rejected, and the bloody “ art of war ” was being practised once more.

The killing of this man seemed like butchery, occurring as it did almost before the bearer of the flag of truce was within his own lines, and a soldier standing near Peter said, in a low tone :

“ God help the poor wretch who is taken prisoner by the Britishers now ! There may have been some little chance for life before ; but from this out the man that's caught will have a precious good idea before he dies of how Injuns can torture a captive.”

Peter thought, with a shudder, that Colonel Paris and Major Frey were prisoners within the enemy's lines, and he grew sick with horror as he realised that even at this instant they might be in the hands of Thayendanegea's cruel followers.

"Yes, I allow I know what you're thinkin' of, lad, an' it can do neither you nor them any good," Serjeant Fonda said, as he laid his hand gently on Peter's shoulder. "Come with Joe an' me to the barracks, where we sha'n't stand the chance of stoppin' a bullet."

"Isn't it possible, serjeant, that something can be done to save those poor men?"

"No, lad, it isn't. If my own father was with them I'd have to say the same thing. Think; there are nigh on to two thousand in that camp, an' we're a good bit less than half that number. If we should make a sally in the hope of savin' 'em, how many would be killed? No commander would risk the lives of hundreds to save two. Then, agin, if we were four to their one, I doubt if we could do anything, except, perhaps, to save the poor fellows from torture; the Injuns would kill both before we were well out of this fort."

"It is terrible!" Peter cried.

"I grant you that, lad; but yet them red butchers have done worse in this very valley time an' time agin. It's fearful to think that two of our friends are there; but it's the fortune of war an' may be our turn next, so we must harden our hearts to what can't be helped."

The veteran was leading the boys towards the barracks when an order came for him to report at headquarters, and, stopping abruptly, he looked searchingly and inquiringly at Peter before he turned to obey.

Then, as he was moving away, he said:

"Go up there an' wait for me, lads, an' if it so be that one of you don't know why I'm wanted, it's odd."

"What did he mean by those words?" Joe asked, in perplexity.

"I don't know, unless it is that he has been summoned for the same thing Colonel Gansevoort spoke to me about last night, and suspects I already know of it."

"You said I might have a chance to show my courage."

"I should have kept even that to myself, for I was told not to repeat, or hint, at the conversation."

"Well, you've kept your word so far as I'm concerned, for I can't so much as guess at your meaning."

"We won't talk about it now. Wait until the serjeant comes out, and perhaps we shall know more."

Then the two continued on towards the barracks, Peter's thoughts and sympathies going out to the prisoners in the British camp who might at this instant be suffering all the agonies it was in the power of their captors to inflict, and Joe trying in vain to guess the meaning of his friend's mysterious words.

There was little conversation indulged in during the hour Serjeant Fonda was absent, and when he returned it was evident he was displeased.

"What is wrong?" Peter asked.

"Look here, lad," the old man said, earnestly, "you know that I've allers preached agin a soldier's grumblin' when he gets an order he don't jest fancy, an' I still hold to that same idee. But there's a big difference between waitin' for orders, an' volunteerin' for work sich as older men don't care to tackle."

"Has Peter been volunteering again?" Joe asked, in surprise.

“He’s agreed to go back to the German Flats, an’ what concerns you more is, that he said you’d go with him in case two volunteers were needed.”

“Try to go through their lines again?” Joe asked, shrilly, and looking alarmed.

“There is no reason why you should go unless you are perfectly willing,” Peter added, quickly. “The colonel believed it would be better for two to start, because there would be double the chance that the message was repeated, and I told him I thought you’d volunteer.”

“An’ that’s what’s wrong with me, lad. I was proud when you went up like a man the second time; but now it’s different. There isn’t one chance to-day where there were two yesterday, for the number of scouts will be doubled, and every Tory is wide-awake to prevent anythin’ of the kind. It was bravery in you before, but it’s the worst kind of foolhardiness this time, an’ I’ve had my say agin it, discipline or no discipline.”

CHAPTER XI.

A TIMID VOLUNTEER.

PETER was surprised at learning that the old serjeant positively disapproved of his volunteering a second time to leave the fort with a message.

Joe was not absolutely certain he knew what it all meant. Serjeant Fonda's intimation that Peter had stated at headquarters his (Joe's) willingness to accompany him on such a perilous expedition so confused the boy that he found it impossible to understand exactly the situation of affairs.

For perhaps the first time in his life the old serjeant had, as he said, been regardless of discipline, and Peter understood from the veteran's remarks that he had stated his opinion to Colonel Gansevoort more plainly than was strictly in accordance with military etiquette.

During several moments the three talked at cross purposes, and finally Joe said, in a tone of impatience :

"Look here, Peter, I can't get head nor tail to this thing, and I wish you would explain."

"What is it you don't understand?"

"In the first place, why is it necessary for the second message to be sent out of the fort? The people in the Valley know that General Herkimer couldn't get troops through to us; and if he failed, who will be able to succeed?"

"That's something which is really no business of ours —

at least, it isn't necessary we should settle the question in order to do the work."

"I can put my oar in to some purpose by straightening the matter out," Serjeant Fonda said, gravely. "Colon Gansevoort knows there is no better general in this section of the country than the old man Herkimer, but he didn't have half a chance. He's wounded now, and the men who came out of that ambush alive are, most likely, considerably rattled. Now our commandant's idea is that if one of his officers could get down into the Valley, he would soon be able to recruit such a force as ought to be large enough to raise the siege. Then, in addition to that, the settlers should be warned of St. Leger's threat, for there's little question but that the Britisher will let the Injuns loose in case he doesn't succeed in gettin' possession of this fort as easy as was at first counted on."

"But if an officer is to go, why did the colonel want me to volunteer for the service?" Peter asked, in perplexity. "I can't do anything towards enlisting men."

"True, lad; but at present his idea is that Colonel Wiltlett will be the man to go, and he needs a guide 'twixt here and the German Flats. Then again, it is allowed to alarm the settlers without loss of time, and you two boys could make your way over a good bit of territory, givin' news, and notifyin' all able-bodied male inhabitants that Colonel Wiltlett was at Fort Dayton, or wherever he agrees to stop, ready to enlist men for the relief of Fort Schuyler."

"I cannot guide any one across the swamp," Joe exclaimed.

"No, an' there's no need you should be able to, lad. Our guide is enough; but you will be given plenty to do, as I have said."

"Then it seems as if the matter was settled," Joe replied.

in a matter-of-fact tone. "If Peter has told Colonel Gansevoort I'll go, of course I'm bound to do as he said, although there's no question but that I am terribly frightened even at the thought of such a thing."

"Yes," Serjeant Fonda replied, angrily, "you will go because Peter promised you would. *He* will go because he thinks he got a good bit of honour out of the last venture, and wants more, and the result will be that you both stay 'twixt here and the swamp for the crows to feed upon. Now hark you, lads, I ain't preachin' insubordination; I ain't advisin' you to do anythin' contrary to a true soldier's duty; but when I say that this 'ere business is foolhardy an' shouldn't be thought of, it's what I've got a right to say. You enlisted to fight for your country, not to skirmish 'round where the woods are filled with painted Injuns, an' not one show in a thousand of your gettin' through alive. I tell you, lads, it's a good bit more than a soldier's duty to volunteer for such a service."

"But I went through before, and came back without a scratch," Peter said, stoutly.

"True; but see what the situation is now compared to what it was then. We know to-day that when you left the fort the first time the whole force of the enemy hadn't come up. St. Leger himself wasn't here. Sir John was in command, and even if we hadn't been pretty well acquainted with him before, his actions yesterday would have told us about how much he is to be feared. When you started the enemy had just arrived, an', most likely, none of 'em were in trim for good work, while it wasn't of sich very great importance that we should be kept penned up here. Now, everything is changed; the Britishers are all on the spot; the Tories an' Injuns got a drubbin' in the swamp; St. Leger's men had

a knock-down for their welcome, an' so far we've had a leetle the best end of the stick. It begins to look as if capturin' Fort Schuyler wouldn't be as soft a job as was first thought, an' both Thayendanega and St. Leger know how important it is that all the facts of the situation be kept secret from the people of the Valley. At this minute there are ten scouts in the thicket where there was but one, an' I say sich a venture is neither reasonable nor soldierlike!"

Joe was now more frightened than before. The fact that Serjeant Fonda, a man who dearly loved a post of danger and felt himself honoured even when one of his pupils was selected for a difficult task, should be so emphatic in denouncing the proposed attempt, told more plainly than anything else could have done how much peril there was in the venture.

Even Peter looked troubled ; but there was an expression on his face which told that, having voluntarily bound himself to the enterprise, he could not be persuaded into abandoning it.

Serjeant Fonda seated himself in one corner of the tiny room, and began to smoke vigorously, refusing to so much as look at his companions.

The boys remained silent several moments, and finally Joe said, timidly, and in a whisper :

"There's no use in trying to hide the fact, Peter, that I'm too much of a coward to do such things as you seem to take to naturally."

"I don't 'take to' anything of the kind, Joe. We came here to do all in our power to aid the Cause, and knew when we enlisted that we were likely to be killed before our term of service expired. It seems to me my duty to go wherever I can be useful, and, if the worst does come, it is nothing

more than we were told to expect. Don't think I ain't frightened at the idea of trying to get out of the fort again. The first time I was so much afraid that, for two or three minutes after Serjeant Fonda pushed me through the stockade, it was impossible to so much as move, and, even after Spencer joined me, I didn't get over that feeling; but some one must go, so Colonel Gansevoort believes, and boys can be spared better than men. There's no reason why you should make the attempt — ”

“ But you promised in my name.”

“ That doesn't bind you.”

“ I think it does, Peter, and I shall follow you, no matter how frightened I am.”

Thus speaking, Joe laid his hand in Peter's, as if the contact would animate his courage.

The two boys stood side by side in silence for what seemed a very long while, and then Serjeant Fonda, knocking out the ashes and carefully putting his pipe in his pocket, rose to his feet.

“ Lads, I'm ashamed of myself! I've been goin' contrary-wise to my own teachin's for the last hour, an', if it so be you're willin' to kick me, I think it would do me a power of good.”

“ In what way?” Peter asked, with a faint smile.

“ It might give me the shakin' up I'm needin'. When a man who talks as much about discipline an' soldierlike qualities as I do, sets up his opinion agin that of his officers, it's time he was kicked. If I was the commandant of this 'ere fort, I'd court-martial sich a poor specimen of a soldier!”

“ Then you think I did perfectly right in volunteering to make a second attempt?” Peter asked.

"I ain't prepared to eat my words quite so far as all that comes to, lad; but this much I am willin' to say: Since you've agreed to go, it's your duty to hold to the promise, an' mine to help you along all I can, without findin' bugbears for you to stumble over. You see, havin' done what nobody else in the fort was willin' to do, you've earned the right to lay still when volunteers are wanted."

"There is one who would go in my stead if he knew a messenger is needed, and that is Thomas Spencer."

"Yes, an' he's the man for the job. But it looked kinder queer to me that, with all the talk what was goin' on 'round this 'ere fort before you left, he didn't know the commandant had asked for a volunteer. Anyway, it ain't my business to talk agin the half-breed, seein's how he scurried along on your trail once he found somebody had gone. But, look you, lad, he had a tussle to get back, as was shown by the fact that one of the three who come with him was killed not fifty yards from the stockade, an' if goin' out the second time is a thing that can be done by anybody, why ain't Spencer on hand now?"

"Of course I can't answer that question," Peter replied, mildly. "Perhaps the colonel didn't ask him."

"But he asked you."

"Yes."

"Well, then, what stirs me up so is, why he shouldn't have put the job on a man's shoulders, for this ain't any child's play, an' neither was the other journey for that matter, seein's how you run afoul of one of the Britisher's scouts when there wasn't a tenth part as many as are in the woods now. Howsomever, I won't say anythin' more about that matter, for the mischief has been done."

"Do you know when Colonel Willett counts on going?" Joe asked.

"I allow he'll lay still for a day or two till the Britishers kinder get the edge worn off their temper, an' discipline is slacked up a bit. He knows as well as I do, that no livin' man can get out of here to-day, an' when it comes —"

The serjeant was interrupted by loud cries from without.

Then came a hoarse murmur, amid which could be distinguished threatening voices, and the impression conveyed by the tones was that the men were in a state of insurrection.

"Somethin' wrong is goin' on out there!" Serjeant Fonda said, grimly, as he buckled his belt a hole tighter and seized his musket. "Come on, boys, we may be needed, an' remember that it's a case of obeyin' orders, no matter if it seems to us that our comrades are in the right."

"Do you think the men are rebelling against the authority of Colonel Gansevoort?" Peter asked, in alarm, as he copied his old instructor's every movement.

"I never would have thought it possible, lad; but that 'ere growlin' sounds mightily like it. Come on!"

He flung open the rude door, and the scene which met the gaze of the three was entirely different from what they had anticipated.

Instead of having gathered in attitudes of insubordination, the defenders of the fort, almost to a man, were standing upon the works, regardless of the fact that the scouts in the neighbouring forest might use them as targets, and gazing in the direction where the bearer of the flag of truce had last been seen.

Just as the three emerged Thomas Spencer, having clambered upon the gate, was sighting his musket on some object.

A second later the weapon was discharged, and now,

mingled with the threatening cries, were exclamations of disappointment.

"What's goin' on here?" Serjeant Fonda asked, as, followed by the two boys, he hurried towards several members of his company who were standing on and around one of the cannon.

"Look for yourself, an' see what the red devils can do when they are egged on by a British officer, who most likely calls himself a gentleman," a soldier replied, as he pointed towards the thicket directly in front of the fort.

It was necessary for Peter and Joe to clamber upon the gun before a view could be gained of that which was causing the garrison so much excitement, and once they were on this elevation their cries of horror were mingled with those of their companions.

Far out of musket range, and where he could be distinctly seen by the defenders of the fort, stood a man, bound hand and foot to a sapling, while on either side, ranged in such positions as not to obstruct the view, were fifteen or twenty Indians, amusing themselves by throwing hatchets at the unfortunate prisoner.

"Who is he?" Peter asked, in a tremulous voice.

"Spencer says it is Colonel Paris," the man replied. "The Injuns have brought him out here so we shall see what kind of a death he is likely to meet."

The unfortunate man was too far away for those who were watching the terrible spectacle, with emotions of the utmost horror, to ascertain whether the weapons inflicted any severe injury; but all knew the fiendish nature of those engaged in the torture, and understood that the poor wretch would not be granted the mercy of a swift death.

"Why don't we shoot at them?" Joe cried. "Are we to

stand here and see them do such things to one of our friends?"

"It's something that can't be helped, my boy," the soldier nearest replied. "He's a musket-shot and a half away. Spencer's ball didn't come within thirty yards of him."

"The piece you men are standin' on will carry twice that distance," Serjeant Fonda said, quickly. "One of you boys ask Colonel Gansevoort if we have his permission to use this cannon as we wish."

"But you stand as much chance of killing Colonel Paris as you do those painted imps," a soldier objected.

"Well, what of that?" the serjeant asked, sharply. "What greater favour is it in our power to do the poor fellow, than to kill him? A cannon-ball is an angel of mercy compared with them howlin' images that have him in their clutches."

Peter darted away swiftly, leaving the two men disputing as to whether the situation warranted such measures, and a few moments later had repeated the serjeant's request to the commandant, who, standing in the midst of a group of officers, was watching, with pallid cheeks and quivering lips, the terrible spectacle.

Only for an instant did Colonel Gansevoort hesitate, and then he said, as if to himself:

"It would be a blessing to the poor fellow if he should be killed," and added to Peter: "Tell the serjeant to do as he wishes. For my own part I should hesitate to aim a blow directly at him; but I hope Fonda will be stouter-hearted."

When Peter returned, the veteran, assisted by two or three comrades, had finished loading the cannon with an unusually heavy charge, and when the commandant's answer was repeated, the serjeant said, decidedly:

“I’ll aim this ’ere piece myself, pardners, an’ if it’s permitted I shall send the ball true, them painted beasts won’t torture the poor prisoner much longer.”

Peter understood that the serjeant intended to kill Colonel Paris rather than wreak vengeance upon his captors and allow him to be tortured yet further.

It seemed almost like a murder to thus deliberately try to compass the death of a friend; but yet it was the only favour that could be shown the unfortunate man, and the soldiers who heard Fonda’s remark understood this was the case.

Peter shut his eyes, unwilling to watch the flight of the ball, and the cannon was discharged.

“I’ve missed; but two of Thayendanegea’s imps won’t dance ’round another prisoner!” the serjeant exclaimed, as the ball passed within three feet of the unhappy officer, literally severing the body of one of his captors, and shattering the shoulder of another.

“Down, men! Down!” Colonel Gansevoort shouted. “The scouts in the thicket will retaliate. Get under cover!”

“Here, Peter, you an’ Joe help me load this ’ere cannon!” Serjeant Fonda said, hoarsely. “We’ll run our risk of a bullet for the sake of makin’ one more try to put the poor colonel out of his misery. Rouse her ’round lively, boys, for they’ll be takin’ him under cover now we’ve got the range of ’em.”

As Peter and Joe obeyed, a fusilade of bullets came from the shrubbery either side of the fort, but the veteran worked as coolly and calmly as if he were in a position of the most perfect safety, and when he was ready to sight the piece once more, every man in the fort was watching him intently.

"Get down where you won't stand a chance of bein' hit, for the bullets are comin' mighty thick, an' your work is done," the serjeant said to the boys as he leaned over the cannon, taking careful aim.

Both dropped to the ground obediently, although Peter would have preferred to remain on his feet until the effect of the shot had been ascertained.

"I haven't any too much time," the serjeant muttered, "for they are yankin' him back into the thicket now," and hurriedly he completed his preparations.

The cannon was discharged just as the Indians forced their prisoner to the first line of shrubbery, and the branches of the trees and fragments of bushes flying in every direction told that the shot had been well aimed.

"Did it get there, Fonda?" some one shouted, and the old man replied, grimly :

"It got mighty close to him, at all events; but whether it did its work or not, I can't tell. They were out of sight too soon. If poor Paris is yet alive, he's got a world of sufferin' to endure 'twixt now an' the time he draws his last breath!"

From this moment there was no longer safe opportunity for the occupants of the fort to move to and fro, as they had been accustomed to do.

It was as if each tree concealed a foe, and during the hour which followed the withdrawal of the unfortunate prisoner, the bullets struck in every direction inside the fortification.

Eleven men were wounded, and two killed outright.

"I allow that from this minute till the end, we'll have hot work," Serjeant Fonda said to his pupils as he joined them behind a portion of the earthworks where they were com-

pletely sheltered from view of those on the outside. "St. Leger is most likely roarin' mad, as he has a right to be after all that's happened. If it wasn't so, he'd never threatened to turn the Injuns loose on the Valley, or had poor Colonel Paris brought out where we could see the beginnin' of his death agony."

"Do you suppose there is any hope they may spare his life?" Peter asked, in a tremulous tone.

"Not a bit of it. Them painted beasts will score off on him agin them of their crowd as were wiped out at the swamp, an' once they've tasted blood, you might as well think a cat would willingly give up a mouse she's caught, as that they'd show mercy. The colonel is doomed, an' most likely the major's where he can see it all, unless they worked on him last night."

Peter was silent. The thought had come into his mind that perhaps before many days passed he, also, would be in the power of the merciless, and there was good cause for such forebodings, if he was still determined to keep the promise made to Colonel Gansevoort.

Joe's cheeks were almost livid in their paleness, for he, too, was thinking of the journey to be made, and he glanced nervously and quickly from side to side as the reports of the muskets rang out, much as if trying to form some idea of how many Indians might be concealed in the neighbouring thicket.

Serjeant Fonda understood what was in the minds of these boys, for whom he entertained a genuine affection, and to change the current of unpleasant thought, said, cheerily :

"I can't say, lads, that I'm sorry St. Leger an' Sir John have begun in good earnest. This is the proper kind of work for soldiers, an' from now out we'll have our hands full."

"In what way?" Joe asked, in surprise, for thus far, since the arrival of the enemy, it had been as if the men were allowed to follow the dictates of their own fancy, only a small force of sentinels having been kept on duty.

"I hear that Colonel Gansevoort will issue orders this evenin' for every man not on the sick list to report for duty. Peter's spell of loafin' has most likely come to an end, an' from sunset we'll take reg'lar turns at sharp work. I allow the colonel will let us three hang together; but if he don't, I'll do what I never did before—ask that we be detailed for the same duty."

"But it wouldn't be possible for us to do much fighting while we're shut up in here," Joe suggested.

"I reckon we sha'n't have any great amount of spare time on our hands. You'll soon see that with our small force it'll be short hours for sleep, an' long ones for good solid work. I allow Colonel Willett won't make a move towards leavin' here for quite a spell, so we'll turn to an' see what can be done in the way of bakin' you over from raw recruits into serviceable soldiers. We was well started at the time Peter went off on his little excursion, but I allow he's been praised so much since then that we'll have quite a bit of trouble with him, eh, Joe?"

The boys were finally aroused from the despondent mood into which they had fallen, and before nightfall both were on duty, thinking only of the defence of the fort.

There no longer seemed any question but that the venture would be postponed, at least, until such time as the enemy was less vigilant.

The activity of the besiegers was such that the defenders of the fort found little time for rest, as the serjeant predicted.

On the second day after the demand for surrender had been made, the Tories and British soldiers were approaching the fort by trenches known as "saps," and the besieged understood that when these had been dug sufficiently near, they would be exposed to a hot fire, in which shells would probably play a prominent part.

The majority of the Americans professed to be unconcerned as the siege was thus continued, but Peter fancied their light words concealed deep anxiety.

It was apparent, even to Joe, that Serjeant Fonda was becoming despondent. He no longer spoke in derision of Sir John's military ability, or referred to the repulse of the Indians in the swamp; but grew more deeply concerned each day as the work of the enemy's sappers and miners advanced.

Nor was Serjeant Fonda the only anxious-looking man in Fort Schuyler.

Although the officers tried hard to appear unconcerned, there could be no mistaking the fact that they were no longer sanguine regarding the ability of the besieged to hold the fortification, and the eagerness with which each at day-break scanned the position of the foe, told, if nothing else had done so, how surely St. Leger's forces were strengthening their position by drawing more tightly the meshes in which they hoped to ensnare the little body of patriots.

CHAPTER XII.

THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES.

IT was as if the activity of the enemy increased each day. Nearer and nearer came the sappers and miners.

They had approached within a hundred and fifty yards, and began to throw shells into the fort with no slight degree of accuracy.

This approach had not been unopposed by the besieged. The soldiers were untiring in their efforts to check the progress of the enemy; but without avail, and finally the day arrived when the most courageous was willing to confess that, unless aid from the outside should reach them speedily, it would be necessary to surrender, or, what perhaps might be preferable, fight until the last man was killed, for it was not improbable St. Leger would turn his prisoners of war over to the tender mercies of the Indians.

As a matter of course, the stock of ammunition and provisions had been lessened daily.

Those who had believed the remnants of the volunteers under General Herkimer would again rally to the relief of the fort were now almost without hope.

The swamp lay between the fortification and those who might aid the besieged, and but comparatively few men would be sufficient to check the advance of any considerable force over the morass.

More than one of the weary soldiers believed their friends

had abandoned all effort to aid them, and the hour finally came when Serjeant Fonda said mournfully to his pupils :

“I was worse than an old fool to complain against the colonel’s proposition of sendin’ you boys out. Even then, vigilant as was the enemy, there was more chance of success than now. The Tories know as well as you do how desperate is our situation, and if we can be shut off from communication with those outside a few days longer, the siege has been a success.”

“Then you think the time has come when I ought to keep my promise of guiding Colonel Willett to the German Flats?” Peter asked, in a low tone.

“Yes, lad, though I don’t count that the chances of your gettin’ through are even as good as they were when we first talked about it. The lives of a hundred men wouldn’t be too great a price to pay, providin’ some one succeeds.”

From that moment, Peter was impatient to set out on the perilous mission, and Joe, although thoroughly frightened at the idea of such a venture, was more than willing to accompany him.

Already the men had begun to discuss the probable fate of those who should be alive when the fort was captured, and whether he went or stayed, it seemed to Master Sammons as though the danger would be the same.

The boys were not kept long in suspense.

Late in the afternoon of the same day when Serjeant Fonda had announced as his opinion that a desperate attempt should be made, Peter and Joe were summoned to headquarters, and the veteran said, as they turned to leave him :

“I allow, lads, Colonel Gansevoort’s set the time for you to strike through the swamp, an’, most likely, that’ll be

to-night. I go on duty at sunset, an' if it so be I'm not off when you're ready to start, slip 'round for a hand-shake, will you? Even if you get away all right, there are a good many chances I sha'n't see you again."

Peter did not trust himself to speak. He understood that the veteran was in doubt as to whether reinforcements could arrive in time to be of any assistance to those who were so bravely holding their own against a superior force, and sad though this thought was, it was of no slight service, since it convinced him there was but a trifle more danger in attempting to go through the lines than in remaining.

Upon arriving at Colonel Gansevoort's quarters, the boys found that officer in company with Colonel Willett and Major Stockwell.

The expression on the face of each of the men would have told Peter that a desperate undertaking was to be made within a few hours, even had he not been informed by the commandant.

"Peter Kirkland," Colonel Gansevoort began, almost before the boys had had time to salute, "you went through the swamp to the German Flats, and, on your return, told me you were willing to act as guide in case it was decided to send out some of the officers."

"Yes, sir," Peter replied, promptly.

"And is your friend ready to accompany you?"

Peter looked at Joe, and the latter nodded; just at that moment he was too much agitated to be able to reply.

"Does he realise all the dangers which may be encountered?"

"Yes, sir, and is ready to go, although he declares he is terribly frightened."

"Fear is no evidence of cowardice; true heroism is shown

when one does his duty while frightened at what may be the result. Colonel Willett and Major Stockwell are ready to leave the fort shortly after sunset. No firearms will be taken, for, in case of an encounter with any of the enemy, the noise of the weapons would bring a large force down upon you. We shall endeavour to fully occupy the attention of the besiegers in our front, in the hope of covering your departure. If either of you boys, or both, shrink from making the attempt, say so, without hesitation, and your services will not be required, nor could you be charged with cowardice in case of such an event."

"We sha'n't back out, sir," and Peter looked towards Joe for him to confirm the statement.

"I am bound to go if Peter does," Master Sammons replied, "though I am not certain I should dare to try it without him."

"Very well. Report here in two hours. Provide yourselves with such an amount of crackers and cheese as can be carried without hampering your movements, and, as arms, take only knives or spears. The latter weapons are all the colonel and Major Stockwell intend to carry."

"Are we to keep secret the fact that we are about to leave?" Peter asked, understanding that the interview was at an end.

"By no means. The garrison will know what is being done, because I shall call for volunteers to make a feint at a sally, and explain why the manœuvre is to be executed."

The boys saluted, and, leaving headquarters, went directly to that portion of the fort where they knew the serjeant could be found if he was on duty.

When they approached there was no necessity of making any explanation.

"When do you start?" he asked, with a feeble attempt at cheerfulness.

"In two hours."

"What is to be your equipment?"

Peter repeated the order which had been given, and the old man said, promptly :

"I will find some one to take my place here, an' see to fittin' you out, lads. Look sharp to what you are wearin', an' have everythin' in complete order for easy travellin'. I allow you won't go very fast ; but it may so happen that a good deal will depend on swiftness, an' you want to be prepared."

Peter and Joe went towards the barracks, not knowing exactly how to obey the serjeant's orders, for the only equipment at their disposal, with the exception of their muskets, they were now wearing.

Half an hour later, when Serjeant Fonda rejoined them, he made many changes in their apparel, scrupling not to borrow from the belongings of any comrade without asking leave, and, by the time his labours were concluded, the boys realised that they were in much better condition for the journey than they would have been save for the veteran's careful attention to all the details.

"Now I allow you're as near ready as may be, an' we'll see how much crackers an' cheese can be stowed in your pockets. It'll be a longish journey, an', at the best, you'll come short of rations, for it would be more'n foolhardy to encumber yourselves with any great load."

"Did you hear anything about the sally which is to be made?" Peter asked.

"Yes, lad, an' I'm one as will take part in it. I allow there ain't a soldier in the fort who isn't willin' to volunteer, an' would be glad of the chance. We've been penned up

here so long that a bit of sharp fightin' will seem like a blessin'. I don't reckon there's anythin' I can say to help you along, except it is that, dangerous though the attempt will be, there's not much more risk in makin' it than there would be in stayin' here, for, unless we can get reinforcements an' supplies precious soon, the end ain't far off, an' we who saw Colonel Paris in the hands of them painted beasts can have a pretty good idee of what the end will be. I allow that's all the talk that's necessary, an' will go back to my post. God bless you, lads, an' if it so be you're permitted to get through, we'll pray He allows you to bring to us what you've been sent after."

The veteran pressed the hands of his pupils for an instant, and then hurried away without speaking, as if he feared to trust himself.

The time which elapsed after Serjeant Fonda's departure, until the appointed hour, was exceedingly trying to the young volunteers, and particularly to Joe.

Action, however closely attended by danger, was preferable to remaining idle waiting for the decisive moment to arrive, and both felt a sense of deepest relief when they set out for Colonel Gansevoort's quarters.

There they found Colonel Willett and Major Stockwell ; but the commandant was absent.

"You will not see Colonel Gansevoort before we start," Major Stockwell said, as if in reply to Peter's inquiring look. "He is making preparations for the sally. Are you fully equipped?"

"We have such provisions as we can carry in our pockets, and Serjeant Fonda has provided us with these knives," Peter replied, as he drew his weapon.

"Then there is nothing to delay us here, and we may as

well go to that point from which we shall take our departure, so there shall be no delay after the signal has been given," Colonel Willett suggested.

The two officers were in as light marching order as the young guides, and, observing their calm demeanour, Joe experienced decided relief. They had the appearance of men about to embark in some ordinary enterprise, and were so confident in their bearing that his wavering courage was instantly strengthened.

Each wore his uniform, and carried a spear. So far as the boys could see, these were their only weapons.

Colonel Willett led the way, starting from headquarters towards that portion of the fort directly opposite the point from which Peter had made his way through the stockade when carrying the first message, and the latter ventured to say in a whisper :

"The swamp through which we are bound to go lies over there, Colonel Willett."

"Yes, my lad, but it is our intention to set out from this side, under the belief that the enemy will be less vigilant here. Every Tory and Indian on duty knows full well the direction in which a messenger leaving the fort would most desire to go, and we propose to make the long *détour* necessary in the hope of more readily escaping their notice."

This was a manœuvre Peter had not anticipated ; but he at once recognised the wisdom of it, and from that moment felt confident that, with such a leader, they could not fail to arrive at their destination.

Colonel Willett led his party to a point where were three men on duty, and here he halted.

During the next ten or twelve minutes not a word was

spoken, and then was heard a furious volley of musketry from the direction of the gate.

"That is our signal," the colonel said, hurriedly, and at the same moment the soldiers lifted from its place in the stockade one of the logs, which had been previously loosened.

The din from the front was almost deafening, as the four members of the forlorn hope crept through the narrow aperture, and, bending low, ran with all speed toward the thicket.

For one moment Peter believed they had succeeded in leaving the fort without the knowledge of the enemy. Then his hopes were dashed as he saw directly in advance of them the flash of a musket, and heard the whistling of a bullet as it cut its way through the air uncomfortably near his ear.

"Quick now!" he heard Colonel Willett say, sharply, and the two men dashed forward at full speed, carrying their spears as if they were bayoneted muskets.

Neither Peter nor Joe knew what the leaders intended to do; but both instinctively unsheathed their knives, and followed close in the rear, mentally bracing themselves for a conflict.

Although the colonel and the major were not more than six or eight feet in advance, when the boys overtook them the action, if such it could be called, was concluded.

The Tory who had fired the musket was lying an inert mass under the trees, the two gaping spear-wounds in his side.

It seemed to Peter as if he had but just glanced at the dead man when there was a report of musketry, which might have been caused by those who were making the sally, although it sounded close at hand, and he was so bewildered as to have no very clear idea of direction.

He saw shadowy forms dart out from among the foliage; heard shrill cries; was hardly conscious of what was going on about him, save that he struck here and there with his knife as a dark figure dashed towards him, and that he leaped forward to arrest the attention of every black form he could distinguish amid the shrubbery.

It was more like some hideous nightmare than an actual struggle for supremacy, and when it ceased, as if by magic, he heard Colonel Willett ask the major:

“Are you hurt, Stockwell?”

“Only a scratch on my side. One of the boys struck the Indian just in time to prevent the blow from being a deadly one.”

“Have you lads come through safely?” the colonel then asked.

“I’m all right, sir,” Joe replied, and Peter was literally obliged to pass his hands over his body to assure himself he was unwounded.

“Then we will push ahead. This is no place to loiter. You lads are made of the right stuff, and I warrant that, among us all, we’ll manage to carry the message into German Flats before forty-eight hours have passed.”

Then the colonel started forward once more, the others following closely in his footsteps, and Peter wondered why it was he had no more knowledge of that short and sharp encounter than if it had been a dream.

The report of musketry, which had been almost incessant from its beginning, died away before fifteen minutes had elapsed, and the little party understood that the pretended sally had come to an end.

Serjeant Fonda, in explaining to the boys Colonel Gansevoort’s purpose, had intimated that the force from the fort

would keep the enemy fully occupied half an hour or more, if possible, therefore this sudden cessation of hostilities could only be explained by the probable fact that the Americans had found the besiegers on the alert.

It was reasonable to suppose Colonel Gansevoort would do his best to prolong the struggle, and there seemed no question but that he was being too severely punished to warrant his continuing the diversion.

The main purpose of the pretended sally, however, which was to enable the messengers to leave the fortification, had been accomplished, although not as successfully as was hoped, and Joe's heart grew even heavier than it had been, as he realised that now they could no longer depend upon assistance from their old comrades.

If they were captured, death by torture awaited them beyond hope of rescue.

During fully an hour Colonel Willett continued to lead the party at as rapid a pace as was consistent with safety, and then he halted.

"I believe we have circled around the fort, and are now in a direct line with the course you pursued on your first journey," he said to Peter. "From this point you will act as leader. If I am correct, the fortifications are directly behind us."

The boy remained motionless an instant, as if trying to fix in his mind the proper route, and then replied :

"Of course I cannot see any landmarks ; but if this is the right direction we should come upon some evidence of the fight within two hours at the longest."

"Push on then, my boy ; but don't make the mistake of trying to travel too fast. It is not probable we are yet outside the enemy's lines, for by my reckoning we are

hardly more than a quarter of a mile from the fort. Halt at the slightest suspicious sound, for it is better to spend a few hours in needless precautions, than rush blindly against a force which can overpower us."

It was hardly necessary Colonel Willett should give such explicit instructions. Peter, from past experience, was fully prepared to travel as cautiously as the most prudent soldier could desire, and once he was acting as leader, he became alert and quick-witted.

The sensation as of being in a dream no longer assailed him; the realisation that the lives of his comrades might depend upon him brought every faculty into play.

Before they had thus journeyed ten minutes the boy halted.

Directly in their line of march could be heard voices, and a few seconds later Peter knew that, although they were then in the morass, the enemy was between them and their destination.

It was evidently a party of Indians that were thus barring the passage, and after the Americans had remained silent and motionless five minutes or more, Peter pressed Colonel Willett's arm to attract his attention, pointing to the left as if to suggest that they make a *détour* in that direction.

The colonel shook his head very decidedly. He had had much experience in fighting with the Indians, and knew how dangerous it would be to make the attempt at circling around them. Besides, the fact that these savages were here was reasonable proof others were in the immediate vicinity.

"There is probably a line of sentinels extending some distance into the swamp to cut off any one who might

venture out from the fort," Major Stockwell whispered in Peter's ear. "We must remain here until the colonel gives the word to resume the march."

Then ensued the most tedious, painful halt Peter and Joe had ever experienced.

During nearly the remainder of the night the four patriots stood in deep water, moving only so much as was necessary to give relief to their cramped and aching limbs.

The gray light of dawn could be but faintly discerned when the enemy made a move, evidently towards the main line, and not until ten minutes after the last sound betokening their progress had died away did Colonel Willett give Peter the signal to continue the march.

There seemed little doubt but that they had passed the outermost line of sentinels, and the only danger now to be apprehended was in meeting with hunting or foraging parties, for it was known St. Leger depended in a measure upon the forest and the nearest settlements for his supplies of provisions.

When the day had fully dawned there was no longer any question but that they were proceeding in the right direction, for horrible evidences of the battle in the swamp began to present themselves.

Here and there were the bodies of human beings torn and mangled by wild beasts; muskets, powder-horns, and shot-pouches which had been thrown aside in the retreat. Now the silent travellers came upon one of the enemy who had bled to death while making a supreme effort to reach his lines, and, as they neared the causeway, the bodies of white men and Indians who had died struggling for the mastery could be seen on every hand.

It was the most horrible of all horrible pictures painted



“ HORRIBLE EVIDENCES OF THE BATTLE IN THE SWAMP BEGAN TO PRESENT THEMSELVES.”

by War, and more than once Joe screened his eyes with his arm to shut out from view these terrible scenes.

Once they had arrived at the causeway, Peter's work was finished, for from that point both Colonel Willett and the major were familiar with the country, and now the advance was comparatively rapid, although the journey was not brought to an end until forty-eight hours after the time of their leaving Fort Schuyler.

Then they were at Fort Dayton, instead of at German Flats, as had been decided upon.

When they arrived at a settler's house in the vicinity of what is now known as the town of Whitesborough, they were informed that volunteers for the relief of the besieged were gathering at Fort Dayton, and, consequently, it was decided to push on to that stockade.

"Our work will not require as much time as we anticipated," Colonel Willett said, in a tone of relief, when, having replenished their scanty store of provisions, they were striding forward once more at a rapid pace, despite the weariness which beset them heavily.

It was on the evening of the twelfth of August that the journey, which had at one time threatened a fatal termination for every member of the little party, was successfully accomplished.

At the stockade were three or four hundred recruits, the majority of whom had come unscathed through the desperate struggle on the causeway, and before making himself known Colonel Willett stopped to listen to a conversation among a group of men.

It was in regard to General Herkimer, and through it Peter learned that the old hero had been carried from the scene of the engagement, thirty-five miles, on a litter to his

own home, where his wounded limb had been so unskilfully amputated that there was no hope of recovery.

"He has been the same as murdered by them who allowed to be under his command," one of the men said, as he finished the recital of the sad intelligence just received.

"Yes, them as professed to be followin' him forced him against his own judgment into that ambush, an' may God help me, for I'm one of them!"

"It was a fatal error, my man," Colonel Willett said, abruptly, startling those around him, who were unaware that the four had joined the group, "and cannot now be rectified; but you may make amends by aiding in carrying out the work General Herkimer would have accomplished had he been unhampered by those who should have obeyed."

"Who may you be, sir?" the man asked, quickly.

"One whom you know very well, Silas Judkins."

"Bless my eyes; but it's Colonel Willett!" the man cried, as he pressed closer to look into the speaker's face. "We all heard as how you was in Fort Schuyler, sir."

"So I was day before yesterday, Silas; but have made my way through the lines with these three comrades, because, desperate though the adventure was, it seemed mild as compared with the situation of those who are besieged by St. Leger's forces. We have come for assistance, friends, imploring you to aid our brave fellows, who must in a very short time be given over to such torture as only Thayendanegea's warriors can inflict, unless you rally generously to their aid."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON RECRUITING SERVICE.

THE enthusiasm of the recruits stationed at Fort Dayton could hardly be kept within bounds when it was known that the officer who had so suddenly appeared among them was Colonel Willett, whom many of the Indians believed to be the devil in human form.

That he and his companions had undertaken the perilous journey for the purpose of begging that reinforcements be pushed forward to the beleaguered fort, told most eloquently how desperate was the situation, and every man who saw the colonel declared his willingness to hazard any venture, however dangerous, in the hope of aiding those who were so sorely pressed.

The frontiersmen who had seen Peter before now pressed forward to clasp his hand and express their gratification that he had for the second time shown himself "to be a man."

Joe, as the son of Lieutenant Sampson Sammons, came in for full share of the praise which was being bestowed so generously, and as he listened to the words of commendation he mentally decided that the fatigue, hunger and peril which had been borne was all too small a price to pay for such honours as were being heaped upon him by men who had already won the right to be called heroes.

The best of the stores to be found in the stockade were set out for the newcomers, and every one vied with his

neighbour in trying to add to their comfort or pleasure ; but Colonel Willett was not so poor a soldier as to allow himself to be diverted from the purpose of his mission.

Even while partaking of the meal so sadly needed by all who had performed the journey from the fort, he made the strictest inquiries as to the number of available men who were ready to start without delay, and Peter believed the colonel was determined to lead forward the small body assembled there, until the arrival of a messenger to Colonel Weston, commandant of the stockade, made a decided change in the aspect of affairs.

It was announced that General Arnold, with eight hundred men, was on the road from Albany, having been sent by General Schuyler as soon as information had been brought of the disaster to General Herkimer's troops, and that they would arrive within three or four days.

After this fact had been made known it appeared as if there was nothing to be done save to wait for the force, and Peter and Joe decided that they would be forced to remain idle, while the friends they had just left were menaced by defeat and a horrible death.

Before the evening was very far advanced, however, they learned that there was plenty of work to be done, for Colonel Willett had no idea of remaining inactive while it was possible to add more recruits to the number then at the stockade.

The colonel and the major were in private consultation with the commandant for some time after supper, and, finally, the boys, who had been treated as honoured guests by the rank and file of the garrison, were summoned to headquarters.

After a formal introduction to Colonel Weston, Colonel Willett informed them that it was his purpose to spend the

time which must elapse before Arnold's force could come up in raising more recruits among the inhabitants of the Valley.

"There are many here who would enlist if they heard the facts of the case direct from us, who have come out of Fort Schuyler. I propose that you boys do your share of such work. The major and myself will go in different directions; but you two may join forces."

"What are we to do, sir?" Peter asked, as the colonel paused.

"Go about from one house to another, covering as much distance as possible during the next three days, and tell the story everywhere. Take good care not to omit such portions as refer to the drubbing General Herkimer's men gave the enemy in the swamp, after recovering from their first surprise, and, also, the fact that we tendered St. Leger a good American reception when he arrived. Direct those with whom you talk to this fort, if they show any inclination to enlist. In fact, boys, do all you can to raise men in the aid of your comrades who are making such a gallant struggle for the Cause."

"When are we to start, sir?"

"In the morning. You are surely entitled to a night's rest after our journey. Colonel Weston will see to it that you are supplied with horses, if necessary. The major and myself will decide as to the settlements we shall visit, and you shall be informed before you start, to prevent the possibility of crowding on each other's heels."

With this the interview was brought to a close, and the boys returned to the barracks where they had been so hospitably entertained.

Here had gathered to learn the sad details, those who had

not been present when Colonel Willett told the story of the besieged, and even the men who were in the fort when the messengers arrived appeared eager to hear the account repeated; therefore, the boys were forced to give all the particulars once more.

While Peter, who acted as spokesman, was doing his best to paint the situation of the besieged in true colours, half a dozen soldiers entered, and instantly Joe found himself clasped in his father's arms.

Lieutenant Sammons had been absent on leave in the immediate vicinity of the fort, but returned immediately he learned his son was in the stockade, and after the first greetings had been exchanged, before the lieutenant made any inquiries, he seized Peter by the hand, as he whispered :

“ Did you keep your word, lad ? ”

“ I did, sir. ”

“ And Joe has no idea what part I played in leading the volunteers into the ambush ? ”

“ He simply knows how brave you were when the enemy stood before us. ”

“ You're a good boy, Peter Kirkland, and if the time ever comes when it can be done, I'll take good care to repay you for your kindness. ”

“ You don't owe me anything, Mr. Sammons, not so much as good-will, for I should not have told Joe that portion of the story even though you hadn't asked me to remain silent. ”

Sammons would have said something more; but Joe had come nearer to hear what his father was saying to Peter, and there was no further opportunity.

Not until a late hour were the boys at liberty to retire, so eager were the recruits for all the minor details of the

situation ; but when the curiosity of the company had finally been satisfied, the tired messengers sank down on the most convenient pile of skins, their eyes closing in slumber almost immediately afterward.

The sun had not yet risen when Colonel Willett came in search of the boys, and it was Lieutenant Sammons who directed him to where they could be found.

“Stockwell and I set off at once,” he said, hurriedly. “We have decided that you shall stay in this vicinity. Visit all the houses within ten miles, and tell the story. It is not necessary I should enjoin upon you, who know the exact situation of our friends at the fort, to work earnestly to raise additional recruits. Every musket will be needed, no matter how many we may succeed in enlisting, before we can force our way through St. Leger’s lines, fortified and protected by heavy cannon as they are. Do not let the men here beguile you into idleness, for every moment we are absent will be anxiously counted by the poor fellows besieged at Fort Schuyler.”

“You may depend upon us, sir,” Peter replied.

“I am well aware of that, my lad ; but I thought it best to give a word of caution, lest you be induced by these men, who have been so kind, to loiter here for their gratification.”

“We will begin the work at once.”

“It will be well you should have with you some one who is acquainted with this section of the country, for, unfortunately, all the inhabitants do not favor the Cause, and you are to remain silent before those who are lukewarm, or enemies at heart.”

“Shall we ask one of the men to go with us?”

“I have requested Colonel Weston to detail Lieutenant Sammons for that purpose, which I fancy will please Joe.”

“Indeed it will, sir,” Master Sammons replied, joyfully. “I was afraid I shouldn’t have much chance to see father; but if he is to go with us, it will seem almost as if I were home again.”

“And you yearn to be there?”

“Not until the country is free, sir; and perhaps that time isn’t so very far off.”

“If it should prove to be many years distant, lad, don’t allow yourself to grow discouraged. The fathers depend upon their sons to continue the struggle they have begun so well, however protracted it may be, and it is certain very many more lives must be offered up before we have earned our independence.”

Peter fancied he detected a tone of sadness as the colonel spoke; but he had little time to speculate upon it, for instantly the latter resumed the business on which he had come, by reading over a list of families in the vicinity upon whom he particularly wished the boys to call, and after this had been done he took his departure.

Thus stimulated to activity, Peter and Joe lost no time in setting about their work, and as soon as their fast had been broken they started out in company with Lieutenant Sammons, who followed the colonel’s instructions by guiding them in turn to each of the families of whom the latter had spoken.

During all that day Serjeant Fonda’s pupils laboured most industriously, and when night came they had the satisfaction of knowing that fourteen men, influenced solely by the story they told, had enlisted for such time as might be necessary to give the besieged assistance.

On this evening many young men came from a distance to hear the news, having learned that messengers had arrived

from the fort, and the boys repeated again and again the story, until it seemed absolutely necessary they should retire.

On the following day they continued the labor, and when night came were in the home of Adam Tyler, where were five young men who gave strict attention to all that was said, but at sunset appeared yet undetermined as to what course they would pursue.

"I must be at the stockade," Lieutenant Sammons whispered to Peter; "but there is no reason why you shouldn't stay a while longer, for I am certain you can persuade these fellows to join us. The Tylers always were slow-goin' people, an' these boys inherit the trait from both branches of the family, which makes them slower about deciding a matter than cold molasses is in moving. Can you find your way back?"

"Oh, yes, sir, there will be no difficulty about that. If we get through here in time, wouldn't it be as well to call at some of the houses on our way?"

"There'll be only two between here an' the stockade, if you go in by the nearest path. Shoemaker, a rank Tory, although he keeps his ideas to himself, lives in the first house, an' at the second all the able-bodied men have already joined us, so you can call the day's work done when you finish with the Tylers."

Then Lieutenant Sammons excused himself, and Peter renewed his efforts to gain these "slow-thinking" young men as recruits, by telling of the brave defence made in the swamp by General Herkimer's ambushed force.

"They *had* to fight then," one of the listeners said, with a drawl. "The trouble with that force was that everybody knew more'n the general, 'cordin' to his own ideas, an' them

as are left alive can count themselves his murderers without goin' very far from the truth."

"It was a disaster they nobly atoned for," Peter replied, quickly, and, noting the look of astonishment on Joe's face, he changed the subject abruptly by repeating the story Serjeant Fonda had told, regarding the capture of the enemy's supplies.

Joe no longer took any part in the conversation; but remained silent, as if pondering over some vexed question, and Peter could readily understand what that question was; therefore he devoted all his efforts to diverting his friend's thoughts, rather than to raising recruits.

Not until late in the evening did he cease his labours, and then he had not succeeded in either attempt.

The Tylers agreed to come to the stockade on the following day; but would not promise to enlist until after considering the matter more fully.

Joe aroused himself from his reverie now and then, but it could be plainly seen that he was beginning to understand, better than ever before, how culpable his father might have been in the disaster of the causeway.

Peter feared his friend would question him too closely, and once they were outside the Tyler home, said, almost sharply:

"I have talked so much to-day that it seems as if I couldn't speak another word. We've three miles to walk, and I propose that neither of us so much as opens his mouth till we reach the fort."

"That is something I can't agree to, Peter," Joe replied, gravely. "You heard what was said about all those who went with General Herkimer being his murderers, and I must know if my father can be held guilty?"

“Of course he can't, Joe. That was a foolish remark. Those who wanted to push ahead simply made a mistake, and it is nonsense to declare that certain men are responsible for what occurs after a course has been decided upon by all.”

“Was my father guilty of more insubordination than all, or any, of the others?”

“If he had been those fellows would have told you so very quickly. You know your father is a true friend to the Cause, is in the ranks to-day that he may do all in his power in its aid; therefore it is worse than useless to discuss what was said.”

“Do you know anything you have not told me?” and Joe forced his friend to halt, by suddenly wheeling in front of him.

“I wish Serjeant Fonda was here to shake such ideas out of your head!”

“But answer my question.”

“I have already told you the story, and —”

The hoof-beats of horses could be heard on the path in their rear, and Peter ceased speaking very suddenly as he forced his companion into the bushes where they might be screened from view.

“What is the matter now?” Joe asked, impatiently.

“There is no need of showing ourselves until we know who is coming this way.”

“Do you fancy there may be enemies here? We are no longer near the Britishers, but among friends.”

“Not entirely, for there are several families in the neighbourhood suspected of being Tories. Your father told me that the Shoemakers, who live in the next house we shall pass, are enemies.”

There was no opportunity for Joe to reply, if he would please his friend by remaining concealed, for by this time the horsemen were within a few paces of their hiding-place.

There were three young men in the party, but, owing to the darkness, it was impossible for the boys to distinguish their features.

They were evidently riding rapidly when Peter's attention was first directed to their approach, but, on arriving nearly opposite where he and Joe were crouching amid the bushes, the animals were reined to a walk, as one of the party cried :

“ We are going too fast, if we count on being overtaken by Dunbar. He never rides a horse that has any speed, and it would be a good idea to wait for him.”

“ And trust to the chances of being seen,” one of his companions replied, irritably. “ This isn't a time when we can afford to make public our movements, for if our hot-headed militia should have a suspicion we were abroad, it might result in a very disagreeable surprise for us.”

“ We are hidden here by the bushes.”

“ Yes, from those who might be making their way through the thicket ; but in a very good place to be recognised if any one goes from Tyler's to the stockade.”

Peter could not hear the reply to this last remark. The horses had continued on at a walk, and the riders were so far away by this time that their words could no longer be distinguished.

“ Come on !” Peter whispered, excitedly, as he dragged Joe out from the hiding-place. “ We must keep them in sight, and, at the same time, take care that the fellow who is in the rear don't see us.”

“ What are you about ?” Joe asked, in surprise.

"Didn't you hear what they said?"

"Of course I did."

"Then can't you understand that we may be doing good work by following them?"

"But you don't know who they are, or where they are going."

"I shall soon find out."

"Look here, Peter, do you count on following three mounted men?"

"Yes; they won't ride fast, because of the friend who is expected to overtake them."

"But why should we bother our heads about strangers? I thought you were dead tired."

"So I am; but that won't prevent me from doing my duty. They were afraid of being seen by a member of the militia. Doesn't that prove they are enemies to the Cause? They said meeting with our friends might result in a very disagreeable surprise for them. Isn't that the same as if they had confessed that some mischief is on foot?"

Joe had been so deeply engrossed with his own disagreeable thoughts that he had failed to give due weight to such portion of the conversation as he had overheard; but now that Peter pointed out the suspicious words, he was quite as eager as his friend to discover what was being done which would not bear the light of day.

It was not difficult for the boys to keep within sound of the riders' voices. Although they had professed to be afraid lest their journey at this particular time might be observed by others, no especial care was taken to preserve silence, and this fact caused Peter to fancy that perhaps he was making a mistake.

Five minutes later, hoof-beats in the distance told that the

friend who had been expected was approaching, and once more the two boys screened themselves among the bushes, waiting motionless and silent until the fourth horseman had passed.

“Now we shall have harder work,” Peter said, in a whisper. “No matter how slow that last fellow’s horse is, it won’t be easy to keep pace with him.”

Joe made no reply, but pressed on by his friend’s side, and for the time being gave no heed to the fact that his father might have acted an ignoble part.

Peter now had many doubts as to his ability to follow the travellers, and was already beginning to question whether it might not be as well to abandon the pursuit and give immediate information of what he had heard, at the fort, when Joe cried, incautiously :

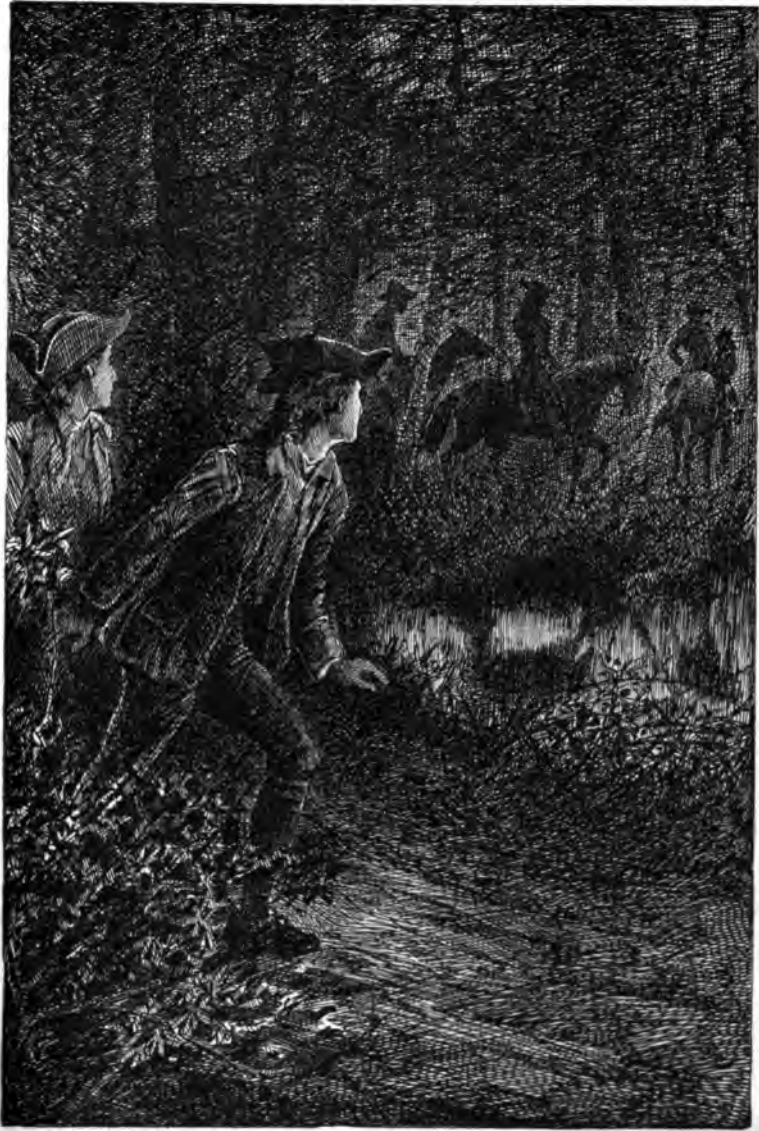
“They are turning down that path! Where does it lead?”

“Most likely to the house where the Shoemaker family live, and if that be true, we have done well to follow. There is some Tory plot on foot, and we may be so lucky as to discover it.”

“Then why do you wait here? They may give us the slip.”

“If the path does really lead to a house, we have no need to keep close at their heels with the risk of being discovered; while if they have taken a short cut across country, it will be useless for us to follow on foot. We’ll wait five minutes, and then push ahead.”

With any one but Peter, Joe would have been impatient because of the delay; but he was so accustomed to following his friend’s advice in all things that he was now content to act upon the suggestion.



“‘THEY ARE TURNING DOWN THAT PATH!’”

When it seemed to Peter that they had been motionless and silent for five minutes or more, he started on again, and, after walking about two hundred yards down the path in the direction taken by the horsemen, a building could be seen dimly in the distance.

“It is the Tory’s house!” he whispered, “and there’s no longer any question but that we ought to know what is going on. We’ll do our best to find out why those fellows were afraid of being seen by the militia, and no harm will be done if it turns out that there was no real cause for suspicion.”

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR JOHN'S PROCLAMATION.

BEFORE the boys had advanced within a hundred yards of the dwelling, it was discovered that a guard had been set around the grounds, probably to prevent, or give warning of, the approach of undesirable visitors.

There were two on duty, one on that side of the grounds nearest the young soldiers, and the other directly opposite, on the highway.

Peter was a pace in advance of Joe, and would have stumbled directly upon the first sentinel, having no suspicion of his presence, but for the fact that the fellow called to his comrade to know if all who were expected had arrived.

As a matter of course, Peter stepped back very quickly, and, fortunately for his purpose, a clump of bushes, so dense as to afford ample hiding-place for both the young Colonists, bordered the path at this point.

Once the two were crouching among the foliage, hardly daring to draw a long breath, so near were they to the sentinel, it became apparent to both that the effort to approach the house sufficiently near to discover the purpose of the meeting must be abandoned.

Now there was no longer any question but that the horsemen had come to this place for some illegal purpose, and Peter regretted most heartily that he had not hurried on to the fort when he first overheard the conversation, in order

that, by receiving timely information, Colonel Weston might be able to ascertain what was being done.

The thought was in his mind that it would be wisest to beat a retreat as soon as possible, when the two sentinels met within half a dozen yards of the hiding-place, where the conversation which ensued could be readily distinguished, and that which the boys heard caused them the liveliest surprise.

“What puzzles me is that Colonel St. Leger, with seventeen hundred men, counting the Indians, should need assistance from us, when the garrison can only muster about seven hundred,” one of the sentinels said, as he crouched low to catch a spark from the flint in order to light his pipe.

“I don't understand that it is for the purpose of reducing the fort that Sir John has called out the loyalists,” the second sentinel replied. “Of course the capture of the fortification is the first move to be made in the campaign, and once that has been done the rebels here in the Valley will be driven out. To do that we are called upon, and it will give me much pleasure to treat them to the same dose they have given our friends. Seventeen hundred soldiers is not force enough to hold the Valley, once it has been swept by the loyalists, and, as Sir John says in his proclamation, we must be prepared to hold our homes against the enemy, or suffer the same penalties as our less fortunate neighbours.”

“Walter Butler is a brave man.”

“He is not a coward; but why do you speak at this time of his being brave?”

“Because if the rebels should capture him he would be shown no mercy.”

“True; but what chance is there of his being taken?”

Colonel St. Leger's force holds the country between here and Oneida Lake, and the only danger he could encounter would be in this place. Do you think our friends cannot protect him from the ragamuffin militia who claim to guard the Valley against its rightful owners?"

"If those in the stockade should make a descent upon this house, Robert Shoemaker, how long could it be held against them?"

"Not a great while, I am willing to admit; but Walter Butler came here so secretly that there is little fear of suspicion being aroused, and if anything of the kind should happen, his escape is provided for."

"In what way?"

"Not more than two miles from here are twenty of Thayendanegea's Indians, who have come as a guard until his mission has been accomplished. At the first signal of danger he could readily escape to them, and when the militia arrive, what would be seen to prove we had had a visitor from Sir John?"

"The proclamations. I saw no less than twenty scattered around the room before I came out."

"You scent danger when none exists, William Howland. Do you suppose my father would allow those parchments to remain in full view of any sneaking rebel who might chance to come prying into the affairs of his betters? When our friends depart, those proclamations will be put out of sight, and I defy that braggart Weston to find them."

"Even though he be a rebel, he has a keen scent for loyalist documents," Howland replied, with a laugh; "and you know how powerless your father would be if he should come here with a force of men."

"He may search all he will for the proclamations; but

without finding them, even though he has been told they are in the house. Who would think of looking beneath the fire for what can so readily be burned?"

"Would your father destroy them?"

"Not he; but a portion of the hearth directly under the fire can be removed at will. It has served us a good turn many times, and will again, if occasion requires. Now that the King, God bless him, has determined to relieve us, the rebels will soon be driven from the Valley, and we can hold our own once more without fear of such treatment as we have received in the past."

"What news did Butler bring from the camp?"

"The garrison of the fort is being starved out. They have only a small supply of provisions, and so little powder that they cannot afford to waste many bullets. Walter Butler believes that in six days more, even though they are not molested by our shells, the survivors will beg to surrender as prisoners of war."

"Think you such privilege would be allowed them?"

"Certainly not. They will be given the same treatment that Paris, who probably thought his person almost sacred because he was a member of the rebel legislature, received. Colonel St. Leger is not a soldier who can be played with, and their doom was sealed when they refused to surrender at his demand."

"There seems to be little danger of prying visitors, and you should be able to guard the house alone for a short time."

"To what purpose?"

"I want to hear the story from Walter Butler himself."

"Go in; we are secure here, and, even though a guard had not been set, could come to no harm. The rebels have

enough with which to occupy their time in trying to relieve their fellows from the trap into which they voluntarily walked. I will give the alarm if anything suspicious appears."

Young Shoemaker walked with his companion to the door of the house, and this gave Peter the opportunity he desired.

"Come," he whispered, as he pressed Joe's arm. "We have no time to lose; but be cautious, for the slightest carelessness now may prevent us from doing the greatest possible amount of good to the Cause."

The sentinels were so far away that any ordinary noise made in the thicket would have been unheeded by them, and the boys crept swiftly to the intersection of the paths.

Now the way to the stockade was open before them, and Peter said, as he quickened his pace:

"We must lose no time. If we run, it will be possible for Colonel Weston to get a squad of soldiers here before the company disperses."

"Butler will make his escape, for he has only to join the Indian guard."

"That the colonel should know how to prevent. Now we will waste no more breath in talking, but push on at our best speed," and Peter broke into a swift lope, a gait which would carry him over the ground more rapidly than any other.

Not once during the journey of more than two miles did either of the boys slacken his pace, and then, breathless, almost exhausted because of the severe exertion, they burst into the commandant's quarters without ceremony.

Lieutenant Sammons was with Colonel Weston when the boys entered, and he leaped to his feet in genuine alarm, as if believing the enemy was upon them.

It was several seconds before Peter could tell a coherent story ; but finally the commandant was in possession of all the facts, and then he lost no time in doing his part.

“ You have performed a most important service to the Cause,” he said, quickly, “ and shall not go unrewarded. I believe I know about where the Indians must be encamped, if they are only two miles away, and it may be we can bag a few of them.”

Then he gave hurried orders to Lieutenant Sammons, and immediately began making his preparations to accompany the men who would be sent out.

Peter listened to all that was said between the two officers, and when no mention was made as to anything he or Joe were detailed for, asked, anxiously :

“ Are we to be kept out of this, Colonel Weston ? ”

“ Haven't you done sufficient already ? We shall travel rapidly, once we have started, and your long run should have been exercise enough for one evening.”

“ It isn't for us to say who should go ; but, unless you have reasons to the contrary, we would look on it as a favour if we could be of the party.”

“ So you shall, my brave lads, if it is your wish. You may remain with me, Peter, since I hear you have had experience as an aide. What weapons have you ? ”

“ None but the knives we brought from Fort Schuyler.”

“ Take what you can find, although I hardly think there will be any fighting, unless the Indians should make a rush to rescue young Butler, and that is not their usual method in such cases.”

It was hardly more than fifteen minutes after the boys arrived at the stockade, before fifty men marched rapidly out of the fort towards that point where the savages were

supposed to be encamped, and half as many more were moving in a direct line to the Shoemaker house on the double-quick.

Peter and Joe had found muskets, with a small quantity of ammunition, and, without orders, took their position directly in the rear of the colonel, where, if there should be any resistance made, they would be in the hottest of the fray.

Word had been given that no one should speak during the march, and the men were ordered to carry their weapons in such a manner that there would be little possibility of making a noise.

Silently as shadows the troops made their way along the ill-defined road until arriving at the intersection of the path which ran past the Tory house, and then the men were counted off into two squads.

One, under Lieutenant Sammons's command, was ordered to make a *détour* through the bushes to the left, in order to approach the building from the opposite side, and ten minutes was the time allowed for the work.

"Take your places as near the house as possible without running the risk of being discovered," the colonel said. "At the end of ten minutes we shall move down the path in skirmish line. When you see the first of our men come into the open, close up immediately, and take care that no one escapes."

The lieutenant's force filed off into the shrubbery so quietly that, unless he had been looking at them, Peter would not have been aware a man had moved, and the colonel stood, watch in hand, awaiting the moment he had set for the second body to start.

To the boys, eager as they were that the Tories should be

captured, it seemed as if fully half an hour had elapsed before the whispered command to march was given, and then they pressed forward close at the commander's heels.

During the advance along the path they could see no person save Colonel Weston ; the others were in the shrubbery, each ten paces from his neighbour, and not so much as the snapping of a twig told of their whereabouts.

When this portion of the force arrived within view of the house, the sentinels were no longer to be seen, and Colonel Weston continued straight on at a rapid pace.

Before he was within hailing distance of the building, Peter saw dimly in the gloom, shadowy forms on the opposite side, and he understood that the manœuvre had been successful.

It only remained to effect an entrance, now that the house was surrounded completely.

At the instant Colonel Weston started towards the door, it was opened, and a young man, with a musket in his hand, stood on the threshold.

One glance was sufficient to show him the position of affairs, and, raising his weapon quickly, he fired pointblank at the colonel.

Then, before one of the Americans could even so much as make an outcry, so rapid were his movements, he leaped backward, closing the door in front of him.

To Peter it seemed impossible the bullet could have failed to hit its mark, and he sprang forward to the colonel's aid, but his assistance was not needed.

Without waiting for orders the men rushed forward, some at the door, and others at the heavily barred windows, trying to effect an entrance by using the butts of their muskets as sledges, and, at the same instant, the report of musketry

from the rear of the house told that Butler was endeavouring to escape to his savage allies in the forest.

“Hold steady, men!” the colonel shouted. “It is useless to try to batter that door down; it was built to resist just such an attack. Fall back under cover, keeping the line drawn around the building closely, until we can get something with which to do the work properly. Shoot down any who may try to escape! Come, boys, I want that which will serve as a battering-ram. Can’t you find a log hereabouts, or an axe with which to hew one from the grove?”

Peter darted around the house, believing that near the stack of fuel would be found what was needed, and there he saw that Lieutenant Sammons had not only succeeded in entering the building, but had a prisoner in his grasp.

“Call the colonel!” he cried, as he caught a glimpse of Peter. “I happened to be here just as the back door was opened, and —”

Before he could finish the sentence the boy saw a flash of light directly in the rear of the lieutenant, and an instant later he staggered forward, but still retaining his hold of the prisoner.

“See that this fellow don’t escape,” he cried. “It’s Butler!”

Peter presented his musket at the unarmed man’s breast as he said, sternly :

“March ahead of me, sir, and remember that I shall shoot when you make the first move toward giving me the slip.”

Butler obeyed, and before the two gained the corner of the building Colonel Weston and Joe came into view.

The officer paid no attention to Peter, but Master Sammons joined him, asking, as he ranged himself by the side of the prisoner :

"Was any one hurt?"

"Your father is wounded. I can take care of this man if you want to assist him."

"Do your duty where you are, Joe," the lieutenant cried. "The disabled can take care of themselves till the scrimmage is over."

"A man who can give such an order as that isn't guilty of forcing General Herkimer to his death," Joe said, proudly; and from that moment he apparently ceased to think of what he had heard relative to the culpability of those who fought on the causeway.

Peter understood that in Butler he had the most important prisoner of all, and in order to guard so far as possible against a rescue, he directed Joe to bind the Tory's legs with his own belt.

"We mustn't take any chances, and the sooner he is helpless, the more certain I'll feel that he can't get away."

Sir John's messenger neither resisted nor spoke. He passively allowed Joe to strap his ankles together, and even held out his hands when Peter approached with a second belt to fasten them behind his back.

His submission touched his captors not a little, even though he was an enemy who would have worked the country the greatest possible harm, and just for an instant Joe believed they were offering needless indignities by thus fettering him.

Then came into the boy's mind the picture of Colonel Paris as he was led in front of the fort, where all might witness the terrible torture to which he was subjected, and the feeling of pity passed away.

As a matter of course the prisoner could no longer stand, but lay stretched at full length on the ground, and the boys

had an opportunity of seeing, so far as was possible in the gloom of the night, what was taking place around them.

Lieutenant Sammons's men had closed up when their leader was wounded, and now formed a line around the rear of the building.

The one who forced an entrance at the same time as the lieutenant did had remained inside, thus keeping open the way for Colonel Weston, who called for three to follow him.

What took place in the room where the guests were assembled, the boys could not see; but they understood that no very spirited resistance was being made, since there were no more muskets discharged.

Five minutes after the colonel entered, one of the Americans came out with the order that every other man of both squads should come into the building to take charge of the prisoners, while the remainder of the force stayed at their posts lest Tories, who might be secreted in other parts of the house, should attempt to escape.

Then, one by one, each guarded by a soldier, the prisoners were marched out, until ten stood in line near the boys.

Peter had no idea of losing sight of Butler, although escape would have been well-nigh impossible even had he not been fettered, but the colonel sent word that he and Joe should come inside.

On entering, the first person they saw was Lieutenant Sammons, who was binding up as best he could a wound on his left shoulder, and Joe cried, anxiously as he ran toward his father:

“Are you hurt much?”

“It's a little more'n a scratch, lad; but I allow to come out of it all right, though I may lose my arm.”

“Are any bones broken?”

“As near as I can tell the shoulder is splintered ; but never you mind about me. The colonel wants some information.”

“What did you hear said in regard to the place where the proclamations would be hidden?” Colonel Weston asked, and Peter repeated what the sentinel had told his comrade.

“Then these coals must be raked aside, although it doesn't seem possible they can have been disturbed since the first alarm was given,” and he pointed to the burning logs in the deep fireplace, which were giving out no slight amount of heat, although the night was uncomfortably warm.

“This end of the hearth seems to be loose,” Peter cried, as he pulled at a flat stone that was slightly raised, and in another instant the hiding-place was disclosed.

A large package of documents lay beneath the stone, and this Colonel Weston took possession of, saying, in a tone of satisfaction, as he did so :

“I think we have made a clean haul of this nest. The women I shall not molest, although they are most likely equally guilty with the men. You have put us in the way of a good night's work, boys, and deserve a rich reward.”

“We do not expect any,” Peter replied, quickly. “We only did our duty, and if we have been of service to the Cause, that is sufficient reward for us.”

“But you shall have more than the approbation of your own consciences, if I have any influence. Now we will complete our work here, and go back to the fort.”

Then the colonel directed three of the men to make a thorough search of the building, and while this was being done he went outside, followed by Peter and Joe.

Ten minutes later the searchers reported that none save

the women of the family remained in the house, and the order was given for the prisoners to be taken to the stockade.

As a matter of course Butler was so far relieved from the bonds that it was possible for him to walk, and at the very moment the squad filed out into the path, a report of musketry in the distance told that those sent in search of the Indians had succeeded in their mission.

CHAPTER XV.

GENERAL ARNOLD.

PETER and Joe marched by the side of Lieutenant Sammons during the return to the fort, and the former was exceedingly anxious regarding the result of the engagement between the soldiers and the Indians, until the lieutenant said, in a careless tone :

“There is no reason why you should be troubled about those of our friends who went in that direction, lad. They knew very near where the Injuns were hid, and wouldn't be taken by surprise. I allow there hasn't been much of a fight, for the firing has ceased already, and it isn't ten minutes since we heard the first report.”

“But very much can be done in ten minutes, sir.”

“Perhaps you are thinking of when we were in the swamp? It didn't take long there to slaughter three hundred of our number; but now the case is different. Our friends are in the position to surprise the enemy.”

Before the troop had arrived at the stockade Lieutenant Sammons's wound was causing him so much pain that he resolved to visit a friend who lived in the vicinity, believing he would be better cared for in such a place, than if he went to the fort.

Colonel Weston readily granted him leave of absence, promising to send a surgeon to attend to the wound, and then said to Joe :

"There is no reason why you shouldn't go with your father, my boy, if you wish. You are not under my command, and even if you were, I should consider you entitled to a free foot after the service you and Master Kirkland have rendered."

Not until he was assured again and again that Peter had no objection to being thus left comparatively alone, did Joe decide to accompany his father, and then he promised to be at the fort early next morning in order to continue the work Colonel Willett had assigned to them.

"Stay as long as you can be of any assistance to your father," Peter said, firmly. "If you are really needed, I will come for you, and until hearing from me you may know your services are not required."

Then the wounded officer and his son fell out of the ranks, and Peter marched on by the colonel's side, listening vainly for those sounds which would betoken the continuance of the engagement in the woods.

On arriving at the stockade the boy loitered near the entrance until the squad sent in search of Butler's escort should come in, and he had not long to wait.

They returned victorious, and without a wound to show that the enemy had made any resistance.

"Injuns don't make much of a fight when the odds are against 'em," the officer in command said in reply to Peter's question. "We found the hiding-place without trouble, an' gave 'em an' unhealthy kind of a surprise. After firing one volley at random, as you might say, the whole crowd took to their heels."

"I thought from the reports that you were having quite a sharp engagement," Peter suggested.

"Our side was doing most of the work. We crept up

within thirty yards before the alarm was given, an' two fell at the first fire. You see, it was so dark that it was a lucky accident, rather than good marksmanship, when our bullets went in the right direction. The savages emptied their guns before findin' out exactly where we were, and I didn't so much as hear the whistlin' of a ball. We winged three more before givin' up the pursuit, which I allow will be a good warnin' to Thayendanegea not to send his painted imps around this way, unless in a gang large enough to wipe us all out. We are under something like discipline, an' can't be compared with those who forced General Herkimer into the ambush."

"Were you in the swamp?" Peter asked.

"I was, lad, an' it's about the only thing I'm ashamed of ownin' up to since I enlisted. We shall never forget what insubordination cost us and the Cause! But it isn't a pleasant subject to talk about, so I'll change it by askin' how your party succeeded at the Shoemaker house?"

"We took the Tories completely by surprise, and brought into the fort eleven prisoners."

"Eleven! You surely made a good haul; I didn't allow there were as many of the brood left in these parts. I think I'll have a look at the beauties, for among them I may see some old acquaintances."

"Is there any reason why I shouldn't go with you?"

"I'll be glad of your company, my boy, as would any one who loves to see true grit, an' that you must have in plenty."

"No more than any other fellow would have under the same circumstances."

"That's a matter of opinion, I reckon. But come on, and after we've seen the prisoners you shall go to my quarters for the night."

Five minutes later Peter was gazing at the disconsolate-looking men, who must have realised the fate in store for them.

The officer who acted as his guide knew several of the party, and among these acquaintances a coarse, loutish-looking fellow, who had accompanied Sir John when that gentleman fled into Canada.

Hon-Yost Schuyler was his name, and as he replied in a surly tone to the officer's greeting, Peter thought he had never seen a human being who appeared so near akin to the brutes.

"It would have been better if you had stayed with your Tory friends, Hon," the officer said to the prisoner.

The fellow nodded, but made no reply, and appeared averse to entering into conversation, until he was asked :

"Where is Major Frey?"

"Dead," Hon-Yost replied, with a grin, as if the subject were to him amusing.

"Tortured to death by Thayendanegea's painted beasts, I suppose?"

Again Hon-Yost nodded.

"I'll warrant the major showed himself a brave man."

"Yes, while the Injuns had him in hand ; but he weakened once before they got hold of him."

"Do you mean in the swamp?"

"No ; when we brought him into camp. Then his brother wanted to kill him because he hadn't joined the Royalists, an' I saw his lips quiver."

"I don't wonder!" the officer exclaimed, indignantly. "That renegade brother of his does well to make such a show ; but, bad as I know him to be, I never believed he had so little heart as to abuse a prisoner, let alone his own flesh an' blood!"

“How long did Colonel Paris live after they brought him out in front of the fort?” Peter asked, with a half-suppressed sob.

“He didn’t die till the next night.”

“Then he wasn’t tortured that same day?”

“Yes; the Injuns had sport with him all that night, but he wasn’t finished off till nearly sunset of the second day.”

Peter could no longer even so much as look at the brutish fellow who appeared to enjoy speaking of the terrible suffering he had seen brave men endure; but turned away, walking slowly towards the officer’s quarters, while the latter continued his questions until he had learned that nearly all the prisoners taken in the swamp, and more particularly the wounded, were killed by the Indians.

Early next morning Joe returned to the fort; but it was to say that his father was in a critical condition, and needed more attention than could be given him by the friends at whose home he was then lying.

“If you don’t need me so very much, Peter, I would like to stay with him.”

“And that is exactly what you must do. One can perform the work Colonel Willett charged us with, as well as two, and I’ll see that the Cause doesn’t suffer because you are playing nurse.”

Then it was agreed between the boys that Peter should visit Joe that evening to learn if there was any service he could render the invalid, and the two parted.

During the forenoon Peter did his best towards spreading the news regarding the besieged, and then it would have been useless to continue the work longer, for the advance-guard of General Arnold’s forces arrived, and every able-bodied person within a radius of three or four miles assembled at the fort to “see the troops.”

Before the afternoon had passed Colonel Willett rode up to the stockade, and, as Peter saluted, said, with a cheery smile :

“I suppose you thought there was no need of working for recruits after the troops came in sight?”

“I should have kept on according to orders, sir ; but no one is at home around here ; all hands are out looking at the soldiers, and waiting to see General Benedict Arnold.”

“They will soon have enough of sight-seeing, for the general and his staff are only a few miles behind. Where is your friend?”

“Nursing his father, who was wounded the night we captured young Butler.”

“To which Butler do you refer, Peter?”

“The one who has been with Sir John so long. He came here with a proclamation from the British camp.”

Then, encouraged by the many questions and the great interest displayed, Peter told the story of the capture, and when he had concluded Colonel Willett took him by the hand almost as proudly as Serjeant Fonda could have done, as he said :

“You are a true patriot, my lad, and work for the Cause wherever you may be. I doubt not but that Colonel Weston, in telling the same story, would give you and Joe more credit. It is brave news, for we do not care the Tories hereabouts should know the true condition of affairs.”

“Yet it can make no difference now this large force is here.”

“General Arnold has not men enough to warrant his attempting to force an entrance to the fort, or even as many as would be needed in going through the swamp. He will not advance until we can raise more recruits, and *his* men

will never oblige him to act contrary to his own opinion, as did those under brave General Herkimer."

"Is it true, sir, that the general cannot live?"

"He died yesterday morning, lad," Colonel Willett replied, sadly, "and there are many officers in the Continental forces who could have been better spared by us."

While the two were thus talking the troops continued to arrive, and had he not been assured to the contrary, Peter would have felt certain there were fully as many as St. Leger had under his command.

Eight hundred all told, with an effective force of not more than seven hundred, was the total number, and, after the lesson received on the causeway, Peter could readily understand why their commander did not think it prudent to advance until considerably more recruiting had been done.

Colonel Willett soon went to Colonel Weston's quarters, but Peter remained near the entrance to the stockade until he had seen General Arnold and his staff arrive.

Then, believing he could be of no further service that day, he sought for Lieutenant Sammons and Joe.

He found them comfortably situated; but the invalid was in a more serious condition than he had fancied possible.

"They cut off his arm this morning," Joe said in a whisper, as he opened the door softly and motioned towards the restless form on the bed. "Since that has been done he talks continually of the ambush, and the fight on the causeway. He doesn't appear to know who I am."

"What does the surgeon think about him?"

"He hardly answered my questions, except to say he hoped father would pull through. Now that such a large force has arrived I surely can't be of any service at the fort—"

“There is no reason why you shouldn't stay where you are, Joe. I will speak with Colonel Willett about it, and let you know exactly what he says. It seems as if some time would be spent here waiting for more recruits,” and then Peter repeated the conversation he had had at the entrance of the stockade.

Joe was so anxious regarding his father that he failed to realise how much such a delay might mean to the poor fellows in the fort, who were most likely hoping each hour to receive cheering news from those who had left them in the effort to procure assistance.

Understanding that he could be of no service either to the invalid or Joe, Peter went back to the fort, and during the remainder of this day and evening he wandered around idly, for those who had previously appeared eager to talk regarding the condition of affairs at Fort Schuyler were so much occupied with the newcomers as to hardly notice him.

Not until noon the following day, after he had paid a visit to Joe and learned that the lieutenant was resting more comfortably, did it appear as if there were any reason why he should remain in the stockade, and then he was summoned to a log hut just outside the fort, where, to his great surprise, he learned that General Arnold was holding a court martial to try the prisoners captured at the Shoemaker house.

He was required to give his testimony regarding what he had seen and heard on that particular night, and after this had been done he was dismissed.

Peter understood it was a serious matter to be found within an enemy's lines, and knew what his fate would have been had the British captured him while trying to leave Fort Schuyler. It had never occurred to him, however,

that Americans would be so cruel as to condemn a man to death for such an act ; therefore he was literally astounded when, late in the evening, it was announced in the stockade that the prisoners had been found guilty, and were sentenced to be hanged as spies on the morning of the second day.

It seemed to him as if he were responsible for the fate of these unhappy men, even though he knew full well that he and Joe had done no more than their duty in giving information of what they heard, and he was in deepest distress of mind as he hurried away to tell his friend the terrible news.

Joe was less anxious regarding his father than he had been when Peter met him in the morning. The lieutenant was now in full possession of all his senses, and the surgeon had declared that, providing due care was exercised, he would recover.

Therefore it was that Joe came to the door, in response to his comrade's summons, in a happy frame of mind, and was startled at seeing the expression of grief on Peter's face.

"The men we helped capture are to be hanged, Joe!" he cried. "Every one must die a shameful death, and all through us!"

"But we only did our duty," Joe replied, hesitatingly, and the troubled look which came upon his face told that this fact was by no means as satisfactory to him as he would have it appear. "Come in, and hear what father says about it."

Peter entered willingly, for he disliked being alone with his thoughts just at that time, and a few moments later the invalid had heard the story he came to tell.

"I understand how you feel, lad," Lieutenant Sammons said, when Peter ceased speaking; "but you are looking at the affair in a wrong light. It is not a case where a man is

allowed to think of the result of his work as something personal. Your duty was that of a soldier to his country, and there the matter ends so far as you are concerned."

"But if it hadn't been for us, those poor men would not be hanged!"

"True; yet they would have caused indirectly the death of many of our friends. Once Sir John's proclamation had been circulated through the Valley, the Tories would have flocked to his aid, perhaps, and what would have been the fate of those whom you risked your life to save? You have no more to do with the death of these men than Colonel St. Leger, and not as much, for he sent Butler on a mission which he knew would result in death if he were captured."

This argument did not appear to satisfy Peter, and, after a brief silence, the lieutenant continued by saying:

"Peter, you have come from the fort twice, through the enemy's lines. You knew you would be killed if taken prisoner. Now suppose your capture had followed, would you have said that the soldiers who took you were personally responsible for the sentence St. Leger pronounced?"

"No, for he would only have been doing his duty."

"Very well, that is exactly the position in which you now stand. You have done your duty, and in so doing rendered a great service to your country. That the prisoners are to be executed as spies does not concern you, save as it affords a lesson in case you should be tempted to do the same thing. Don't think of it more than you can help, and, above all, do not take blame upon yourself when it would have been a crime had you or Joe done other than exactly as you did."

This last argument served to relieve the boy's mind somewhat; but he was far from being light-hearted when he went back to the stockade.

Instead of mingling with the soldiers, he went directly to the quarters assigned him, for nearly all the men were discussing the result of the court martial, and he had no desire to listen to their comments.

On awakening next morning his first thought was concerning Lieutenant Sammons and Joe, and without waiting for rations to be served he set off to learn how the invalid was progressing.

On gaining the entrance to the stockade he started in surprise as he saw before him one whom he believed to be at Fort Schuyler, and before he had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to speak, Thomas Spencer, the half-breed, was holding him by the hand.

"We believed all your party had been captured," the blacksmith said, "and it is only two hours since I learned we were mistaken."

"When did you leave the fort?" Peter cried.

"Before daylight yesterday morning."

"Why should you have taken such chances? Surely the Britishers are keeping as strict watch as ever?"

"There has been little change, lad, save that, perhaps, the lines have been drawn tighter. As I said, we feared, hearing nothing, that you had been captured, and the situation was too serious to warrant our remaining without one more effort to get reinforcements. I volunteered at midnight, and two hours later was crawling out."

"Are our friends in a worse plight than when I left?"

"Even though the enemy had been content to remain quiet, the garrison must be growing weaker every day. Six rounds of ammunition to each man is all that is left, and the cannon can no longer be served, owing to lack of powder. The provisions are nearly exhausted, and in six days more

the poor fellows will be face to face with starvation, unless they choose to surrender."

"Surely they would not do that, knowing what fate awaits them?"

"There are very many who boldly declare there is no other way left open. They insist that St. Leger will receive them as prisoners of war, and do not believe it possible he would deliver them over to the Indians."

"What does Serjeant Fonda say?"

"You can fancy how the old man answers those who insist that Colonel Gansevoort should treat with the enemy. He says he is ready to starve, or be killed, but it must be inside the fort, not within the enemy's lines, and threatens to shoot the first man who talks in his hearing about a surrender."

"Does Colonel Gansevoort have no hope?" Peter asked, faintly; the knowledge that his friends were in such sore extremities causing him to grow sick at heart.

"You can judge, when I tell you he has been discussing with his staff the question of trying to cut his way through the enemy's lines. Such an attempt would never be thought of for an instant, unless as a last resort. It is not probable our friends could get a hundred yards away; but they would at least die while fighting."

"It is terrible!" Peter said, as if to himself, "and yet General Arnold does not think this force large enough to warrant his advancing."

"Neither is it, lad."

"Then what is to be done?"

"The men will die as Americans should, at their posts."

"But we have gotten away; why cannot others?"

"A few might succeed; but only a small number of lives

could be saved in that manner, and who would act such a cowardly part as to run away while many must remain."

"You and I have done it," Peter replied, with a sigh.

"We have risked our lives to save the others, and are ready to do the same thing again if necessary. I shall go back to-night, and either get into the fort, or die in the attempt."

"Going back?" Peter cried.

"I would not do so if the danger were less; but it shall not be said Thomas Spencer was a coward, even though some scornfully call him a half-breed."

"If you are going back, I shall do the same."

"But you must not, lad. You can do our friends no good."

"Neither can you; yet you are going rather than have it said you left them while the danger was so great."

"It is different with me."

"I can't understand how."

"You may be needed here."

"No more than you would, and if you do not let me travel in your company, I shall go alone."

"That will be as Colonel Willett says, for you shall not be allowed to sacrifice your life!" and before Peter could stop him the half-breed hurried towards headquarters."

CHAPTER XVI.

HON - YOST.

PETER could not imagine why Spencer was so opposed to his going back to Fort Schuyler.

He was thoroughly alive to the perils which menaced its defenders and all who would succour them; but he had believed from the moment he agreed to make the second journey, that he could return before the reinforcements arrived, even though they should set out in advance.

It would be, so he reasoned with himself, directly opposite what he had been led to believe he had a right to expect, if Colonel Willett should refuse to allow him to rejoin his comrades, and he did not intend to be deprived of his rights if continued and warm remonstrance should be of avail.

It was while he was thus reflecting that Major Stockwell came up, and would have passed with but a nod of recognition but for the look of distress on the boy's face.

"What is the trouble, Private Kirkland?" he asked, stiffly, but yet not unkindly.

"Thomas Spencer has gone to Colonel Willett for the purpose of trying to prevent me from returning to Fort Schuyler, sir."

"Do you know in what desperate straits the garrison is?"

"Yes, sir, the half-breed has just told me."

"And you know what Colonel St. Leger threatened should be the fate of any prisoners he might take?"

"Yes, sir ; but that cannot prevent me from going back. I was sent on a mission, and —"

"You were not ordered to return."

"Colonel Gansevoort knows it is a soldier's duty to return to his comrades as soon as he is at liberty to do so."

"And you think it your duty to venture into that place, where death in the most revolting form must be your fate, unless reinforcements can be gotten through the swamp in time?"

"Serjeant Fonda would say so, sir."

"Then the serjeant is to be blamed. You can be of no especial service to your comrades by returning, and, on the other hand, may be of great benefit to the Cause, if you do not throw your life away."

"I would not like the men to think me a coward."

"Neither will they. You volunteered for a particularly dangerous service, such as even the serjeant himself believed outside of a soldier's duty, because of the peril. Having done that, no one can call you a coward."

"At the same time my place is with my comrades, sir," Peter replied, stubbornly.

"Unless General Arnold's force advances, you will stay here, my lad, for I shall see to it that you have strict orders not to leave this fort under any pretext."

The major walked away with that stiffness of carriage which had earned for him the nickname of "the ramrod," and Peter stood staring after him as if transfixed to the spot.

Making known his troubles to this officer had but increased them, and the boy could have cried with vexation, unsoldier-like as such an act would be, as he thought that he had done the very thing which would prevent him from going where he wished.

While he stood undecided as to whether or no he ought not to start at that moment, before an order to the contrary could be given him, a woman entered the stockade and stood gazing around in perplexity.

Peter observed that her eyes were swollen as if with much weeping, and that she was in great mental distress there could be no question.

He stepped forward as if to offer his services, and she came quickly towards him as she said, in a voice choked by tears :

“Will you tell me where General Arnold’s quarters are?”

“In that large tent just beyond the log house,” and Peter pointed towards that portion of the stockade where, despite the early hour, was a great bustle as of business, and confusion consequent upon the moving to and fro of many men.

“Do you think I may speak with him?” she asked, timidly, looking up into Peter’s face as if in that of a friend.

“I do not believe it will be easy to see him, unless you have important business.”

“Important business?” she repeated, as the tears began to flow. “What can be more important than the saving of a human life? My son, a boy who has always been considered as not being quite right in his mind, was among those taken prisoners at Mr. Shoemaker’s house. He has no idea of what he was doing; he cannot be an enemy to the Americans, for he is so simple as to do the bidding of the first who attracts his attention, and surely his death is not necessary to the cause of freedom!”

Peter was distressed; it was very much as if the poor woman were pleading with him for the life of the prisoner; but yet he hardly knew how to prevent her from saying that which was in her mind.



PETER AND THE MOTHER OF HON-YOST SCHUYLER.



“What is his name?” he asked.

“Hon-Yost. Hon-Yost Schuyler. He is but little older than you, my boy, and surely you are willing to do what you can to aid his distressed mother?”

“I wish I could aid you!” Peter replied, fervently, and hoping most sincerely she did not know he had been instrumental in making the capture. “I would do anything in my power; but I have no influence with either the officers or men.”

“Yet you can aid in procuring an interview for me with General Arnold. Surely you will be able to do as much as that.”

Peter looked about him in perplexity. He knew it was absolutely impossible he alone could gain an audience for the poor woman with the man who had the power of life or death over her son, and yet he understood that she, half-crazed with grief, would not believe him when he stated the fact.

At that instant Thomas Spencer appeared, coming from Colonel Willett's quarters, and to him the boy appealed, repeating what the poor woman had said.

The half-breed shook his head to intimate that it would be useless for him to do anything, and Peter caught him by the arm lest he should walk away, as he said, imploringly:

“Surely you can do more than I, Spencer, and it makes my heart bleed to hear her plead. I would make any sacrifice to aid her.”

The blacksmith turned suddenly, as he asked:

“Will you promise me one thing if I do all in my power to take her inside the general's tent?”

“Indeed I will.”

“Then agree to make no attempt at going back to Fort

Schuyler, and, if it is possible, she shall have the interview she wants ;” and he added in a lower tone, “ Little good it will do her, for General Arnold is never inclined to pity.”

Peter hesitated. It seemed as if the half-breed demanded too much, and he was on the point of refusing when the grief-stricken woman touched his hand.

One glance into her face, and he cried :

“ I promise, Spencer ! Now do your part !”

The blacksmith motioned for Hon-Yost’s mother to follow him, and Peter turned quickly away. He feared to see her again if Spencer failed, and, to prevent the possibility of such a meeting, went to the further end of the stockade, where, lying at full length on the ground, he gave himself wholly up to unpleasant thoughts.

It seemed certain his comrades would think of him as a coward, if he failed to return. Having reached a place of safety, it was as if he considered only himself, forgetting alike his friends and his duty.

The hours passed until noon came, and yet the boy remained partially screened from view, for he did not feel that he could meet Hon-Yost’s mother if she failed in her purpose, and it was not certain she had yet left the stockade.

The soldiers had eaten dinner and were strolling around the enclosure, talking, as may be supposed, of the besieged garrison, when a private in the militia, who knew Peter, called to him :

“ Thomas Spencer is hunting for you.”

“ Since when ? I saw him this morning.”

“ I met him less than half an hour ago, and he said he must find you soon, or it would be too late.”

The thought came to Peter’s mind that there was some-

thing he might do to aid Hon-Yost's mother — that perhaps it was possible the life of her son could be saved, and he went rapidly to and fro about the stockade eagerly inquiring for Spencer.

Ten minutes later his search was ended. He literally ran into the half-breed's arms, and asked, before the latter could speak :

“ Did you succeed ? ”

“ Yes, and it isn't impossible Hon-Yost may escape the gallows ; but he must earn his life if he would save it.”

“ How ? By enlisting ? ”

“ Much as recruits are needed, I doubt if he would be accepted, for the fellow is little better than a fool.”

“ Then how is he to earn his life ? ” Peter asked, impatiently.

“ Come with me where we sha'n't be overheard, and I will tell you.”

Then Spencer led the boy to a secluded spot in the rear of Colonel Willett's quarters, where he began the story.

“ The sentry on duty in front of the general's tent was a friend of mine, and I persuaded him to let us pass. It might have cost both an arrest if matters hadn't turned as they did ; but I had made the bargain with you, and intended to carry out my part of it to the best of my ability. As soon as she was inside, Hon-Yost's mother threw herself on her knees in front of General Arnold, and begged for the boy's pardon in a manner that was painful to all who heard her, except the general. He has no pity. I believed he would order her out of the tent, and call upon the soldiers to carry her away if she didn't go willingly, when suddenly a thought occurred to him, and he proposed that Hon-Yost should make an attempt to be of service to the cause.”

"In what way?" Peter asked, impatiently, as Spencer paused for an instant.

"He suggested that Hon go into the British lines, and try to make the enemy believe our force here is four or five times larger than it really is."

"But a man like Hon-Yost could not deceive Colonel St. Leger."

"It is not improbable. His coat will bear marks of bullets; he will look and act like a man who has barely escaped death, and the fact that he is known to have been with Butler must be in his favour."

"Yet there can be no doubt but that he will be closely questioned."

"True; but before St. Leger or Sir John see him, half his work will have been done. The Indians know him; he will go first to them, and there his story will be believed."

"What story?"

"That he was captured at the Shoemaker house with Butler and all those who met him; that, while being led to the gallows, he managed to escape; that he was shot at, but succeeded in gaining the woods. The bullet-holes in his clothing will be proof of this portion of the story. Thayendanegea's braves probably know General Arnold has arrived with a force, and will believe Hon's statement. After that it is proposed that I take a part."

"In what way?"

"I know of four Oneidas who will go with me, a few hours behind Hon, to the British camp, and we shall tell the same story he does. The two statements agreeing, must be believed."

"How long would you be allowed to live after arriving there? Do you fancy Sir John's men will not know you?"

"I hope not, for I shall be dressed and painted like an Oneida. I speak their language, and we can readily account for our coming by declaring we are afraid to stay in the Valley, now that General Arnold is here with such a large force. Besides, it is not certain I shall be questioned by St. Leger and Sir John; a single one of us may be summoned. Yet I willingly take the risk because of what it is hoped to gain; we may be able to prepare a way for this force to enter the fort."

Peter remained silent several seconds; the plan seemed to him a good one, and yet there were many things which might contribute to its failure.

"Do you believe Hon-Yost will do his part after he is once free?" he asked.

"General Arnold has provided against any treachery. Hon's brother is to stay here as a hostage, and, in case Hon fails to carry out his portion of the bargain, his brother will be hanged in his stead."

"And you insist that I shall remain in the fort while you are doing all that!" Peter cried, reproachfully. "I am to be deprived of the opportunity to do anything for my comrades!"

"No, my boy, I have thought better of it, and now, instead of insisting that you stay here, ask you to go with me."

Peter leaped to his feet in delight.

"There is great danger in what you are about to attempt," Spencer said, warningly.

"But we shall at least be *trying* to do something! Tell me what my share in the plan is to be?"

"I want you to go with us in order that, if a chance offers, you may make your way inside the fort to warn Colonel Gansevoort of what we are trying to do. When Hon's

story and ours are first told, it may happen the enemy will be momentarily disheartened, and the besieged can take advantage of the disorder to inflict such a blow as will work to their benefit. At the best, lad, it is a poor plan, but better than nothing, and we know now that General Arnold will not advance his force until it is much larger. Will you go?"

"Will I?" Peter cried, excitedly. "There is no need of asking such a question. When shall we start?"

"Before daylight to-morrow morning. After sunset we will begin the work of transforming you into an Indian—"

"But I can't speak a word of their language."

"What matters that? You will not be called upon to talk, and, if by chance the Britishers speak to you, I shall see to it that you do not get into trouble by refusing to answer. I hope, however, you will not be with us when we enter the enemy's camp. We intend to go out of the swamp at that point where it will be necessary to pass very near the west side of the fort, and it should be possible for you to enter."

"Shall I have time to see Joe before you want to make me an Indian?"

"Yes, you can do as you choose until an hour before sunset, when you are to meet me here. Be careful, lad, not to tell your friend of our plan. It must be kept a secret from all save the officers, lest some spy carry the news to St. Leger."

Peter was about to leave the stockade for the purpose of informing Joe of his intended departure, when he stopped suddenly, and asked, in a low tone, such as one uses when speaking of the dead:

"What about the other prisoners?"

“They will be hanged in the morning; but we shall not be here to see it done.”

Instead of running, he walked slowly away, for all the horror of having been instrumental in the death of these men was upon him once more, and, while in this frame of mind, the venture he was about to make, with Hon-Yost Schuyler as the principal actor, seemed to have less chance of success than when he first heard it explained.

The enemy was strongly entrenched; was well and fully armed, with every advantage which besiegers could have, and already the weakened garrison was almost within its grasp. Could it be possible that old soldiers, under such circumstances, would be frightened away simply by the story of an idiot?

By the time he arrived at Lieutenant Sammons's quarters he felt convinced the attempt would be a failure; but, nevertheless, he was eager to do his part in it.

“If we succeed so far as my getting into the fort is concerned, I shall be satisfied, and if we fail in that, it is no more than would probably have happened if I had tried to gain an entrance unaided; but General Arnold must not hope to frighten such soldiers as Colonel St. Leger has under his command.”

“Talking to yourself?” Joe asked, cheerily, as he opened the door. “By the way you acted I thought you might be making a speech.”

“I was trying a little one for my own benefit,” Peter replied, with a brave effort to conceal the true state of his feelings. “I am going away with Spencer for awhile, and have come to say good-bye. How is your father?”

“Getting better fast, and has already begun to speak of the time when he can be in the field once more.”

“A one-armed soldier?”

“Since he carries a sword instead of a musket, he can still be of service.”

“You shall see, lad,” Lieutenant Sammons cried, for by this time the boys were inside the house. “They sha’n’t put me on the shelf simply because I have but one arm, that you may depend upon. The stockade must look brave with so many soldiers in it.”

“So it does, lieutenant; but yet there are not so many that an advance will be made for some time.”

“And in the meanwhile the poor fellows at Fort Schuyler are starving! I do not understand why General Arnold loiters here while there —”

Lieutenant Sammons ceased speaking very suddenly, as he realised he was about to use the same arguments which had been favourites of his when General Herkimer was literally driven to his death, and he added:

“I suppose an officer like General Arnold knows best; but it seems cold-blooded to wait here idle while seven hundred brave fellows are facing worse than death!”

“Where are you going, Peter?” Joe asked.

“That is what I can’t tell.”

“When shall I see you again?”

“I don’t know.”

“You are going —”

“It isn’t fair, Joe, to try to make me speak of what I must keep a secret. I haven’t long to stay, and we’ll talk of something else.”

Then Peter told his friends of the scenes he had witnessed in the fort; described the general appearance of the new troops, and, in fact, spoke of anything rather than his proposed venture.

After remaining half an hour he took his leave, promising to send Joe word of his movements whenever it should be possible, and after he had disappeared in the distance Lieutenant Sammons said, half to himself :

“ A good boy, and a true, is Peter Kirkland. He holds to his word as the old parson did, and a man can depend upon him.”

Joe had a suspicion as to why his father had suddenly become such an admirer of Peter's ; but he did not allow it to trouble him. He had seen Lieutenant Sammons in action — not a severe one it is true, but still a position where a coward would have shown his true colors — and he was resolved to put from his mind any thought that his father could be guilty of bringing about the disaster on the causeway.

“ I think Peter is going back to Fort Schuyler,” he said, after a long pause.

“ He can do no good there, unless it should be to say reinforcements are coming, and that, according to his own statement, is the very news which won't be told for some time.”

“ He said he was going with Spencer, and it isn't likely the half-breed would travel in any other direction.”

“ Perhaps you are thinking you would like to go with him ?”

“ Of course I would. I'm not as brave as Peter ; but I can follow where he leads, and should be in his company.”

“ Would you leave me, Joe ?”

“ Not while I can be of any service, sir ; but when you were wounded you told me to pay no attention to you while there was work to be done for the Cause.”

“ You are right, Joe. If you think it your duty to go

with Peter, and he can take you, never give me a thought. I am able to wait upon myself now, and don't really need you."

Lieutenant Sammons had hardly ceased speaking before Joe was running at full speed towards the stockade.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REHEARSAL.

PETER was searching in the stockade for Spencer when Joe arrived, breathless from rapid running, and the expression on the former's face told that he was not particularly well pleased at seeing his friend so soon again.

"You didn't allow I'd follow you," Joe began, half apologetically. "I wasn't counting on anything of the kind myself, for I supposed father would think I ought to stay with him until he is well enough to be around ; but —"

"And that is what you should do, Joe."

"I wouldn't have thought of anything else if you hadn't been going away. You see —"

"My going has nothing to do with the duty you owe your father," Peter said, sharply, understanding now why Joe had followed, and eager to prevent him from making any proposition.

"Father himself believes that I should play the part of a soldier as I agreed to do when I enlisted."

"But you can see for yourself that the men are idle ; therefore your time is your own until an advance is made, and you will be better off with him than loafing around the stockade."

"You are not going to do any loafing, Peter."

"How do you know ?"

“Both father and I understood that you came to say good-bye because you were about to start on some mission —”

“Well, suppose I am?”

“Now, don’t be angry, Peter. I came here with you, and it seems only right I should be allowed to finish the work in your company.”

Peter realised that Joe was simply asking what he himself had claimed was his due because of that which had previously been done.

“I’m not angry, Joe dear,” he said, after a short pause. “I won’t lie about it by saying I’m not going away on a particular service; but it is all to be kept a profound secret, and there is nothing you could do in the work.”

“I might follow you, Peter, as I did when we came here,” Joe replied, meekly.

“Yes, and you have the right; but this time it isn’t for me to say whether you can be allowed to do so. Why not stay here quietly and take care of your father?”

“Would you be willing to do anything of the kind if you knew I was going away into danger?”

“No, Joe, you know I wouldn’t. It *is* your right, and I will ask if you can go. Wait here until I see a certain person.”

“And will you do your best to give me the chance, Peter? Will you ask for the permission as earnestly as if it were for yourself?”

“I give you my word on it, Joe. Stay right here, and do not be impatient if I am gone a long while.”

“I’ll wait, and all the time keep hoping you’ll not be forced to go without me.”

As Peter walked away to continue the search for Spencer, he realised that another white member would not increase

the strength of the party, but rather add to the chances of detection, yet at the same time he resolved to do exactly as he had promised. He understood full well how his comrade felt in regard to the matter, and was determined to use all his powers of persuasion on the half-breed in the hope of gaining his consent.

He was not allowed to carry out these intentions fully, for when he finally found Spencer, and began to make the proposition, it was vetoed very decidedly.

"You boys are too fond of doing dangerous duty," the half-breed said, interrupting him before the request had been fully made; "but this is a case where only one is needed, and the danger for all would be greatly increased if both went with me. I should not have allowed you to go, but for my desire to send a messenger into the fort, in event of its being possible, and you know as well as I that one will have a better show of getting in than two would. For the safety of all I refuse to take another volunteer, and should repeat the same words to the best soldier in this fort. Tell Joe Sammons what I have said, and then come with me, for it is time we began our work of making you over into an Indian."

Even if it had been for himself that Peter came to plead, he would have remained silent after the case was presented in such a light; therefore nothing was now left but to acknowledge himself beaten, and accept the defeat with the best possible grace.

Joe looked sadly disappointed when, without explaining the nature of the proposed service, Peter repeated to him the substance of Spencer's reply.

"When he said that it would increase the danger, and that he would not take the best soldier in the stockade, for the same reason, I couldn't say anything more, Joe dear."

“You’re right, Peter, and I’ll try not to feel badly. Of course I don’t want to follow you where I might be doing harm instead of good; but all the same I’m sorry.”

“I know how you feel, Joe, and wish it might be otherwise; but since that is impossible, you had best go back to your father, for I must be making preparations.”

“If you see Serjeant Fonda will you tell him why I wasn’t with you?”

“Of course I will, and he’ll understand exactly why two couldn’t have done the work as well as one. Don’t speak to anybody about my going away, and let’s shake hands without having more words, for you know this kind of talk isn’t good for a fellow’s courage.”

Joe pressed warmly the outstretched hand, and then walked rapidly away, not so much as turning his head to look back.

Peter watched until he was lost to view in the distance, and then went to where Spencer was awaiting him.

The boy had supposed all the preparations would be made within the stockade; but, to his surprise, the half-breed led him out of the fort, saying, as he did so:

“I don’t allow you have anything more to do here before you go. It may be you will see Colonel Willett or Major Stockwell; but I hope that even they will not think it necessary to come where we are.”

“But surely you’re not going now?”

“No, because both you and I have a good deal to do before we can hope to pass ourselves off as Oneidas. That work couldn’t be done among so many men without arousing suspicion, therefore we will go to those who are in the secret, because they will form a portion of our party.”

Peter asked no more questions, and when Spencer had led

him to the Oneidas' camp, which was situated about half a mile distant from the stockade, he understood that his masquerading as an Indian was now to begin.

The Oneidas were expecting their visitors, as was shown by the fact that, immediately Spencer entered, certain articles were pointed out, after which the occupants of the tepee appeared to pay no attention to the newcomers.

"Strip off your clothes, and I'll try my hand at giving you the proper colour," the half-breed said, as he examined, critically, the contents of an earthenware pot.

"Am I to go naked?" Peter asked, in surprise, as he began to obey the command.

"You will dress exactly as do your companions, and, since our lives may depend upon the completeness of the work, you can understand that I shall not be careless. Your skin is to be stained with this stuff," and he pointed towards the pot; "for if an arm or a leg were allowed to remain its natural colour, and should by accident be exposed, you know what the result would be."

The half-breed was unusually grave, and Peter began to understand better than ever before how much danger he apprehended.

Spencer did his work thoroughly, and in such a manner as appeared satisfactory to the Oneidas.

He first covered every portion of Peter's body with a stain made from the bark of a tree, and then rubbed over it no small amount of dirt.

"It will be some time before you get back your natural colour," he said, when the work was completed, and he surveyed in evident satisfaction the result. "That stain must wear off, for water will not affect it, and so far as the skin goes I think even Thayendanegea himself might be deceived. Now

we'll put on this assortment of ornaments, and then nothing remains to be done save to learn your lesson. Watch the Indians closely; observe how they sit or lie around; take particular notice of every movement, and practise the different attitudes while I put myself into shape."

At first, Peter thought it very easy to learn this lesson, but before it was well begun he realised that it would be exceedingly difficult.

He had never paid particular attention to the movements of an Indian; but now, when he studied every action, he understood that he had much to learn, and entered upon the task in a painstaking fashion, for not only his own life, but the lives of his companions, might depend upon his knowledge of the character he had assumed.

So occupied was he with this task that he paid no attention whatever to Spencer, and was considerably surprised an hour later when an Indian, in full war-paint, seated himself by his side.

Peter motioned to himself, and then his companion, as if to ask whether he looked the part he was playing, when the seeming savage said, in good English :

"You are doing very well, lad; but don't forget for a single instant what you profess to be. Thayendanagea's braves are sharp-eyed."

"Is this really you, Spencer?" he cried, in astonishment.

"Certainly; can't you see any difference between me and the others here?"

"Not a bit, except, perhaps, that you look more like an Indian than the Indians themselves."

"Then I am making a mistake; to overact the part will be as dangerous as to be careless. Let me see you go out of the tepee."

Peter obeyed, but his movements did not meet with the full approbation of his teacher, and not until many moments had been spent in rehearsing was the half-breed satisfied.

"I can't say that this costume is very comfortable," Peter said, as he tried to more completely cover his body with the feathers.

"Are you cold?"

"Yes, and yet it doesn't seem as if I ought to be, for the night is warm."

"You will soon grow accustomed to having your body thus exposed, and, once we are on the march, can appreciate the comfort of being perfectly free in all your movements. Now, I will discuss the plan with our companions, and you are to observe closely the attitude of the listeners, for that is the part you will be forced to play, if, unfortunately, we do not succeed in getting you into the fort."

Then ensued a spirited conversation, in which only two of the Indians took part, and, before it was concluded, Peter believed he could carry out his assumed character unless, through some unlucky chance, he were addressed by a stranger.

After half an hour passed, the discussion was brought to a close, and the Indians stretched themselves out at full length on the ground as if to go to sleep.

"Is everything arranged?" Peter asked, and Spencer replied:

"Yes, and we are to leave here an hour before sunrise."

"Where is Hon-Yost?"

"At the stockade. He will be set free about daybreak, just before the others are executed, for his story is that he escaped while being led out to the gallows. Starting at the actual moment the others are marched to the scaffold, he

must necessarily arrive in proper time to give good colour to his statement. It will even appear to the soldiers that he makes his escape; only the party sent in pursuit will know he is not to be captured or wounded. Thus, in case Thayendanegea's spies are near, they must believe he has really given our people the slip."

"But why are we to start before he does? I thought the plan was for him to arrive first."

"So it is; but we shall not travel as rapidly as he, and will be near in case he is disposed to sacrifice his brother by really running away."

"It seems as if the plan were well laid; the one thing which troubles me is as to what I shall do in case any one speaks to me."

"That is the lesson I have reserved for the last. The greatest danger to be feared is that if you are spoken to in English, you will forget you are not supposed to know the language, and reply. Now from this moment you are to keep silent even when I speak, unless I first say that it is necessary you should answer. Under no other circumstances must you so much as open your mouth. Remember, we have begun the lesson, and from this instant until we are in a place of safety, you are an Oneida, even to me."

Then Spencer rehearsed the positions Peter should assume in case he was addressed by any one, and during nearly an hour the lesson was continued.

"That will do for the present, and now you can lie down," the half-breed said, with a sudden change of tone.

Peter was tired, and gladly obeyed the command; but started up the next instant as Spencer assumed a threatening attitude.

"You deserve to be beaten!" he cried, with an assump-

tion of most violent anger. "I have been showing you what should be done, and the work is no sooner finished for the time being, than you forget all I have tried so hard to teach. Didn't I say you were, even to me, an Oneida from the moment I warned you? You may answer this time, for you have not only failed at the first trial, but I begin to doubt if you can ever play the part."

"What have I done?" Peter asked, in astonishment that verged on bewilderment.

"Didn't you lie down when I told you?"

"I thought that was what you intended I should do."

"You have no business to think anything, except that you don't understand English, and are an Oneida. Suppose we had been in Thayendanagea's encampment, and some one had spoken quickly. If you obeyed so readily, or even betrayed the fact that you knew what was said, you might lead us all to the stake."

"I should remember, there," Peter replied, penitently.

"If you cannot do it when we are practising, how can you be certain? If any of the English had a suspicion you are not what you pretend to be, the first trap laid to catch you would be the one I then tried. Now we will begin. Once more you are only an Oneida, and whether waking or sleeping, you must be on the alert to prevent yourself from appearing to understand English."

Peter would have tried to excuse himself for having been careless, but for the fact that Spencer prevented him by transforming him into an Indian once more, and he resolved that such an accident should not occur again.

He realised how much depended upon his playing the part perfectly, for, let a single mistake be made, and not only he himself, but all his companions, would be doomed.

Nor would that be the only disaster he might cause ; the slight hope of saving the garrison would be gone, and thus he be forced, if by any chance his life should be spared, to consider himself responsible for the death of many men.

Spencer did not continue the lesson further ; but laid himself down by the side of the apparently unconscious Indians, and Peter followed his example.

The amateur Oneida was so weary that he fell asleep almost immediately, and it seemed as if he had but just closed his eyes in slumber when he was aroused by a heavy hand on his shoulder, to hear the half-breed ask :

“ Are you ready to start ? ”

Peter was on the point of replying when he remembered the previous mistake, and, instead of speaking, he arose to his feet, walking to the door of the tepee.

“ You have done well, lad,” Spencer said, approvingly. “ My greatest fear is that, once we are in Thayendanegea’s encampment, providing you are forced to go so far, you will betray the secret on being suddenly aroused from sleep. Keep it on your mind the last instant before sinking into the unconsciousness of slumber, and it will visit you at the first waking moment. Now come with me, and we’ll find something to eat, for we shall set out in a short time.”

Again Peter came very near forgetting his lesson, because of the change in the half-breed’s tone ; but he restrained himself before even the slightest gesture had been made, and again did his teacher reward him with praise.

“ That’s right ; be on your guard all the time. If any one should try you it would be more skilfully done, and even so much as a turn of the head, or a change of expression, would betray the secret.”

Then Spencer motioned for Peter to follow, and led him to the adjoining tepee, where an old squaw gave them half a dozen thin, cinder-covered cakes of meal.

The four Indians who had been selected for the service came into the open air, spoke to Spencer briefly, and then started off through the forest in single file.

Peter would have brought up the rear but that the half-breed took that post upon himself, and motioned for him to copy the movements of the man in advance.

It was not yet light, and the boy was obliged to keep very close behind his leader, otherwise he might lose sight of him in the gloom. The morning air chilled his half-naked body, and he felt decidedly uncomfortable ; but after travelling a mile or more his blood was warmed, and he began to realise the benefit of being unhampered by clothing.

Not a word was spoken by either member of the party. All moved through the forest silently as shadows, and, so far as the Indians were concerned, with apparently as little effort.

An hour after the sun rose the Oneidas had arrived at the causeway, and there, in obedience to some order given by Spencer, the band concealed themselves in the thicket, where, motionless as statues but on the alert for the lightest unusual sound, all waited for — Peter knew not what.

Then came into the boy's mind the knowledge that they had concealed themselves in the very ambush where Thayendanagea's braves stationed themselves, and all the incidents of that terrible morning came to him with horrible distinctness.

Again he heard the rattle of musketry ; the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying. Once more he saw General Herkimer, his injured limb rudely bound up, giving

orders when it seemed impossible they could be executed, and the same sensation of helplessness came over him.

He was rapidly growing unnerved, and if an enemy had taken advantage of the moment to discover whether he was really an Indian, he would probably have disclosed the important secret.

Just at this time the actions of the Oneidas indicated that some unusual noise was heard, and, listening intently, Peter soon distinguished the sound of footsteps, apparently approaching the hiding-place.

Nearer and nearer they came until the boy saw Hon-Yost Schuyler making his way rapidly towards the British camp, and evidently unsuspecting that he was observed.

Whether Hon-Yost was "simple" or not, he surely acted his part well, even there where he had no reason to suppose any one would see him.

His clothing was torn as if he had forced his way through the tangled foliage; he had no covering on his head, and the expression on his face was that of the most abject terror.

"General Arnold impressed upon his mind that he would probably be seen at every stage of the journey by St. Leger's spies, and he doesn't intend to take any chances," Spencer whispered to Peter. "If Hon-Yost continues as he has begun, there is no doubt but that all he says will be believed."

Peter wished to ask several questions regarding Hon-Yost; but he had resolved that his teacher should have no further cause for complaint against him, and remained silent and motionless, not so much as showing by his face that he had heard the remark.

The Oneidas remained in hiding half an hour longer, and

then the eldest of the party gave the signal to resume the journey, by rising to his feet.

Once more Peter was following every movement of the Indian in front of him, and with the knowledge that when the next halt was called they would be within the enemy's lines.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FAILURE.

DURING an hour the leader continued on without slackening his pace, and the fatigue of maintaining this gait, which can best be described as a "lope," was beginning to tell upon Peter, when the band came to an abrupt halt.

Unable to communicate with the Indians, and forbidden to speak to Spencer in English, Peter could not ascertain the cause of this interruption to the journey. He listened intently, but heard nothing which might betoken the presence of enemies; yet Spencer acted as if he understood the matter thoroughly.

The boy looked at the half-breed questioningly; but the latter made no sign, and just as Peter, having come to the conclusion that the halt had been made in order to give the band an opportunity to rest, was about to throw himself upon the ground, he was startled almost to the extent of exposing his true character, by seeing three Indians stalk gravely out from among the foliage.

They came towards the leader of the Oneidas, who advanced a pace to meet them, and then began what proved to be a long conversation, the remainder of the party standing silent and motionless as statues all the while.

As a matter of course Peter could not understand a single word; but, after the first flush of fear had subsided, he

watched the countenances of the speakers closely, hoping thus to learn the nature of the conversation.

At the beginning of the interview the faces of the men gave no clue to their thoughts; but as the leader of the Oneidas told a long story, interspersed with many gestures, all grew excited, and from the manner in which they handled their weapons Peter believed the fanciful account of General Arnold's forces, as invented at Fort Dayton, was being told.

It was fully an hour before this conference ended, and then the leader of the newcomers had spoken animatedly at great length on some subject which appeared to give Spencer the most intense satisfaction.

"If I live a month longer I will learn the Indian language," Peter thought to himself. "I am completely in the dark as to what is being said, yet, at the expense of a little study while we were idling at Fort Schuyler, I might have been in a position to enjoy this as much as Spencer seems to be doing."

When the conference finally came to an end the three Indians, instead of continuing on in the direction they had evidently been travelling, took the lead, and the Oneidas followed without question.

Peter believed the story relative to General Arnold's supposititious force had been told, and that these men, members of Thayendanegea's band, were conducting the party to the British camp.

As he afterward learned, this surmise was correct.

The new leaders travelled at a more rapid gait than had the Oneidas, and Peter began to think it would be impossible for him to continue the pace.

Had the position of affairs been one whit less serious, he

must have fallen out of the line before five miles had been traversed ; but at the expiration of an hour he was too deeply excited to be conscious of fatigue.

This last condition of mind had been brought about by Spencer, who suddenly approached nearer, and, while walking with his hand on the boy's shoulder, whispered :

“ We are closing in on the fort, lad, as I allow you know ; but getting you inside of it doesn't look promising. I didn't count on meeting these fellows.”

Peter looked around inquiringly, determined not to speak until his teacher should give permission, and the half-breed said :

“ I'm not trying you this time ; you may talk as much as you please in whispers, for if we go into the British camp it will be the last chance you'll have for some time. Once there, if it so be you're obliged to go, it will not be safe to say a word.”

“ I have been thinking that if you allowed me to lag behind I could get in without serious trouble. Simply leave me alone, and I'll take the chances.”

“ There might be too much danger to us in anything of that kind, my boy. If you should be captured in this disguise, the remainder of your party would be roughly overhauled.”

“ I promise not to speak, no matter how long they torture me.”

“ And I believe you would keep your word ; but you must not be allowed to make the venture alone. In the first place, you would be shot by the sentinels as an Indian before you could get near enough to tell them who you are. Then again, I am afraid the new members of the party might be suspicious, if, when we arrive at the camp, one of our number is missing.”

“Have you given up all hope of getting inside the fort?”

“Very nearly, although some lucky accident may happen between here and there. Your portion of this plan we must call a failure, I’m afraid.”

“If I took off these feathers and washed away the paint, why might it not be possible to let our friends know who I am?”

“You couldn’t remove the stain, no matter how long you washed, and a naked Indian would be shot as quickly as one in full costume. Besides, there are so many scouts in the woods hereabouts that you wouldn’t have a chance to make all the preparations you propose.”

Peter understood fully the dangers by which they were surrounded; yet he would have braved them all in the effort to warn his friends that there might be an opportunity for them to make a bold and successful stroke. But since Spencer had declared that a false move on his part would peril the lives of all the party, the boy realised he must not attempt anything which was not fully sanctioned by the half-breed.

He did not try to conceal his disappointment, and said, bitterly :

“It would have been better if I had remained at Fort Dayton, since I cannot be of any service.”

“True; but when we started it was hoped a chance might present itself. Now, however, I allow it’s a failure. Don’t take it to heart, for there may yet be a way in which you can aid your friends, and—”

He ceased speaking, and stepped quickly back a few paces in the rear, for at that instant the leaders had halted.

The man in front of Peter continued to advance, and the

boy did the same until he was where he could see the cause of this second delay in the journey.

Five more Indians had confronted the band, and the Oneidas seated themselves on the ground, as if believing it would be necessary to remain some time.

As a matter of course this last party was also a portion of Thayendanagea's force, as could be told by their paint, and it was reasonable to suppose they were scouts on duty around the fort.

The three who had first been met told some story to their comrades with no slight show of excitement, and then the leader of the Oneidas repeated what was probably the same fictitious account he had previously given, for similar signs of astonishment and alarm were exhibited as on the first occasion.

Spencer drew near the speakers, while Peter remained discreetly in the background, but not so far away as to let it appear that he had any reason for avoiding attention.

At the first opportunity the half-breed assumed the rôle of story-teller, and Peter knew very well what he was relating.

The result of this long conversation, and it was not brought to a close until the sun had risen high in the heavens, was that the second band joined the party, when the march was resumed once more.

"If all the scouts are going into camp with us it wouldn't be very hard work for me to get into the fort," Peter said to himself, but even as this idea presented itself, some of the Indians in advance fell back to the rear, thus shutting off the boy's last hope that he might leave the party unobserved.

It was now no longer possible for him to hold any conversation with Spencer, and a sigh of dismay escaped from

his lips as he realised that he must enter the Indian encampment within the enemy's lines, where would be a thousand watchful eyes upon him, quick to note the slightest false move he might make.

"I'll count ten before so much as looking around, no matter who may speak, or what may happen," he thought. "During such time I shall at least be able to remember that I am supposed to be an Indian, and if I *do* betray my secret it will not be through my mouth."

Once during this last portion of the march he caught a warning glance from Spencer, and understood it to mean that the time was rapidly approaching when he would be subjected to a most severe test.

As he followed the Indian in front of him he had ample time for gloomy thoughts. He pictured himself a prisoner, his secret suspected, and wondered how long he could remain silent after they began to torture him. He fancied Hon-Yost, growing alarmed at the final moment, confessing everything to Colonel St. Leger or Sir John, and speculated upon the possibility of being given over to the savages and made to suffer within sight of the besieged, as in the case of Colonel Paris.

If he had not suddenly realised that it was dangerous to indulge in such unpleasant thoughts, and put a decided check upon them, he would have arrived at Thayendanegea's encampment in the most pitiable frame of mind.

He succeeded in getting the mastery of himself in good time, however, and when they arrived where the British trenches could be seen, he was, so far as outward appearances were concerned, as stolid and impassive a savage as any of the band.

As a matter of fact, not a single member of the party,

save Spencer, at all approached that stately calm which is popularly supposed to be an Indian trait.

Thayendanegea's men were unquestionably frightened by what they had heard, and Peter's heart beat fast as he realised that, if the defenders of the fort should make a sudden sally just now, this particular portion of the army would beat a rapid and undignified retreat.

Now more than ever did the failure of his portion of the scheme appear as the greatest disappointment which could have come upon them.

When they were within full view of the British encampment Peter looked in vain for signs of that terror which General Arnold had fancied Hon-Yost's story might cause.

So far as he could judge the condition of affairs was the same as before Hon-Yost arrived, if indeed he had been there.

The soldiers were in the trenches with pick and shovel, approaching the saps nearer the apparently doomed fort ; the sharpshooters remained on the alert for a living target, and shells were being fired with regularity and precision.

With longing eyes Peter gazed toward the fortification, wishing most fervently it was possible for him to whisper a single word in Serjeant Fonda's ear.

As a matter of course he could not see any one, save now and then when a man, too far away to be recognised, dashed across the bullet-swept parade-ground, and during the five minutes he gazed at that place in which he most desired to be, neither musket nor cannon was discharged by his friends.

He understood only too well the cause of this silence. Before he left the fort the ammunition was so nearly exhausted that the men were ordered not to shoot save in a

case of necessity, and it was only reasonable to suppose the supply smaller now than it had been then.

The American flag was still waving above the crosses of St. George which had been so readily captured, and a brave sight was that homely emblem of his country floating over a handful of men who were all heroes.

Peter did not realise what suspicions might be aroused by the loving glances he was bestowing upon that flag, until Spencer lurched roughly against him, giving a look of warning as their eyes met.

Then he turned away lest he should once more forget himself, and when they had marched to that point between the trenches and the camps occupied by the Tories, they were halted by a third party of Indians.

Near by was a group of soldiers conversing in tones so loud that Peter had no difficulty in hearing all they said.

"Yes, the bloomin' idjut gave the Yankees the slip jest as they were tyin' a halter 'round his neck," one of the party said, evidently in answer to a question. "I was sent to take him from the Indian quarters to Sir John's tent, and a fine yarn he spun."

"Is it true the rebel Arnold is advancing on us with a large force?" one of the men asked.

"So the idjut says. Two thousand regulars, as he puts it, an' not over an' above twenty hours' march distant. It's likely to be hot here before long, for there's no knowin' which way the savages will jump when it comes to close quarters."

"Two thousand of even such troops as the Yankees raise can march into the fort without askin' our leave, an' then, with both forces against us, it'll be time we started for Canada."

“We shall soon know what the Indians think of it. This crowd was on duty in the woods to the westward of the fort, an’ at the first alarm have come in to hold a pow-wow, I fancy.”

To Peter’s disappointment, the leaders of the party moved forward once more, and he was forced to follow, much as he wished to hear the remainder of that conversation.

Now his despondency was rapidly vanishing.

There was no longer any question but that Hon-Yost had played his part faithfully, and, what was far better, the story was believed, by the rank and file at least.

“Now, if the Oneidas can carry out their portion of the plan as well, we shall —”

His spirits fell again as he realised that it was not possible to acquaint the Americans with the condition of affairs inside the enemy’s lines, and in a short time the truth must be discovered, when the courage of the besiegers would return.

“My failure was a disaster!” he said to himself, and again Spencer crowded roughly against him.

“Be careful of your face!” the half-breed whispered, and Peter knew he was not pleasing his teacher.

The Indian encampment lay beyond that of the British and Tories, therefore the Oneidas had an opportunity of seeing the entire force commanded by St. Leger as they passed along the lines.

Once among the red men, the leaders of the joint party were summoned to Thayendanegea’s tepee, and their followers allowed to do what they pleased.

“Keep close to me,” Spencer whispered. “The Indians will want to know why their comrades have come in from the forest, and what brings the Oneidas here; you cannot

answer their questions, therefore must be with one who can."

"Is the plan succeeding?" Peter asked, anxiously, unable longer to remain silent.

"We shall soon know. General Arnold did not suppose the British soldiers could be frightened away unless the Indians fled, and the interview which is now being held with Thayendanega will soon determine that."

Then Spencer stood gazing idly around, anxious to be questioned, and not many moments elapsed before his desire was gratified.

When it was known throughout the encampment that a party of Oneidas had arrived, every Indian was eager to learn what they had to say regarding the information brought by the escaped prisoner, and Spencer was soon surrounded by an eagerly questioning, eagerly listening throng, all of whom were willing to believe implicitly in what this seeming Oneida told them.

They were weary of the dull monotony of the siege which brought them neither prisoners nor plunder, and in that frame of mind where any pretext for abandoning the British was welcome.

What Spencer said to them Peter did not know; he understood that the half-breed was adding very materially to the story told by Hon-Yost, and could readily see that the audience was beginning to show signs of alarm.

Twice did some warrior, impatient to learn more details than those given by Spencer, question Peter; but the boy paid no other attention than to point to the half-breed in intimation that he alone should be listened to, and in the general excitement no one appeared to notice that the youngest of the Oneidas refused to speak.

As the moments passed, Spencer's audience dispersed into little groups until he and Peter were left comparatively alone amid half a hundred Indians, all of whom were talking excitedly or listening with many a grunt of approval.

"Now is the critical time," the blacksmith whispered, and Peter asked, in alarm :

"What do you mean? Is it suspected, because I refused to answer their questions, that I am not an Oneida?"

"This crowd is so excited that hardly one of the number would pay any attention to you, lad, even if you stood here in your buff coat. The moment is critical because the lightest word, now, will turn the scale one way or the other."

"Do you mean that they are all frightened?"

"They understand that this is a good excuse for beating a retreat; such warfare is not to their liking, and every one chafes under the discipline St. Leger imposes."

"But it can't be possible they will run away," Peter said, incautiously loud, forgetting his surroundings in the hope that suddenly sprang up.

"Anything is possible at this moment, although I do not believe the British soldiers will take flight simply because of such a report as has been brought in. The force will be so weakened if Thayendanagea's warriors desert, that General Arnold can easily raise the siege. In case the Indians do as I hope, we must be prepared to get back to Fort Dayton without loss of time."

"I will run every step of the way, and never stop to rest."

"I believe you, lad; but yet think I can travel the fastest. You shall go into Fort Schuyler, and I will carry the tidings down the Valley. At this moment I question whether you could find an Indian in the forest, and the only danger you

may encounter will be while you are trying to persuade the sentinels your face is white instead of red."

"Where is Thayendanegea?"

"Holding a pow-wow, I suppose. At all events, if he isn't at that, his chief men are, which will answer our purpose quite as well."

Spencer and Peter were not foolhardy by thus conversing in English, although surrounded by enemies. Of all that throng not one gave any heed to them, and the boy could have committed many an error in Indian etiquette without attracting attention.

The entire encampment appeared to have suddenly gone mad; men were darting here and there without apparent purpose; tepees were being lowered by the few squaws who had accompanied the war party; not a few were clamouring for rum, and many were pressing towards the quarters of Colonel St. Leger and Sir John.

"Why can't we follow them?" Peter asked, as he pointed towards the Indians who were overrunning the encampment of the whites. "There we shall discover what the soldiers think of the news."

"Here is where we can learn the most. Wait until the council breaks up, and then we shall know whether we have good news to carry to Fort Dayton, or if it is necessary to beat a retreat in order to save our scalps."

Even as he spoke a body of Indians came running out of the large tepee where the pow-wow had been held, and Spencer listened intently, to catch the first intelligible word.

To Peter it was as if all were very angry, and he began to fear the decision of the council was against flight, when Spencer said, in a low, thrilling whisper:

"The plan is a success, lad! Thayendanegea's warriors

have decided to go, and now is our time to learn what the result will be upon the soldiers! Come with me, and keep close at my heels!"

Peter did not wait for a second command.

As Spencer joined the throng that pressed towards the large white tent, above which an English flag was flying, he kept step with him, in such a bewilderment of joyful surprise that it was with difficulty he could restrain a song of thanksgiving.

"They are not all going to headquarters," he whispered to Spencer. "Some have begun the retreat!"

"You are right!" and the half-breed halted a single instant to watch the flight that had commenced as soon as the sachems announced the result of the council. "When the Tories see their allies going off in such haste the weaker-kneed will join, and thus deprive St. Leger of two-thirds of his command."

Spencer waited only long enough to assure himself the greater number of the Indian force were really fleeing, and then he urged Peter on in the wake of the sachems who led the way to the British commander.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUCCESS.

WHEN the two seeming Indians arrived within a short distance of Colonel St. Leger's tent, a war of words was in progress between the commander and Sir John.

The colonel had at first been literally rendered speechless when he saw the Indians in full retreat ; but as soon as it was possible for him to speak, he stormed and raged in a fury of passion.

The first order he gave was for a squad of Tories standing near by to shoot the cowards ; but no attention was paid to this command.

The refugees from the Valley were dismayed by the thought that their strongest allies were deserting them, and, crediting the stories told by Hon-Yost and the Oneidas, they believed that, before many hours passed, they would be in the power of those who had warned them, with direful threats, against ever returning to this section of the country.

Their faces were paled with fear, and not a few had already thrown down their muskets preparatory to following the red men, when Spencer and Peter arrived.

St. Leger was almost beside himself with rage, as he waited in vain for his order to be obeyed, and then he roared for a squad of British soldiers to be ordered up.

There was no one to carry his command, and the press of men around him was so great that the soldiers would have

been obliged to force a passage at the point of the bayonet in order to gain the side of their commander.

It was at this moment that Sir John arrived on the scene, his eyes filled with tears of vexation and disappointment.

From the conversation of those nearest, Peter understood that the baronet had been pleading in vain with the sachems to oblige their warriors to remain, and trying to convince them that, even though General Arnold had with him two thousand men as was reported, entrenched as they were, the position might be held at the same time that the reinforcements were prevented from gaining the fort.

It was useless for Sir John to plead or beg. A panic had seized upon the savages, or one was simulated because of their desire to return home, and Thayendanegea himself could not have prevailed against them.

As Sir John came in sight the vials of St. Leger's wrath were poured out upon him.

"So these are the allies you swore would be faithful to the death, Sir John? These are the troops with which we could march through the Valley of the Mohawk, depending upon their fidelity?"

That he should be reproached with what he was powerless to prevent, and when his intentions were of the best, aroused the baronet's rage, and he retorted:

"With a commander who had pushed forward the siege with greater zeal, they might have remained. You have been lukewarm in your work, and the Indians no longer have that confidence in your abilities which soldiers need in order to be successful."

"You do well to charge me with anything of that kind! You who was so certain of these redskins! What have you done towards forwarding the work? Are these saps of your

devising? Have your men shown anything but cowardice, although they are seeking to recover the property which has been wrested from them? Have you no power over those whom you claimed would make such faithful soldiers?"

Sir John attempted to reply; but his rage was so great that the words refused to come at his bidding.

One of his friends, a Tory in the uniform of a captain, whispered to him, evidently making some suggestion which he thought best to act upon.

Turning his back on the commander with a gesture which told that the rudeness was intentional, he spoke to the sachems nearest:

"I have said many times, and I now repeat, that if the men hold their grounds we cannot be dislodged from our position. Force your warriors to return, and we will prevent the reinforcements from gaining the fortification. You shall have both plunder and prisoners if you hold your ground twenty-four hours longer!"

"At the pow-wow it was said we must go," one of the sachems replied, gravely — indifferently, Peter fancied.

"Will you turn your backs on the enemy? Will you be frightened away before the cowardly Yankees have even so much as shown themselves? I will lead you on; I will stand in the thickest of the fight —"

"It has been said in the pow-wow," was the sullen reply.

"The savages are cowards; they have learned it from your own troops," Colonel St. Leger cried, and again he ordered that a company of British soldiers be summoned.

Sir John was about to make an angry retort, when the sachem nearest him suddenly screamed:

"They are coming! They are coming!" and darted off as if terror-stricken, those nearest following his example.

Sir John was in his shirt-sleeves ; but he did not wait to make his toilet.

The fever of fear was infectious, and almost before Peter could realise what had been done, the brave baronet was running after the rabble of savages as fast as his legs would carry him.

Bewildered by the success of what had seemed at the best a poor scheme, Peter looked toward Colonel St. Leger, expecting to hear the commander repeat his order to shoot the fugitives ; but even that gentleman was stricken with the same disease, for all Peter could see of him was the ends of his coat-tails amid a tangle of foliage, and the doughty soldier who had been so free with his epithets of "coward," was numbered among the rabble.

An instant later it was as if every person in the encampment was doing his utmost to lead the retreat. No one stopped to make preparations ; arms, personal property, rations to sustain them during the flight, were alike forgotten—the army had become a disorderly, terror-stricken mob.

The Oneidas continued the cry which had been raised by the sachem, and the terrifying words, "They are coming ! They are coming !" rang in the ears of those in the rear, causing them to make yet more desperate efforts to outstrip their fellows.

It all seemed like a dream to Peter as he watched this formidable force disappear, fleeing from a danger which had no other foundation than the story of a fellow whom all had considered an idiot.

It was the twenty-second of August ; when the sun rose that morning he looked down upon an army well-nigh victorious, and before he reached the zenith, the victors were

vanquished while yet the reinforcements intended for that half-starved garrison were lying at Fort Dayton, waiting until their number should be sufficiently large to warrant their advancing against a force that had been dispersed by an idiot's story.

"They have really fled!" Peter exclaimed, as if unable to credit the fact.

"Yes, lad, and what is better, have left such a store of military equipments behind that Fort Schuyler will be the best armed and most generously provisioned fortification in the possession of the Continentals. But why are you standing here? It is your right to carry the glad news to the garrison, and you alone shall do it. These few stragglers will pay no attention to your movements."

"But our friends must have seen what is going on, and will soon come out."

"Have you forgotten that the enemy's line is screened from view of any one in the fort? Even if a portion of the retreating men were seen, Colonel Gansevoort would have good cause to believe it a ruse to draw him on, and refuse to fall into what must look like a trap. No sane man could believe what has been accomplished this day, without he had the evidence of his own eyes. Find something to serve as a flag of truce, and show yourself. Remember that unless proper precautions are taken, you will be thought an Indian."

Peter looked around hurriedly for something white, but nothing could be seen in the immediate vicinity.

Sir John's tent was but a few yards distant, and, without knowing to whom it belonged, he entered.

The baronet's gorgeous uniform coat was hanging on one of the poles, and Peter seized upon it as a trophy, the second garment Sir John had left behind him during the siege.

An open portmanteau was upon the camp-bed, as if its owner had been on the point of making an elaborate toilet when he was alarmed by the news of the Indians' defection, and from it Peter took the first white object that met his gaze.

It was one of Sir John's shirts, and, so the boy thought with grim satisfaction, would serve admirably as a flag of truce under which to tell the story of its owner's sudden and needless flight.

With the red coat over his arm, and waving the shirt high above his head, Peter strode forward, trembling with the excitement caused by the wonderful news he had to impart.

On, past the trenches from which the screaming shells had been sent into the fort with such deadly precision; past the pits where the sharpshooters had sent their leaden missiles into the hearts of the brave defenders; past the outermost of the enemy's lines, until he heard from the walls of the fortification the command:

"Halt where you are, or I fire!"

Peter obeyed very quickly, understanding how soon the threat would be executed if he continued to advance.

"Will you ask Colonel Gansevoort to come to the wall?" he cried.

"Want to demand our surrender agin, eh? St. Leger needn't trouble his head about us; we'll take care of ourselves!" the sentry replied, and Peter knew the speaker was hungry at that very moment, with no more than half a dozen rounds of ammunition in his horn and pouch.

"I have good news —"

He was interrupted by the appearance of the commandant, who, having heard the parley, had mounted the wall, and on seeing him Peter cried, excitedly:

“Colonel Gansevoort! Colonel Gansevoort, the Britishers have run away and left everything behind them! Open the gates!”

“Who sent you with such a message?” the colonel asked, angrily.

“Don’t you know me? I’m Peter Kirkland! Thomas Spencer is back there with some Oneidas who came up with us from Fort Dayton. The Britishers have been frightened! Here’s Sir John’s coat, and he is running for dear life, with Colonel St. Leger close behind him!”

It is not strange that Colonel Gansevoort believed his foes were trying to make sport of him. The story seemed the wildest that could have been invented at that time, when he knew the enemy to be on the verge of victory, and he made an angry gesture as he replied:

“That flag will protect you only so long as is required for you to get back to your lines! When you are there, tell Colonel St. Leger that such childish tricks are unworthy a soldier.”

“But, Colonel Gansevoort, I am really Peter Kirkland! See, I have no weapons — nothing but this coat and shirt! Let me come to the gate, and send Serjeant Fonda there; he will know me although I am in such a rig.”

It is doubtful if even this appeal would have been heeded had not Spencer stepped out in full view as Peter ceased speaking, and cried:

“That boy is Peter Kirkland, and he tells the truth! There is neither British soldier, Tory, nor Indian, save four friendly Oneidas, in this encampment. The story seems wild, Colonel Gansevoort, but it is true. I am Thomas Spencer; the ruse which has succeeded so well was devised by General Arnold, and we have come in this disguise to

assist in carrying it through. Let the boy advance to the gate as he proposes. Surely you are not afraid of an unarmed Indian, and a counterfeit one at that !”

The colonel disappeared, and, believing he was at last convinced, even though the story seemed incredible, Peter advanced, waving both coat and shirt in transports of joy.

He was not ten paces from the gate when it was flung open, and the first person he saw was Serjeant Fonda.

The veteran had not heard the conversation ; but hurried to the gate when he saw it being opened in order to learn what was going on, and, as a matter of course, was very much surprised, and perhaps a trifle alarmed, at seeing what he supposed to be an Indian rushing towards him eagerly.

Stepping back quickly, Serjeant Fonda drew the huge pistol he always wore in his belt while on duty, and was about to discharge it, when Peter cried :

“ Don't you know me, Serjeant. I'm Peter Kirkland !”

The veteran recognised the voice instantly, and cried, as he clasped the boy in an embrace so energetic as to be almost painful :

“ Lad ! Lad ! Lad ! Is it really you, whom I had begun to despair of ever seeing again ?”

“ Indeed it is, serjeant, and — but I must first report to the colonel,” and with no slight show of confusion because he had so nearly forgotten what was due the commandant, he turned towards that officer, saluting him ceremoniously.

“ If you are really Peter Kirkland, then there can no longer be any doubt as the truth of the statement you made before advancing beyond the trenches ; yet I am unable to so much as guess what can have occurred to bring about such a happy change in the position of affairs. Are reinforcements coming to our relief ?”



“DON'T YOU KNOW ME? I'M PETER KIRKLAND!”

“Not for some time yet, sir. General Arnold was sent to Fort Dayton for that purpose; but he did not think it prudent to attempt to make his way through the swamp until his force is very much larger.”

“Then why has Colonel St. Leger retreated when his work was well-nigh completed?” Colonel Gansevoort asked, in perplexity.

“Shall I give you all the particulars of the affair here, sir?”

“Certainly, my boy. That which you bring is good news indeed, such as my brave fellows are sadly in need of, and it is due them that they hear all the particulars immediately.”

By this time Spencer and one of the Oneidas were seen advancing at a leisurely pace, and those who had heard the conversation between Colonel Gansevoort and Peter raised the cry that the enemy had fled; but not a man moved from the spot while the boy was telling his story, and it is safe to say that every member of the garrison, not acting as guard or sentry, was where he could hear the strange tale.

Peter told the glad news with no slight amount of detail, and, when he finished, Thomas Spencer said, gravely:

“It was well the boy should give you the story, men, and for this reason: When we at Fort Dayton knew that General Arnold would not attempt to move forward until more recruits had joined his force, we believed there was no longer any hope for you. Then Peter Kirkland considered himself abused because I tried to prevent him from endeavouring to make his way back to share your fate, rather than have you think him willing to remain in a place of safety while his comrades were in so much danger. When I proposed to him the perilous experiment of coming among Thayendanegea's warriors in this disguise, he was overjoyed, although

I warned him of the result in case he was detected, and his friend, Joe Sammons, was left behind, sorrowing that he, also, could not join what seemed only a forlorn hope. With such boys as these among you, it is not surprising you have held Fort Schuyler against great odds, and were willing to face a most horrible death rather than surrender."

Then Serjeant Fonda caught Peter up in his arms, as he began to cheer, and the boy was held aloft by first one soldier and then another as all shouted and yelled like crazy men, until it seemed to Peter that he had been passed entirely around the garrison.

Not until this had been done, and every member of the force had screamed until he was hoarse, did any one make a move towards taking possession of the evacuated lines, although the majority of the men were absolutely hungry.

Never had Peter passed an evening so full of joy and festivity. He surely had all the praise he could have desired, for it seemed as if his comrades would never tire of discussing the part he had played in the odd, but successful ruse.

One of the Oneidas had been sent back to Fort Dayton by Spencer to carry the good news, and, before the close of the second day, Peter and Joe were together once more.

The final triumph for Serjeant Fonda's pupils occurred during this second evening after the retreat of the British.

Under Colonel Gansevoort's orders the garrison was drawn up on the parade-ground, and there, with Spencer, Peter, and Joe beside him, the commandant told again what the soldiers had heard so often, of the loyalty to the Cause, the devotion to their country, and the soldierly qualities displayed by the youngest recruits in the fort.

In concluding, he said :

“If these boys had had sufficient military training, I should use all my influence to have them given commissions as officers, even though, I have no doubt, they prefer to remain with the comrades in whose behalf they have rendered such signal service. In due time, however, thanks to the instruction which shall be given them by Serjeant Fonda, all difficulties in the way of promotion will have been removed, and then I promise, as I know you wish me to, that both shall be fittingly rewarded for the part they have played during the siege of Fort Schuyler.”

An able historian, writing anonymously regarding the siege, says :

“Compared with the more extensive conflicts of the Revolution, that in defence of Fort Schuyler must appear insignificant ; but as a desperate and heroic struggle—fierce and bloody beyond parallel—and as a terrible blow to the plans and prospects of the crown, it deserves, together with its heroes, famous and nameless, who laid down their lives before the invading foe, a prominent and enduring place in the chronicles of our forefathers’ heroism.”

THE END.



This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred
by retaining it beyond the specified
time.

Please return promptly.

