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THE BOY SCOUTS

AS

FOREST FIRE FIGHTERS

BY

SCOUT MASTER ROBERT SHALER

AUTHOR OF "boy SCOUTS ON THE SIGNAL CORPS," "BOY SCOUTS ON
PIONEER CAMP," "BOY SCOUTS OF THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY," "BOY
SCOUTS OF THE LIFE SAVING CORPS," "BOY SCOUTS ON PICKET
DUTY," "boy scouts OF THE FLYING SQUADRON," "BOY
SCOUTS AND THE PRIZE PENNANT," "BOY SCOUTS OF
THE NAVAL RESERVE," "BOY SCOUTS IN THE SADDLE,"
"boy SCOUTS FOR CITY IMPROVEMENT," "BOY
SCOUTS IN THE GREAT FLOOD," "BOYSCOUTS
OF THE FIELD HOSPITAL," "BOY SCOUTS
WITH THE RED CROSS," "boy SCOUTS
AS COUNTY FAIR GUIDES," ETC.

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The Boy Scouts as Forest
Fire Fighters.

CHAPTER I.
oakvai^e's one wise man.

"Don't believe in it, I tell you ! All a hum-
bug! No boy of mine will ever fool away his
time strutting around and wearing soldiers'
clothes when he ought to be doing his chores
at home ! Take that from me, young fellow !"

"But Mr. Prentice, if you care to ask any
one of the best citizens of Oakvale "

"Foolish of them to be so blind, I tell you,
boyr

"There's Mr. Hayward, the minister, sir!"

"'A good man, but an easy mark all the
same !"

"And Judge Marshall!"

"Surprised to hear that a long-headed man

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like the judge should allow his name to be
used in connection with such utter foolish-

ness. If he had boys of his own instead of three girls he might see things in a different light/'

"There's Dr. Kane, and— well, the father of every one of the thirty boys in the troop. In fact, Mr. Prentice, I think you're almost the only prominent man in or around Oakvale who hasn't enthusiastically endorsed the local scout troop, which they believe has made good."

Perhaps this little shaft of flattery told. At any rate the man called Mr. Prentice allowed a glimmer of a grim smile to flit across his stern face as he observed:

"All I can say then, Hugh, is that the prominent men of this section are a short-sighted lot when they allow themselves to be so easily led by the nose, and humbugged by a parcel of prank-loving boys!"

Billy Worth nudged the leader of the Wolf Patrol, Hugh Hardin, in the side. He acted as though it might be on the tip of his tongue to say something saucy; but for fear he might thus injure the cause Hugh was so manfully representing, Billy managed to remain silent.

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Hugh made a final appeal, as he saw the man was about to leave them.

"But surely, Mr. Prentice, you must have heard some good things said about the scouts, haven't you?" he asked, with one of his most persuasive smiles ; which, however, in this case, seemed to be wasted on the one-idea man.

"Oh ! yes," carelessly replied the other, gathering up his lines preparatory to starting his horse, "a lot of wonderful stories have come floating over to my house, but I set most of them down as exaggerations. When I was a boy I read the 'Arabian Nights,' 'Baron Munchausen,' 'Sinbad the Sailor,' and 'Gulliver's

Travels.' I know how proud fathers like to boast of their smart sons. I've had my eye-teeth cut, Hugh. You're a clever lad, I know, but if you talked until doomsday you couldn't change my mind about the folly of this Boy Scout game."

He spoke to his horse, and the two boys saw him go down the road in a cloud of dust, for it was the driest fall ever known about Oakvale.

Billy Worth — ^who was a pretty ample sort of a boy — a good-natured expression on his

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face most of the time, doubled up like a hinge, so far as his girth allowed, and seemed to be quivering with mirth.

Hugh Hardin was shaking his head as though he fancied he had run across about the hardest nut to crack of all his experience.

"What is there so funny about it, Billy ?'^ he asked, for he was thinking how sorry he would be to report an utter failure to poor Addison Prentice, who was really wild to join the scouts, and had begged Hugh to intercede with his parent for him.

"I'll tell you,*' gasped Billy, trying hard to catch his breath. 'When you said he was the only prominent man around here who didn't think the scouts worth their salt, he had nerve to say he pitied them all for disagreeing with him. He made me think of a story I heard long ago.*'

"Well, go on and tell it,'" said Hugh, "for I know you'll not be in shape to talk straight again until you get it out of your system."

"Oh! it was only that chestnut about an Irishman who was on a jury that had to be discharged because they could not come to any

agreement after being out ever so long. When

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some one asked him what was the matter he vowed he had never run across eleven such pig-headed men in his life; and that he was the only sensible member of the whole jury. Hugh, that stubborn Irishman is Mr. Prentice/'

"I guess you're pretty nearly right, Billy; but don't think I've given up trying to influence him on that account. Opposition only makes the game more worth playing. Something seems to tell me that we'll make Mr. Prentice see a great light one of these days."

"That's the ticket, Hugh! 'Never give up the ship !' is our motto. We'll try and get up some scheme to prove to Addison's dad that he's barking up the wrong tree when he thinks the scouts are a shiftless lot, who've got a reputation that hasn't any foundation in fact."

The boys were some little distance outside of the town of Oakvale when they had this conversation with Mr. Prentice, who owned the big quarry toward which he was heading when stopped on the dusty road by the chums.

Oakvale was proud of its troop of Boy Scouts, and justly so. If you do not know why this should be, it may pay you to secure a few

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of the previous volumes in this series and read what some of those boys had done to gain such an enviable reputation among the thinking people of the neighborhood.

Even a glance over the titles of these books will show the extent of their activities in the time that had elapsed since the troop was first organized. As Hugh and his comrades went steadily on their way as the weeks and months crept by, they were constantly finding numerous opportunities to add to the esteem in which they were held by the community.

Well had they proved the vast advantages which scouts have over ordinary, unattached boys in a country town. Organization had done wonders for many of the members of the troop. There was really not a single family in Oakvale a member of which wore the khaki of the troop but stood ready to openly declare that a most radical change for the better had followed since "Tommy joined the scouts."

Hugh had received the proper credentials from Headquarters to be an assistant scout master; and sometimes during the temporary absence of Lieutenant Denmead, a genial, retired army officer who had willingly assumed

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that office because of his love for boys, Hugh filled his place acceptably.

If Mr. Prentice had not been one of the most stubborn men alive, and if he had been open to conviction, he certainly would never have closed his ears to the stories that were told of the doings of these Oakvale scouts, and proven to be absolutely true.

Why, only on the preceding spring several of them chancing to visit Lawrence, a town many miles away, during the great freshet which culminated in a disastrous flood, had aroused the dormant local scout troop, almost

dead from lack of appreciation, and performed prodigies in the way of saving distressed families caught in their homes by the rising waters.

Then Hugh, on that same visit, had actually saved the life of a reckless boy who ventured onto a bridge threatened by the flood, snatching him off after he had fallen and become, senseless just before a floating tree carried the structure down amidst the boiling waters of the torrent.

Later on when they were in camp near a large cement works it happened that there was a strike by the hundreds of foreign workmen.

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and the guards who had been brought from the city to defend the strikebreakers fired upon them.

As a result a dozen and more men, yes - and women, too - among the ignorant foreigners received serious gunshot wounds. Hugh and some of his chums hurried to the spot, organized a rude field hospital, and looked after the injuries of the wounded in a manner that called for high praise from the Red Cross surgeon coming on the field later on at the summons of Hugh Hardin.

For this great service, and for saving lives at the same time, every scout who had taken a part in that work now proudly displayed the coveted bronze medal which is sent from Scout Headquarters in New York City to any boy wearing the khaki who saves a life. Hugh was also the possessor of a gold medal, because he had saved that lad from the doomed bridge at the extreme risk of his own life.

Then, to come down to a period only a short time back, in the early days of the present dry autumn, the scouts had served as guides at the yearly County Fair in the vicinity of Oakvale. They had met trains, directed visitors to board-

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ing places, answered innumerable questions, run errands, taken telegrams, and last but far from least, rendered first aid to the injured to a considerable number of persons who came to grief among the jostling throngs that visited the Exposition grounds.

(What else Hugh and some of his nearest and dearest chums managed to do during that time will be found narrated in the pages of the preceding volumes ; and they should afford interesting reading to all who are concerned with the education of boys along other lines than those connected with ordinary school Ufe.)

Hugh and Billy. walked slowly on after their meeting with Mr. Prentice, which had been an accidental one. They saw that he had stopped his horse a little further along the road, and appeared to be examining some part of the hillside, since his extensive quarry ran for a quarter of a mile along the road.

The boys had climbed up the slope and were standing by the little narrow-gauge track down which cars loaded with stone were allowed to drop, checked by a brake, to the base of the hill, where wagons came and went.

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This track crossed the county road at a certain place below where the two boys were

standing. In reality it was a dangerous thing to allow, but during working hours the quarry company always kept a signal man there to see that vehicles were warned to keep back, whenever a car came down the almost level incline. An overhead trolley drew the empty car back up the rise again.

^Why, isn't that a queer thing how that wagonload of children has gone and stopped right on the track of the stone chute!*' exclaimed Billy, suddenly. "My stars ! they must have got a wheel caught in the track somehow, for the horses don't seem able to drag it off worth a cent. It would give the children a bad scare now if one of those stone cars started down the hill, eh, Hugh?"

*It's to be hoped nothing of the kind happens," said Hugh, "though with the brake set the man on the car could stop it easily enough. I was just wondering who those children are, and I've guessed it. They come from the orphan asylum."

"Yes, that's Sim Reeves' rig, of the town livery stable, and he's a good-hearted man, so

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I guess he loaned the wagon and driver just to give the poor kids a little outing on this fine Saturday afternoon. But I wish they'd hurry and get that wagon moving, for as sure as you live there's a car loaded with stone starting slowly down the incline jtiow/'

^^Yes, you're right/' said Hugh, thrilled by the thought of a catastrophe overtaking those innocents below.

"The man on it can't see that there's anything wrong down at the crossing," cried Billy in great excitement. "He will soon, and put on the brakes."

While Billy continued to keep his eyes glued

on the coming car, Hugh on the other hand allowed his gaze to roam around. He even took several steps over to one side as though measuring the distance separating him from the track at a certain place.

All at once Billy gave a shriek.

"Hugh! look! look! the brake's given way! There goes the man jumping for his life, and listen to the children screaming, will you? Hugh, can't we do something? It'll get going faster and faster, and— oh! Hugh, the poor, poor kids!"

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CHAPTER II.

WHAT PRESENCE O[^] MIND MEANT.

While Billy Worth was talking Hugh was acting. That seemed to be a chronic habit with the scout master. An emergency never caused him to quail, and as a rule he could be depended on to do the right thing at the right time.

That was where the benefit of his preliminary look around came in. The very second that he discovered the accident to the descending stone-laden flat-car, Hugh knew that it was up to him to do something in order to save those imperiled orphans from a terrible calamity.

The car was on a run of the track that was very nearly level, so that as yet it had not attained the very great velocity sure to follow, after it came over the crown of the rise, just above where the two boys stood.

Hugh stooped and caught hold of a small log that he had noticed when he made his movement in the direction of the track. It took all

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his strength to lift it up, and Billy would have been of great assistance could his wits have served him as speedily as was the case with the scout leader.

With a tremendous effort Hugh raised the log and hurled it upon the track. Just as he intended it should do, it fell with one end braced in a cavity, and the other pointing upwards. When the onrushing heavy car struck that obstruction, it could not very well go any further, but must be hurled from the track.

All this happened almost in a breath. The car had now reached the edge of the steeper descent, and was seen by the frightened children below. Some of the youngsters were being flung from the wagon by the driver, but there would never have been time to have saved them all before the constantly increasing speed of the runaway car brought it upon the trapped wagon.

The horses, as though conscious of their peril, pranced and jumped wildly, but for all their antics did not seem able to release the imprisoned wheel. As for the children they shrieked louder than ever, for the anticipated danger had become a real one.

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Billy began to realize that his more active chum had done something while he was only standing there shivering. He also found

Hugh's hand gripped on his arm, and that he was being dragged hastily back from the track.

'Oh!" gasped Billy, as with a rush and a roar the laden stone car came speeding down the incline.

Hugh held his very breath in fear lest the uptilted log might not project far enough to catch the base of the heavy car. But it turned out all right.

There was a mighty crash when car and log came in collision, and Hugh saw the descending vehicle of transportation flung bodily aside. It landed in a heap upside-down - something of a wreck, with the rocks scattered in all directions.

Billy tried to shout, but his best effort was hardly more than a whisper, such was the reaction that instantly set in when he saw the danger to the orphans was a thing of the past.

He did manage to seize Hugh's hand and pat it tenderly, as though in that way he could find an outlet for the mingled emotions of gratitude and pride that filled his loyal heart

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Some scouts might have immediately hurried down, to allow themselves to be made heroes of by those who had witnessed this presence of mind on the part of the boy. That was not Hugh Hardin's way.

^'Go down if you want to, Billy,'" he told the other, when importuned to descend to the road. "They've managed to get a lever under the wheel now, and pried it loose, so they can go on. I want to see just how the car struck, and how close it came to passing over the log without connecting."

That seemed to be the point giving him the greatest satisfaction; for he found that had the

stout little log been six inches shorter, it would have failed to thro>;^ the car from the track. What that meant made Hugh shiver as he looked.

"Here comes Mr. Prentice up to see what happened!" exclaimed Billy.

"There's one thing this accident may bring about," remarked Hugh, "and that's a change in this grade. The stone cars should never cross the road at all, but go over or under it. When the town coimcil hears about this new

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trouble, mark my words if they don't make him change his grade/'

'It would be just like him to blame you for smashing his car, Hugh," said Billy, who apparently did not entertain a very high opinion of the owner of the big stone quarry.

"Let him !" replied the other, unconcernedly. "The driver of the wagon must have seen all that happened. I'd be willing to go on record for what I've done. Still, knowing the kind of a man he is, I hardly expect to be thanked for saving him from a lot of lawsuits that might bankrupt him; or perhaps even being accused of criminal carelessness in a coroner's court."

Mr. Prentice came climbing hurriedly to the scene of the wreck. There was an awed expression on his face in place of its habitual stern look. The man who had jumped from the car when the brake gave way, and who was an ignorant foreigner, reached the spot about the same time.

The owner of the quarry examined the remains of his heavy car. Then he looked at the track, and discovered the partly broken log projecting upward.

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^'Who put that log in there?''* he asked.

"I did, Mr. Prentice," answered Hugh, modestly but firmly ; ''but only when I saw that the car was heading downward, and that it would likely strike the wagonload of children stalled on the crossing."

Mr. Prentice did not say another word. He looked hard at the boy, who did not allow his eyes to drop a particle. Mr. Prentice was thinking many things just then ; his mind must have been in a riotous condition.

He went back and again looked around at the scene of the wreck, up the hill, then down to where the wagon had been stalled.

"I guess he understands pretty well what a great thing you did for him when you jumped that car off the track, Hugh," muttered Billy, as they watched the quarry owner moving around, and talking with the man who had abandoned the runaway car on finding the brake had given way.

"All I'm hoping is that he makes up his mind now never to drop another load of rock down this grade till he's made it safe for anyone passing on the county road below," Hugh replied.

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"But he didn't even thank you, Hugh/'

"I never expected he would, and it doesn't matter a particle to me if he keeps on forgetting to,*' said the scout master, smilingly. "There's enough satisfaction in knowing you've done your duty, without looking for thanks or praise. The feeling that comes from within beats any outside commendation all hollow, according to my way of thinking."

"Huh ! I'd just like to tell the old man what I think of him," grumbled the indignant Billy.

"For fear you might be tempted to say something you'd be sorry for afterward," remarked Hugh, "suppose we slip down to the road and head for home."

Though still grumbling, and evidently feeling pretty hard toward Mr. Prentice, Billy could not refuse to keep his chum company as the other started down the side of the hill in the direction of the road. He looked back several times, however, and said a few things half under his breath, which could not have been very complimentary to the quarryman, if the sour expression on Billy's round face stood for anything.

Once down at the crossing the scouts stopped

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to exchange a few words with the man who was stationed there to signal when a car was coming. He, too, chanced to be a Pollock and could not talk English very well, so Hugh looked for himself to see how it happened the wheel of the heavily-laden wagon came to be trapped in the way they had seen, and just at the wrong time.

Then they surveyed the situation so as to see whether it would be possible to build an overhead track, or dig one under the road.

"It can be done as easy as anything," said

Billy, after they had discussed this phase of the question. "You mark my words, this near-accident is going to be the last straw on the camel's back. There's been talk of making him change his grade a number of times ! now it's got to come. And, Hugh, they've got to thank you for ^"

"Oh ! come on, let's be on the hike for home !" laughed the other, shaking his head as if to warn Billy he would not stop to listen to anything that bordered on praise.

Billy was muttering to himself as he followed, this time vowing that he'd see to it Hugh received all possible honor for having

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done a clever thing, in spite of his modesty about owning up to it.

As they entered the outskirts of the town it happened that they came upon a boy who must have seen them from a store near by, for he came running out to intercept the two scouts.

"Why, hello, Addison!" said Billy, giving Hugh a wink as much as to say: "Isn't it queer that you sometimes run across the very fellow you're thinking about?"

"Hugh," said the boy, who was not as robust as he might have been, and had rather a pasty look about his face, which indicated too little outdoor exercise, "tell me, have you seen him yet?"

Hugh knew that he must give the other a grievous disappointment, but he would have to be told some time, and it had better be over with.

"Yes, it happened that we ran across your father up the road just a little while back, Addison, and thinking it as good a chance as any to speak to him about you joining the scouts, I

started in."

"But - ^you didn't have any luck, did you,

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Hugh?'* asked the boy, in a trembling voice, and with a disappointed look on his face.

"Fm sorry to say I didn't seem to convince him just then that it would be a good thing for you to join the troop, Addison," replied Hugh.

The boy drew a long breath. His lower lip quivered, and Billy ground his teeth in sudden anger at the short-sighted policy of a father who could not see how much necessity there was for a boy like Addison to be encouraged to take all the outdoor exercise he could get in order to build up his physical strength, and his nervous system in the .^again.

"I just expected it would be that way, Hugh," he said, presently, "though you do have such splendid luck telling things that I kept hugging a little hope he might look into the matter, anyway. But it's all over now."

"Oh ! I wouldn't say that if I were you, Addison," Hugh told him. "One of the very first things a scout is taught is never to give a thing up until he's exhausted every possible eflfort. And I haven't thrown the job over yet by any means."

Addison tried to smile, but the effort was a

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dismal failure. He looked more inclined to break down and cry than anything else, Billy thought.

"It's nice of you to say that, Hugh, and I'm sure you'll do all you can; but I've nearly lost hope."

"Get that notion out of your head, first of all, I tell you, Addison. I expect to see your father again, and while I can't explain what I mean, still there are certain things working that may make him see matters in an entirely new light. Even Mr. Prentice has had to change his mind a few times in his life."

"Oh ! yes, in a business way, Hugh, but you don't know my father. He's got his notions of how boys ought to toe the chalk line, and nothing that can ever happen will make him look at things differently. It's all up with me, and I'll never be a scout, never!"

"Wait !" Hugh told him, as they separated, "there is still plenty of hope. I'll be working for you, and a lot of the other boys will, too!"

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CHAPTER III.

THE THREATENING PERU..

"Did you ever see such a queer looking sun, fellows?"

Bud Morgan, when he made this remark to a group of other boys, stood on the campus of the Oakvale High School. Besides Bud there were present Arthur Cameron, Dale Evans, Billy Worth, Chester Brownell and Blake Merton, all of them scouts, although not wearing their khaki suits at the time.

"What else could you expect," Arthur went on to say, "when weVe had such a terribly dry fall? Why, the roads are an inch deep with dust right now."

"I guess I ought to know about that," added Dale Evans. "Only yesterday I had a chance after school to go with a party in his car. We made a run of thirty miles in all, heading south, and twice we had to stop at wells to wash the dust down our throats. I never saw anything like it."

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Another boy, who had been hurrying toward the group, came up while this talk was going on. His name was Alec Sands, leader of the Otter Patrol of the scouts.

There had been a time when Alec was a bitter enemy and a keen rival of Hugh Hardin for first honors; but when the latter forged ahead Alec came to his senses, and ever since they had been the best of friends, even chtuns.

"I'm surprised at you, Arthur,** he now exclaimed, which remark of course drew the attention of all the others to Alec, just as he intended it should.

"What for?" demanded the boy spoken to, who had a great reputation among his fellows as a coming authority in things pertaining to surgery.

"Well, in times gone by weVe always looked up to you as a regular weather sharp and prophet; yet here you are agreeing with the rest of this ignorant btmch, and taking it for granted that the dry weather and the dust is the cause for that red sun. You're away off, all of you; it's smoke!"

"Smoke!" exclaimed Billy Worth. "Then,

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as they expected, the forest has been set afire. Is that what you mean, Alec?"

"Well, where there's smoke it stands to reason there's likely to be a fire back of it," Alec told him, a little sarcastically it must be admitted.

*What do you know about it, Alec?" demanded Dale Evans.

"Yes, open up and tell us, like a good fellow," added Blake Merton.

A clamorous circle of eager faces met Alec's eye as he looked around. It pleased him to be the center of attraction, even in such a small matter as this, for Alec had not wholly mastered his love for power, which in the old days had been his besetting sin.

"Well, it was in this way I learned about it," he began, deliberately. "I had occasion to go down to the post office just before school this morning, and there was a crowd of people around police headquarters. I thought the Chief might have been arresting some negro kid for playing craps, or something like that, so I stepped over just out of idle curiosity."

"And what was it all about?" asked one of

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the others, as Alec purposely stopped so as to further arouse their eagerness.

'Why, messengers had come in from up north, asking for help to fight the forest fires that were getting more furious every hour. All sorts of stories were told about farms being burned over, people having to flee in the night with what clothes they had on their backs, and others being trapped in the burning woods.'

The boys exchanged looks of sudden anxiety. It was no laughing matter then, this having a forest fire sweep down upon a little settlement or community, with everything dry as tinder, and ready to burst into flames.

They turned as if by one impulse and looked long and earnestly toward the north. Some of them began to sniff the air suspiciously.

"Say, I do believe the wind's changing right into the north," said Chester.

"And I can get a whiff of wood smoke all right!" added Billy.

"I wonder if the fire can be around Rainbow Lake where we always had our summer camp in the good old days?" remarked another member of the group.

They were not alone in their scrutiny of the

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heavens, for other scholars, girls as well as boys, had begun to notice the distinct odor of smoke in the air, and were commenting on it, showing signs of growing excitement.

"If you look close, fellows,** remarked Alec, who had very keen eyes, "you can see a sort of dull haze low down near the horizon. That's the smoke, and it's heading this way in the bargain."

"Why, you can see it moving like a cloud even while you watch!" declared Dale. "I

wouldn't be surprised if it covered the town like a regular blanket before long and frightened the women folks and children half to death."

"There's something doing up that way, all right," said Blake Merton. "I can just imagine the thick woods that lie all arotmd the base of Old Stormberg in sight of Pinnacle Peak, ablaze."

"Gee! perhaps I wouldn't like to be up there to see the sight!" remarked Billy.

"And to help fight the fire in the bargain," added Alec. "That wduld be more than half the fun for me. I had one experience some years back when visiting some relatives in the

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country. It was a hot old time, too, and we came near losing the farm buildings."

They stood there staring at the horizon toward the far north as though fascinated by the sight of that low hanging but advancing cloud, which all of them had decided must be smoke from the forest fires.

Play was forgotten that morning on the campus. Groups of boys and girls stood about, and talked, and looked. Already the shadow of a possible calamity for Oakvale seemed to have permeated the air. There were no loud shouts heard, and many of the more timid ones even lowered their voices when speaking of the new peril that had arisen to menace the peace of the community.

Long before the bell rang to call them within the buildings the pall of smoke had reached the town, and enveloped it. It looked weird and yellow and threatening. It also caused the tears to come unbidden to weak eyes; and whichever way they looked they could see the housewives of Oakvale standing at their front

gates to exchange comments with the neighbors, equally appalled and alarmed.

"Huh! I don't see how there's going to be

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any lessons to-day with all this excitement in town," remarked Billy, as he heard the summons to indicate that school was about to take up.

"It's worse than the day the circus came to town," suggested Spike Welling, who was another member of the scout troop.

When the scholars had come together in the large assembly hall it could be easily seen that many of them were in a poor condition for study or recitations. Some of the girls looked alarmed, and others had the appearance of being on the border of an attack of hysterics. Home was certainly the best place for them under such distressing conditions.

The principal, Professor Marvin, who was new to the school that year, though already well liked, looked exceedingly grave as he watched the scholars file in to take their accustomed places.

"He's going to make some sort of an announcement, take my word for it," Dick Belamy managed to whisper to Billy, as their heads came close together.

"Gee! I only hope it means we're going to be dismissed for the day," muttered the stout

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boy, "Then there might be some sort of way for a fellow to get up there, and see just what a forest fire looks like."

Professor Marvin stood up, with elevated hand, and you could have heard a pin drop, since the utmost silence fell upon the assembly.

"I have a most important communication to make to you this morning, young ladies and young gentlemen," said the head master, who always made it a point to speak in a dignified way when addressing them. "Word has been received that the forest is on fire to the north of our town, and that there is serious danger of its coming this way. Men are needed to help fight the flames, and it would be folly to try and keep you here in school when no one is fitted for lessons. So I am going to dismiss you for the day. It depends on the weather whether there will be any further session of the school during the remainder of the week."

Some of the boys acted as though they felt like giving a cheer, but something seemed to restrain them. If people were suffering, perhaps being ruined by the spread of the fire, so near Oakvale, it was no time for merriment or exulting over an unexpected holiday.

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In their regular order, just as they had been taught in their fire drills, the scholars filed out of school. There was no confusion, no pushing, and little excitement visible.

No sooner had they reached the grounds than they looked about them, appalled at the changes which had taken place in the short time they had been inside. The smoke cloud had swooped down upon the town with a vengeance. They could see waves of the dense

vapor scurrying along. At times it was hard to see a block away.

Some of the smaller children coming from the kindergarten classes in another school building near by, were crying as they ran along toward home, nor could any one really blame them for feeling frightened.

"Whew ! this beats anything I ever saw before!" Monkey Stallings was saying as he caught up with several other boys. (He had come by that queer name through his great love for acrobatic feats, and one of his favorite pranks was to hang by his toes from the limb of a tree as though he were in truth a simian.)

"There goes a party of fire-fighters off in

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that car!"* exclaimed Billy Worth, as a large touring car swept past, headed into the north, filled with some of the lusty men of the town, all in old clothes as though they anticipated a pretty hard tussle with the fire after they reached the front.

The look Billy cast after them told that deep down in his heart he was wishing he had a chance to hang on behind, so as to get up where things were happening. Billy liked to be in the midst of stirring events, though one would hardly believe it when they observed his build, for he was unusually stout.

"'Guess there'll be mighty little business down in Oakvale to-day," suggested Don Miller, the leader of the Fox Patrol. "There goes Mr. Allison, the grocer, with Mudge, the butcher, in a buggy. As you live, there's our principal. Professor Marvin, crowding in along with them."*

"'He's the right kind of school teacher ; let's give him three cheers when he passes by!"

cried another of the boys.

They did give them with a hearty vim, and the head master seemed pleased, for he waved his hat at them and bowed. Evidently, when

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there was a need of men, Professor Marvin was ready to meet his obligations. He would undoubtedly do his little part in fighting the flames or saving imperiled country folks from being burned alive.

More than ever did Billy wish he could start off. He was trying to figure out whether it would pay to ask some of the other fellows to join him, and get a rig of some sort at the livery stable. They could, in this way, manage to make their way up closer to the raging fires, and see what things looked like, perhaps find a chance to help some of those who were being burned out.

'*If only I could see Hugh now, we might manage to get up a scheme between us,* he was telling himself; and then calling out to the others he continued: "Has any one seen Hugh since we came out of school ?*'

'Yes, I had a glimpse of him running for all he was worth, one boy announced.

"Oh! I wonder what's up?" exclaimed Billy; and then he held his breath in rapture as the bell of the church where they held their meetings began to toll so loudly that the sounds could be heard all over town.

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There were three sonorous strokes, then a pause, followed by three more. And every scout recognized it as the signal agreed on that was designed to be a "hurry call" for the troop to assemble at the meeting place I

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CHAPTER IV.

THE CALL 01? DUTY.

Billy immediately threw his arms around the nearest fellow who happened to be Monkey Stallings.

"Hear that summons, boys !" he cried, as he hugged the other in his overbounding enthusiasm. "It means Hugh has decided that the scouts ought to go up there in a body, and fight the forest fires! Just what I was wishing would happen! When there's anything big going on, we're the boys to get moving."

"Let me loose, you bear!"* gasped Monkey Stallings as he struggled in the enveloping arms of the other. "Do you want to squeeze me to death? Say, you can hug worse than any grizzly that ever came to town. Please don't try that game on me in a hurry again, Billy! Fm too ticklish!"

"Come on, everybody, let's put for the meeting place, and find out what's in the wind!" called Don Miller.

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"I'd say it was sure enough wood smoke, from the way it smarts your eyes/' declared another of the group, though no one laughed at his intended witticism, for they had more serious things to weigh upon their minds.

Boys were seen coming on the run from various directions. All of them converged toward the bell, still throbbing its startling message. The cry of Paul Revere in those old Continental days could hardly have thrilled the hearts of those who lived in Massachusetts villages and hamlets any more than the brazen notes of that bell did the gathering scouts.

Some were in uniform, others not, but that was a matter of very little importance just then. They were wild to learn why this hasty call had gone forth; and hoping it meant a chance to enter the fight against the oncoming forest fire.

Not only boys were running, for girls, women, and some men could be seen hastening toward the church. Like wildfire the news would spread that the scouts were going to take a hand in the game, and somehow people

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had come to place a wonderful amount of faith in Hugh Hardin and his comrades.

True, thirty mere boys could not do much when they tried to pit their puny powers against so savage a thing as a raging forest fire. Still, somehow, those good people had come to feel a degree of confidence in the ability of the troop to accomplish things. Their past history was a splendid one, and on a number of occasions never to be forgotten, they

had attained triumphs that made Oakvale very proud to own them.

So from lip to lip went the cry : "The scouts are going out to fight the fire !" Mothers, who had boys enrolled in the troop, surveyed that dark pall of smoke and turned pale with new apprehension. It seemed as though some frightful peril might be hovering off where those fires burned; and while it was right sturdy men should go forth to assist those in distress, each mother's heart was a battleground of pride and fear as she contemplated the possibility of some disaster overtaking the boy she loved.

The crowd grew in volume as minutes passed. Each scout upon arriving pushed in

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so as to reach the center of the gathering. When Hugh and Walter Osborne, the Hawk leader, came out of the church, they having been ringing the loud-pealing bell, it was a startling scene that met their eyes.

Fully three hundred people had gathered there. The appearance of the assistant scout master was greeted with loud cheers.

"What's doing, Hugh?" cried one eager boy.

"Are we going up to the foot of Old Stormberg?" asked another.

When Hugh stepped forward and held up his hand all these voices stopped.

"There is a great need of help up there, they say," he told them in a ringing tone, "not only to fight the fires, but to save property, perhaps helpless people who have been burned out and are in danger. If we went in a body we might find a chance to make ourselves useful; and so I have decided to ask the members of Oakvale Troop to join with me in the work!"

"Hurrah!"

Scores of lusty voices took up the cheer until the volume of sound rolled along through that entire part of the town. Those women who had remained at home, though still at their

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gates, with aprons over their heads it might be, seemed readily to guess what that vociferous cheer in boyish voices meant.

The scouts were going! Strange how a little thing like that could give them a thrill, but it seemed to all the same.

^'Remember,** continued Hugh, when the clamor which his announcement had caused died away, "it is optional with every one of you whether he goes or not. You can be of great service to those who are in trouble. Still, if any scout's mother does not wish him to be of our party he should stay at home."

"No danger of that happening, Hugh!" called out one boy.

'*WeVe got the right kind of mothers, and they Ve proved it in the past. Count on a full attendance, Hugh!" another informed him, at which there were further loud cheers.

After that it was hardly to be expected that any mother would dream of objecting to her boy going to the front, no matter how her fond heart might be gripped with natural fears. Pride would step in and make sure that the finger of scorn should never be pointed at her boy.

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"Get away home now, fellers/* said Hugh, "and change your clothes. Put on any old suit youVe got, it doesn^t matter what it looks like. With sparks flying around you're apt to have some damage done before we come back. Don't waste any time, but get back here. We start in exactly half an hour."

He knew that every single boy would be on the run, and eager to get back to the rendezvous long before those thirty minutes had expired.

"Another thing!" Hugh called out as they were starting away, "bring canteens along with you if you have them; and don't forget your big red bandana handkerchief above all things, with an old campaign hat that will protect your neck from any sparks!"

There never existed a more excited lot of boys than Oakvale boasted about that time. All over town they could be seen running wildly this way and that, with people trying to ask questions which the hustling scouts were too busy to answer.

By the time fifteen minutes had expired a dozen of them had arrived at the designated meeting place, all flushed and eager. One af-

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ter another the rest came on the run, showing signs of relief at finding they were not too late.

Had any scout been actually left behind on that occasion he would have been the most heart-broken fellow ever seen. The crowd was greater than ever as new arrivals con-

stantly augmented it. A buzz of tongues told that the women were trying to explain how matters stood to those who could not understand what all this excitement meant.

Hugh was keeping count of the boys as they came up. He had them ranged alongside the wall of the church, so that he would know when the full quota had arrived. It pleased him to see how anxious they all were to join their fortunes with the expedition that was about to set forth, bent on a new work of usefulness.

It still lacked five minutes of the appointed time, and yet Hugh believed that every member of the troop who might be expected to gather had done so. Two boys he knew were sick at home, and another was away from town; but the rest were on hand.

"There's no use waiting any longer, Hugh!" called out Billy Worth. "We're all on deck, you see."

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Everybody stopped talking when Hugh was seen to step forward again, and raise his hand. This boy had won the respect of Oakvale through his manly qualities. He had even managed to disarm the enmity of certain boys who at one time had striven to throw every obstacle possible in his path.

"We're going to start off, fellows," he announced, cheerily; "and it isn't too late yet for any one who isn't in good shape to do a lot of work to drop back. Fall in, double file, and we'll be moving!"

Quickly they obeyed. Not a single boy dropped out of line; indeed, just then it would have required a most powerful lever to have dragged any of them aside. They did not know what awaited them up where that billowing smoke came from; possibly it might mean danger, and surely suffering from the

pungent vapor that smarted the eyes, but they believed duty called them, and they were wild to go.

The crowd parted to let them pass through. Other boys who did not belong to the troop cheered them as they walked smartly along, keeping excellent military step.

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There were no inspiring notes of the bugle to cheer them this time, no exhilarating throb of the drum to enliven their steps ; but nevertheless every boy's face was an index to the feelings of his heart, and they shone with delight

On down the street they went, followed by the crowd that seemed bent on seeing the last of them. Never had the scouts presented a more manly bearing, though all of them were shabbily dressed, a few in cast-off khaki suits, others wearing such garments as they could find around home of the kind that it would not matter if they were utterly ruined in the fire-fighting.

Now they had passed beyond the outskirts of the town. The crowd had left them with a parting cheer. Ahead lay the road leading to the region being devastated by the furious flames. Sturdily they set out to walk all the way up to the burning woods in order that they might be of some assistance to those in distress.

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CHAPTER V.

CARRIED TO THE FRONT.

"It's going to be something of a hike for us, I reckon," Billy Worth remarked, as they covered the first half mile of ground.

While Billy's ambition knew no bounds, and he was always ready to attempt any feat which others, who were much more nimble, could accomplish, he was often sadly handicapped by his extra weight. Although the rest of the boys were swinging lightly along, and thinking nothing of the exertion, Billy was puffing like a porpoise. He was also secretly mopping his face with his red bandana handkerchief, which he had knotted loosely around his neck, cow-puncher fashion, a trick most scouts are fond of emulating.

"Yes, and we're all sorry on your account, Billy," ventured Buck Winters. "Hiking never was your best hold. If a prize was offered to the longest sitter, you'd come under the wire a victor every time."

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"It'll be a good thing to cut down your heft some, too, Billy," another scout told him. "Nothing half so fine as sweating it off. That's what all the prize fighters do when they have to get into trim."

"Hugh," called out Alec, for they were not trying to keep any sort of order now, each tramping along with some comrade he had picked out, though not strung out over more

than ten yards of road, "have you been able to learn what sort of a fire it is up here?"

"Only that the woods are ablaze for a long distance," replied the scout master. "Some accounts say the fire front is five miles long, and growing every hour."

"I asked," continued Alec, "because there are two kinds of forest fires. One, and the most terrible, is where the trees themselves are burning, and that means the utter ruination of the whole tract. I've seen miles and miles up in Michigan where only stumps stand up like fingers. I certainly hope that isn't going to be the case here, for we'd miss those woods the worst way in summertime."

"But you spoke of another sort of fire. Alec; tell us about it?" asked Shorty McNeil, whose

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hobby lay in collecting strange plants, and who on that account would be very sorry to see the forest ruined, since he spent much of his spare time under the trees, searching for new varieties of wild flowers.

"Why, at this time of the year," Alec went on to explain, "when most of the leaves have fallen, if a spark drops among them and a fire follows it runs along the ground, eating up all the dead stuff. It makes a terrible smoke, and lights up the sky nights, but it isn't so dangerous as the other sort of fire."

"Which kind would you think this one will turn out to be, Alec?" asked Billy.

"Fd rather believe it was the bush sort, though it may turn out some of the trees are ablaze, too. You see, all sorts of logs lying on the ground, dead stumps, piles of wood cut for fence rails and that sort of stuff gets to going with the rest, so it makes a fierce blaze."

"And with this strong wind blowing it must travel pretty fast at that, I take it," remarked Bud Morgan.

"Look out back there!" shouted Ralph Kenyon, "some sort of car coming along in a big hurry; don't block the road. Perhaps it's the

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Oakvale fire department starting out to lend a hand at putting the blaze down!"

Ralph had once upon a time spent much of his time in the woods. In summer he had hunted for places where patches of wild ginseng or golden rod grew, the roots of which he dug up in season, dried, and sold at a good profit.

Then, too, in the winter, he had been wont to trap all sorts of small fur-bearing animals for the sake of their pelts, which brought him in a fair price when sent to a dealer in the city.

Ralph had seen a great light after he joined the scouts. Nothing could tempt him nowadays to injure an innocent little animal, merely in order that he might increase his savings bank account. He had even grown to enjoy watching them frolic in their native haunts which he knew so well.

While others were thinking wholly of human misery apt to follow this sweep of the fire, Ralph had an aching heart for the wood's denizens who, caught in the trap, were apt to perish miserably.

The tooting of an automobile horn told that the car coming behind them was close to the

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bend they had just recently turned. Warned in time, the scouts crowded to the side of the road and left an open space for it to pass through.

No sooner did they glimpse the car than the boys started shouting.

"Why, it's Mr. Lewis, the liveryman!" one called out.

"And he's got his big rubberneck twenty-passenger car, too!" cried a second.

"Hey ! it's empty, don't you notice, fellows !" came from a third keen-eyed boy. The sight-seeing tourist car came to a stop alongside the waiting boys. The man at the wheel gave them a smile.

"Pile aboard every one of you, like hot cakes !" he told them.

"What's this mean, Mr. Lewis?" asked Hugh. "Have you come after us with your rig to help get us up to the fire lines?"

"Just what I've done," replied the other, heartily. "You boys have done so many fine things for Oakvale that we're all proud of you. We want to do what little we can to help you along. I thought of my car too late to get you in town, but that didn't stop me. Find seats

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all who can, and the rest hang on like grim death. We're going to start now. All aboard.'

*'Those that can't get aboard get a rail!'"

called Billy, who being one of the first to clamber up on the "rubberneck" or sight-seeing car had managed to install himself in a comfortable seat in the middle, where he could not be crowded off.

They were soon going along at a fast clip, the boys giving a shout every time one of the **thank-you-mums" in the road, intended to throw off the water in heavy rain storms, caused them to jolt up and down.

'This is a thousand per cent, better than walking, let me tell you, everybody!" asserted Billy Worth.

'It was a fine idea for you to think of us as you did, Mr. Lewis," said Hugh.

"Save us some hours of hard work, which would leave us in a poor shape to fight fires, I should say," Bud Morgan declared.

"After I drop you as near the fire as I care to venture with my car," the liveryman said, "I expect to turn around somehow, and run back for another load. There will be plenty of men volunteers to come up and work. With

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Oakvale threatened with total destruction, none of the mills or factories will think of keeping their employees on duty, so I ought to pick up a number of loads of fire-fighters/'

"Can't be too many,*" asserted Alec, as though his past experience told him that,

"Whew! but this smoke is no joke, let me tell you!" complained Monkey Stallings, digging his knuckles into his smarting eyes, from which the tears were springing.

"How about it, Hugh," Alec now asked, "are we going to try and beat out the fire or will we put in our time saving some of the

threatened farm buildings? We ought to know all this cotmtry up arotmd Pioneer Lake like a book; and once we get our bearings it'll be easy for us to tell whose place is most in danger."

"In most cases," said Hugh, "as far as I know, when a forest fire gets fully started, and with a wind to drive it on, all the men that could be got together can't stop the spread of the flames. They're bound to keep on jumping ahead with all the sparks blowing until it rains and puts the fire out."

"Then we'll devote our time to helping farm-

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ers, will we?" asked one of the boys, a little note of disappointment discernible in his tone, for he had evidently pictured himself as a heroic figure forcing the fire demon to obey his will.

"The chances are," Hugh told him, "that we'll get all the work we want in trying to protect the sheds, hay-stacks, barns, and houses that are in danger of being devoured by the fire."

"That's correct, Hugh," assented Alec. "Mr. Lewis, I think you're wrong in believing any fire could reach Oakvale. There happens to be a pretty wide open stretch to the north of the town, where we play ball, you remember. It couldn't cross that, as the grass is short, and even boys could beat it out."

"I was thinking of the sparks that would be blown over the houses," said the livery-stable owner. "Look up right now and you'll see signs of them. If it was a dark night you'd never forget the sight."

"Then let's hope those clouds that have come up mean business, and it'll rain before many hours," said Billy, fervently.

They had made rapid progress and must now

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be in the region of the fire. The smoke was worse than at any previous time, and others besides Monkey Stallings had commenced to rub their eyes.

'TU go a little further/' remarked Mr. Lewis, who had slowed down somewhat ; "and when I find a good place to turn FU have to ask you boys to vacate.**

Hugh was doubtless figuring on his plan of campaign. Yes, they did know this region pretty well, which would prove a good thing in this emergency. Had it chanced to be strange to them they would not know which way to go in order to render any assistance; and in consequence their coming would be next to useless.

On the way they had passed a number of houses, and found the women folks the only ones at home, besides the children, when there were any. The men had evidently been drafted to fight the fire raging in so many places in the forests around the foot of the mountain.

Even these women were doing what little they could to save their possessions in case the fire came their way. They were drawing water in all sorts of tubs and other receptacles.

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some even digging ditches on the north side of the farm buildings as though in that Western way they hoped to keep the enemy at a distance.

"Oh! look there!" suddenly exclaimed "Whistling" Smith, a boy whose recognized ability as an imitator of birds had long ago given him this nickname.

"Our first glimpse of the fire line!" said Hugh, as all of them stared hard at what they could see through an opening in the timber bordering the road.

It was true enough. They could watch the play of the flames as they climbed up a tree that may have been dead, for it certainly burned like a torch.

"That looks like business, I'm telling you!" remarked Tom Sherwood, the water athlete of the troop, and who could do almost anything well, since he had both the physique and the quickness of action that are so necessary to success.

"And here's a wider place in the road where by crowding I may be able to make a turn about," remarked the driver of the "rubber-neck" car.

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"Junip off, fellows!" ordered Hugh, suiting the action to the words himself, and making a safe landing.

There was a hasty getaway, Billy turning out to be the only clumsy member of the lot; a slip of his foot just at the instant he sprang causing him to roll over after he alighted. He was seized and dragged to a place of safety by his comrades before the car could back, and run over him.

Mr. Lewis knew how to manage, it proved. He made a couple of turns back and forward, and then had his car facing toward Oakvale.

"Good-by, boys!" he called out to them.

"We'll surely remember this kindness, Mr. Lewis," shouted Alec Sands.

"It was only a pleasure to haul such a fine lot of fire-fighters to the work they mean to tackle," the liveryman replied over his shoulder. "Good luck to you, boys, and mind your eye! Do all the good you can for these poor folks up here, but remember, too, you've got mothers at home, and don't be rash. Avoid the fire-traps, boys!"

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CHAPTER VI.

THE BURNING FOREST.

When the car was lost sight of in the pall of smoke that had settled down over that section of the county, Hugh took it upon himself to explain the plan of campaign which he had mentally mapped out while on the road.

'Whatever we do, fellows," he told the scouts clustering around him, all with eager faces, and perhaps streaming eyes, for that smoke did smart tremendously, "we know there's no use going behind the line of fire. When it's once passed over a place either the damage has been done, or else the farm has had a narrow escape. What we want to do is to keep moving along in front of the fire, so as to try to keep it from ruining some of these people."

"Tell us our duty, Hugh, and you'll find every scout on the job," said Alec.

"I know that without you telling me, Alec," the scout master replied. "Now, to the left

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lies the Heffner farm. I don't think the fire can have reached there so far, though it's heading that way fast. I'm going to take half of your number and strike through the woods here to help Mrs. Heifner. You know she's been trying to make a living for her little family of children since her husband died two years ago. If anybody needs assistance they do."

"Only half did you say, Hugh?" exclaimed Shorty McNeil, in a panic lest some of them be left out of the lively game.

"Yes, because I want Alec with the rest to turn off to the right of us. You know how the land lies, and what course to take to get to old Zeke Ballinger's poultry farm, where he raises squabs, and broilers for the city market. If the fire puts him out of business it's going to ruin the old man, for he barely makes a living now. Do your level best to save his buildings. Alec."

"We certainly will, Hugh, and thank you for trusting me with the job. How shall we divide the troop?" asked the leader of the Otters.

"I'll pick one, and then you do the same,"

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said Hugh. "We'll keep it up till all have been selected. Billy, step over here with me."

Billy felt proud of having been the first choice of the scout master; but he knew very well it was pure personal affection that brought this about, and not any belief that he could render better service than any of the other fellows ; indeed, the more agile scouts were apt to discount all of Billy's efforts, no matter how strenuously he tried to excel.

"I'll take Tom Sherwood," said the leader of the Otters, promptly.

Hugh's second choice proved to be Arthur Cameron, for he knew what a useful member of a rescue party the student of surgery was likely to prove. After that they picked their followers rapidly. It was amusing to notice how each patrol leader made sure to get those of his own command first of all, before turning to others. Still, this was only natural, since they were supposed to know the particular virtues of those with whom they came in frequent contact.

The division was quickly accomplished. Fourteen boys stood back of Hugh and an

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equal number waited to obey the orders of Alec.

The two leaders only halted to make an arrangement looking to a possible combination of their forces later on. If it was found that their assistance was no longer needed at the place to which they had gone, the party thus set at liberty was to hasten to join the other. After that further plans could be arranged; for evidently there would be plenty of work to do all along the line.

"Is that all, Hugh?" asked Alec, who was plainly impatient to be moving.

"Yes, good-by, and hope you have luck!"

the scout master told him.

"Same to you; come along, fellows, we're off!"

One party plunged into the woods on the right of the road, while the other vanished in the opposite direction. Of course neither knew what obstacles they might encounter on their way, or which mission would prove to be the more difficult.

Hugh had chosen to go to the farm of Mrs. Heffner because his sympathies were more strongly aroused in her case. True, old Zeke

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Ballinger was to be pitied, for he had every dollar he possessed invested in that little poultry and squab ranch, and would be utterly ruined if the fire took it. Still, he was a man, after all. A lone widow, fighting to make a living off a small farm for her children, should be considered first of all, Hugh thought.

"Sure you've got your points of the compass right, are you, Hugh?" asked Billy, with the familiarity that years of friendship for the scout master gave him. When there was need of displaying the spirit of a private in the ranks toward his commanding officer, Billy could do it all right; but as a rule he met Hugh as one chum would another.

"I think I have, to the fraction of a dot," replied the other. "I know what a bad job it would be to make a mistake."

"I should say it would," Billy asserted. "If we happened to get mixed up in the woods, and wandered around, first thing we knew we might find ourselves trapped by the old fire, and beautifully singed in the bargain."

"We've heading straight for the Heffner farm," Hugh assured him. "A little further

on we ought to strike the zigzag trail she uses

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to come out on the main road. If Mr. Lewis had carried us on a little further weM have struck the junction."

The other boys were also talking among themselves, but in ^ subdued sort of way. Glimpses of the fire, which they could catch at irregular intervals, inspired them with considerable respect regarding the conflagration. In fact, they felt somewhat awed, to tell the truth.

In the past some of them had passed through queer experiences with Hugh Hardin as their leader, but never one like this, with the woods on fire, and people to be rescued, as well as property to be saved.

'What's that strange humming noise we can hear every little while, Hugh?" asked Jack Durham.

'It's the roar of the fire, as sure as anything," Ralph Kenyon told him before the scout master could say a word.

"But why does it come and go like that?" insisted Jack. Some of the other boys shrugged their shoulders, and listened to once again catch the peculiar sound mentioned.

"The wind changes, or else drops down to a lull," Ralph explained. As he was reckoned

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a clever woodsman, Jack accepted the theory without a protest.

"Ralph is quite right there/' Hugh added.
"If that miserable breeze would only die down, the fires might be gotten under control; but so long as it keeps going it is bound to whip a spark into a flame. If an army of men put the fire out in one place they'd hardly turn their backs before the wind would make it spring up again like magic.'"

"Hang the wind, anyway!" said Billy energetically. "It blows billions of sparks ahead and starts new blazes by the dozen."

"It's only a good thing when you're sailing a boat, Hying a kite, or something like that," asserted Harold Tremaine, the newest member of the Wolf Patrol, he having taken the place of a boy whose folks had moved away from town some months before.

The going was not so very smooth, even in the daytime, for matted bushes often caused them to make little detours, and there were other obstacles which had to be passed over.

"Gee! I'd hate to be trying to run through here at night-time," said Billy, as he caught

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his foot in a wild grapevine and measured his length on the ground.

'With a fire racing after you, eh, Billy ?'* remarked Ralph Kenyon. "It strikes me you'd stand a pretty good chance of being roasted."

"Don't mention such a thing, Ralph, if you

care for my feelings," the stout boy begged him. "I was thinking of some ferocious wild animal rather than of a fire. Hugh, how about that little side road you spoke of; hope we haven't been so unlucky as to miss it?"

"I expect to come on it in another minute or so, unless all my calculations are wrong, and I don't believe they are/' was the confident reply which the scout master gave him.

"Seems to me I can see something that looks like a woods lane just ahead there by that silver birch, Hugh !" spoke up Monkey Stallings, who was with them.

"Good eyes. Monkey !" exclaimed Jack Durham. "That it is."

"Thank goodness !" muttered Billy, who was breathing hard with the great exertions he had been forced to make all this while.

It turned out to be as they said. The cut-off road by which the HeflFners were accustomed

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to come from their farm whenever they started for town lay before them.

"This is something like it/' commented Ned Twyford, as they struck out at a considerably faster gait, once they reached the open ground.

"I should say it was/' Billy said, as though his every word might be uttered in a spirit of sincere thanksgiving.

'We're getting closer to the fire every step we take, Hugh!" announced Ralph, who had been noting all things.

Hugh knew that as well as anybody. It had been giving him considerable anxiety for several minutes past Not that he believed there was cause to fear for the safety of himself and

comrades, because that had not as yet entered into his calculations. He was thinking of the poor woman, who, alone in that burning forest, with her little children, might he striving to fight the onrush of those greedy flames, eager to lick up her scanty property.

The very thought caused Hugh to start off on a jog-trot. He was immediately copied by all the rest, even fat Billy joining in, although the effort made him pant more than ever, so

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that his tongue seemed to be protruding from between his teeth.

"Better stop that old trick of yours, Billy," warned Bud Morgan, noticing this. "Remember once before how you took a tumble and bit your tongue just fierce. Some day you'll nip off the tip entirely, let me tell you."

"Glad you told me. Bud," grunted Billy, who did not take offense easily. "I'd sure hate to be tongue-tied when I go to singing school, or to see the girls."

"Hold your breath, Billy; you'll have need of it all," the other warned him further, and accordingly Billy subsided.

All of them knew they must soon arrive at the Heffner farm. Some, who had been up there before, could picture the place in their minds, and remembered how close the woods came to the buildings on at least two sides. Unfortunately these were the north and west, for the farmer when clearing the land had concluded that the big woods might serve as a sort of wind-breaker in winter, a shield against the extreme cold.

That made it doubly bad under the present conditions. It brought the danger closer to

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the door of the widow. Between the woods and her out-buildings there lay only a strip of ground which bore an orchard; and it was possible that, as usual, heavy grass had been allowed to die there under the apple trees in the fall.

Hugh was considering all these things as he ran ahead, picturing them in his mind, and trying to figure out just what he should set his force to doing first.

As a rule it is the one who can plan ahead who has the better chance of success. Sometimes his schemes may go amiss, but often he saves a vast amount of time by the process. This was Hugh's invariable method of doing things, when the chance offered.

Suddenly Hugh felt a thrill pass over him.

^'Wasn't that some one shrieking, and a kid at that?" demanded Arthur, who kept close to the side of the scout master while they ran.

"It sotmded like it to me," Hugh replied, "though it may have been a pig squealing for ail we know. Let's hit it up faster, boys; everybody let out a kink!"

Of course it was hard on Billy, but he was bound to "keep up with the procession," as he

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called it, even if he burst off every button on

his coat trying.

If the road had not been so very crooked they could easily have seen before this what lay ahead of them. True, the smoke was very dense, and the air seemed to be charged with a myriad of sparks that kept raining down upon them; but at that it was possible to see some distance away.

So fast did those sparks come down that the boys were kept busy brushing them off their shoulders. They also kept an eye on one another's hat, so as to give warning in case any of the head gear began to smoke.

There could no longer be any doubt concerning the nature of those shrill sounds. Every fellow sensed their meaning, and knew that children were screaming, either in sheer fright or under the stress of great excitement as they worked trying to assist their poor mother to save her possessions.

It was fine to see how those lads set their teeth hard together, and endeavored to put on a spurt, as though intent only on coming upon the scene as speedily as possible.

There was no longer any doubt that the fire

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had reached the Heffner farm. They could see it in several directions, and the roaring sound had grown much louder now. It thrilled them through and through. Other experiences in the past may have seemed exciting while they lasted, but all of them had to take a back seat when compared with this dash through the woods to the imperiled farm of the Widow Heffner.

All at once they came out of the copse, and the scene was before them. On one side lay the small farm-house, and back of it the bam and other outbuildings, together with several

stacks, one of them of straw, showing that the fall threshing had all been completed.

Moving figures could be seen flitting back and forth. Hugh instantly made them out to be those of a woman, and one man, together with several partly-grown children. They were bearing pails of water to dash upon the sides of the outbuildings in the hope that in this way they might save them from going.

Even the children had some sort of pans, and were working with all the zeal possible to add their little mite to the soaking process^

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meanwhile crying at the top of their shrill voices.

Uttering loud shouts of encouragement, Hugh and his fourteen followers ran forward to the assistance of the brave but almost distracted woman farmer.

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CHAPTER VII.

AS BUSY AS BEAVERS.

"Leave it to us, Mrs. Heffner/' Hugh told the woman as he reached her side. "You are all tired out with working. Get your children back to the house, and keep them out of harm's way. Well save your property if it can be doner'

She was wringing her hands and very much excited.

"Oh ! I am glad you have come, Hugh, you and your brave friends. Save the place if you can ; it is everything I own in the world. The children would starve if it went. But I must keep on working, for every little bit helps !"

Hugh did not waste another second of time. There was need of haste, for already the fire was creeping along through the dead grass in the orchard, heading straight for the out-buildings, and those stacks of hay. The latter must have caught fire before now only that they were covered by a board shield intended to shed rain.

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The scout master began to give his orders as though he had been accustomed to rtmning a fire engine all his life, and also commanding a squad of fire-fighters.

"Get any sort of buckets or other things to carry water. Start that pump to going as lively as you can. Jack, you begin, and someone spell you when you slacken up. Don't let a fire get started, whatever happens. As soon as you see it smoking, pour water on the place. WeVe just got to fight it off, you hear, fellows!"

"That's the kind of talk, Hugh," said Billy, as he picked up a wash boiler and appropriated it to his own individual use.

Each boy hinted high and low for any kind of vessel that could be used to convey water to the exposed sides of the outbuildings. At another time many a hearty laugh would have greeted the queer appearance of some of the things they managed to scare up. Several even dashed into the farm-house and came out carrying pitchers, kitchen tins and even coal

buckets !

Of course, one fellow at the pump, no matter how hard he worked, could never supply

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such a string of constantly going and coming carriers. Hugh looked around to see whether there might not be other means for securing a supply of the greatly needed fluid.

"Here, Monkey, you and some of the rest run over to the duck pond there and fill your buckets that way. It's not much further than to come to the pump ; and the supply of water isn't going to give out either."

Just then the woman came staggering along with a bucket that she had filled at the pump. She was almost exhausted, and seeing this, Hugh deliberately took her burden away from her.

"I'm going to take your place, Mrs. Heffner," he told her, and when she made a feeble resistance, he continued : "There's a shortage of buckets, and I can't stand around idle \.hile a woman works. Go back and sit down and watch us.'"

One thing Hugh noticed with more or less satisfaction. The children had ceased their wild, hysterical screaming as soon as they saw the stream of boys swarming over the place. They had fallen back, and were observing all that went on with wide-open eyes. Confidence

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had apparently taken the place of fright. With such a small army of willing workers on hand it was quite patent to their childish minds that the fire must surely be beaten back.

Hugh wished he had a little more of that confidence himself, as he saw how the encroaching flames were nearing the outbuildings. He knew that some of them must immediately snatch up old brooms, branches off the trees, or any other sort of smothering article they could secure, and proceed to beat out the flames before they reached the threatened buildings.

Accordingly, he handed his bucket over to one of the other boys, and began to designate those whom he wanted to accompany him in his foray. He was careful to select those who were handicapped in their work by not having the right sort of water carrier. Any with buckets might keep on doing just what now occupied their attention.

In this way Hugh picked out six boys, counting himself.

"Get an old broom or any sort of thing that will be useful in beating out the burning grass!" he told them, and that was the first

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intimation the boys had as to what the nature of their new occupation was to be.

There was not an idle scout to be seen anywhere. Every fellow worked like a beaver. The lone man, whom Hugh had supposed was a farm hand, stopped in his work once or twice to stare at the rushing squads of boys. His face was blackened with the smoke, and while it had struck Hugh that there was something familiar about the other, he had really never

taken a second glance at him.

Hugh did not even wait until all of his bunch had armed themselves with such smothering devices as they could find about the stable. He was already at work at the line of creeping, jumping fire, having selected his point of attack near the straw stack. He pounded, whipped and beat at the fire with all the vim he could muster, even jumping on what obstinately remained, and stamping it out. That stack must not be allowed to come in contact with the fire if it could be prevented through any effort on his part.

Billy was close beside him, having found carrying that wash boiler, even half filled with water, no child's play. He, too, had discovered

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an old stable broom, with which he was belaboring the fire with savage fury, pounding it as though he might have a special grievance against its further encroachment.

When all of the squad became busy, they began to make a noticeable impression on the flames. Baffled, the fiery tongues darted out a few times at the fighters, and then seemed to give up the unequal combat.

It was just as Hugh knew would be the case. Hardly would they turn to another section than the smoldering fire was sure to spring up again. So it kept them busy going back again and again to repeat the whipping, only to have the wind play the same trick on them.

Alone, Hugh could never have managed to keep the fire in restraint, but with such able assistance it was finally subdued in that particular quarter.

This gave them a minute to get their breath and look around at the stirring picture which

often returned to their minds in future days.
Over to the north it was a fearful sight, with
the fire leaping up among some of the trees.
Pines were blazing like great torches, but oaks.

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beeches and other forest trees did not seem to
be affected, the fire being confined to the trash
at their bases, such as windrows of dead leaves,
stumps, logs and anything else in the way of
fuel.

Those farmers who had their winter supply
of wood stacked in the forest waiting for the
first snow so as to haul it on sleds to the house,
stood to lose the entire crop, and would have
to cut anew. Others who had heaps of fence
rails laid by for winter work would also meet
with a complete loss, for the ground fire hunted
all of these things out and made quick work of
them.

Leaving some of the boys to keep watch over
that treacherous grass fire, Hugh hurried back
to see how the rest were getting along with
their work. He stopped at a shed and made a
discovery that pleased him.

"Here, Jack, come and help me get this
spraying machine out V he called to the near-
est scout. "We can fill the barrel at the pond
and drag it over to the house. FU cut the noz-
zle off the hose so a good stream of water can
be forced to the roof, and smother any spark
that drops. It's going to insure a home for

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those poor kids anyway, even if everything else goes up in smoke/'

Jack Durham was only too willing to take hold. He was strongly built, and able to work like an ox. Together they ran the wheeled spraying machine down to the duck pond, and utilizing the first bucket that came along Hugh started to scoop up the water, throwing it into the barrel that was mounted on the two wheels.

When it was two-thirds full, he and Jack seized hold, and with considerable straining and dragging, managed to get it over to the farm-house.

Just as Hugh had said, when he used his sharp pocket knife blade to sever the nozzle at the end of the hose, it was possible to reach any part of the roof with a small stream of water once the pump was set going.

"We'll try it, to make sure first before I leave you in charge. Jack," said Hugh.

A few plunges of the easily worked pump satisfied the scout master that it was all right. He saw a large spark drop on the dry roof of the house near the ridge-pole, and had no difficulty whatever in drowning it out with the stream he turned in that direction, squeezing

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the end of the severed hose in order to make the water carry further.

"You see how it's done, don't you, Jack?" he asked, holding up the hose to display his manner of making the opening smaller, and thus increasing the force of the discharge. "Use it that way when you have to reach the further end of the roof. And step around occasionally to the other side to make sure a fire isn't stealing a march on you. That's all.

The house is going to be saved at all events."

"You just make your mind easy on that score, Hugh," Jack told him. "If my muscles don't go back on me, which they never have as yet, I can pump this thing all day, and stand up under it."

Leaving the other on guard, Hugh once more turned back to other parts of the exciting fire line. He noticed that the hired man was still carrying buckets of water methodically, and it struck Hugh he had been standing by Mrs. Heffner in a way that was worthy of praise. Still, Hugh paid little or no attention to him, for a dozen different things were passing through his brain then, all of which

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had to do with the saving of the farm buildings.

"How long do you reckon this is going to keep up, Hugh?" asked Arthur, as he stopped near the scout master, to mop his face with his big red bandana handkerchief.

"I don't know," replied Hugh. "I hope that another hour at the most will see the worst over with. If we can keep things from going that long it's likely we'll come out all right."

"Whew! but the air's getting mighty torrid, I tell you!"

"That's because the fire's passed us and is moving along on both sides, as well as from the north. We're in the midst of a big burning, and soon even escape to the south will be cut off, unless we feel like running the gantlet. The danger now isn't so much from the flames as from the sparks."

"Yes, they're thicker than ever, it strikes me," assented the other, making several quick slashes at his shoulders, and then snatching

off his campaign hat to beat out a smouldering fire in the crown.

"It'll be worth something to us to save the place for Mrs. Heffner," said Hugh. "I'm

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sure every scout is ready to work till he drops, so as to make her mind easy. Think of those poor kids without a home!"

"We can stand it for another hour, if we have to!"* Arthur declared, and with that he ran off to make up for lost time, rejoining the string that was heading for the pond with their buckets.

Many times did those sharp-eyed boys discover a fire just starting, where a live coal had managed to settle in some snug nook, and the dry wood soon began to smoulder. The dash of a bucket always put an end to these ambitious beginnings, and so the buildings had up to now been kept intact.

Hugh put his hand on the side of the barn. He was worried when he felt how hot the wood seemed to be.

"It wouldn't take much to start things so they'd go with a rush," he told himself, "and a hundred buckets wouldn't hinder the flames."

Just then he heard the children start to screaming again, and the sound gave him a nasty feeling, for he felt that it meant new trouble. As Hugh turned he was dismayed to see the straw stack was on fire, a spark having

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managed to lodge in some exposed part of it, and being unnoticed, had finally communicated its fiery touch to the inflammable material of which the stack was composed.

'That settles it for us, I guess !' one of the scouts was heard to shout, when this new disaster was discovered.

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CHAPTER VIIL

BACK-FIRING.

Giving up was one of the hardest things for Hugh to do. He had been known to work for a full hour over a boy who had been a long time under water, and then found the reward for his persistence in seeing signs of returning life.

Just because the fire had seized upon that straw-stack did not mean they should throw up their hands and cry quits. On the contrary, it offered abundant reasons why they should, every one of them, get busy, and fight to save the pile.

Hugh's voice rang out like the slogan of an old-time Scotch border chieftain, rallying his Highlanders to meet the rush of the foe.

He happened to have a bucket full of water in his hands at the time, and with this he dashed straight at the stack. The flames were already having a merry time of it, and given another minute or so of free play, nothing could

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have been done to save the huge heap of straw.

Indeed, it promised to take all the combined energy of the scouts to fight the inroads of those eager flames, once they had taken hold.

'Beat it, soak it with water, tear it to pieces if you have to, but don't let it get the better of you!*' shouted the scout master.

A number of the boys were attacking the stack wildly. The hired man stood close by and watched operations as though he had never seen anything like it in all his life. Evidently the systematic and determined way in which those energetic lads went at things had made a most powerful impression on him.

Once Hugh, seeing him standing there, called out to him to lend a hand and fetch water if he could do nothing more. The man aroused himself and started to do what he was told.

It was once on the tip of Hugh's tongue to ask the boys if any one knew the man with the blackened face, for something about him seemed strangely familiar, although he could not take the time to figure it out, nor did it matter. As it happened, something arose to divert his attention to another point, and he speedily forgot all about the unknown man.

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Such energy certainly deserved to reap success, and in the end the straw-stack was saved, but it had been a pretty narrow escape.

"The worst of it is," said Hugh between gasps when he felt certain the last threatening spark had been crushed out of existence, "that if this pile had gone there would have been a slim chance for saving any of the other haystacks; and after all of them got to burning we wouldn't have been able to hold the bam back."

"Chances are even the house would have gone up the flue, too," declared Billy, who had worked like a good fellow to assist in the work.

Billy was a sight by this time calculated to excite the laughter of his chums. What, with his own personal efforts, added to the heat of the fire, he had long been fairly reeking with perspiration. Streaks of black ran across his face and made him look like a Fiji Islander decorated for the warpath.

"Talk about the map of Ireland, Billy," one of the other scouts told him, "you carry it around with you."

"He certainly came from somewhere near Cork," remarked another fellow, "because he

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kissed the Blarney Stone before crossing over. Billy can soft-soap you to beat the band. He gets nearly anything he wants/'

"Oh! heaps more than I want sometime," laughed the good-natured Billy.

Having gained this hard-fought victory, the boys felt that they must take a rest before starting in again. Hugh surveyed the field, and tried to figure from which quarter the peril might come next.

"I'm afraid there's getting to be a shift of the wind, Hugh," remarked Arthur, who, being known as a sort of weather prophet, felt it his duty to observe all such things as clouds

and wind.

"That would make it bad for us again," asserted the scout master.

"You mean the fire is bound to strike us from a new quarter if the wind whips around as it's trying to do right now ; is that it, Hugh ?" questioned Arthur.

"It's moving into the northwest," Hugh told him. "Which would bring it across that patch of dead grass that up to now seems to have kept from burning. Then the woods are closer

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on that side, and the heat would be greater on the roofs of the bam and house/'

"Shall we get busy again and try to wet down everything that faces that way?'" asked the other, as though grasping the conditions by which they were now confronted.

"It is the only thing we can do,"* said Hugh.

As soon as he had shouted out the new orders, once more there was a hurry call for the bucket brigade to start operations. Tired though they might be from their late exertions, the scouts never hesitated. The noisy clang of the pump was again heard in the land, and a stream of hustling lads carried water to the new point that was threatened by the insatiable enemy.

Hugh had made a correct diagnosis of the case, for as soon as the wind swung around into the northwest, that dead grass began to blaze up and the fire started to travel swiftly toward the outbuildings of the farm.

Once more the poor widow saw her cherished possessions threatened with destruction. Unable to remain still, she had again joined the throng of willing workers, and was carry-

ing water as best the conditions allowed.

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The hired man, too, staggered back and forth with a bucket. He did not appear to be very strong, but then Hugh, on noticing this, supposed he was tired out from his long-continued exertions. Doubtless they had struggled against the encroachment of the fire for some time before the coming of the scouts gave them new hope.

It was a lively ten minutes they all put in. Those who did not have buckets in which to carry water stamped on the fire, and fought it with brooms or any other like article they could find. Led by Hugh, they defied the flames to approach closer to the outbuildings than a certain line.

Billy was so industriously engaged that he must have overstepped the bounds of personal safety. The first thing he knew he was feeling uncomfortably warm in the rear. Then one of the other fellows gave a shriek.

"You're on fire, Billy! YouVe all ablaze! Stand still, and let me whack you with this broom !'*

"Hey, bend over, and I'll put you out all right!" cried Jack Durham, and immediately following his words he gave the bucket he was

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holding a clever toss that shot its contents all over the fat boy.

"Now you're extinguished, Billy!" he told the other, laughingly, as he ran off to the duck pond.

It was a satisfaction to Hugh to see that they were mastering the new attack of the devouring element. Several times there had been danger of the barn going, for little blazes started up ; but a dash of water finished these.

They could hear a cow mooing wildly inside the barn, and a horse was stamping in his stall, being greatly excited by all this clamor. Hugh had already made up his mind that if the worst came they must see to it that the poor animals were given a chance for their lives; should the barn take fire in earnest, and all hope of saving the building be lost, some one must go inside and lead both horse and cow to the outside air.

Fortunately things did not reach this desperate stage, for the efforts of the hard-working scouts to save the buildings were crowned with complete success.

'Wheel but that was a corking fight, though P gasped Billy, when it was finally safe

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for them to stop their labor and breathe more freely.

"But we won out, as we nearly always did, you noticed!" suggested Harold Tremaine, who had learned some pretty valuable lessons since becoming a member of Oakvale Troop.

"Thanks to Hugh and his way of doing things," added Ralph Kenyon.

"I've done no more than the rest of you," objected the scout master. "Every fellow is

justly entitled to feel that he's had an equal share in the glory."

"There's enough to go around, all right," suggested Bud Morgan. "I know I'm as glad as I can be that we came up here. It's been a picnic fighting the forest fire. If we can't help extinguish it we've helped cheat it out of its prey."

"You have saved me from being ruined, my brave boys," declared Mrs. Heffner, as she looked at the group. "I'll never forget it, never. When my Willie and Ben grow up to be big enough I give you my word they shall also wear the uniforms of the scouts. If this is what your organization teaches you to do

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for others in time of need, every boy ought to belong."

^^They would/' said Hugh, "if their folks only took the trouble to investigate for themselves what was going on. But we're all glad to be here, Mrs. Heffner, glad to be able to help you out. It would have been too bad if you lost your home, after fighting so hard all these years to build it up, and keep a roof over the heads of your family."

"I never could have lived through it again, Hugh," she told him, beginning to cry, now that the danger seemed over, for up to then she had kept up wonderfully.

"What if the wind changed again and swung in from that side over there, Hugh?" asked Arthur just then, pointing as he spoke.

"I hardly think it will," the scout master replied. "But just as you say, there is a little chance, and to make things absolutely sure we must get busy and back-fire."

'What's that P'^^ asked Harold, who had con-

siderable to learn concerning many things connected with outdoor life.

'Why, in the old days out West," Hugh explained, "when a border man found himself

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threatened with a fire near his dugout he would himself apply a match to the dead grass. It would eat its way up slowly against the wind, and by the time the big fire arrived there would be a section burned over. This would serve as a protection to him against the roaring fire, which would pass him by on either side."

"Oh ! I see now what you mean/* commented Harold, who was anxious to learn many of these interesting things, "we will go around starting little fires wherever we can find a clump of dead grass that hasn't been water-soaked, and let them burn as far back as they can. Show me how to do it, Hugh; I'd like to have a hand in this back-firing business. It sounds good to me.'*

The other boys, as well as Mrs. Heffner and the strange hired man, had heard all that Hugh said. No sooner was the word given than a number of them started to run from tuft to tuft of dead grass, applying a firebrand. Where only a few minutes ago they had been trying their best to kill the flames, they were now turning their attention to coaxing them to start up afresh.

. "Fire's all right, and a right good thing,"

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remarked Billy, wisely, "if only you can control it/'

"Yes," said Hugh, "like a lot of other things fire makes a splendid servant but a mighty bad master. We're going to get it to do our bidding now, and clean off the dead grass on the east side of the buildings. Keep a sharp watch so that it doesn't give you the slip and surprise us."

"We need fire to keep us warm, and to do our cooking for us," continued Billy ; and then clapping his hands behind him he went on to add: "But when it bites holes through the only trousers you've got along it is going a little too far, I say. And I might have been roasted if it hadn't been for you. Jack; you saved my life with that bucket of water, even if you did make me feel pretty moist."

"Listen," said Ralph just then.

"What did you think you heard?" asked Hugh, when all of them had strained their hearing for a full minute without catching any sound out of the ordinary.

"I must have been mistaken," admitted Ralph, "but it was like someone calling 1"

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CHAPTER IX.

PETLSR^ THIS BOUND BOY.

"Oh ! what if somebody was caught in that fire-trap, and so mixed up he couldn't tell which way to go?"

It was Billy who said this. Always tender-hearted, the stout scout was appalled at such a dreadful thing happening. They all stood there and stared hard at the smoke-filled for-

est. Here and there flashes of flame could still be seen, and in more than one place a tree burned fiercely.

"Let's hope it isn't as bad as that," said Hugh.

"The people up through this section had plenty of warning to get away, from what I heard," remarked Ned Twyford.

"But some of them would sooner stay and take the chances, just as Mrs. HeflFner here did," Monkey Stallings suggested.

"You could hardly blame them, either," another boy interjected.

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"It's hard to desert your property/' the widow told them, "especially when you've got a family of children to bring up, and no husband or father to lean on. But I didn't dream the danger would be so great."

"You mean," said Hugh, "that if you'd known how bad it was you'd have gone off in the wagon and left things to burn?"

She drew her two younger children convulsively to her.

"Yes, I think I would," she admitted. "The lives of my little ones are worth much more to me than even the farm buildings. But it would have been very cruel to have lost my home just when I was making the last payment to lift the mortgage."

"Hugh! there it was again!" called out Ralph.

The boys of the Wolf Patrol always said Ralph had the ears of a fox. Either through natural causes, or because of the training he had received when trapping small fur-bearing

animals during the winter time, Ralph certainly could catch sounds that were unheard by his mates.

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At this fresh announcement new excitement arose.

"The same sound you heard before, was it, Ralph?" asked the scout master.

"As near as I could tell, it was, Hugh."

"And you think it may have been someone shouting?" continued the other.

Ralph shrugged his shoulders.

"Seemed like it, that's all I can say," he replied.

Once again everybody listened. They could hear the crackling of the flames as the fire seized upon another half-dead pine tree not far away, mounting upward with fierce rapidity.

"There, didn't you hear that?" demanded Ralph suddenly.

Several of the other scouts admitted that they had caught some uncertain kind of sound, though unable to say just what it seemed to resemble.

"It may have been a crow cawing," suggested Jack Durham.

"Or else a dog barking in the woods?" added Bud Morgan.

"Whatever it can be," persisted Ralph, "it's

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headed this way, because all of you heard the cry that time and you couldn't before/'

Hugh turned toward the widow.

*'Who lives nearest to you over that way, Mrs. Heffner?'' he asked her.

"The Bargers — oh ! I wonder if he got back again last night?'' was the answer she made.

Hugh saw that she was looking anxious.

"Why do you say that, Mrs. Heffner?" he asked.

"It's this way," she tried to explain. "Mr. Barger is a widower, and has three children. He doesn't keep hired help but has a bound boy of about fifteen working for him. Poor Peter has a hard time of it because Mr. Barger is a drinking man, and not an easy boss."

"Do you mean that he went away yesterday?" asked Hugh.

"He took a load into town," she replied.

"But surely he had plenty of time to get back home again?"

"Most men would," Mrs. Heffner explained, "but when Mr. Barger goes in once in a while he meets some boon companions, and he usually gets home the next day at noon in a muddled condition."

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Hugh grasped the cause of her alarm.

"You are afraid the three children have been left there with only that bound boy Peter to take care of them ?"* he asked.

"Yes, I'm fearful that is what has happened, Hugh. And think of those poor children in the midst of that terrible smoke and fire. Even if they haven't been burned to death, there's a chance they've been smothered."

All of the scouts had heard what was said. They looked toward the forest with pitying eyes. It was terrible to think of children being lost in those smoke-shrouded woods.

"Can we do anything, Hugh?" asked Billy, looking as though ready to even rush out into the forest himself if Hugh but gave the word.

"Yes, there is one thing that might help," the scout master decided.

"Start out and scour the woods, do you mean?" questioned Harold.

"No, because we might manage to miss them after all," said Hugh. "Let's all join together and give a yell. They're bound to hear it, if what we believe is true, and can head this way. Now, ready!"

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Like every other high school pupil, Hugh had watched the clever tactics of the cheer captain when they fought for honors on the diamond or the gridiron with some rival school.

He knew how to bring out a concerted shout, capable of carrying a long distance, and when they all gave tongue together the result was certainly satisfactory.

"Listen!" warned the scout leader, as the sound died away.

Plainly all of them caught what seemed to be an answering cry.

"It must be that boy Peter," said Mrs. Heffner, excitedly, "he's tried to lead those poor children over to my house, not knowing where else to go. Oh! please help him get here, Hugh! The dear little things, just to think of them being out in those terrible woods."

"Wait a minute and we'll give another shout," said Hugh.

When they did so the response came quickly.

• "Closer than before," said Jack Durham.

"He's getting his bearings all right!" declared Ralph.

"We must keep him posted," added Arthur

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Cameron, "and I hope none of them will be burned seriously. Fm glad I brought that salve along with me. We found it good at other times to take the fire out of burns."

Each time they" sent out that cheering shout it seemed as though the reply came from a point nearer at hand.

"He's coming right along," declared Billy.

"Another call or so ought to do the business," Ned Twyford told them.

"Poor chap," Harold ventured, "it's enough to scare any one, just the thought of being lost in a forest afire."

All of them were scanning the smoky edge of the woods as if they fully expected to see a

party of childish figures issue forth and hasten toward them. It was a very exciting moment, and one those boys would not soon forget.

"I see something moving over there !" called out Ralph.

He pointed as he said this, and every one tried to follow the direction of his extended finger.

"Yes, there is some person coming," ejaculated Bud Morgan.

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"Only one did you say?" cried the widow, as though appalled.

"Seems to be/' Bud continued ; "there, now he's burst out on the open I can see him better."

"Just one perspn?" persisted Mrs. Heflfner.

"Looks like it might be the boy Peter you told us about," said Ralph ; "he's bending over and trying to walk steady but he seems pretty groggy. Yes, that's Peter all right, but he's alone, Mrs. Heflfner."

"Must have cut out for himself, and tried to escape," Jack Durham hinted, with all the scorn in his voice that a true scout would naturally feel for any one who would be guilty of such an act.

"But I wouldn't have believed that of Peter," objected the widow. "He always struck me as a steady, reliable, brave sort of boy. It wouldn't be like Peter to run away and leave those motherless children to burn when the farm-house took fire."

"Look! he's fallen over now, poor fellow!" cried Billy.

"No, he's got on his feet again, and keeps

right along," Jack Durham declared. "Bully for Peter; he's got the grit all right."

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The boy came staggering toward them. He was, indeed, a piteous sight with his clothes burned in many places, his face fiery red from the heat, and his limbs fairly tottering under him.

He pushed aside the tin cup of cold water Hugh held out to him.

"Save - ^the kids - they^re in between the rocks at the Dry Spring-- couldn't fetch 'em any further. Oh! please go,'" and with that Peter collapsed in a heap.

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CHAPTER X.

AT THE DRY SPRING.

'Why the poor boy has fainted !'' exclaimed the widow.

Arthur Cameron was quickly bending over Peter.

*I'll bring him around, Hugh, and look after him," he said. "Do something for the kids out there in the woods. Let me have that tin cup of cold water, please.'"

Knowing that Arthur could be trusted to do

the right thing by the exhausted boy, Hugh turned to Mrs. Heffner.

"Did you hear what he said, ma'm?" he demanded.

"Yes, every word of it, Hugh."

"He must have had the children along with him?"

"Just as I said," she told him. "Peter thought of us because I've been kind to him a few times. He was tr3dng to fetch them here."

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"But they gave out on the way; that's about what I made out he said?" the scout master remarked, with a note of interrogation in his voice.

"Yes, and I really believe Peter must have done the best he could trying to hide them so the fire wouldn't injure the poor little darlings."

"He mentioned a place he called the Dry Spring?"

"We all know that place, and he would have to pass it on the way here from the Bargers' house," Mrs. Heffner explained.

"Do you think I could find it?" Hugh asked next.

She considered for a brief space of time.

"The smoke in the forest might bother you, Hugh."

"Oh ! we'd have to stand for that," was his cheery remark.

"I think I could tell you how to go."

"Then please do it, Mrs. Heflfner," said the scout master. "Here, Jack, Bud and you, too, Don Miller, stand by and listen, because you're elected to keep me company on this trip."

"And how about me?" asked Billy, trying

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to throw all sorts of entreaty into his voice and look.

"YouVe nominated to stay right here and stand guard/' Hugh told him. "Fact is, weVe got to have athletes on this trip, Billy. Now, Mrs. Heflfner, let's hear the directions, please.'"

"First head into the woods where Peter came out," she explained. "You'll run across a stone wall. Keep that to your right. About the time you reach the end of the wall you ought to see the dry bed of a creek. Sometimes in the spring, water runs there, but just now it's as dry as a bone."

"Do we follow the bed of the dry creek?" asked Hugh.

"Yes, all the way. I should say it was all of half a mile before you'll strike the Dry Spring. Once it fed the stream that ran there, but now only the rocks lie there. Peter must have left the Barger children among those rocks."

"We understand, Mrs. Heflfner," said Hugh. "Just tell us on which side we will find the Dry Spring."

"Keep watch on your right as you go from here," she told him, "and while you're gone

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I shall pray that you find the poor little innocents safe and unharmed."

"Ready, boys ?" called out the scout master.

'On deck, Hugh," replied Don Miller, "and I suppose it wouldn't be a bad scheme for each one of us to carry a full canteen of water along."

"A good idea, Don," admitted Hugh. "I have one already, you may notice, but several more can do no harm."

As they were getting these, Hugh noticed that Peter was responding to the treatment of Arthur Cameron. He had come out of his swoon and was eagerly drinking some water from a bucket. No doubt his tongue and throat were parched from his recent experience in the burning forest.

When he realized what Hugh and his several chums meant to attempt, the bound boy started to get upon his feet.

"I'll go along and show you," he said, and Arthur had to catch hold of him; he was so extremely weak through exhaustion and excitement.

"No, you're going to stay just where you

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are/' Arthur told him, severely. "You're not in a fit condition to walk twenty feet."

"But what if they couldn't find the place?'" the boy pleaded.

'We'll get there, Peter, don't you fear,"
Jack Durham assured him.

"Every time," added Bud Morgan.

Billy Worth was not the only disappointed one. Every scout who could not accompany Hugh felt as though he were being cheated out of a treat. They would all have been pleased to belong to the rescue party, but at the same time they had learned the value of discipline, so there was no protest.

The hired man had listened to all that went on. He had watched the business-like way in which Arthur revived the fainting Peter. Apparently the help, as Hugh took it for granted he must be, took a lively interest in the venture, for after the boys had actually started he called out in a voice that was husky from the smoke he had swallowed:

"I hope and pray you may get those children, Hugh Hardin."

Hugh half turned in his tracks as though

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tempted to reply, but changing his mind hurried along.

^'Watch out for the stone wall, boys," he told the other three.

"She said it lay on the right, didn't she, Hugh?'"

"Yes, and the Dry Spring lies in the same direction from the bed of the creek," the scout master explained.

"This smoke is sure enough tough," remarked Jack. "It grips your eyes — and how it makes 'em smart."

"There's a lively bunch of fire ahead of us," observed Bud.

"We'll pass around it," suggested the leader.

"No use wasting our time fighting fire in spots," Don Miller told them.

"We'll keep all our strength for the job we've got before us," Hugh explained.

"I only hope we find the place," said Jack.

"With the poor, frightened kids safe and sound," Don added, for he was almost as tender-hearted as Billy Worth.

They were now deep in the woods. All around them lay the smoke clouds. It arose from smoldering beds of leaves or stumps that

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were slowly giving up their substance to the hungry flames.

The low stone wall lay close beside them on the right. Hugh wondered what it had ever been built for, though there were traces of a long-abandoned road to be seen in places.

All of them were constantly on the watch for signs of the dry creek bed which Mrs. Heflfner had explained was to be their guide all of the way to where the dry spring was located.

"I think I see it ahead there, Hugh/" announced Jack, presently.

"Yes, you're right about that," Don Miller echoed, proving that he, too, had made the discovery.

"It's about time we struck it," said Hugh, "because here's where the wall ends. She described things exactly as they are. It's a pleas-

ure to follow up such a trail."

The creek bed was plainly in evidence. Years before there must have been quite a lovely little stream of clear ice-cold water gurgling between those moss-covered stones. That was before the spring had stopped, owing

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to some interior convulsion of Nature or rock "slip/'

It was very hot and almost suffocating in the midst of the forest through which the devastating fire had so recently passed. It would have been much more so had the trees been included in the general conflagration.

Frequently one of the scouts would feel the necessity for taking a mouthful of cold water, because he believed himself to be perilously near the choking stage. One and all were glad they had been wise enough to carry those canteens along with them.

There was no sign of animal or bird life anywhere about them. Perhaps many of these perished in the fire. Most of them, however, must have found some means for escaping through flight, or failing that, taken refuge among the rocks, perhaps in hiding places under the roots of trees.

"Must be pretty near there I should say, Hugh ?" ventured Jack.

"We've certainly covered half a mile of territory since starting out," Bud Morgan asserted, using his bandana freely in order to mop his streaming face.

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"Not quite that much yet/' Hugh told them.
'You know, in a case of this kind, it's easy to think you've gone further than you really have. But we are coming close to where the spring ought to be located, and we'll all be on the watch for the signs.'

"It'll never give us the slip," ventured Don Miller confidently.

"I don't see how it could very well," the scout master told them, "because when the spring was working it fed the creek, so we should easily tell where they joined forces."

"Unless I miss my guess," ventured Bud, "we're going to strike that junction right away."

"Looks so to me," Jack hastened to add.

Through the eddying wreaths of pungent blue wood smoke they could see a pile of stones. It lay on their right, and that was where the widow had told them to search.

"Looks almost as if someone had piled those rocks up, doesn't it?" said Don Miller, as they stumbled along, and constantly drew nearer the spot that all of them had decided must be the place they were aiming for.

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'Terhaps that's what has been done, partly/* Hugh observed.

"You mean Peter heaped 'em up like that, don't you?" asked Jack.
' "I think that's about the kind of fellow

Peter is," the scout master replied. "Think of him doing his level best to save those children when their father, who ought to have been at home to look after them, was having a lark in town over night."

"Peter is a faithful fellow," remarked Don, ^^and I'm afraid he leads a pretty hard life of it there with Farmer Barger. When I get back home again, I'm going to see if something can be done for him. He deserves a kinder master, poor chap."

They were now close to the rocks, and all of them felt thrilled with eagerness to know what the result of their mission was going to be. Would they find the three frightened and weary little Barger children where Peter had •entrenched them; or was it possible they had since wandered off into the blackened and smoking forest to meet some dreadful fate?

The piled-up rocks made Hugh shiver to

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look at them ; he thought they seemed so like a caim or a burial place.

So, raising his voice, the scout master gave a loud shout, his object being to learn the truth, one way or the other. Immediately all of them felt greatly relieved, for above the rocks there suddenly popped into view several tousled heads as the children stared around in search of the one who had brought them new hope.

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CHAPTER XL

BABES IN THE WOODS.

'One, two, three! All there!'^{*} whooped Jack Durham.

"We're in great luck, fellows!" Hugh assured them, for truth to tell he had felt fear gripping his heart as with an ice-cold hand.

If they had failed to discover the children where Peter had left them after they could walk no further through the smoky forest, it would have been very much like looking for a needle in a haystack to have tried to find them. Following a trail by eyesight alone over that burned ground must have proved well-nigh impossible, even for practiced scouts.

But here were the children, ready and willing to be saved. Indeed, they were already stretching out their little hands entreatingly toward the boys, as though begging Hugh and his trio of chums not to forsake them.

Hurrying forward, the scouts were quickly on the spot

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They found the reason why Peter had been forced to temporarily leave his charges while he went in search of help. The oldest child could not have been much more than five, the second three, and the youngest less than two.

Later on they learned that Peter had carried the little one pretty much all the way, but when the second child broke down and was unable to walk any further Peter just knew he had to do something different.

'It's all right, little ones,' said Bud Mor-

gan, with one of his reassuring smiles that made all youngsters like him. ^We've come to take you to the house of your neighbor, Mrs. Heffner. She'll keep you till daddy comes."

"But Peter said we must stay here," remarked the oldest child, a boy who looked as though later on in life he would be able to hoe his own row much better than, according to common talk, his father was doing.

"Peter sent us out to fetch you," Hugh explained. "Peter would have come along but we wouldn't let him, because he was tired out, and burned in a good many places. You're going to come with us, of course. Jack, you take the little one. Put your arms around his neck,

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honey, for he wants to carry you. Bud, do the same with the second one. Don and myself will look after this fine manly little chap here; and when you get tired just let us know, for we mean to spell you playing nurse."

Hugh said this in his kindest tone, and it had always been a notorious fact that children took to the leader of the Wolf Patrol as though they knew instinctively that he was a good friend.

The oldest boy did not hesitate after once looking into Hugh's face. He immediately put out his little hand confidingly, and allowed the scout master to take it in his. Don offered support on the other side, and thus flanked, what was there to fear further? Let the forest smolder and blaze as it would, with such staunch allies between him and danger he could rest stout of heart and undisturbed.

Nor did the other two show any sign of rebellion when Jack and Bud offered to lift them up in their stout arms. "Any port in a storm" must have appealed to the babes in the woods just then. Besides, these boys looked kind, and

they had promised to go straight to where

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Peter was, Peter in whom the kids seemed to have unbounded confidence.

So they started back.

Hugh and Don led the way, with the little chap between them. If the boy gave any sign of being tired out either of the scouts stood ready to lift him up, '^ting*' him part of the way.

The forest looked just as gloomy and fearful as before, only none of them seemed to mind it now. They had accomplished their errand, and the suspense that had weighed so heavily on their minds had taken wings and flown away.

*It was a lucky thing all around,' said Hugh as he picked his way along, taking the easiest course possible more on account of those tender little feet than for his own benefit, ''that the kids didn't think of straying off."

'We would have had a dickens of a time finding them if they had," agreed Don.

"Shows that someone must have taught them the spirit of obedience," suggested Jack. "I reckon now these two boys will grow up to make extra fine scouts one of these days."

'Must have been their mother, then," de-

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dared Bud, ^'because from all I've heard about their dad he's a pretty poor stick; bad enough while his wife was living, but a heap worse since he was left alone."

**All but this boy here were too young to know anything about their mother when she left them," observed Hugh. "'So I imagine we'll have to look somewhere else to see where they've been influenced."

"Now I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you were right there, Hugh," admitted Don, "'and that it was Peter's work."

"He struck me as an uncommon sort of a boy," continued Hugh. "He certainly was faithful to his trust with these kids."

"What do you suppose will become of them all?" questioned Bud.

"Oh! Mrs. Heffner will be only too glad to look after them until their dad can come after them," Hugh informed him.

"What a shock the man will get if he makes his way this morning to his home and finds it a heap of ashes," suggested Jack.

"He'll think his babies have all perished there," added Bud. "It'll serve him right. A shock like that might set him to thinking, and

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to reform. I can remember that years ago before he took to drink Alec Barger used to be reckoned a fine-looking man, with a future before him. It isn't too late yet for him to undo the past if only he sets his foot down hard on his failings.'

"I wonder what the damage done by this

forest fire has been?" queried Don.

*'When they go to count up," replied Hugh, 'there will be a pretty heavy toll to pay in the way of farms ruined and wood burned. Plenty of them may have escaped, something like Mrs. Heffner's place did, but others went up in smoke."

'That isn't the whole story by a good deal," declared Jack. "It's been so terribly dry this fall that I reckon there are fires burning in dozens of places all through the East, from the Adirondacks to the Maine coast."

"If only it would rain," sighed Don, "what a wonderful amount of good an hour's soaking would do everywhere."

"I thought I felt a drop strike me a minute ago!" admitted Bud. "I was half afraid to say anything about it, for fear I'd frighten

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it away. One thing you can see for yourselves, though, fellows/'

'What's that?'' demanded Don.

"The sun has gone in !" announced Bud, as seriously as though that event might be the most important on the calendar ; which to tell the truth was a fact, since the whole cotmtry was in danger of burning up.

"That's a fact!" exclaimed Jack, as he turned an eager look upward. "I noticed it was getting somewhat gloomy, but thought it must come from the smoke. But, Hugh, clouds have come up and covered the sky. Oh ! why don't it start in to sprinkling right away. I'm half choked with the dust that's in the air."

"So say we all of us," added Don, as he started to raise his canteen to his lips and then suddenly paused to add: "Why, what's the

matter with us, boys; if we've been wetting our throats every little while, don't you think these kids would like a drink of fresh water, too?"

"Careless of us, I must say!" muttered Jack, as he stopped, got down on one knee and then hastened to tmscrew the cap of his canteen, adding: "Take a drink, little one, a nice cool

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drink of water. It'll make you feel better, and when you get to where Peter and Mrs. Heflfner are, you will have some bread and milk."

All of the children drank eagerly, showing how they must have been suffering. Peter, being only a small boy, could not have had the forethought to provide any means of carrying water along with them on their flight, and the forest rills were all dried up from the long-continued drought.

As soon as the little girl was through, she put her chubby arms around Bud's neck again, and rested her soft cheek against his. It was plain that the scouts had already quite won the confidence of the youngsters. Children, no matter how small, quickly size up those who are their real friends; instinct takes the place of reason with them.

Jack and Bud even began to sing one of their school songs as they ambled along in the wake of the leaders. The obstacles they had met no longer impeded their path, and being yotmg and free from cares it did not take much to start them going,

"This sure is a queer experience for us to

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have, Hugh/' Don was remarking as he looked around at their strange surroundings, with the many colimins of smoke rising from stumps, half-decayed logs and deposits of dead leaves, which, being somewhat damp underneath, had not burned as readily as other batches.

'"Well, it counts with a lot of others weVe passed through in our time," the other told him. *'When you stop to think of it, Don, we've been a pretty lucky bunch of scouts to go through with all we have since the troop was first formed."

*I often have to smile when I think how queer it seems that our fine scout master. Lieutenant Denmead, is nearly always away on some trip whenever these big things are pulled off. This time we'll have another adventure to tell him, of how we were called by duty up into the burning forest, and what a glorious time we had of it beating the fire away from the widow's farm buildings and hay-stacks."

"Yes, and bringing in these tots who were the waifs of the fire," added Hugh, as he looked fondly down at the sturdy curly-

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headed chap who was so manly trudging alongside, with not a single murmur, though the way was far from easy for his little feet.

"If we didn't do a single thing besides this,'* Don asserted in a way that told how he meant every word of it, "Fd feel that it was worth

our trip up here ten times over. I never ran across such a fine little bunch of kids before. No wonder Mrs. Heffner turned white in the face when she thought of them being left there in charge of only little Peter.'

"Everything is all right now, it looks like," remarked Jack, who, of course, had been listening to what the others said, for he was close behind them.

"There, I felt it!" burst out Bud, and when they turned to look at him he was found to be holding his face upward as though searching the bare treetops for something.

"Another drop of rain, do you mean. Bud?" asked Don, with considerable eagerness.

"It certainly was," came the reply. "Oh, why does it wait to be squeezed out in dribblets that way? There's a heap of wet due us by now, and the old weather clerk up yonder had better give it to us from the bung-hole and not by

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way of the spigot. We want it, and we want it bad''

'Hold your horses, Bud,' Hugh told him. "I've got an idea we're going to get all we need before a great while. Half an hour's drenching rain would put out nearly every fire there is. Even if a few old stumps did smoulder afterward they couldn't do any more damage, things would be so well soaked. By the time we get to the farm-house it ought to be starting m.

"Huh!" grunted Bud, "I'd be willing to stand the worst kind of a ducking if that would hurry things up any."

"Well, nothing that we can do or promise will make the least difference," Hugh went on to say, with a laugh, "so we might as well keep

our coats dry and be comfortable."

"We're much more than half way there now, I should say, wouldn't you, Hugh?" Don wanted to know.

"Two-thirds of the distance you had better put it," added Jack.

Hugh nodded, and then surprised them both by saying:

"I'll see what I can do to help things along.

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I remember that leaning birch over there on the left. We struck it after we had left the stone wall just five minutes, so you see by that time we ought to be back there, which would mean the farm-house in as many more. So we're over the worst of the journey, and three-quarters of the way back."

"Every little helps," admitted Jack, "and I'm going to keep a bright lookout for that old stone wall. It'll sure seem like a good friend to me; and the kids will be glad to get in a house again after all they've passed through."

"That's queer now !" Don was heard to say, half to himself.

"What did you think you saw, Don?" asked Hugh, noticing that the other seemed to be staring straight ahead.

"There was something or other moving off yonder, and in this gully, too, where the creek used to run," the scout explained. "I saw it just as it went behind a clump of rocks. Watch and see if it comes out on this side, fellows; over there, I mean."

"Then it must have been heading this way, Don?" remarked Hugh.

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^Which it surely was, and as it stands to reason that no wild animal, a fox or anything else, could have stuck it out through all that fire, I take it I must have seen - there, look !'*

"Why, it's certainly somebody coming this way!" ejaculated Bud, as they stood and stared.

"If that smoke would only blow away we could make out who it was," muttered Don.

"Well soon know," ventured Hugh. "He's headed up the gully, you see."

"I wonder now if it could be their daddy?" reflected Bud.

"Well, hardly," the scout master told him. "He would be coming from our rear, heading for the Heffner place to find out if they knew anything of his babies. Tve got an idea I could guess who it is."

Just then the smoke did blow away and they could see the approaching figure very distinctly. It was a boy, and he was limping painfully along as though his feet had been bruised by the cruel stones. No sooner did the oldest child set eyes on that figure steadily drawing near and nearer than he burst out into a shrill cry.

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'Teter, oh! Peter, here we all are!'' was what he sent out; and at that, the bound boy forgot to limp as he started on a run toward them.

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CHAPTER XIL

WHBN THE RAIN CAME DOWN.

"Well, what do you think of that for devotion?" said Don Miller, as the bound boy came toward them, his face shining with happiness when he found that his fears were groundless, and that all his charges were safe in the care of the scouts.

"It's sure a lesson for every one of us," muttered Jack, who possibly realized then and there a few of his own shortcomings, and felt reproved.

"I told you the boy was a diamond in the rough," said Hugh, winking very hard, as though the smoke may have been wafted into his eyes just then, or for some other reason. *When we get back home I'm meaning to have the entire troop working to better his condition somehow. He deserves the best there is."

"That's right," said Jack. "Look at that little chap run to meet him, and how Peter takes him up in his arms? Now he's coming to the

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other two, and their eyes are dancing with joy. You bet they think a heap of Peter."

'What made you start back again when you were nearly played out?" asked the scout master, after they had seen the greeting the smaller children had for the boy who had come from the poor house to work for Farmer Barger.

Peter looked half frightened as though he feared he had done an unwise thing in disobeying orders.

"I just couldn't help a-comin'," he said. *'I was so afraid you wouldn't find 'em, or else that they'd stray away, though they did promise me solemn they wouldn't budge a foot. But oh ! I'm right glad to see 'em all agin, I am."

He limped along beside them after another start was made, and persisted in holding the chubby hand of the smallest Barger youngster. Apparently a great load had been lifted from Peter's faithful heart, and his own pains were utterly forgotten in his new happiness.

"There's the wall!" announced Bud suddenly.

'Xooks like an old friend to me," said Don. "I know the farm-house isn't far away now, and that means shelter from the rain in case

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it comes down— course I'm thinking of the kiddies here when I say that, you understand. A veteran scout has no need to be afraid of a little sprinkle, or even a ducking in the line of duty."

Hugh was feeling unusually proud of his three chums. Perhaps it was partly on account of the fine way in which Jack and Bud persisted in "toting*" those two babes, and declining to let either of the others "spell" them

even once.

"It's coming down faster now, boys!" declared Don.

There could be no doubt about that, for they could feel the drops pattering on their campaign hats. But then the farm-house with its attendant outbuildings could be plainly seen now, and the chances were they would soon be under shelter,

A rousing cheer attested to the fact that their approach had been discovered by some keen-eyed scout, who had communicated the pleasing intelligence to the others. There was good-hearted Mrs. Heffner waving her hand to them also, and evidently eagerly waiting to "mother" the children.

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So, presently the boys arrived, and just in good time, too, for as they passed in at the kitchen door of the farm-house, the rain commenced to fall in good earnest. It beat an increasing tattoo upon the roof of that kitchen, and the sound was sweet music to the ears of those boys. They knew what an invaluable ally that downpour would prove to be to those farmers whose property would otherwise soon have been threatened by the forest fires.

"Go it, old rain !" shouted Monkey Stallings as he capered about after his usual nimble manner. "Do the thing right while you're about it. We need lots and lots of that stuff right now ! Don't be a miser ! Act generous ! That's something like it."

"Gee! listen to it come down, will you?" burst out Billy, as he pushed forward to join the circle around the three children, for Billy was unusually fond of all little ones.

Mrs. Heffner had taken each of them in her motherly arms. Then, thinking they must be

hungry, she hurried off to get some bread and milk, the latter to be warmed, for the air now began to feel cljilly, since the rain had come.

"It's a lucky thing it's rain and not snow,"

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said Hugh, "though that would have helped some, I suppose. But after this there's going to be no more fire fighting for Oakville Troop, you can understand, this season, anyhow."

"WeVe had our fill of it, all around, I should say," remarked Ned Twyford.

Hugh cornered Arthur Cameron.

"How did you come to let Peter get away from you?" he asked the amateur surgeon.

At that Arthur chuckled.

"I guess he was a little too smart for me that time, Hugh," he started to explain. "I looked after his burns, and eased them with some of that lotion that is so fine to draw the fire out. Then I happened to turn my back for just three minutes. When I came around again I missed Peter, and one of the boys told me he had seen him slip away."

"Did you guess where he had gone?" asked the scout master.

"Well, it didn't take me long to do that," came the answer. "I had seen how nervous he was, and heard him saying to himself over and over: 'I sure hope they find the kids.' So I could size it up. Peter had disappeared and no one saw him go, but I felt pretty sure

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he'd come back with you ; and I was right. He thinks a heap of the kiddies, Hugh."

"Yes, and they do of Peter,"* added Hugh, Whereupon he began to tell Arthur just what he and some of the others had decided they must do to try and make the bound boy's path in life less thorny.

Unnoticed by either of the scouts, someone had drawn closer to them at the time they began chatting. It was the "hired man," he whose face was so streaked with grime from the smoke and cinders that his best friend might have had more or less difficulty in recognizing him.

Evidently he had been drawn there by some subtle attraction. The subject of the boy's conversation must have deeply interested him, too, for he could be seen to nod his head in the affirmative every time one of them made some remark that did him credit.

When finally the two boys moved away the man stood there for some time as though lost in reflection. Then he laughed softly to himself as though he considered that there was a joke on somebody.

It was just then that the kitchen door was

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flung wide open and a dripping figure of a man came staggering into the room. Hugh instantly guessed who it must be even before he heard one of the children cry out:

"Daddy!"

Immediately the man was passionately kissing the babes of the woods, only refraining from taking them in his arms because of his soaked condition. Hugh saw that Mr. Barger was still a fine-looking man. He also noticed that Mrs. Heffner seemed strangely moved at seeing him, though at the time he did not exactly understand why.

Later on Hugh learned the whole story of how years before Mr. Barger had been courting Sally Slavin, but an unfortunate quarrel had separated them. Both had married and lost their partners. Since the death of Mr. Heffner, the widower had tried to renew his attentions. Though Mrs. Heffner cared for him, she had resolutely declined to encourage him as a suitor on account of his bad habits, which he seemed loth to give up.

The man was trembling like a leaf. Hugh believed he had had a serious shock, and so

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he was not surprised to hear him say to Mrs. Heffner :

* When I heard about the fire up this way I hurried my team as fast as a whip could make them tear. Leaving the horses on the road I made my way through the fire to where my house had stood. It was a heap of ruins. Money can replace that, but my terrible fear was that my children had perished. Sally, right then and there I got down on my knees and promised Heaven that if only I could find those babes again unharmed, never would a drop of the vile stuff pass my lips again. Sally, I mean to keep that vow as long as I live, you understand? '*

Hugh wondered why the widow should blush so, and snatching up the smallest of the waifs press the little one to her heart. He knew all about it later on, and could rejoice in that those

motherless babes would no longer lack the care they needed.

"Things seem to be turning out first-class, eh, Hugh?" remarked Billy, as he and the scout master stood watching all this transpiring. "It's too bad Mr. Barger lost his house.

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though. Perhaps Mrs. Heffner will shelter the kids till he can put up another one/

"She's got plenty of room for them all here in her house/" remarked Hugh, with something so suggestive in his manner that even Billy noticed it and managed to give a guess as to what it meant.

* Whew ! is that the way the tide sets, do you think?" he muttered. ^Well, he's a pretty fine looking fellow, and she's as good as gold. Say, that must have been what he meant when he told about giving up his bad habits. Well, it would be a fine thing all around. This farm requires a man's care; and his babes need a mother to look after them, though Peter tries to do the best he can."

"If it does turn out that way," remarked Hugh, with a low laugh, "what becomes of all our big plans to better Peter's condition? He could find his home here and be well looked after, besides staying with the children he loves so much."

"It's all coming out like one of those old fairy tales we used to read when we were kids," remarked Billy, as though that time were ages and ages ago in place of a very few

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years; but then when a boy dons the khaki of a scout he jumps far ahead of his years, and the dim past seems to be spanned by a bridge longer than any ever built with mortal hands.

"Peter looks pleased enough, you can see/" said Hugh.

Indeed, the bound boy was smiling all over as he stood back and watched. When Mr. Barger hearing what wonderful good care Peter had taken of his babies, came over and squeezed his hand, the boy's happiness knew no bounds. If his life had not been all that it might in the past, he realized now a new day had dawned on his calendar, and that the future promised much,

"I suppose we'll be getting down home some time to-day," suggested Billy. "Though if this rain keeps up, we'll be a pretty well soaked lot of scouts when we strike Oakvale. But who cares for expenses? . Haven't we all got on our oldest duds, and what's a wetting to a scout, anyway?"

"No use bothering about that yet awhile," Hugh assured him. "The rain may let up, and we'll get back with* dry jackets. Then

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again I noticed a big wagon with a canvas waterproof top out there in the bam. If it comes to the worst perhaps Mrs. Heffner might have her horses hitched to that, and we could all pile in like sardines/"

"Well, there's another way," said Billy. "You know some of the people up along the

road have got telephone communication with Oakvale. Now a scout could make his way over to the road and call up the livery at Oakvale, so as to have covered rigs come up after us. Mr. Prentice said he'd stand for the expense, if there was any."

'What's that?' exclaimed Hugh. 'Why do you say Mr. Prentice, I'd like to know?'

"Well, I declare!" cried Billy, "I clean forgot that you were away when he told us who he was. I never would have known him with all that black on his face, and his clothes burned in ever so many places. Why, the one we took for the hired man is Mr. Prentice, you see! He had come up here to fetch the last note for Mrs. Heffner to pay on her mortgage, when the fire coming closer kept him here. Then he had to help her fight it off, which I reckon he did all right."

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"Mr. Prentice!" repeated Hugh. "To think that it should be Addison's father of all men who happened to be up here when we were showing what scouts were made of!"

"Yes, and Hugh," said one, coming up behind the two boys, "I want to confess right here and now that I never was so glad of anything in my life!"

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CHAPTER Xni.

RIGHT-ABOUT ^ACEI

Hugh caught his breath as he realized what all this meant for Addison Prentice. Here was the one prominent man in all Oakvale who had positively refused to believe there could be any good thing come out of this scout movement that was sweeping like wild fire all over the country. In a wonderful manner he had been placed in a position to witness a practical demonstration of the efficiency of scout tactics and organization.

'This certainly is a surprise to me, Mr. Prentice/' Hugh told him. "I never dreamed it was you. Several times I found myself looking your way, and wondering why something about you seemed so familiar ; but before I could mention it to any of my chums something would come up to put me off."

"I don't wonder you didn't know me," laughed Mr. Prentice, "and I think my wife would try to chase me out of the house with a

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broom if she saw me entering. But, Hugh, would you mind shaking hands with me; and you, too, Billy. In fact, I want to humbly apologize to every member of Oakvale Troop for the mean estimation in which I've been holding them up to this wonderful day, when I've had the scales lifted from my eyes."

It can readily be understood how joyously first Hugh and then Billy each gripped a hand of the quarry owner. Really, for the time being they considered that this amazing change of front in Mr. Prentice even dwarfed all the other surprising events of this record trip.

"The seed," explained the gentleman, "was sown on the occasion of your wonderful presence of mind, Hugh, in throwing that log in front of the runaway stone car, and shunting

it off the track. In doing that you possibly saved a number of lives, and me from a feeling of guilt that I never could have survived.'

He still held Hugh's hand while saying this, and gave it a grip that told how deeply his feelings were stirred.

"I said to myself, when I could get my wits to working alter the feeling of numbness over my narrow escape had passed away, that if

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being a scout could teach a boy to show such wonderful presence of mind in the face of a sudden peril, there must be something about this movement that I should never condemn without having investigated further. And, Hugh, ever since then I have been making quiet inquiries and getting opinions from some of our leading men without letting them know what my object was/'

'That was only what I asked you to do in the first place, sir,' said Hugh.

^'Yes, I know it was," the gentleman continued, "but I am an obstinate man, and persisted in shutting my eyes to the facts. But I was rapidly coming to the conclusion that I was making the greatest mistake of my life in going against such a great development of the American boy, when I started up here this morning. Well, what I have seen done and heard spoken of you and your brave boys since coming here has utterly overwhelmed me with confusion and regrets."

"Fm more than glad, sir - for Addison's sake!" said Hugh, softly and meaningly.

"Yes," the other went on to remark, "there'll be no difficulty about his getting permission to

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join your troop after this. Why, if he showed any hesitation I'd be three times more bent on making him don the khaki than I was before in refusing to grant that favor. I can plainly see what a great list of possibilities opens up before a scout. If Addison can, in time, become as sensible a boy as most of your companions — I might easily say all of them— are, I will be grateful every day of my life that Fortune took me up here to see Mrs. Heffner at just the time the forest was burning, and your troop came up to render first aid to the afflicted.*'

Really, there did not appear to be anything lacking, for it all seemed to have come out just right. If Hugh himself could have had the planning, he doubted whether he could have improved on what had happened.

'Then you give me permission to tell Addison that he can put in his application to join the scouts, do you, Mr. Prentice ?' Hugh asked.

" You'll hardly have the opportunity, Hugh,*' he was told, "because as soon as I get home I will issue orders that he must join at the very first meeting!'"

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"It will make him pretty happy, I think, sir, for he has set his heart on being one of us/'

"And let me tell you it will make his father doubly happy when that time comes, for I have

seen and heard things I never would have believed possible a week ago. It just goes to show how foolish men can be to judge without knowing what they are talking about. But, Hugh, I shall try and make amends for what injury I have unwittingly done the cause in the past by booming it in the future. You see, it's a case of right-about face with me. They do say that I'm pretty sure to go to extremes when my mind is made up.'*

"The boys will all be glad to know that you've reformed, sir,*" said Billy, boldly, but Mr. Prentice only chuckled.

"Yes, you hit the nail squarely on the head when you call it that, Billy," he frankly declared. "In a case like mine nothing short of a reformation would fill the bill. You'll never understand how much I've enjoyed being here and watching the way you boys went about saving the farm buildings. It seemed as if you knew just what to do and how to work it I had a lesson I'll never forget. The boys of

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to-day are in a class by themselves when compared with my time. I can see now how they owe most of it to the teachings of the scout organization/'

As it was getting on toward noon, and boys are known to have ferocious appetites, especially when they have been working very hard, Mrs. Heffner busied herself in getting a luncheon. Like most of her class she always had a great abundance of good food in the house, which was a fortmate thing for that army of voracious lads.

Such a jolly time they had of it, everybody trying to lend a helping hand until in the end Mrs. Heffner had to chase the lot out of the kitchen while she completed her arrangements. But she was looking very happy, Hugh thought; perhaps it was because a good for-

tune had spared her possessions ; or again there may have been still another reason which she did not choose to share with any one.

And that was a meal not soon to be forgotten. All sorts of good things were forthcoming, so that no scout could rise from the table and claim that his appetite still clamored for more. Cake, pies, jams and jellies, sandwiches,

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milk, coffee with rich cream, hard-boiled eggs by the score, even several cold chickens which she had been intending to take to town for the Woman's Exchange table - all these and much more were placed before the boys, until even Billy sighed and humbly confessed that he had undone the last button of his vest, and could not eat another bite.

About two in the afternoon it was discovered that the rain had ceased. No one interpreted this fact, for it had come down so heavily that every fire must have been long since extinguished.

"Now's our chance to go home, boys," announced Hugh, at which there was a decided scurrying around, as hats were looked up, and good-byes said.

"I'm going to town with the horse and wagon Mrs. Heffner has loaned me," said Mr. Prentice, "and if any of you scouts want to ride, say the word."

There was not a single answer; apparently the boys looked forward to such a fine time hiking it for home that they did not care to be separated. Hugh considered this a compliment to the leaders of the troop, for it might

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be thought that a few out of the dozen and more would prefer to ride home.

"I've an idea we may find the other half of the troop waiting for us on the road," he mentioned, "and if so we'll all go back together."

Everybody was sorry to see them depart, even the three little Barger youngsters who had become quite friendly with the scouts during the short time they had known them. Jack, Don and Bud would always look back to their association with the "babes of the woods" with a feeling of keen pleasure.

Sure enough, there was Alec and his detachment waiting for them at the pre-arranged rendezvous. When the two sections sighted one another there was more or less calling back and forth, and cheering.

Apparently Alec's crowd could not have had anything like the serious time that came the way of Hugh and his chums. This was to be seen in the fact that their uniforms, unlike the others, did not bear signs of hard usage, with holes burned here and there, besides being pretty well water soaked.

Of course both sides were wild to hear what

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had been accomplished by the other detachment.

"Who's going to take the floor first and spin the yam?" demanded Billy Worth, who was

really anxious to know just how far Alec's supporters had gone in the way of fire-fighting.

Alec and Hugh exchanged looks, and smiled.

"I reckon we'll have to toss up for it, then, seeing that each wants to be last," remarked the Sands boy, taking out a coin.

"That suits us," said Billy; "and Hugh can say whether it's heads or tails."

"Whichever falls upward means the last to tell the story, doesn't it?" asked Hugh.

"Yes, and you call out while the quarter is in the air," Alec told him.

So he sent it whirling upward, and about the time it reached its highest point Hugh sang out:

"Tails for me!"

The coin fell to the ground, and numerous heads were craned in the effort to see what the result would turn out to be.

"You win, Hugh," remarked Alec, laughingly. "Tails it is, face up. I'm only sorry I've got so little to tell, because our work

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wasn't so fast and furious as you had come your way, if signs count for anything/' and ^s he said this Alec pointed to numerous small holes burned in the clothes of Hugh and some of those who had fought the flames with him.

'AH the same/' Hugh told him directly, 'Ve know mighty well it was only the want of a chance that kept you from showing your mettle. We happened to be lucky that way. So long as you did your part the best you knew how, what odds does it make how much of a result followed?"

That was characteristic of Hugh. He tried to minimize his own acts, while at the same time eager to enlarge upon anything a fellow scout had been able to accomplish. It was this brotherly trait that had made him the best-liked fellow in or around Oakvale. Selfishness and Hugh Hardin had little in common, as every boy understood who knew the young scout master.

'Well,' began Alec, "it isn't going to take me long to cover the ground of our activities. We got to the squab and chicken farm, and found Old Zeke pretty nearly out of his seven senses, because he expected he was going to be

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caught by the fire, and lose his whole plant, which you know would about kill the poor chap, for he's got every cent he owns in the wide world invested there."

"And I've heard," interrupted Billy Worth, "that it's the apple of Zeke Ballinger's eye, that squab plant. He ships a box of plucked baby blue-rock pigeons to a big hotel in the city every week, and gets cracking good prices for them."

"Yes," added Ralph Kenyon; "I've been up at his place, and he nearly gave me the squab fever, too. I could see good money in the game; but it takes a lot of time to look after things ; and what with school duties, as well as scout matters, I couldn't see my way clear to make the start. But go on. Alec, please."

"You can be sure," continued the narrator of the story, "he was pleased when we broke in on him. I never saw a man so happy. I guess Old Zeke has heard a heap about what the scouts of Oakvale have done in times gone by, for he just up and said he knew now his place wasn't going to be burned to flinders."

Somehow every fellow looked proud when Alec said that. It seemed to them worth while

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to have worked so hard in the past, if by so doing a reputation for accomplishing things had been earned among the people of their native town and the surrounding country.

"We started in to get ready for business," continued Alec; *'such as locating the water supply, gathering all sorts of buckets, pans, and anything that could be used for carrying the stuff when the sparks came sailing over, and threatening to set fire to the roofs of the chicken and pigeon houses.

"First we began to soak the roofs as well as we could, and all the while the fire was getting nearer. As luck would have it, there was an open space between the woods and the buildings. Old Zeke didn't have any straw stack, or hay worth mentioning, to start going, which I counted in our favor.

"Then finally we saw the flames begin to pick up over to windward. The fire had been carried through the thick woods. It was eating up all the dry stuff on the ground, and some dead trees were beginning to look like great big burning torches or candles.

"So we worked harder than ever, with Zeke keeping on our trail, doing great stunts carry-

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ing water and helping out. Every bucket thrown gave us more hope that we'd be able to keep things safe and sound; but pretty soon we saw that here and there the roofs were beginning to smoke.

^'We'd made sure to have what ladders there were about the place handy. So keeping a bright lookout, whenever a little flame was discovered on the roof of a building some of the boys hustled there with a ladder, and one went up to throw a bucket of water over it.

"That was about what our work amounted to, all the way through. None of the buildings were burned down, though we did have a few scares, and several times it took the liveliest jumping anybody ever saw to manage all the little fires that sprang up.

"And in the end the fire had swept past, the heat gradually grew less and less, so that we knew we had saved the place for the old squab • raiser and chicken farmer."

"Is that all, Alec?'" asked Hugh.

"Not quite," replied Alec, with a bright smile, as he glanced toward Dale, "we did have just one little adventure worth mentioning."

"Stow that, can't you. Alec?" hastily re-

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marked Dale, who seemed to suddenly flush up, as though more or less confused; for he was known to be an exceptionally modest fellow, who neither went about "blowing his own horn," nor liked to have any of his chums do the same for him ; "it wasn't worth mentioning in the same breath with the splendid things Tm sure Hugh and the rest have been doing."

^"We're the ones to judge of that, old fellow," said Don; "so please let's hear what it

was. Alec, will you?"

Dale immediately fell back, for they were at the time walking along the road in the direction of distant Oakvale, forming quite a lively bunch as they clustered around Hugh and the leader of the Otter Patrol.

'Why, it was like this," the latter proceeded to explain ; "there was one tall building with a steep roof that had a pitch of fully forty-five degrees. I think it was the main pigeon plant; but then that doesn't matter.

"Right in the midst of the fiercest of the fight to save the frame buildings, when the red sparks were falling thick and furious, one of the boys shouted out that the roof of that particular building was afire.

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"Now, I had been afraid of that right along, you see. It was so much higher than any of the others, and that sloping roof made it doubly hard to get around. As soon as I hurried to the spot I saw that the chances were we'd have a tough job getting that little blaze under control, and it even looked as if the crisis of the whole business had come around.

"A big spark had dropped in just the worst place it could go, and there must have been some dry leaves and trash in that cavity, for a blaze sprang up right away. It was going right merrily when I got there.

"As soon as the ladder was slapped against the side of the tall building Dale went up it like a monkey. The boys pushed another ladder up so that he could lay it on the roof. Then they handed him a bucket of water.

"I wish you could have seen him hunch along that ridge of the roof, Hugh. It was as fine a thing as any city fireman ever did, I'm dead sure. And all the while Dale had to carry

that heavy pail of water along, trying not to spill a drop if he could help it.

"Well, we held our breath while we watched him, and not a fellow called out any instruc-

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tions, for we believed that Dale knew best what he was up against.

"By that time the fire was springing up as if it surely meant to cop everything in sight. But Dale he just kept hunching along, and hunching along till he had come to where he thought he could get the bulge on the busy flames. Then we saw him hold his bucket up as if aiming, and after that it was good-night to Mr. Fire.

"And that was as near an adventure as anything we ran across, Hugh,*' concluded Alec; "so please start in to tell us what came your way over to the Heffner farm.*'

Knowing how eager the others were to hear, Hugh wasted no time in beating around the bush. He proceeded to tell what a stiff fight he and his backers had put up in the endeavor to save the property of the widow, and what splendid success their efforts met with. In vivid language he described how the hungry flames had tried to devour the stacks and out-buildings of the woman farmer, and the sturdy efforts put forth to baffle their intentions. It could be noticed that through the whole story Hugh seldom referred to himself; if he

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chanced to have had a part in the happening he invariably spoke of it as ^'we did this." Then in the midst of his story came the appearance of Peter, the bound boy, with liis thrilling tale concerning the little charges whom he had had to temporarily abandon while he went in search of assistance. After that there followed the finding of the yoimgsters, the triumphant return to the farm-house, the coming of Mr. Barger, and finally, most astonishing of all, the discovery that the black-faced man they had supposed was the hired help should prove to be Addison Prentice's father.

As all the scouts knew about the decided opposition shown by the quarry-owner toward their organization, when they learned of his wonderful conversion a series of hearty cheers made the sliunbering echoes in the woods awaken.

**That ought to make it unanimous for the scouts in and around Oakvale," asserted Alec, boisterously. "I can't seem to remember another person of consequence willing to say a single word against the troop. We'll have every patrol filled to the limit before a month

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rolls by. Things are flourishing like a green bay tree for the scouts. I certainly envy the great time you fellows have had; but we did our duty just the same, and if the fire had come closer we'd have fought just as hard as you did, to save the squab farm."

'Nobody doubts it for a single minute, Alec!'^ declared Hugh.

'The old man was grateful to us, too,' added Buck Winter, "for he hauled out every bit of grub he had around the house, and even

offered to dress some chickens for us, but we wouldn't hear of it."

"I guess we about cleaned him out of eatables that time/' chuckled Dale Evans.

"And maybe we weren't glad a certain fellow we know was with the other crowd," remarked Dick Bellamy, with a meaning look toward Billy, who only grinned.

They managed to reach home before dark, and such a disreputable lot of scouts had never before entered the corporate limits of Oakvale. But when the good people learned of what great help they had been to Mrs. Heffner and others up in the stricken country, they felt

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that they could readily forgive their dilapidated appearance.

It afterward turned out that Mr. Barger and the widow married, and the three little babes in the woods seem to be just as fond of their new mother as anyone would wish to see. Peter, of course, now has his home with them, and the last time Hugh met the boy he hardly knew him, there was such a great change in his looks, for he had grown much more manly.

In good time he will undoubtedly become a scout, as nearly all sensible lads do ; and those who understood how faithful Peter could be to a trust, feel certain he will always be a credit to the organization.

Other adventures are bound to happen in the history of Oakvale Troop worthy of being written up, and at some future time it may be our pleasing duty to once more follow the fortunes of Hugh Hardin and his chums in new fields of scout activities. Until such time we will say go6d-by to the reader.

THE END.

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